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Exploring new ways to vote

Forum looks at electoral reform

By **JEANNE PENGELLY**
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Variations on a single theme emerged at last night's citizens' assembly on electoral reform.

The way Ontarians make governments is unjust, unrepresentative, denies citizenship and is anti-democratic, said the majority of speakers at the forum.

More than 50 people attended the three-hour gathering at Trent University, one of 37 meetings where members of a provincial assembly are charged with listening to voters, and reporting back to the government.

"I am appalled at the behaviour of federal, provincial and local governments," said Fred Corbet, who presented a case for doing away with the current voting system, and replacing it with one in which voters choose the party they want

to run the government.

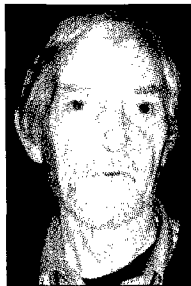
The citizens' assembly on electoral reform was put in place by the provincial government to look at voting systems around the world.

Its 104 members spent six weekends learning the ropes. Now they are journeying around the province in small groups to hear what others think, and in May will make its recommendation.

If the assembly recommends reform, the government has promised a public education campaign before the Oct. 7 provincial election, when all voters will be asked to weigh in on the question of electoral reform.

Any actual changes to ballots or procedures would not take place until the following election.

Former broadcast journalist and area resident Mark Finnan called



Mark Finnan

Learn more

- More information: www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca. or pick up literature at any Service Ontario kiosk.
- Send written comments by Jan. 15 online, by mail to Citizens' Assembly Secretariat, 1075 Bay St. Ste. 830, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2B1, or by fax to 416-325-8390.
- E-mail: info@citizensassembly.gov.on.ca

last night's meeting an "historic occasion," and said he was deeply concerned that the current system does not reflect the diversity in Ontario.

"Voting is one of the most important political acts I can engage in as a citizen," he said.

"It would really change the face of politics," allowing parties to pull people into the legislature so that it would better reflect minorities and rural areas, he said.



Most of those who attended, some part of Fair Vote Canada, a group already aligned with electoral reform, favoured some form of proportional voting where people choose a party rather than a single candidate.

The current "first-past-the-post" system claims one winner who needn't have a majority as long as he or she gets more votes than any of the others.

That's the system many last night called unfair.

"If I lived in an old house with a leaky roof ... I would know I need a new house," said local resident Betty Borg.

A compromise would mix the current voting system with proportional voting, and have people choose a local candidate and a party. The party could fill extra spots with its own choices, or from a list of candidates ranked by voters.

A small handful said the way we elect people to make governments is fine the way it is.

James McKeever said there's no need to change things, and cited an unstable government in Italy as an example of proportional voting gone wrong.

The two local assembly members, Ann Thomas for Peterborough and the county, and Marie McLaren for Haliburton, Victoria and Brock, reminded speakers several times they have no say over what happens after May 15, when they make their recommendation.

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