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# Your chance to spout off on electoral reform in Ontario

Public forum  
next step in  
modernizing  
Ontario elections

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For The Sudbury Star

Ontario voters honour an old tradition every time they go to the polls to elect a new provincial parliament. They make their choices in much the same way voters did in the first election to choose their governors in 1792.

The election procedure has thus stood the test of time for more than 200 years. If it was good enough for great-great grandfather's great-grandfather, it should be good enough for us, right?

Well, maybe. But that matter is now under scrutiny by 103 men and women who make up the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. This is a group set up by the provincial government, but none of its members is a politician or an officer of the legislature.

To establish the Assembly, names of voters from each riding in the province were selected at random from the permanent voters' list by Elections Ontario. Then, by means of a draw made at public meetings, one person from each riding became a member of the Assembly. The representative for Sudbury riding is Christine Robert of Kent Court and for Nickel Belt it is me, of Val Caron.

On alternate weekends since the end of September, Assembly members have

gathered in Toronto for intensive training in the voting and vote-counting processes now in use by democracies throughout the world. To some of the Ontario group, it came as a surprise to know that our simple one-count "first past the post" plurality system for awarding legislature seats is not the method used by most countries with open electoral processes. Various forms of proportional representation take the leading place.

Under proportional representation, allowance can be made for voter-preferences that are swallowed up and left out of the picture in our elections. It is possible, for instance, in one variation of the process, (there are many) for the voter to express a party preference as well as choosing an individual representative.

Additional seats can then be allocated on the party basis in direct proportion to support recorded at the polls. This is in addition to individual name choices and it is all done in the cause of fairness.

This is just one of the possibilities that could be open to Ontario voters — and there are others to be considered, too. Multiple voting for candidates in order of preference is a method in some jurisdictions.

There are many alternatives

to our tried-and-true procedures and all of them are being looked at by the Citizens' Assembly.

It is important to this whole process that the views of Ontarians in general be presented for discussion in public. Meetings throughout the province are currently being set up for these public presentations and to answer questions about the work now going on.

For Sudbury and Nickel Belt ridings, there will be a public meeting at the Friendship Centre at 110 Elm Street on Nov. 29 at 7 p.m. Anyone wishing to make a presentation should register

Certainly, the assembly seeks some emphatic opinions as it sets about its major task of considering what (if anything) is to be done to bring Ontario's most basic and vital democratic process into the twenty-first century.

Did great-great-grandfather really have it right forever? What might be done to improve the fairness of our voting system? What are the trade-offs? Should the whole thing be left alone? Why?

There is much for the assembly to mull over and debate when it sets about the second phase of its task in the early part of the New Year, after the current series of public input meetings is completed. A report with detailed

recommendations is to be presented to the provincial government next May.

The assembly was set up on the recommendation of a legislature all-party committee which conducted a study of its own.

The government has promised to call a referendum on any changes to the present system which the assembly

with the Citizens' Assembly secretariat. Details of this procedure can be found online at [www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca](http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca) or by toll-free phone: 1-866-317-3208.

The two local representatives, Christine Robert and myself, are hoping for a good turnout and a lively discussion at the meeting, which will be equipped for French as well as English language presentations. The meeting is open to anyone who has something to say on the subject or who simply wants to listen or ask questions.



may bring forward after its deliberations are done next spring.

In the meantime, 103 Ontario citizens still have much work to do in thrashing out their conclusions.

If you have some thoughts to offer, the best way to do it is to attend next week's meeting but don't give up if that is not possible. We are always available by e-mail at [www.citizen-](http://www.citizen-)

[sassembly.gov.on.ca](http://sassembly.gov.on.ca).

■ Richard Bowdidge represents Nickel Belt on the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

**FOR MORE**

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