

Election report 'voice of the people'

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After eight months, Ron Green has a lot to catch up on. The recently retired St. Catharines building inspector wants to get back to his home renovation project. "I cleaned up the bedroom but the back is still a mess," Green said. And he's eager to have weekends free to ride his Harley Davidson motorcycle and play slo-pitch. Free time has been hard to come by for Green, who has spent most of the past eight months participating in the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

He was one of 103 randomly selected Ontarians who were charged with the historic task of studying the way we elect our representatives, and possibly suggest a change. Green will be among a number of assembly members heading to Toronto on Tuesday to present their final recommendations to Queen's Park.

It's the first time Ontario politicians have asked citizens to make such important decisions about our government. "It's the voice of the people," Green said. "This is our province." Green says including citizens in the process will make people more interested in elections. "It's made Ontario more aware of government," Green said. "I think more people will come out to the election because of it."

Green is hoping for a high turnout, because the assembly is recommending that Ontarians vote in a referendum to change the way we elect our representatives. That referendum will likely take place during the next provincial election, Oct. 10. It's a rare event for Ontario.

The last referendum in this province was in 1921, when voters had to decide if alcohol should be prohibited. The referendum in October will ask voters to choose between the current system and a new system – mixed member proportionality - being recommended by the Assembly.

It's a controversial proposal. The new system would give voters two choices on the ballot: one for a local representative and another for a political party. The assembly says the system will make sure parties won't form a majority government unless they win a majority of the vote. Critics say Ontario would likely swap the stability of constant majority governments for coalition governments.

Green said the current system may produce frequent majority governments, but it's outdated. "It's a 200-year-old system designed by white landlords," Green said. The decision to reject the current system wasn't an easy one, Green said. The assembly spent months learning about elections and consulting with the public before making any recommendations.

Green said giving up two weekends a month was only the beginning of his commitment. "There was a lot of homework and reading so we could understand it all," Green said. But he said he'd do it again "in a heartbeat." "I like to stay involved and serve the public," said Green, who is president of the 10th Field Battery Association and a board member for St. John Ambulance, among other service groups.

Green said the public response to the assembly has been positive. "A lot of people we spoke to said they'd trust our judgment," Green said. "We're just regular people, too." He said he thinks the referendum will gain the 60 per cent support needed to make the assembly's recommendation a reality.

But Green will have to wait until October to see if the proposal will become a reality. Until then, you can find him on the slo-pitch diamond.