

Electoral system is just fine, commission told

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Byline: TONY RICCIUTO

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Ontario's electoral system has worked well for 215 years so why change it, says Grade 9 student Steven Badger of Niagara Falls. "If we look at the countries with the most stable governments in history, we see a trend," he told an audience of about 30 people Monday night at a meeting hosted by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

"The United States, Canada and the United Kingdom have had the most stable governance in history. All use and have always used single-member-plurality/first-past-the post" methods of electing governments. Badger, 14, a student at A. N. Myer Secondary School, was one of seven people to speak during the three-hour meeting at the MacBain Community Centre on Montrose Road.

Badger said millions of dollars would have to be spent to change the current system that is easy, where voters simply mark an X on the ballot. "In other systems, you may be forced to rank lists of candidates and parties and if you don't rank enough or you rank too many, your vote may not be counted," he said.

The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform has toured the province since November, collecting input from people across the province on the state of democracy in Ontario and ways to improve it. Public forums are being held in 37 communities.

Salvacion Villamil, a retired high school teacher, represents the Niagara Falls riding on the assembly. Villamil, like other members of the commission, was selected at random by Elections Ontario to represent the citizens of each of the province's electoral districts.

There are 103 citizen appointees and a chairman, George Thomson, a former judge and deputy minister who was appointed by the government. Another speaker, Mel Grunstein, who ran for the Reform and Conservative parties in the past, said meetings like this are worthwhile because people can present different views.

"I got into politics largely because I didn't think one little X every four years is enough," said Grunstein. "The system is overly simple at the moment and we could get more ideas from more people if we were just prepared to be a little more imaginative and have a slightly different system."

The Citizens' Assembly must recommend to the government whether Ontario should keep its electoral system or adopt a new one. If the assembly recommends a change, it will be put to a referendum expected to be held during the next provincial election Oct. 4.

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