

## Opposition Motion—Proportional Representation

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**Motion:** *That, in the opinion of the House: (a) the next federal election should be the last conducted under the current first-past-the-post electoral system which has repeatedly delivered a majority of seats to parties supported by a minority of voters, or under any other winner-take-all electoral system; and (b) a form of mixed-member proportional representation would be the best electoral system for Canada.*

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):**

moved:

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**Mr. Craig Scott:**

Mr. Speaker, I should start by saying that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from [Louis-Saint-Laurent](#).

This motion is intended to put our parliamentary democracy on the right track by fixing what is an extremely unfair electoral system. Every voter counts equally, from a philosophical perspective, so every vote should count equally within our electoral system. Unfortunately, the current system does not do that.

Allow me to quote a former highly respected MP who everyone knows has the health of our parliamentary democracy at heart and first in mind:

*“Why not turn the theory of representative government into reality? Legislatures that reflect citizens' values, in proportion to how we vote in elections, can help make balance, moderation, diversity, inclusiveness, and maturity the refreshing new hallmarks of Canadian [parliamentary] democracy.”*

That was from J. Patrick Boyer, Progressive Conservative MP for [Etobicoke—Lakeshore](#), 1984 to 1993.

Paragraph (a) in the motion says:

*...the next federal election should be the last conducted under the current first-past-the-post electoral system which has repeatedly delivered a majority of seats to parties supported by a minority of voters, or under any other winner-take-all electoral system;*

Paragraph (a) is designed to attract a consensus of MPs affirming that our current system, a winner-take-all system of first past the post, must go.

Many, if not most, Canadians do not actually know that our system produces huge distortions.

There are three kinds of majorities that emerge from an election in Canada: false ones, arbitrary ones, and inflated ones.

The false majority is the biggest concern. A party may receive well less than 50% of the vote but end up with well over 50% of the seats. When Canadians hear about a landslide victory or a government getting a majority government, many, if not the majority of Canadians, do not know that this means only seat count. It does not mean that the governing party received 50% of support. In 2011, the current government, not the first but probably the 20th since Confederation, came into power on these terms: it had 39.5% of the national popular vote and 54% of the seats. Another example is the Progressive Conservatives in 1988, who with 57% of the seats had only 43% of the votes. Those were the Mulroney years. The next year, the Liberals came in. They had 60% of the seats with 41% of the vote.

Do members know what happened? The Progressive Conservatives went from 169 seats to two seats. They received 16% of the national vote and received less than 1% of the seats in the House of Commons.

This is not a partisan thing. NDP governments across the country in provincial governments have also benefited from our wonky system. The NDP under former premier Bob Rae received 57% of the seats with under 38% of the vote.

It can get arbitrary, as well. For example, in Quebec, in 1998, the PQ won 60% of the seats with 43% of the vote, despite the Liberals actually getting 43.5% of the vote.

Inflated majorities are common. Even in the situation where a party manages to get over 50% of the vote in a province, usually where there are only two parties, it can end with the ridiculous result that a party gets all or almost all of the seats. In 1987, under our system, 60% of the votes for the Liberals in New Brunswick produced 100% of the seats; 58 out of 58 seats for that entire period were in the hands of one party. Forty per cent of the electorate was shut out from representation in that legislature. In B.C., in 2001, 58% of the vote produced, for another Liberal Party, 77 out of 79 seats: 97%.

This is fundamentally unfair, quite obviously, not to mention, frankly, absurd. However, this unfairness is not the only consequence. Our voting system has knock-on effects, what I would call pathologies, that undermine the health of our entire democracy, from how Parliament works to citizen engagement.

I would simply like to go through a few of those problems. I will list them, because in debate, I can go into them in more detail.

Here are eight problems.

- ❑ One, our system produces a false sense and exacerbation of regional differences. We almost get, for decades and decades, only Conservative MPs from Alberta. It creates the idea that somehow Alberta is monolithically a Conservative province. Nothing could be further from the truth.
- ❑ Two, it diminishes the diversity of viewpoints in Parliament, especially from different areas of the country. We never hear from a rich range of voices from many provinces because of that problem of regional exacerbation.
- ❑ Three, it promotes majorities in the House of Commons such that, because of our system in which the [Prime Minister](#) has so much power in an executive embedded in the legislature, if the [Prime Minister](#) and the government are of a mind, the views of 60% of the electorate, having elected only 40% of the opposition MPs, do not have to be taken into account. Legislation can be rammed through if a government is so minded.
- ❑ Four, there is an underrepresentation of women in our system.
- ❑ Five, adversarialism and hyper partisanship are emphasized over co-operation and compromise in legislative activity.
- ❑ Six, the chances of poor legislation because tunnel vision and single ideologies, which do not have to grapple with other points of view on the floor of the House and in committees, also can dominate.
- ❑ Seven, citizen frustration goes through the roof, and it is one of the contributions to lower voter turnout.
- ❑ Eight, the role of MPs is undermined due to the fact that in our system, voters have to choose, with one vote, the local representative they would like to have representing their constituency and the party they would like to see with the most seats in the House of Commons, and quite often, they are choosing one other factor, which is which party leader they prefer.

All of these things, under a properly structured proportional representation system, would be dealt with.

What is the NDP advocating? Let me start by quoting from Tom Mulcair, the leader of the official opposition, the member for [Outremont](#), who said a year and a half ago:

*“Electoral reform is an important way to reinvigorate our democracy, and in 2015 New Democrats will be seeking a mandate to introduce a proportional-representation voting system that better reflects the true*

*political preferences of Canadians. We are committed to ensuring that 2015 is the last unfair election.”*

Only last week, we deepened that commitment by explaining how we would form a special all-party task force upon becoming government and then would legislate to a deadline that would produce a proportional-representation system of a mixed sort by 2019.

It is important to note that NDP conventions over the years have emphasized “that mixed-member proportional representation must be adapted to Canada”. The fact is that we have examples. New Zealand, Germany, and Scotland are three healthy democracies we will be borrowing from. The fact of the matter is that the lessons they have learned have to be applied in a way that takes into account Canadian realities.

It is important as well to note that we are intent on not reinventing the wheel. Here in Canada, much work has been done over the decades on mixed-proportional representation as the best proportional representation system for Canada. Eight out of nine commissions or citizen assemblies created by governments in the last dozen years in Canada have not only advocated getting rid of our first-past-the-post system but have advocated adopting MMP, or mixed-member-proportional representation.

What is mixed-member proportional representation? The way I like to talk about it is as three pairs that are married into a rather harmonious whole. It is much simpler than people think.

I would start by saying that two principles are merged. One is the principle that voters in each local constituency or riding should be able to elect a single MP directly accountable to them. That is our current system. The second is that voters in each constituency should also have their party preference directly count so that party representation in the House of Commons, that is the seats, the number of MPs, is proportionate to the degree of support the party actually received in the national vote.

Let me now take the voter into the voting booth. This is how voters will understand how easy this is.

These two principles are merged by giving voters two votes. Let us call it a one ballot, two votes approach. Under the first vote, on a single ballot, citizens elect a single local MP to represent their riding. With the second vote, they vote for a candidate, on a list, of the party they prefer. It is this second vote that tells us the number of seats each party should get in the House of Commons, and then from the list, MPs go to the House of Commons, join their local MPs, and voilà, we have a much-reformed system that would get rid of all of the pathologies I listed that are part of our current system.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite on this issue of democratic reform. I know he has worked long on this issue over many years.

I want to make a comment. Let us say that we move to mixed proportional representation as a system of voting. We would end up with a House of Commons with some 300 members of Parliament. Let us say that 200 of those members of Parliament would be local members of Parliament representing local geographic districts across country. We would have another 100 members of Parliament who would be selected by the parties themselves, based on the percentage of the popular vote each party received in the general election.

Currently, however, section 67 of the Canada Elections Act gives party leaders the final determination as to who party candidates will be.

What we would in effect have is a system in which party leaders would have the final say on these 100 MPs, making them beholden to the party leaders and not to any other group or constituency here in this country.

I note that Bill [C-586](#), the reform act, would remove that statutory requirement for the party leader's endorsement.

I wonder if the member would comment on the relationship of that bill to the NDP's opposition supply day motion.

**[Mr. Craig Scott:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate where the question is coming from.

First, it is important to clarify the premise, which is that under the system we are talking about, there would be no appointing by party leaders of the MPs. Each party would have an internal process that would have to be transparently revealed to Canadians as to how they ended up with a list of MPs from which people could go to Parliament.

Under the system we would advocate, individual voters could actually go into the list and say, "That is the order the party set, but I do not prefer that order. I prefer this person to move up in the order".

It is very important to note that there would not be an appointment system. It would depend on how each party set up its list so voters could determine how that would influence their vote.

On the second point, absolutely, the idea that the whole question of a direct appointment by a single leader of any MP, let alone all these MPs, is anti-democratic. I would actually say that our current system does not actually have an appointment power; it has a power requirement, under the Canada Elections Act, to sign off on local nominations. It is not quite the same thing.

**[Mr. Kevin Lamoureux \(Winnipeg North, Lib.\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the member has it all figured out.

What the NDP is suggesting today is something that was debated and voted on in P.E.I and in Ontario, where both populations said no to it.

I even understand that there were a number of New Democratic MPPs in Ontario who actually campaigned against this particular proposal.

A bit of a surprise is that a lot of people, including me, favour electoral reform. However, what is a bit hard to understand is why the NDP has taken such a narrow approach to electoral reform to the degree that it has endorsed one plan. I do not think Fair Vote and other organizations would want to see that. They would like to see a more open approach to dealing with electoral reform.

**[Mr. Craig Scott:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, it is called leadership.

It is also the case that the hon. member should not be invoking Fair Vote, knowing full well that his party does not support proportional representation, which is the mandate of Fair Vote. That is the second point.

The third point is that MMP, mixed-member proportional representation, is a proven system in three healthy democracies. It is also confirmed by eight out of nine commissions or government-initiated provinces in this country. This is where the consensus is.

We are taking a leadership role in this and saying, "This is the system. We will implement the system. We are inviting you to join us. Now is the time. Now is the chance."

This could amount to pre-electoral co-operation on behalf of parties that truly believe in electoral reform. That includes proportional representation. Alternative vote, or preferential balloting, standing on its own, is a regressive reform.

**[Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse \(Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my speech by thanking my colleague from [Toronto—Danforth](#) from the bottom of my

heart for moving this motion and for bringing this extremely important debate to us today.

As I have said many times as the official opposition deputy critic for democratic reform, it is absolutely essential to have a debate on our electoral system and on the way we elect MPs, the representatives of the people.

I understand that people may not necessarily be interested in this idea, or that it is not necessarily one of their priorities. However, I think it is extremely important to talk about our electoral system and the way we choose who will lead our country because everything else flows from there. If the power is in the hands of an individual who does not share the values of the majority of the population, then it is in everyone's best interest to have the most representative and most democratic system possible.

It is no secret that voter turnout in Canada has declined and that cynicism continues to grow. People have little confidence in politicians and we cannot really blame them. The current system has failed us many times. This broken system is a relic of days gone by and not well suited to the reality of the 21st century.

Our first-past-the-post system gives all the power to a majority government even though it does not have the support of the majority of the people.

What we are proposing is to implement a mixed member proportional system, whereby some members would be directly elected to represent a certain area of Canada—which is presently the case—and other members would be elected on the basis of the proportion of votes received by their party in the election.

My colleague from [Toronto—Danforth](#) had started to explain this in more detail. The idea is that we would vote twice on one ballot. People would first vote for the person they want to represent their riding. Then they would vote for a candidate on a list who belongs to the party they prefer. The person chosen would represent the voters and also the party in Parliament.

Thus, no one who goes to vote will be able to say that his vote will not count. That is the very basis of voter participation. I can even give a very concrete and personal example. In 2006, voter turnout in the riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, which I represent, was approximately 60%. The member who represented the riding before me often got elected by a strong majority of over 50%, and so in 2006 and 2008, voter turnout in my riding remained stagnant at 60%.

When I campaigned in 2008, many people told me that there was no point in voting because they knew that my predecessor was going to win. They said that it would not change anything if they voted for another party. Voting was not important to them because they did not believe that it would change the outcome of the election.

What happened? In 2011, people saw that things were changing and that there was a new movement. They realized that their vote could make a difference this time. There was a 10% increase in voter turnout in my riding alone. Voter turnout increased from 60% to 70%, one of the highest rates in Canada. That is huge and that is a very real example.

When people realize that their vote can make a difference and that they can influence what their government and Parliament look like, they will vote.

In the system we are proposing, people will vote for the person that represents their geographic area. Meanwhile, their other vote will count because every vote will add up and the percentage of people who voted for a given party will change the makeup of the House.

The example that is often given is the Green Party. Many people across Canada support that party. However, when it comes time to vote in each riding, the party receives only small pockets of support across the country. Why are the people who voted for this party not able to be represented in the House of Commons? Why is it problematic for every vote to be reflected in our Parliament? In my opinion, that is the best way to do it.

In September 2013, I had the opportunity to participate in a very interesting conference in Orillia called “Make your

vote count". I was joined by the leader of the Green Party as well as a representative from the Liberal Party, and we had a wonderful multi-party discussion on how to make very vote count in Canada. There were all kinds of workshops and discussions over the weekend on how to help Canadians regain their faith in our political system.

We kept coming back to one idea: if we truly want Canadians to think that their vote counts and if we truly want them to go out to vote on election day because they believe it will make a difference, we need to introduce proportionality into our electoral system. We have no choice.

When we look at the makeup of the House of Commons, which is meant to reflect the Canadian public, since we are here as representatives of the people, it is clear that women and young people are under-represented. Although the NDP is one of the youngest caucuses in the history of Canada, young people are still under-represented here.

People everywhere are amazed at the fact that NDP MPs are so young, but the Canadian population has a greater proportion of young people than our caucus does. That goes to show that the 308 MPs are not yet representative enough.

Implementing mixed proportional representation could help in terms of representation of women, young people, cultural groups and sexual minorities—so many things. I do not see why anyone would oppose this other than for partisan reasons. Some people might think that it is easier for a party to get a majority and hold power without trying to collaborate with others or to think of ways to encourage people to go out and vote and participate in our democracy as much as possible, instead of scaring them and telling them to stay home.

Our voting process has not changed since the 19th century. Our position is clear. The NDP is committed to integrating proportional representation into our system to renew people's interest. The NDP wants to make Canada a truly 21st-century country, a country where the democratic discussion will ensure representation, stability and effectiveness. That is our firm commitment.

What can Canadians expect from the two old parties? Nothing but schemes and excuses. The old parties seem to think they are the state. They have been telling us for ages that they—not anyone else—are the state.

New Democrats are citizens first. We are people of our time who care much more about Canadian democracy than our political party. We want to act on behalf of the fairer and more representative Canada of the future.

It is not just our duty; it is the duty of us all.

**[Mr. Joe Preston \(Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, the member for [Louis-Saint-Laurent](#) and I serve on committee together. I admire her work and how hard she works as a member of Parliament. However, I think she just put me in a class of old guys. I may fit, but I do not like it.

I have a bit of a problem. I love her dearly, but I do not like the solution she offers. If proportional representation means we have to appoint people off a list of party hacks to fill a role, after other people have gone out and worked very hard, as I have done four times, to win a seat, to come here because they are a favourite of a leader, or a party official and they are on a list, just makes it wrong.

Who represents the constituent back home? Is it the fellow or the woman who worked very hard to become the constituent politician, or the person appointed off the party list, the party hack?

**[Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. He does a fine job as committee chair, and it is always a pleasure working with him.

I would like to explain more clearly how the system works. First, Canadians will always be able to vote for an MP to represent their area of the country.

Closed lists are not the only option. What we are proposing is an open list that would allow people to vote directly for the candidates they prefer. We have to trust that the public is capable of choosing the best candidates to represent them.

**[Mr. Adam Vaughan \(Trinity—Spadina, Lib.\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Trinity—Spadina, I am proud to represent the only provincial district in Ontario that voted for proportional representation in 2007. We had to fight the NDP very hard to get that put in place. However, the prevailing thought of the province was not to go in this direction because of the vagaries of the system.

I just listened to the presentation made by the hon. member and I understand there are more details to the proportional representation proposal than are currently in the motion in front of us. For example, there is the list of 100 people. However, if majority rule is the problem that prevents accurate reflection of the general population inside the House, how would a list that does not set aside specific seats for a region over a national interest, or women over men, or perhaps even a selection from our aboriginal first nations people to make ensure their voice, like in New Zealand, is protected and heard inside the House, solve that problem?

The members have all these details. They have not shared the details with the House, yet they have a very prescribed way of getting to a list of 100 people and allowing the majority to choose. How would they ensure that minorities would get a voice in the House if they are subjected to majority rule, once again, through the proposed system?

**[Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for [Trinity—Spadina](#) for his question.

We are not saying that this plan is completely fleshed out and set in stone. We are just saying that closed lists are not the only option.

In a mixed member proportional system, there is the possibility of adjusting various parameters in order to determine what best represents Canada. There is a way to strike a balance between regional representation and proportional representation of parties, so that each party is able to present more representative candidates. It would not be very difficult.

**[Ms. Peggy Nash \(Parkdale—High Park, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I need to correct the record. My good friend from [Trinity—Spadina](#) was in error when he said that only his riding voted in favour of a previous vote on proportional representation. I would like to reassure him that the good citizens of Parkdale—High Park, where we have two strong NDP members provincially and federally, also voted in favour of proportional representation.

My question for my colleague is the following. The hyper-partisanship of the House so often turns off Canadians to politics and leads to the dialogue of the deaf in many cases. Would she not agree that systems of proportional representation, like MMP, the system that the NDP has proposed, which exists in Germany and has a coalition right now of social democrats and conservatives who are able to work together and find common ground, reduce partisanship and lead to better governance for citizens?

**[Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent question.

I want to take this opportunity to boast a bit. *Maclean's* named me runner-up in the most collegial MP category two weeks ago and, as such, I really do not like partisanship. I find that, far too often, it completely poisons our debates.

As my colleague said, one of the positive effects of a mixed member proportional system is that it curbs rhetoric and partisanship and forces the parties to get along, converse and try to find common ground, instead of always focusing on their differences.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I give a special thanks to the member who raised this motion and has given us the opportunity to discuss our democracy and various ideas on how to improve it.

In order to talk about this proposal, we need to discuss the broader context of the debate. I will start with the broad strokes of Canadian democracy, recognizing that everything great that has been achieved in this country has been done through gradual, incremental improvement, starting 800 years ago with the Magna Carta, whose anniversary we will celebrate next year.

I will not go through each of the 800 years, but I will state that in 1867 we actually got a country. It was not until 1931 that we got an independent foreign policy through the Statute of Westminster, and it was not until 125 years after Confederation that we got constitutional independence with the Constitution Act of that year.

There have been instances with the Statute of Westminster where the British mother country actually offered us more independence than we were prepared to accept, which really speaks to the temperamentally conservative approach that Canadians had always taken to the evolution of their democracy. We have built on that approach by making some important incremental improvements in our democracy under the leadership of the present-day Prime Minister.

For example, in this Parliament under this Conservative majority, we have passed more private members' bills than any other government since 1972. Private members' bills are proposed by backbench members of Parliament, not by the government, and they are supported by this government to pass into law. The last time as many passed was 1972, when a large number were simply for riding name changes. In this case we are talking about substantive legislative changes that have done everything from protect vulnerable people from sex trafficking to cracking down on crime, to countless other measures that improve the daily lives of Canadian citizens.

Second, we have allowed vastly more free votes than was the case during previous majority governments. Free votes are when members of a given caucus can decide how they want to vote regardless of what their party leadership tells them to do.

Indeed, *The Globe and Mail*, along with Samara Canada, a group that studies democracy, looked at 162 individually cast votes on the floor of the House of Commons and concluded that the Conservative caucus was far more likely, during the two-year period under examination, to have members vote independently from their leadership than any other caucus in the House of Commons.

The Liberals voted as a unanimous block 90% of the time. In the two-year period under examination, the NDP voted as a unanimous block 100% of the time.

In one in four votes cast in this House of Commons, the Conservatives had a member stand up and vote differently from the party leadership. Statistically speaking, our members have been proven to be far more independent from their leadership, and our leadership has far less control over our caucus, than is the case in other parties.

We have also seen ideological litmus tests on the other side, with the NDP saying that anyone who opposes the long gun registry should be removed from caucus. That happened to one member of Parliament from northern Ontario. The Liberal leader said he would ban anyone who disagreed with him on the subject of abortion.

These sorts of hardline ideological litmus tests that ban anyone with a different point of view are a foreign concept in the Conservative caucus, which is, as I have said, far more open. That speaks to the culture of the caucus in the government of the present day, but let us talk about the legislative initiatives.

First, we passed the Fair Representation Act, which gives fast growing provinces—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):**

he the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth is rising on a point of order.

**[Mr. Craig Scott:](#)**

Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think this is so obvious that it does not need any articulation.

Are we going to have context-setting right up until the end of 10 minutes? The member has not addressed a word to the motion and the context of the motion. He has said nothing but sing the praises of the Conservative Party. I honestly do not believe this is relevant.

**[The Acting Speaker \(Mr. Bruce Stanton\):](#)**

I appreciate the intervention by the member for [Toronto—Danforth](#). The minister is only about a quarter of the way through the time he has allocated for his remarks today, so on points of relevance one first has to hear what he has said before one can make a decision explicitly on that.

The topic before the House today concerns matters of democratic reform. I am sure that the hon. [Minister of State for Democratic Reform](#) is working in his preamble toward coming around to addressing the question before the House. We will give him a bit more time to do that, which I am sure he will do in due course.

The hon. Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

**[Hon. Pierre Poilievre:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, in setting the context, I will take just a few moments to elaborate on an important piece of legislation on democratic reform that he and I both debated, the Fair Elections Act, which requires people to present ID when they vote, a new requirement in Canadian elections that has removed the largely inaccurate voter information card as a form of ID. It has brought in independent investigations so that an investigator can look into potential violations of the Canada election law without any interference from either a party or Elections Canada itself.

We got rid of the ban on the early transmission of election results, which was no longer practical in the modern-day environment. In this country, we used to ban anyone reporting the election results on the east coast before the end of the election on the west coast, something that is possible in the modern era of technology.

We cracked down further on the power and influence of big money by closing the loans loophole that some politicians had used to get around donation limits and by banning dead donors, that is to say, people dying and leaving in their wills donations that were vastly larger than the donation limit, effectively allowing people to do in death what they were prohibited from doing in life. We got rid of dead donors in the Fair Elections Act. It was the biggest remake of our election laws in well over a decade and, according to publicly released polling data, has been overwhelmingly popular with Canadians.

That is a short summary of the context in which we enter the debate on the proposal for a proportional representation system in Canada.

One thing that I have always admired about our existing system as distinct from the proportional one proposed by the NDP is that each member in this place is accountable to an individual constituency and there is not a single square inch in Canada that does not have an MP. Therefore, no matter where people live or who they are, they have members of Parliament that they help hire or fire every four years. That person is responsible to go back to their geographic area and represent its interests and values on a continuing basis.

With a proportional system, that direct connection between a member of Parliament and citizens is obscured at best, and broken at worst. In fact, this place is called the “Commons” because it represents the common people. Its colour is green because the early commoners actually met in fields. They almost always represented a geographic area and would take to the fields with the values and interests of the commoners they represented. Over time, that has evolved into this very sophisticated and well-entrenched system of responsible government that relies on members of Parliament whose jobs are given and taken by the voters in their communities, and we have been very well served in this country by that system.

Proportional representation, by contrast, would inevitably lead to unstable and risky coalition governments that are constantly falling and re-emerging. That would break the stability that Canadians have come to expect and demand from their governments.

Canadians have clearly rejected coalition government. It was not so long ago, back in late 2008, that the NDP and Liberals joined with the separatist Bloc Québécois with the aim of forming a coalition government against the wishes of the electorate and the outcome of an election that had been held only a few days earlier. They came very close to forming a government by way of this coalition. It was not until a massive, potentially unprecedented backlash that they were forced to retreat from that plan and allow the winning party to govern the country.

There is no question that if Canadians return a Conservative minority in the next election, that coalition would re-establish itself and attempt as a coalition to take power that it was not able to secure via a direct election.

Instead of using the proposed change to the electoral system to achieve that coalition government, the Liberals and New Democrats should be honest in the coming election if a coalition is their intention. I think that NDP and Liberal candidates should go door to door and explain their plan for a coalition after the next election and let Canadians decide if they want that. If Canadians vote for it, that is one thing, but what they should not face is a group of parties pretending to run independently from one another and then, after the election is over and the decision is out of the grasp of voters, doing something entirely different, as was the case in late 2008.

If we look at the quality of life that we enjoy in Canada, we see that no matter what measurement we take on an international scale, the success of Canadian democracy in representing the values and interests of the people is really unsurpassed anywhere in the world. We have inherited the greatest democratic system in the world, which is parliamentary democracy. Regardless of where people come from around the world, they can cherish this democratic institution that we inherited from the British parliamentary tradition. Our success is entirely founded on all of the attributes that this system brings. It brings responsible government, common law, limited government, and economic freedom, all of the basic pillars of a free society that have allowed countries throughout our civilization to enjoy so much prosperity and well-being.

I look forward to working with members across the way to build on the success of that great tradition. Hopefully, day by day and step by step, we will make Canada's democracy even better.

**[Ms. Linda Duncan \(Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to thank the minister for his comments on this matter. Yes, he has brought forward a number of changes to the electoral system, which Canadians were very upset about and expressed their disdain for. Some of them we are able to beat back, but not others.

I am disappointed that the minister chose not to discuss whatsoever the motion before the House today. He speaks of responsible government. I would remind him that my ancestor, a Father of Confederation from New Brunswick, reluctantly became a Father of Confederation because he wanted responsible government in this country.

Doug Bailie, president of Fair Vote Canada, has soundly supported proportional representation. He said that it is not a system, but a principle. He says that it better supports our system of responsible government by better ensuring the majority in this House reflects that majority of voters.

If I look at the outcome in Alberta, as a member previously mentioned, I see that in the last election, Conservatives won 66.8% of the vote but 96% of the seats. The NDP received 16.8% of the vote and only 4% of the seats. Saskatchewan is even more skewed. The Conservatives won 56% of the vote but 93% of the seats.

How, then, does the minister think that his system, which he says he is willing to amend, will better represent the views of Canadians? How can he speak against the reforms that we are bringing forward?

**[Hon. Pierre Poilievre:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I did address those arguments in my speech. First of all, I believe that the system we have of first past the post has given Canada good, stable, democratic government. It is government that Canadians are comfortable with.

In fact, when proposals similar to the one that that NDP has put before us were offered in referendums in British Columbia, Ontario, and P.E.I., all of them were rejected by the voters. There was a member across the way from the Liberal Party who pointed out that it was only in one riding in all of Ontario that electors voted in favour of this proportional system that the NDP is now proposing.

Canadians do not consider this proposal to be a priority. They want us to use our existing democratic system to focus on jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity. With our low-tax plan, that is exactly what we are doing.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I am listening very attentively to the discussion in the House of Commons because I think all of us want to see some democratic reform. It is what we are hearing in our constituencies.

I appreciate the efforts of many members of Parliament to put forward different options for reform, but is this what Canadians want? Have we really consulted with Canadians? We know that what is being proposed today has been rejected by a number of ridings and provinces across Canada already.

I have a question for the government member. Will the government support consultation on democratic reform for Canadians, so that we can hear what they want and how they want to reform our system? Is the government prepared to do that?

Also, is the motion before us today a free vote for government members? Are they voting as members of Parliament, or are they voting as a government?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:**

Mr. Speaker, the question was about consultation.

The member correctly points out that this particular proposal has received some consultation in three provinces. It was rejected by referendum by the people of British Columbia, Ontario, and P.E.I.

I note that the motion does not actually call for a referendum. It just calls for the politicians in this place to impose this new system on Canadians through a single vote in the House of Commons, which I think is in itself undemocratic.

Over here, we are not planning structural changes of this nature. Instead, our focus is on keeping taxes low and helping families get ahead. A new family tax cut and an increased universal child care benefit combined will give the average Canadian family with kids an extra \$1,200 a year that they can spend on the priorities that matter to them. That will go to 100% of the families who have children in this country, meaning that four million families will be better off.

Part of a democracy is letting Canadians vote on these types of proposals, and that is what they will be able to do in the next election.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns I have with respect to the New Democrats' motion is that it might lead to the further concentration of power in party leaders' offices.

This has long been a concern of mine. Parties and party leaders currently control the process of party nominations. Without reform of this process of party nominations, my worry is that in a mixed-member proportional representation system in which a number of MPs are selected by the parties themselves, we could see a further concentration of power in party leaders. I think that would weaken this House and the very principles of responsible government.

**[Hon. Pierre Poilievre:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, the member makes a very good point. Recently he identified what I believe is a flaw in the Canada Elections Act.

The flaw he identified was that a leader must personally sign off on the candidacy of every single person who runs for his or her party. That ensures that under the law, parties do not have the choice to select who within their organization would be best suited to approve candidacies. That is something the member has sought to fix with his proposed reform act, which is under examination at committee.

I congratulate the member on his work on that. He is quite right that the proposal from the NDP would actually further concentrate the power of party leaders and backroom party operators. That is the opposite of what we want to achieve in our democracy.

**[Mr. Craig Scott \(Toronto—Danforth, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, it is really important that we clear up some of what is amounting to misinformation. I will not call it disinformation.

The system of mixed-member proportional representation is not the classic list PR with candidates appointed by central parties. It is nothing like that.

We are talking about the example that was set out by the Law Commission of Canada, whereby local constituency MPs are elected exactly as is currently the case. Whatever the percentage is—it could be 60% or 65% of the House of the Commons that would be made up that way—everybody would have a local, directly accountable MP.

Then there would be regional MPs in the House of Commons to create the balance to make sure that the parties are represented according to the popular vote. That is the system. Everybody would be elected, and on the second list people could determine who they want to vote for on the party list.

Everything that has been coming from the other side is already a mischaracterization from both sides. I wonder if my colleague, the minister, might want to clarify why he is not acknowledging that mixed-member proportional is not the kind of proportional representation system that he thought he was describing earlier.

**[Hon. Pierre Poilievre:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, the member acknowledges that there would have to be a list voted on by the citizen. However, that list has to be established somehow. Somebody has to put the list together. The party, the party apparatus, and party leaders would establish that list and give all of its priorities, so the vast majority of parliamentarians on that list would be the hand-picked selection of party leaders.

We do not do that in this party. We have locally nominated candidates who win the support of party members on the ground. That makes our party unique. The others have been exercising a heavy hand to shut down legitimate contestants in their nomination races. That is something we have avoided in the Conservative Party, and we are very proud of the democratic record of our [Prime Minister](#).

**[Mr. Kevin Lamoureux \(Winnipeg North, Lib.\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I am wonder if the member can indicate whether or not his caucus will be having a free vote on this issue, given the preamble to the speech that he just gave. Are the Conservatives in favour of having a free vote on the issue?

**[Hon. Pierre Poilievre:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks, *The Globe and Mail* did a study on that exact question and concluded that among all of the parties in the House of Commons, the Conservative Party was by far the most likely to have free and independent votes. Out of 162,000 individual votes cast by MPs, we had far more MPs vote independently of leadership than the other parties, which is unusual, given that we are on the government side of the

House of Commons.

I think this [Prime Minister](#) has shown his willingness to accept debate and a robust exchange of ideas even when they are not precisely aligned with his own. That is one of the reasons our government has been able to stay in such close contact with the values of everyday Canadians.

**[The Acting Speaker \(Mr. Bruce Stanton\):](#)**

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for [Québec](#), National Defence; the hon. member for [Drummond](#), Environment.

**[Mr. Scott Simms \(Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I am really enjoying this debate. We get to talk about democratic reform in a very precise manner.

We are focusing on the one system that has been put forward in our country, which is talked about ad nauseam in many forums, not just in this country but around the world, and that is the MMP, mixed member proportional representation. However, I am surprised at how prescriptive the motion is.

I will read parts of the motion, and I want to illustrate to the House how important it is, such that countries around the world had this discussion, including Canadian provinces in the form of referendum. There were citizen assemblies created and referendums in New Zealand as well as in this country. The process was a long one and consulted dramatically. It consulted with an entire nation, or in our case, consulted with an entire province. Therefore, I find the motion a little too prescriptive.

Let us dissect the motion for a moment, starting with (a), as follows:

*(a) the next federal election should be the last conducted under the current first-past-the-post electoral system which has repeatedly delivered a majority of seats to parties supported by a minority of voters, or under any other winner-take-all electoral system;*

The critic from the NDP pointed out inflated majorities, and I agree with him. Numbers such as gaining 41% of the vote but getting 60% of the seats are troubling to all Canadians, and they want to rectify that. Therefore, when it comes (a), it sounds good to me. This is a good basis for a debate in which we can fix the problems with the system. Such was illustrated when the Progressive Conservatives went down to two seats but received a substantial amount of the vote. It becomes regional in nature, such as the first-past-the-post system, and therefore we need to fix that system in and of itself. I do not disagree with that whatsoever.

However, I find the second part quite surprising. It reads:

*and; (b) a form of mixed-member proportional representation would be the best electoral system for Canada.*

It begins with “and (b)”. I do not know if that is what is being recommended or if the NDP is proclaiming that it is the best one. Says who?

Personally, even if I did find this to be the best system, I could not say that without a full debate in the House. We are only here for a couple of hours. Let us take a look at the track record. Let us take a look at other systems.

Someone said that the people of British Columbia also turned it down. Actually, they voted on something else, the single transferrable vote, which is a different system. Now we are talking about multi-member ridings, which is completely different.

I was shocked when I saw the consultation. I have talked with NDP members on many occasions, I have spoken to Fair Vote Canada, Fair Voting BC, and to the opponents of proportional representation and received their views on it.

However, to me, it seems that I am only scratching the surface every time I do this, because there is so much more to discuss.

I am surprised, because when we had the Fair Elections Act, or unfair elections act, whatever members want to call it, when the minister brought that to the House and we passed it, I remember NDP members saying, unequivocally, that the one thing they did not like was the fact that it was overly prescriptive.

For example, when Elections Canada advertises, it likes to advertise to promote voting, to get more people to vote and get those numbers up. I agree with that. However, the government decided to take that away and have it advertise only the location, when and where, one could vote, and that is it. The NDP members said that this was overly prescriptive and we should not do that. Therefore, why are they forcing us to vote on just one system? It is one narrow system already turned down by other provinces. Why was it turned down by other provinces?

People in Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick would like to know because they have never faced this type of referendum before. There is so much to be talked about. To me, this sums up why we should have consultation.

One particular politician from Quebec said a year and a half ago in an interview:

*“The other thing that people have to understand is that even if it's not constitutional change per se, it is profound democratic change, and precisely because of that, it's not they type of thing that you can do either by just snapping your fingers the day after an election, or without profound consultation.”*

He further went on to say:

*“People have to be brought in. It's a little like any form of development -- this is democratic development -- and it has to be from the base up. People have to agree with it. You can't shove it down people's throats.”*

Who said that? The leader of the NDP.

This was not said several years ago. If he had said this about 20 years ago, I would understand, but he said this on May 7, 2013—

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** He was the leader then.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** He was the leader then, Mr. Speaker. Why so prescriptive now?

We just heard some conflicting views about the fact that there was an open list based on regions, or not, according to the second member. It is prescriptive to a point, but then it stops there. Our party understands about the necessary change.

Someone pointed out earlier that the Liberal Party did not believe in proportional representation in any way, shape or form. Here is what was passed at our Liberal Party convention in 2014. At our biannual convention in Montreal, we said:

*—immediately after the next election, an all-Party process be instituted, involving expert assistance and citizen participation, to report to Parliament within 12 months with recommendations for electoral reforms including, without limitation, a preferential ballot and/or a form of proportional representation, to represent Canadians more fairly and serve Canada better.*

That is a party position.

Despite that, however, because of the lack of information here, our leader has chosen to have a free vote. I have no doubt that many of our members will vote in favour of this because they believe it would be the best way to go. They

have studied this option and they fully believe that. However, they are not happy about the fact that this has not been engaged in a citizenship discussion, and that is too bad. Some of the consultations that did take place were a resounding no.

I asked proponents of this type of mixed-member system of proportional representation what they did during the referendum in their province. They said they voted against it because they really did not understand it. Many people in Ontario and P.E.I. who were faced with this type of system said that. That has to tell us as parliamentarians that we need to have open and public consultation across the country.

That was decided upon in British Columbia. In May 2005, B.C. had a controversial referendum. The result of the STV, single transferable vote, was 57.69% in favour, but it did not pass because the threshold was set at 60%. It decided to do it again. In May 2009, it was decided to do the identical referendum to resolve the ambiguity and the proposal was rejected by 60%. Over four years, B.C. had a chance to look at it, but maybe it did not like it. In all fairness, that was not the system the NDP has proposed today. It was a different one, the single transferrable vote.

People in British Columbia told me they did not have all of the information. Some people had some really good arguments. I met with a group called Fair Voting BC, which had some great arguments as to why we should consider doing this. I thought it, along with Fair Vote Canada, provided some profound arguments. We should learn from what the people in B.C. have done, maybe from the mistakes they made or maybe put more information out there.

In November 2005, Prince Edward Island held a referendum on MMP, which was defeated by 63.58% of the vote. Again, what was one of the most common complaints? Not enough information.

In May 2009, B.C. redid the identical referendum, as I mentioned earlier, which was defeated by 60% of the vote.

In October 2007, Ontario held a referendum, and 63.13% decided that it was not for them, and in that one we heard a lot about misinformation and not a lot of people felt comfortable enough to vote for it.

Remember, those people want to change the system, but what do they want to change it to? What is it to become?

There are groups out there that are very active social media, such as Fair Vote Canada. It is going through a process of collecting information so it can make that argument. It will not make the mistake where people did not know a lot about it. It wants to get the information out there. It wants to sell a form of proportional representation that it feels is beneficial, as Doug Bailie, the president, pointed out. This was mentioned earlier by my colleague.

To be so prescriptive as we are now is not a good idea, in my opinion. As I said, other people in this party will vote for it. That is why we have the free vote. Even the leader of the NDP said, "You can't shove it down people's throats". Why?

The New Democrats have said that we will have a form of system. When I read it that it was a form of mixed-member proportional representation, I thought maybe that this was of some benefit. If it were a form of it, then we would have a parallel system. We would have people directly elected first past the post and then we also would have our open list. I did not even know it was an open list until the debate started.

I am not sure if this is evolving as we go along, not that there is anything wrong with that. However, I feel like I am not given that choice right now.

I applaud the efforts of the critic of the NDP for what he wants to do. As the member for [Louis-Saint-Laurent](#) pointed out, we need to be more collegial on these issues. We never had a discussion on this. I feel like this was only put in there as a wedge, that the members of one party in the House wanted to take this issue upon themselves. I will give them credit. They were talking about this before most other parties were. This is my way of reaching out and saying, "Let's do this". If they are so right, why do they not discuss it with us?

Our resolution in the Liberal Party stated that we wanted to look at a form of it. In fact, our resolution mirrors what their leader said a year and a half ago, almost to the word, but now it is about wedge politics.

The NDP has stood each and every day and preached openly about the duty to consult, that the Conservative government does not want to consult with people. Well then what is this? We take it upon the research of others. We can go to provinces like Ontario and P.E.I. Those are the only two provinces that have faced this. What about the other provinces? They never have had to face a referendum like this. Now we are in this situation.

I am still waiting to see how this debate unfolds. Quite frankly, if we are going to look at a form of proportional representation, the one the New Democrats are proposing is probably one of the more favourable ones. Germany and New Zealand have it, but let us put all the facts out there.

It is said that when MMP was introduced, voter turnout in New Zealand went up. That is true. The following election it went to a historic low. Therefore, how do we deal with that? We deal with it by having an open discussion on how it has worked in other countries, even if we have to look at countries as far away as Djibouti, which has it. Maybe there is something in that. However, I do not know if we even have an open-list concept that we can draw upon.

We talk about the coalition between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democratic Party over in Germany, but at what point on election night do they get to that point? How is Germany favoured in doing so? I would like to know.

This is a free vote for us but we do not have a lot of time to discuss this. Back in 2013 the leader of the NDP had it right. This should not be shoved down anyone's throat. It should be talked about in an open manner so that people understand that this, as the NDP leader said, is "a profound democratic change". I applaud the people who want to change our system, because we want to change it too.

**[Mr. Craig Scott \(Toronto—Danforth, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for weighing in. Some explanation is needed.

It is not as if the debate is just starting now. It has been going on for decades and there is an accumulated series of studies, commissions, and citizens' assemblies on it. Eight out of nine of the serious ones have reported that a mixed member proportional system, MMP, is the best. We are standing here and saying that there are only two possibilities that would really work in Canada, and there is a consensus on that: a single transferable vote system, STV, or MMP. STV has no locally elected MPs—no single-member-constituency MPs. We personally believe, from all of the studies of the past 12 years, that Canadians would not accept that. Therefore, we are standing here and saying that the only other proportional representation system that would work in Canada is MMP. We have been studying it.

The fact is the Liberal Party has only recently begun to add a process commitment to look at proportional representation after the next election. It is not our fault that the Liberals are so far behind in thinking about this. The point is that if the Liberal Party were to stand up and move an amendment and say that it fully supported proportional representation, that proportional representation is what all parties should be committed to the next time around, that would change the debate because then we would only be arguing about which system. I have not heard that from the Liberal Party. It is very important to know.

What we have not heard is anything at all resembling a commitment to proportional representation, and that is not surprising when the leader of the Liberal Party is constantly saying that he does not support proportional representation, and giving bad reasons for not supporting it.

**[Mr. Scott Simms:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I respect where the member is coming from on this, and I have even alluded to the fact that the members have been talking about this for quite some time as a party mechanism. However, it has never really gotten to the point of fleshing it out in the public like this. I quoted the member's leader earlier, who just talked about the duty to consult on this profound democratic change. If he wanted to have something decent in the House today that we could all vote for, he could start with paragraph (a) of the motion, by saying that the first-past-the-post system fails us in the numbers that it produces. Then, as I said earlier, if that is followed up with a prescriptive measure that

failed in other parts of the country, and miserably failed by a supermajority, there is still a lot of work to do before we can actually put this to vote in the House and say it is the best system.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment that the three oldest continuing democracies in the world are all first-past-the-post systems: the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. We three countries have had our institutions longer than any other democratic system. Unique to these three democracies is the fact that we all use the first-past-the-post system. We should be very cautious about this proposed change.

The other comment I have is that the House is based on representation by population and that we also have the senatorial floor for provincial divisions in the House, such as Prince Edward Island, which is mandated to have a minimum of four seats in the House of Commons. It would require some pretty complex adjustments to preserve that fundamental constitutional principle of representation by population and, at the same time, allocate a number of seats based on the proportion of popular vote.

Those are just the two comments that I have on this motion in front of us.

**Mr. Scott Simms:**

Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that. I do respect his opinion.

I do recall some of the changes to the Westminster system, such as what was done in the U.K. regarding the House of Lords. Also, we are looking at proportional representation in Australia as far as the Senate is concerned, as a play-off to that.

These experiments have good and bad parts. Again, we never really had a chance to discuss this. Some people might want to start this process in the Senate to see how it works and how we would go about doing that.

New Zealand had some time to come to terms with this in a couple of referendums. What runs through all this, as he mentioned, is that it is one of the oldest democracies around. To make a profound change like this in a two-and-a-half-hour debate, as prescriptive as it is, I would not find a responsible thing to do.

However, that being said, I am sure that a lot of people will vote to support this measure as it is right now. A lot of people have worked on this and have their opinions. I respect that, even if they do say yes to the proposal today.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, the notion that the Liberal Party has taken a firm position not supporting proportional representation is news to many of us in the party. The idea that we have not been talking about this is news to many of us. As a former journalist, I have sat in on those conversations as a reporter covering those debates. Therefore, I am not sure where this idea of it being new to us comes from.

What is new today are the details of the proposition we are being asked to speak to and vote on in very detailed specifics, that being a list of 100. The details of the bill are not known until suddenly we ask questions in the House.

In the spirit of collaboration, I am curious as to whether anyone from the sponsoring party has approached the Liberal Party or the critic responsible and detailed exactly what the NDP means by this very specific proposal we are learning about today.

**Mr. Scott Simms:**

Mr. Speaker, no, I have not received anything formally like that. I would love to have chatted about how we could study this, whether to have one of the committees, even a legislative committee or a special committee for that matter, look at this sort of thing. I would certainly be open to that.

As for some of the details that are coming out, as my hon. colleague noted, I am not quite sure about them. Some of the details about open lists and closed lists are coming out during all this. I am not sure that either would work in our

country, given its size. That is part of an argument that could be had. The discussions in the academic world, to me, have been really good so far. The problem is that we have to take that from the academic world out into Main Street, to use the common phrase, and bring it to people to say that this is the system.

The system the NDP is proposing has a big element of first past the post, but also has that section that is done by proportional representation to allow smaller parties' representation. Fundamentally, that is not a bad thing, but we have to look at the fact that some things will change. Ridings get larger.

Perhaps there are other ways of doing it. Perhaps multi-member ridings would work better for a proportional system in our country. This has to be discussed.

**[Mr. François Lapointe \(Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, there is an expression in Quebec that we used to hear all the time, until about 10 years ago or so, to the effect that New Democrats were Liberals in a hurry. I think that people are starting to realize that the Liberals are slightly lazy New Democrats who are a bit short on courage. Today's debate illustrates that.

My colleague has noticed, as we have, an incredible decline in youth voter turnout. In some cases youth voter turnout is 25%. I tour the colleges back home when I can and talk to the young people. There are some who come to meet me in the cafeteria and I am always greatly honoured to see them. They tell me that the current voting system does not encourage them to vote. That is a major problem.

I am sure that my colleague sees that this is a problem. Why does he not want to participate in this debate? My NDP colleague moved this motion so that there would be a debate, so that we could have the courage to move forward and have the courage of the New Democrats. I invite the Liberals to have the courage of the New Democrats and to participate in this debate.

**[Mr. Scott Simms:](#)**

Mr. Speaker, sometimes there is a fine line between courage and stupidity, and I do not mean that in a derogatory way. I apologize if he is offended by that, but here is the problem. One cannot rush ahead and do something with bits of information that is put out to the public for people to consume.

I want to repeat what the leader of the NDP said:

*"The other thing that people have to understand is that even if it's not constitutional change per se, it is profound democratic change, and precisely because of that, it's not the type of thing that you can do either by just snapping your fingers the day after an election, or without profound consultation."*

The courage of one's conviction must be measured in the public realm. That is how one gets people to vote for something. What if a referendum were proposed down the road? The information will have to be disseminated better than it has been so far. Luckily, there are people in organizations like Fair Vote Canada and others to do that, to help us have that debate and get through it. The courage that he is talking about is not where the courage lies in making a solid stand, if the NDP wants proportional representation in this country.

**[Ms. Jean Crowder \(Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting, as I rise to speak to the motion put forward by the member for Toronto—Danforth, to hear people talk about how we cannot rush into this change.

I was elected in 2004. I would like to pretend that this is the very first time that I have risen in the House to speak to the notion of moving toward proportional representation, but sadly, it is not.

I spoke about it when our former leader and the former member for Ottawa Centre was in the House in 2004 and 2005. I spoke about it when Catherine Bell, the former member for Vancouver Island North, brought forward her motion. I spoke about it in 2008, when a member from the Bloc brought forward a motion.

I know that over the last 10 years, many other members in this place have raised it time and time again. I hardly think that this is a rapid change. In addition, a number of studies have been done and I am going to reference them.

Before that, Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be splitting my time with the member for Ottawa Centre.

I would like to turn to the 2004 report from the Law Commission of Canada entitled "Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada". I wish I could read all of the couple of hundred pages, but I cannot.

In its executive summary, it said:

*For the past decade or so, Canada has been in the grip of a democratic malaise evidenced by decreasing levels of political trust, declining voter turnout, increasing cynicism toward politicians and traditional forms of political participation, and growing disengagement of young people from politics. However, as the Commission heard throughout its consultation process, many citizens want to be involved, want to have a real voice in decision making, and would like to see more responsive, accountable, and effective political institutions.*

That was in 2004. A substantial amount of consultation was taking place and some very strong recommendations were made.

It goes on to criticize our current first-past-the-post system. Those of us who have been around for a while can talk about the problems and challenges with our first-past-the-post system after seeing in 2011, that the Conservative government was elected with less than 40% of the vote.

There is something wrong with a system that allows less than 40% of the voters, which was only about 25% of the eligible voters because the voter turnout was so low, to actually put a government in a majority situation. It is now driving the agenda for a whole country, when it does not remotely have a majority of Canadians supporting it.

The Law Commission of Canada identified problems with the first-past-the-post system. It said:

*For many Canadians, this system is inherently unfair—more likely to frustrate or distort the wishes of the voters than to translate them fairly into representation and influence in the legislature. It has been criticized as: being overly generous to the party that wins a plurality of the vote, rewarding it with a legislative majority disproportionate to its share of the vote; allowing the governing party, with its artificially swollen legislative majority, to dominate the political agenda; promoting parties formed along regional lines, thus exacerbating Canada's regional divisions; leaving large areas of the country without adequate representatives in the governing party caucus; disregarding a large number of votes in that voters who do not vote for the winning candidate have no connection to the elected representative, nor to the eventual make-up of the House of Commons; contributing to the under-representation of women, minority groups, and Aboriginal peoples; preventing a diversity of ideas from entering the House of Commons; and favouring an adversarial style of politics.*

Again, over the last three years, I can certainly speak to my own personal experience in the House. It is the most adversarial that I have seen it in the 10 years that I have been a member.

In its conclusion, the Law Commission of Canada said:

*Canada inherited its first-past-the-post electoral system from Great Britain over 200 years ago, at a time when significant sections of the Canadian population, including women, Aboriginal people, and nonproperty owners, were disenfranchised.*

I heard the Liberal member talk about the fact that there are three western democracies that still have this system. It seemed to me that he was touting this as a great thing, whereas other democracies have moved on. I would suggest that, perhaps, after 200 years of the same system, it might be time to take a fresh look at how Canadians should be

represented.

The Law Commission of Canada also said:

*Canada's political, cultural, and economic reality has vastly changed; the current electoral system no longer responds to 21st century Canadian democratic values. Many Canadians desire an electoral system that better reflects the society in which they live—one that includes a broader diversity of ideas and is more representative of Canadian society. For these reasons, the Commission recommends adding an element of proportionality to our electoral system.*

*Furthermore, because of its many potential benefits, electoral reform should be a priority item on the political agenda.*

Its final note was:

*However, it has become apparent that the first-past-the-post electoral system no longer meets the democratic aspirations of many Canadians. Electoral reform is thus a necessary step to energize and strengthen Canadian democracy.*

Ten years ago and we are still making no movement with regard to examining the first-past-the-post system. In a speech on October 15, 2005, on ethics and democratic reform, the Hon. Ed Broadbent noted a couple of key points. I will not talk about the ethics and the accountability part of the speech, but I will focus on proportional representation.

In his opening statement, he said:

*"The debate and time spent in Parliament should be about the state of our health-care and the state of our economy, about foreign policy and human rights, about the security of our seniors and the poverty of our children. I have never seen such a reversal of priorities as in the past 12 months."*

I want to remind people that this is 2005 I am talking about. He said:

*"Time spent on governmental policy has yielded more often than not to debates about the process of governance: about Canadians' concern over the integrity of elected politicians and public servants, about the rules and accountability governing those appointed, about access to information, about contract corruption, about high living at public expense, about unaccountable lobbyists, about wrong-doing partisan-appointed officials resigning with legal impunity—"*

Here we are almost 10 years later and we have got exactly the same situation here in this House. We can lay part of that at the foot of the fact that we still have a first-past-the-post system. We do not have a more representative House here.

Mr. Broadbent talked about the ethics and about some of the ways to address the accountability deficit in this House, but he also talked about democratic reform. He said:

*"A major source of needed democratic reform is our outmoded first-past-the-post electoral system."*

*"Ninety percent of the world's democracies, including Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland and Wales have abandoned or significantly modified the pre-democratic British system that still prevails in Ottawa. As the Law Commission recommended and five provinces seem to agree, fairness means we need a mixed electoral system that combines individual constituency-based MPs with proportional representation. Only such a system would positively redress the existing imbalance in gender, ethnic, ideological and regional voting preferences."*

Just a note on the gender issues, over a couple of decades we have only seen the representation of women marginally increase in this House. In many countries, proportional representation has assisted in that.

He went on to say:

*“In particular, as the Pepin-Robarts Commission pointed out 26 years ago, our present system does a great disservice to Canadian unity because regional representation in the House of Commons—in the caucuses and in the cabinet—does not reflect Canadian voters' intentions.”*

I know that members in other parts of the House talk about how the Senate can address regional representation, but I am talking about elected representation here. That way, people have a real voice in who it is that speaks for them here in the House.

British Columbia unfortunately had a failed referendum with regard to a single transferrable vote, but the process that was used in order to come up with the system, the first time it went to a referendum, it was so close that the government had to hold a second referendum.

Part of the reason the second referendum lost was not because people were not hungry for change, they wanted change, but what happened in British Columbia was that many people did not understand the system.

Many British Columbians that I spoke to, after the referendum failed, said that they really did want change, but they did not understand what it was, so they voted no.

What we need is a very clear proposal for Canadians, outlining how it would affect them in their riding, in their district, and how their access to a parliamentary procedure would improve under a system of proportional representation.

We should all be very concerned in this House about the lack of participation in the electoral process. We should all take a hard look at how we operate in this House. Our objective here should be to increase voter participation. Our objective should be to ensure that the values of Canadians are adequately represented in this House by having a broad cross-section.

I have heard people say that the NDP proposed this system because it would advantage it.

Actually, in a number of elections, proportional representation would have advantaged the other parties, whether it was the Liberals, the old Reformers or the Green Party. We are proposing a system that will more adequately reflect what Canadians want to see.

I would encourage all members of the House to support this good motion and help us ensure that the next election in 2019 reflects true Canadian wishes.

**[Mr. James Lunney \(Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC\):](#)**

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention from my neighbour on Vancouver Island from the riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan.

The member mentioned the citizens' assembly back in 2004. It was actually promised by the previous Liberal government to create a citizens' assembly to look at electoral reform. That assembly, with two people from each of the 79 electoral districts, came up with a formula and they chose an MMPR formula that they then presented in the referendum. It was rejected by the people of British Columbia. It was rejected here in Ontario and it was rejected in P.E.I.

I would like to go back to British Columbia briefly. I was there in a restaurant while 100 people were in a room next door having a presentation on this, and when they came out afterward, I was having lunch with a friend, a business

colleague. When I asked them what it was all about, they said it was about the new electoral referendum question. I asked them if they understood it now. They had been in there an hour. She said she had this booklet. That is the problem. If they cannot explain it to a voter in an hour, it is too complicated, and frankly, it has been rejected all over the place.

Does the member not recognize that the NDP is trying to push through something that Canadians in our province have already rejected?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:**

Mr. Speaker, I actually addressed that in my speech by saying that part of the challenge for people with the single transferrable vote system was they wanted change. That was pretty clear in the first referendum. It was 57% and they needed 60% to make that referendum pass.

We have to wonder about the cynical approach in setting up that referendum. The Liberals made the threshold so high. First, they put together a citizens' assembly and they thought that the citizens' assembly could never come to consensus. They were wrong. The citizens' assembly came to a consensus. Then they set the referendum threshold very high. It was a complicated formula and it came so close that what they actually had to do was go back and have a second referendum.

That clearly demonstrates that there is an appetite for change. We have to work with people in order to ensure they understand the change and that they are involved in putting forward a proposal that will work for them.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I note with interest that there had been 28 provincial governments led by the NDP and not one of them has ever proposed this. In fact, every single time proportional representation has been put on the ballot for a referendum, it has been done by a Liberal provincial government, but somehow our support is in question. It is strange.

The critical piece here is that we are being asked to support a very specific proposal with a very vague motion and the challenge that we have is trying to understand exactly what the member means. She talks about the concern about lack of representation from certain groups. What we find is that the trade-off for that is massively bigger ridings.

I have a colleague from Labrador who can barely get to her entire riding within a given year because of its size. The hon. member is proposing to make it even bigger.

The trouble with this is, if we have the voting system as described by the member, it would be extraordinarily difficult to prevent large money candidates from always topping that list.

You cannot do this with the snap of a finger. You have to have public consultation. Why will you not agree with your leader?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):**

I remind the hon. member to avoid using that “you” word. When we start doing that, we tend to not be addressing the Speaker.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:**

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member quoting my leader in the House. I am pleased to hear that the Liberals listen to the leader of the official opposition. That is good news.

I also want to acknowledge the comment that an NDP provincial government had not put forward a system of proportional representation. It is unfortunate that has happened because we would have had a good chance to have it succeed if an NDP government had moved forward with that initiative.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That is what happened in Saskatchewan and Ontario.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I want to thank the House leader for heckling during my speech, Mr. Speaker. I still believe that, fundamentally, at the core of what we are talking about is a desire for change in the electoral system. People are very concerned about the hyper-partisanship that is a symptom of our parliamentary process. They are very concerned about the under representation of youth, women and aboriginal peoples in this House.

Surely, again, if we are concerned about what many people are calling the democratic deficit, we would move forward on a system that better reflects the wishes of Canadians.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):**

Before we resume debate, I will let the member know that there are five minutes remaining in the time provided for the debate this afternoon.

The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, I will truncate my comments, but the message is fairly clear. We have a democracy that has been around since 1867. It predates access to electricity. We on this side think it is about time to look at reforming a system that allows the Conservative Party and the previous Liberal government to have all the power with only 38% of voters, out of which half of the population voted.

I have travelled as the foreign affairs spokesperson for my party, and the Government of Canada advises other governments about democratic reform. If we were to ask people if it is an acceptable system for a minority of citizens to decide where the power goes and to say that the status quo is fine, they would look at us and ask what was wrong with us. That is what New Democrats are talking about. We are talking about the fact that it is time for us to actually deal with democratic reform.

I have to say that this comes just after the government and the [Prime Minister](#) wrote about the importance of democratic reform. Mr. Speaker, you know this as I am sure you have read all of the [Prime Minister's](#) writings, particularly those before he became Prime Minister. He co-authored a paper on proportional representation. It was our Prime Minister who advocated this system. New Democrats are simply saying that we agree with him, and let us get on with it.

The old prime minister understood our system. He lived through it. He saw the phony majority governments of Jean Chrétien and prior to that, when a party that received less than 40% of the vote got all of the power. It goes deeper than that. It is something we are seeing in the United States, which is very troubling. It is when people see there is no opportunity for their votes to count. We have to change that, because people are becoming cynical.

A discussion I often have is about young people not voting. People say they do not know what is wrong with young people. It is not what is wrong with young people; it is what is wrong with our democratic system. Young people are smart, and they are saying that until the system is fixed, they are not going to participate. They are looking at the choices and saying that if they vote, their votes will be wasted.

There are a couple of ridings that always vote Conservative. If there are Green Party or NDP supporters, they know their votes are wasted and they do not vote. They simply decide not to use their franchise. Similarly, in a riding that is typically NDP, Conservatives' votes are wasted, and that is wrong. It is fundamental to our democracy.

I remember a quote from Governor Smith of New York, who famously said that the solution for all that ails democracy is more democracy. That is exactly what we need in our system. That is what our proposal is about. We have seen it work very well. This is what we are proposing to take to Canadians, unlike our Liberal friend, who made some weird statement about New Democrats not consulting and who also thinks we have a \$400 billion infrastructure deficit. He made that up. For some reason, Liberals think that talking about it in the House of Commons, bringing forward a

motion, running on it in an election, and then actually consulting people is somehow not consulting. It is the Liberal way, I guess.

We are serious about reforming our system so that every vote will count. If every vote counts, then we will have what New Zealand has. New Zealand has a history similar to ours, a Westminster tradition. What did New Zealanders do? They took what New Democrats are proposing here and put it into action. Not only that, they then had a referendum after a couple of years. It took place just a couple of years ago, and it asked the people of New Zealand if they thought it was working and if they liked it. Everyone said yes. That is what we are talking about.

The way it would work is people would vote for the people they want to represent them in their ridings and the party of their choice. It gives people more choice. It is very simple. It would allow Canadians to see their votes count and for the votes to be recognized in Parliament.

At the end of the day, what is happening in New Zealand, which I know might sadden some Conservatives, is that toxic politics are gone. People actually work together to make sure that the business of the people comes first, rather than having all these toxic talking points and wedge politics, which might be a reason for the party not to support the previous position of their Prime Minister.

I would ask members to look to Canadians, particularly young Canadians, and say, "Let us reform our system. Let us make every vote count. Let us make sure that we take a system conceived in 1867, before we had electricity, and modernize it so that we can have a Parliament that functions for everyone."

This is why I want all members, in good conscience, to ask themselves if they want to improve things in their country. If they do, then let us change the system. Let us have democratic reform in our electoral system and vote yes to this motion.