

Dear members of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform,
Thank you for taking on this important task.

My name is Chris Klomp from Georgetown; I emigrated from the Netherlands 9 years ago. When I learned about the Canadian voting system, I was appalled about the injustice this system exhibits, by throwing out the majority of the votes and let a minority rule the province.

Before I explain the Dutch voting system I was accustomed to and its merits, let me share this tidbit of news with you. The Dutch have gone before you in using the Citizens' Assembly process to verify their own voting system this year and have just published their findings this November (<http://www.nederlandpraatmee.nl/u/fckeditor/File/Advies.pdf>). Their conclusion is that the current voting system is still the best system for the Dutch people and only minor corrections have been brought forward to improve on it. I hope you can take advantage of their conclusions and the reasons behind it, to make your daunting task more focussed.

How does the Dutch system work?

Here is a novel idea! Scrap the riding system, with all the problems associated with it. It might have worked in the 18th century, but we have now all kind of technology to bring people together. We're all Ontarians and we all have an equal vote to elect our preferred candidate.

The Netherlands uses the List Proportional Representation (as described on page 10 of the consultation guide, "Citizens Talking to Citizens"). You vote for a party and within the party you can give your personal support for a specific candidate.

So you like the professionalism and viewpoints of the candidate from Thunderbay, why should you not be allowed to support her to represent you in parliament? And you happen to be in Barrie on Election Day? So why not vote there!?

Let me reflect on all the principles as outlined in the handout and how the Dutch system measures up to them. As a comparison I'll use a Canadian example, where 3 candidates were running for office in a riding and the votes stacked up as 40% for the winner and 35% and 25% for the other two candidates. (Not all that far fetched, right?)

Legitimacy

"The electoral system should have the confidence of Ontarians and reflect their values."

Fairness of Representation

"The Legislative Assembly should reflect the population of Ontario in accordance with demographic representation, proportionality and representation by population."

How legitimate and fair is it that 40% can rule the country. And 60% is not being heard. If a party has support of 40% of the voting public, then they only should have 40% of the votes in parliament. Seems pretty obvious to me! And that is exactly what the Dutch system accomplishes.

But what about local representation you say?

Exactly! 60% is NOT being represented at all, local or otherwise! Sure Ontario is a big place,

but it does not mean every municipality has its unique problems! Do you really think, we're unique here in Halton Hills, in wanting to keep "the small town community feel" in light of the Places to Grow act? Think again!

And with the Internet, every candidate is really only a click away. The public list system still allows for preference voting for a local candidate, but local can mean something different from voter to voter. Let's not pin it on arbitrary riding boundaries.

Personally, I see very little chance that any one candidate in a riding would truly be able to represent me, let alone a majority of the voters in a riding. There is a better chance, (and I have experienced it in reality) that I can feel affiliated with a candidate within the whole list of my preferred party!

Voter Choice

"An electoral system should promote voter choice in terms of quantity and quality of options available to voters."

Why should I be limited to only the 3 choices of the candidates in my riding? Why can I not support a subject matter expert in my party for an issue that is especially dear to me? I should have the right to support any candidate for parliament regardless of where I live! And I should be able to support any party, whether there is local representation or not!

Effective Parties

"Political parties should be able to structure public debate, mobilize and engage the electorate, and develop policy alternatives."

Effective parties are those that people believe in! You happen to believe green, but in your riding there is no green candidate! How can you feel your party can be effective? Parties can only be effective, if they get a seat in parliament. A system that limits the amount of parties in parliament will never be effective in representing the public opinion.

Stable and Effective Government

"The electoral system should contribute to continuity of government, and governments should be able to develop and implement their agendas and take decisive action when required."

The current one party majority can force an issue like privatization of government functions and in the next election this ruling can be reversed, when the opposing party gets majority. In a coalition government a true majority of the public opinion has to be established, before a bill becomes legislation. It's unlikely that bills get reversed, without a decisive shift in public opinion. In other words, you want a real majority of the voters opinion to rule legislature.

Effective Parliament

"The Legislative Assembly should include a government and opposition, and should be able to perform its parliamentary functions successfully."

In the majority party system one party dictates, what gets billed and become legislation. Opposition is only able to criticize the government and is looking for opportunities to force a confidence vote to turn over the government and have their own run for office again. In a coalition government the opposition can be a lot more constructive. Individual bills can be supported by opposition parties, if they are in line with their party's agenda. Thus the

opposition can be constructive to the government of the province. (Remember that the opposition's voice should be fairly represented in parliament, which will not happen when you ignore 60% of the votes.)

Stronger Voter Participation

“Ontario’s electoral system should promote voter participation as well as engagement with the broader democratic process.”

How can you expect voter participation, when 60% is left out in the cold? When every vote counts, people can begin to feel valued and want to participate. The voters opinion needs to be taken seriously and as much freedom of voting needs to be made available. This great candidate from Winsor needs to be able to get support from Cornwall or anywhere else for that matter!

But though the electoral system can facilitate stronger participation, a lot depends on the political parties as well. No system alone will guarantee stronger participation.

Accountability

“Ontario voters should be able to identify decision-makers and hold them to account.”

When only 40% is being represented, only 40% is interested in accountability. With a public list system each and every candidate will be accountable to each preference vote issued. And all candidates are accountable to the amount of party votes. Even the opposition can be held accountable for providing a constructive parliamentary presence. Since there is room for smaller parties, you can better affiliate yourself with a party and hold the party as a whole accountable.

Simplicity and Practicality

No riding hassles and confusion over it's boundary. One and the same list for every Ontarian. One vote to cast. No need to vote in any particular place, but bring out your vote where it is most convenient for you, the voter. It all is simple to understand. And it's practically doable, because it is being done!

Since the party agenda is becoming more important than that of any individual candidate, election funding can be better regulated and made transparent. Block corporate funding of parties and limit the individual funding. This will curb corporate lobbying. Parties are to attract individual Ontarians, not corporate Ontario. Limit their funding and they will have to go out and meet the public! Candidates are the party and no individual candidate funding should be allowed. When candidates receive a seat, they are there to represent the party and when they break the tie with the party, they should have no business being in parliament. You want to be independent, start your own party. But let the voting public know in advance, where you stand! At the same time the representative has the freedom on every issue to interpret the party guidelines as campaigned at election time, which is acting accountable to the electorate!

In summary, every vote has to count. And all votes are equal. Votes should be guided by party agendas and supported by individual candidates. You want the most knowledgeable candidate to defend an issue and to govern, not the most photogenic or familiar face. Government is too

serious business to make it prone to opportunity.

Thank You, for your attention.