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The Honourable Maryam Monsef
Minister of Democratic Institutions
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Ms. Monsef:

Eight Principles That Will Guide Electoral Reform

I am responding to the report in iPolitics of your address on Thursday 14 April 2016 to a group at the University of Ottawa.

- The Law Commission of Canada, in its 2004 report entitled 'Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada' after Canada-wide hearings and careful deliberation established ten criteria for assessing electoral systems (page 58, table 3):
 - representation of parties
 - demographic representation
 - diversity of ideas
 - geographic representation
 - effective government
 - effective opposition
 - valuing votes
 - regional balance
 - inclusive decision making

I suggest that these should be the starting point for discussions in the yet-to-be-appointed Special Parliamentary Committee. Your eight principles, as reported by iPolitics, would seem to pre-empt the authority and independence of the proposed committee to make an independent recommendation to Parliament.

However I will address your eight points as reported by iPolitics:

1. *"Canadians should believe that their intentions as voters are fairly translated into election results, without (the) significant distortion that often characterizes elections conducted under the first-past-the-post system".* Of course I couldn't agree more, having studied proportional representation (PR) in high school in the UK in the 1950s and worked toward attaining PR in Canada since I joined Fair Vote Canada in 2006. I note that PR seems also to be the policy of the Liberal government since the Liberal Party adopted Fair Vote Canada's rallying cry to 'Make Every Vote Count' after winning the 42nd General Election under FPTP, thus *making 2015 the last unfair election.*
2. *Canadians' confidence needs to be restored – in their ability to influence politics and in their belief that their vote is meaningful.* It is clear that many Canadians have abandoned any thought of influencing politics under a winner-take-all or First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system, as evidenced by their unwillingness to even vote (60% turnout in the 42nd general election). Others have become disgusted with manipulating their vote, thus voting strategically, to ensure a person that they don't want is elected rather than see a candidate elected that they consider to be an even worse choice.

Changing to a suitable PR system is urgently needed and could restore participation rates by at least 7% (the evidence of other countries using PR). Retaining a 'winner take all' system such as the Alternative Vote (AV), where 50%-1 votes are discarded or the current FPTP (where with five candidates, 25% of the vote can 'win' a local seat and 75% of the votes are discarded) is no longer acceptable to the 70% of Canadians who are calling for PR¹.

3. *Reforms need to increase diversity in the House of Commons and politics more broadly.* Studies in other countries show an increase in participation by women as candidates as well as in voting under PR. A party which seeks success will ensure there is a diversity of candidates reflecting the electoral district for election under a PR system such as Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) or Single Transferable Vote (STV).² You might consider mandating quotas for women and minorities in electoral reform legislation and (most importantly) ensuring that voters can cast votes for candidates from 'open' or flexible lists, not party-dominated 'closed' lists³.
4. *The chosen reform can't make the electoral system more complex.* The present apparently simple system where a voter marks a ballot for one candidate with an X from a list of perhaps as many as seven candidates is fraught with complexity for a strategic, thinking voter. I refer you to my remarks concerning your principle #2 above. By contrast, a PR system where a voter marks his or her preferences in a numerical order is almost unbelievably simple and allows the voter to vote **for** the candidate(s) he or she prefers. A PR system is essential. A preferential ballot in a multi-member constituency produces the fairest, most proportional result. A preferential ballot in a single-MP election (the Alternative Vote, AV) produces an attractive result for the winner (*'I got 50%+1, a majority!'*) but in reality it disenfranchises 50%-1 of the electorate, wastes almost half the votes, and perpetuates unfair elections.
5. *Voting needs to be more user-friendly and accessible.* This is relatively simple to achieve by:
 - a. adding voting days including weekend days,
 - b. adding voting hours,
 - c. ensuring advance polls are many and accessible,
 - d. facilitating electronic voting,
 - e. legislating a mandatory use of space required for electoral offices and polling stations if necessary using the power of 'eminent domain'are just a few ideas that come immediately to mind. The inconvenience to 'hosts' of polling stations for a few days every four or five years is a small price to pay for an effective democracy.
6. *(Voting) needs to maintain the vital local connection an MP has with their constituents.* This is one of the reasons the Law Commission recommended MMP as its preferred reform. However, 12 years on we have a myriad more ways to connect with our MPs including Skype, Facebook, Twitter, telephone, webinar ... it is no longer essential for a

¹ EKOS poll of 1800 Canadians, December 2015, reported in iPolitics, January 2016

² Electoral System Design: New IDEA Handbook, pages 121-123, para's 148 - 154

³Law Commission of Canada, Recommendations 5 to 9, pp. 104 - 109

constituent to be within a day's horseback 'ride' to the MP's local office.

7. *(Voting) needs to be secure and verifiable.* Elections Canada has achieved this very effectively for a number of years and Canada does not experience the personal security or most of the electoral fraud issues experienced in many third world countries. Electronic voting could raise issues of privacy and security of the ballot. Electronic or machine reading of ballots could be satisfactorily achieved with a high degree of security. American-style electronic voting carried out by (possibly biased) contractors should be carefully avoided.
8. *Canadians need to be inspired to find common ground and consensus.* If Canadians have a PR electoral system where every vote counts - fairly and equally - we can elect MPs who themselves can negotiate to common ground and consensus in committee and the House instead of the adversarial party-based winner-take-all-for-five-years system with which we are now burdened. I believe first adopting a fair voting system, in conjunction with reforms such as those proposed by Michael Chong in the original version of the Reform Act, will lead to a more collaborative Parliament where Mps respond to the people who elected them and decisions are made by consensus and with a longer view than the next election.

I have read your mandate letter and I am impressed with what you have been charged, especially:

“ . . . your overarching goal will be to strengthen the openness and fairness of Canada's public institutions. You will lead on electoral and Senate reform to restore Canadians' trust and participation in our democratic processes.

In particular, I will expect you to work with your colleagues and through established legislative, regulatory, and Cabinet processes to deliver on your top priorities:

(Edited)

Bring forward a proposal to establish a special parliamentary committee to consult on electoral reform, including preferential ballots⁴, proportional representation, mandatory voting⁵ and online voting”.

⁴ The term 'preferential ballot' as used in the mandate letter is misleading. A preferential ballot used to elect a candidate in a present single member electoral district is better and more correctly known as the Alternative Vote (AV). While attractive to politicians and political parties because it produces an apparent majority vote to elect a candidate, it is inherently unfair as almost half the electorate is disenfranchised and almost half the votes are wasted. In effect, it is a yet worse form of 'winner take all' voting. However, a preferential ballot exercised in a multi-member electoral district as used in the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system is highly desirable and highly proportional and is to be encouraged if proportionality is the over-riding goal of the new electoral system.

⁵ See Electoral System Design, page 125, paras. 163-165. Mandatory voting is usually unnecessary in a well-designed PR electoral system which encourages people to

If the 42nd General Election in 2015 was indeed to be the *last unfair election* and you and the government are intent on *making every vote count* in 2019, it is imperative that the Parliamentary Committee be announced very soon, as time is slipping away; Parliament and Elections Canada must have sufficient time to properly prepare for the 43rd general election, the first to be conducted under proportional representation in 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

A.M. Hambridge

CC: Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
Rona Ambrose, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition
Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada
Tom Mulcair, Leader, New Democratic Party
Len Webber, MP, Calgary Confederation
Fair Vote Canada

vote. Mandatory voting smacks of USSR-style authoritarianism leading to a refusal to vote (what are the consequences of not voting?) and spoiled ballots. Better would be to include an option 'none of the above' on the ballot paper.