

Host: Geoff Regan, MP
Topic: Electoral Reform
Style: Lecture & Workshop
Date: 15 September, 2016
Time: 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Location: Mount St. Vincent University

ELECTORAL REFORM TOWN HALL

Approximately thirty constituents attended the Town Hall meeting held at Mount St. Vincent University to discuss their views on electoral reform. Before breaking off into small groups, a presentation was given, exploring electoral reform.

To promote discussion among the groups, the following questions were presented for consideration:

- (1) What do you think could be done to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy?
- (2) What do you think are some current strengths of our electoral system? What are some weaknesses?
- (3) Are there any other electoral systems that you have heard about? If so, what have you heard? Are there things that you like about these alternatives? If so, what? Are there concerns you have about these alternatives? If so, what?
- (4) What do you feel the relationship between and elected Member of Parliament and citizens in his or her electoral district should look like?
- (5) Are there certain groups that you feel are excluded from the current electoral system? If so, how can they be included?

Candid discussions emerged between the six groups, initiated by the above-noted questions. When the groups were asked to consider what would help Canadians feel more interested in democracy, suggestions such as increased education, particularly in grade and high school level, mandatory voting and a system that requires representatives to work together were among some of the comments put forth.

Geoff Regan, MP

When discussing the strengths of our current system, people felt that it provided local representation, there were fewer stalemates and it produced a 'clear' winner. In addition to these comments, it was noted that it was a simple system. Discussion around the weaknesses of the current electoral system brought forward comments such as a vote does not matter, it was a 'winner take all' system, and that there was an under-representation of women and minorities. As well, it was noted as a weakness that, currently, there are no specific qualifications for a person to run for, or serve, as a Member of Parliament.

When discussing other electoral systems, constituents were familiar with proportional representation, mixed member proportional and first past the post. The ranked ballot system was also noted. Examining these various voting systems, comments emerged regarding both the advantages and disadvantages of these systems. People indicated that they like proportional representation because they thought it was fair; you could vote for more than one party and it discouraged partisanship. Some concerns that were raised with these alternative systems, indicated that the ranked voting system could be complicated, lending itself to a number of spoiled ballots. With regard to the first past the post system, it was noted that there might not be a clear winner; as well, this particular system may not provide for a national consensus.

Examining the relationship between constituents and their Members of Parliament, it was thought that Members should solicit feedback from their constituents, through various methods such as in-person, on-line or telephone conversations. Regular communication, accountability/transparency, being approachable, good listener and being highly ethical were common themes presented by the groups.

Finally, when constituents considered whether there were certain groups they felt were excluded from the current electoral system, some noted observations were indigenous communities, people who move a lot, individuals with mobility issues and people who are not partisan.

Below, are the recorded answers by constituents, listed collectively for each question:

Detailed Suggestions for Question 1:

- Realise that the government affects your life, at all levels
- Increase political education in schools
- Make voting mandatory (Australian model, get a fine)
- Hold more constituent roundtables to be informed
- Bring government to grass roots level; engaged, own decisions – affect you
- Current wave – changing – social media impacts, in front of more people
- Negativity does not work
- More education; grade school / high school
- If one's vote actually counted
- Ability to vote for desired representative
- Eliminate need for strategic voting
- A system that forces working with other representatives

Detailed Suggestions for Question 2:

Strengths:

- Local representation
- Fewer stalemates
- Less compromise
- Clear winner – chances higher for majority government
- Clear agenda
- Centre left have to work together (foster cooperation among parties on issues they can agree on)
- Get one party for term or usually a clear winner
- A simple / effective system
- Change of Direction becomes possible

Weaknesses:

- Feeling that a vote does not matter
- Winner takes all
- Small parties do not get any representation
- Lose good policy as a result (with big enough majority, only get)
- 39% can get you a majority
- Polarizing amongst regions gets people entrenched for generations
- Vote may not count
- 100% of power but not 100% of vote
- Number of seats won may not match with votes
- Fosters regionalism
- Under represents women and minorities
- Lack of continuity
- Qualifications to run/service
- By-election costs
- No party identification
- Electorate knowledge

Detailed Suggestions for Question 3:

Other electoral systems & effectiveness:

- Mixed Member Proportional
 - Appointed vs. elected
- Proportional representation
- Ranked Ballot
 - A method of voting, not an electoral system
- Run-off Election
- Multi-Round Voting (like party conventions)

Things that you like about these alternatives:

- Online voting
- Mixed Member Proportional
- Proportional Representation
 - Fair
 - Can vote for more than one party
 - Open party list: enables voting for both a candidate and a party
 - Allows for better representation of voters
 - Votes count
 - Discourages hyper partisanship

Concerns you have about these alternatives?

- Ranked Voting
 - Complicated
 - Number of spoiled ballots
- First Past Post
 - Somebody with 39% gets 50% of seats
 - Might not get clear winner (too much chance of minority government)
 - May never reach national consensus on referendums—should leave to politicians
 - Certain systems more than

Detailed Suggestions for Question 4:

- More soliciting of feedback: in-person, on-line, phone
- Citizens should reach out more; be made aware of how they can contact their representatives
- Accessible when required – 2 way
- Regular communication to constituents as to issues being dealt with, ie, newsletters, social media, town hall meetings
- Accountability / transparent
- Trust needs to be maintained in representing his/her constituents
- Approachable
- Transparency in all actions
- Need good outreach to constituents
- Member must listen
- Member must be highly ethical
- Must constantly elicit constituents views

Detailed Suggestions for Question 5:

Excluded Groups:

- Indigenous peoples
- Youth, students
- People who move a lot
- People with disabilities & mobility issues
- People without identification
- Ex-pats
- Minor parties
- Someone that is not partisan
- Underrepresented groups
- First Nations
- People in jail