

**MP TERRY SHEEHAN  
SAULT STE. MARIE, ON**

**TOWN HALL REPORT  
ON ELECTORAL REFORM  
PUBLIC CONSULTATION**



**TERRY SHEEHAN DÉPUTÉ (E)  
SAULT STE. MARIE, ON**

**RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS  
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME  
ÉLECTORALE**

**Date of Meeting:** October 12, 2016

**Time and Length:** 6:00PM-8:00PM

**Location:** Civic Centre, Sault Ste. Marie, ON

**Total Number of People in Attendance:** 45

**Form:**

- Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation – yes
- Presentation from the MP's office -- yes
- Open microphone --
- Question and answer session -- yes
- Guest speaker – Sault MP Terry Sheehan

**Subjects Discussed:**

- Voting systems
- Replacement of the current voting system
- Voter turnout
- Accessibility and inclusiveness
- Mandatory voting
- Online voting
- Local representation

**Discussion Questions**

**1. What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)? Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated?**

- Four out of five, eight-person groups felt that first-past-the-post was problematic, not fair, not the best.
- Minority views not reflected. Those groups feel left out.
- Result is strategic voting, where people feel forced to vote against something, rather than voting for something.
- Feeling is that if you don't vote for the winning party, you're the loser.
- A conflict often arises, that a voter can choose the representative they prefer or the party they prefer, but not both.

- Tyranny of the majority. Only views being expressed are those of the winner.
- If you cast your vote, and it doesn't mean anything, not much incentive to vote.
- Voter turnout is bad.
- Young voters influenced negatively by social media. Garbage in, garbage out.
- Most of the world has another system.
- Many reasons why people don't vote.
- Who do MPs represent? The party? The riding? His/her own conscience? Should represent local interest.
- 39% of voters select a party, that gets 100 % of the power.
- Fledgling parties, single issue parties.
- Don't know why people aren't voting. We'd need to ask them, not those gathered here.
- First past the post, awesome for local representation, have someone to go to.
- Is voting Green a wasted vote?
- Proportion coalitions, not coalition governments.

**2. Which alternatives to the current system were discussed? Did participants identify specific features that are important to them in an electoral system (for example local representation, proportionality, simplicity, legitimacy etc.)?**

- Many of the alternative systems are so complicated, can't understand. Not clear how to achieve proportionality. Need to keep it simple.
- Need simplicity.
- Referendum a good idea. Referendum a bad idea.
- Like two votes for each voter: One for the party they want. Another for the person they want.
- Should have publicly funded elections. Same limits for all. No undue influence by donors.
- Sacrifice simplicity for proportionality, strongly accepted by one group.
- Want local rep to reflect views of the constituency, not the party.
- Have a stronger handle on the values and principles we want in a system. Not sure which system would accomplish those goals.
- Hoping that we just have to tweak the current system. The system we have is great in many ways, not badly broken.
- Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it.
- There's nothing wrong with the current system. People are angry with the bureaucrats, because they're not doing what the elected representatives want them to do. Elected reps rely too much on bureaucratic "experts". They trust their staff too much. The relationship between the elected reps and the bureaucracy needs to be fixed.
- One group disliked the question. They needed to study more to find out which system would work best. They felt that they needed more information and more study to make the right decision. Not enough time to do the proper research and analysis. Just want some sort of proportionality and control over local representation.
- All groups recognized that they were values-focused rather than system focused. They had not made up their minds about which system was best. They did not have their minds made up at this point. No system in particular jumped out at them.

- Need to remember geographical challenges of this country.
- Minority governments do more long term planning, have more vision.
- Don't like voting strategically, but it seems like a necessary evil, no matter what system.

**3. Did participants discuss why they feel many Canadians choose not to engage in the democratic process? Did they suggest ways to encourage participation?**

- Apathetic. Don't know how the system works. Not taught properly, or consistently in the schools.
- Need increased voter education.
- Maybe experiment with systems, see how they work. Why do we need to carve it in stone.
- Concentration of media, censorship a problem.
- Voting not a habit. Need a voter friendly culture.
- Voting often feels ineffective.
- More assistance for candidates, get better candidates. Child care? More time off to vote?
- No consensus around online voting.
- Good, if it works, for shut-ins.
- Hacking the electoral online voting system would be a serious problem. Security would be critically important, perhaps impossible.
- Vote more in schools, create a habit of voting, an interest in voting. Model voting in schools.
- Feeling unrepresented over and over again, because your party never wins.
- You're consulting the wrong people. We don't know why people don't vote. We vote. Ask them.
- Cannot engage youth via radio, tv. They're just asking their friends how they're voting and join in.
- Generational voting in families.
- Not a high priority for some teachers.
- One issue voting is never in your best interest.
- With mandatory voting, too many would be voting for the wrong reasons.
- Some don't care, they're not aware, voting is not a priority.
- Electronic system elected Justin Trudeau. System worked, but not without bugs.
- Need better publicity, better education, pre-referendum.
- Need to search carefully for any weaknesses and vulnerabilities in any system we choose.
- Should have a short video of each proposed alternative.
- Use last election as an example. How would it have turned out?
- Want a system that is least vulnerable to lobbyists.
- We have more questions than answers.
- Need real life examples of how each system would operate.
- Costs must be considered. Double the number of MPs? Doubling the costs.
- We want change.
- We want more proportional.
- We need more than three years to make the change.

- Referendum a bad idea. Many Brexit voters are now regretting their votes.
- Want some electoral representation combined with some proportionality.
- Eliminate false majorities.
- Keep the ballot simple.
- We have never been deprived of our vote. We take it for granted.

**4. Did participants feel that it should be mandatory to cast a ballot? (Can include spoiling a ballot.)**

- Generally, the group did not feel it should be mandatory. Not much explanation why.

**5. Did participants discuss online voting? Did they express a desire to maintain current voting practices? (i.e. presenting themselves at a polling station, vote secrecy etc.)**

- They thought it was a good idea, but worried that it would be vulnerable to hacking, glitches. Several were quite proud of our current manual, go to the polling station, voting system, which is envied by countries around the world.

**6. Were any other major topics raised by the participants? (i.e. referendum, women/minority representation, accessibility, voter turnout etc.)**

- They felt a referendum was coming, but didn't want one. They referred to Brexit and how many voters had regretted their votes because they didn't fully understand the implications of their vote.
- Accessibility was seen as a significant hurdle: geography, weather, time, disabilities, etc.
- Minority representation was found to be the most serious weakness of first past the post.
- Voter turnout was discussed in Question 3, on electoral participation.

**7. SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS**

- The participants had no electoral system preference. They had electoral values and goals.
- First past the post is problematic, but not terribly broken. Just tweak it, don't throw it out.
- Online voting has some appeal for increasing participation, but serious possibilities for abuse and could be vulnerable to hacking and glitches.
- Liked the idea of some proportionality, but not sure how best to accomplish that.
- They all hesitated to pick an alternative system, as they didn't fully understand all the implications of selecting the system. They did not feel ready to pick a system.
- Selecting a new system would require more research, analysis, experimentation, than there was time for.
- They felt there were many, many reasons why people did not vote, and that we should be asking non-voters why they do not vote. The people in the room were clearly faithful voters.
- No one expressed support for mandatory voting. It was said that such voting would produce poor quality voting.

- Minority representation was a big concern. First past the post fails these groups most.
- Accessibility was seen as a significant hurdle: geography, weather, time, disabilities, etc.

Report submitted to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE) on October 14, 2016.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Terry Sheehan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Terry Sheehan

Member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie