

# New electoral system urged

## Students to present case this weekend at Osgoode Hall

By James Wallace  
Osprey News Network

THE ONTARIO STUDENTS ASSEMBLY, created to give youth a voice in Ontario's democratic review process, will today recommend the province scrap the electoral system used for more than 200 years in this province to elect MPPs and political parties.

In a 24-page presentation obtained by Osprey News, the students call for the province to adopt a "Mixed Member Proportional" electoral system used in countries such as Germany, New Zealand and Mexico.

It's a system that gives voters two votes – one for a local candidate and one to decide which political party should govern.

The students are passing their findings and recommendations onto the Ontario's Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform at Osgoode Hall in Toronto this weekend.

"Some will say that young people always want change, but they might be surprised to learn how much the students focused on the practical consequences of change," the report said.

"They considered how easily voters would understand any new system, how much a change would cost the province, how change would affect the physical layout of the legislative chamber, and even the workload of MPPs."

The Students' Assembly was composed of 103 students, one from every riding in the province, to mirror the process being used by the province's Citizens' Assembly.

And like the adult assembly, the students have met regularly during the past six months to review the pros and cons of Ontario's current electoral system, study alternative systems, to discuss electoral reform and decide whether changes are needed to make our system better.

"I think it's necessary that we should at least consider changing it because in a democracy, it's always important to collectively evaluate our system ... and what's going on in our world," Kathleen Childs, a student assembly member told Osprey News.

Childs began the process six months ago favouring the status quo – the first past the post or "single member plurality" system broadly used across Canada, the U.S. and in Britain.

Like a horse race, the politician who wins the most votes in a head-to-head race against other candidates in his riding is elected.

The party that wins a majority of the 103 seats in the province forms the government (or failing a majority, the parties come to terms to support a minority government).

One of the benefits suggested for mixed member proportional systems is that they better represent broad voter intentions and give meaningful representation to small and fringe parties.

For example, in Ontario's 2003 provincial election, the Liberals won 46.4 per cent of the popular vote but took 72 seats because of riding victories.

Under mixed member proportional the Liberals seats would hold just 48

seats filled by a combination of local candidates and candidates drawn from a central party list and would have been forced to form a minority government.

The Green Party, meanwhile, which captured 2.8 per cent of the vote province wide but failed to win any seats would have been awarded three seats.

Such systems often lead to minority or coalition governments.

When the Students' Assembly members voted on whether to choose an alternative to Ontario's current system, 59 supported the Mixed Member Proportional system.

"We like to think it's a happy marriage between the current system which is plurality and a more proportional-based system," said Johathan Yantzi, a Burlington student and assembly member.

Meanwhile, another 31 Student Assembly members voted for a Single Transferable Vote system such as Ireland uses, where voters rank candidates by preference and vote for multiple candidates including opponents from the same party.

And 13 students favoured an Alternative Vote system such as Australia uses where voters rank candidates by preference. Candidates with the lowest number of first-preference ballots are eliminated one by one until a winner emerges with a majority of first-preference votes.

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