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Date 01.09.2006	Circ. 17000 Page A5	1 / 2

Citizens' Assembly examining electoral process

LETTER OF THE DAY

What an interesting adventure I have been on so far. Back in June, when I was originally chosen for this position, I knew it was going to be fascinating and a lot of hard work.

But first things first. As you can tell, my name is Arita Droog. I'm from Durham and I have been selected to be your representative for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Now I'm sure you're saying what the heck is that?

The Assembly is a group of 104 people, one from each of the 103 electoral ridings in Ontario and a chairperson. (By the way there are 52 men and 52 women).

Our mandate is to examine the current system for electing members of the provincial parliament. In that process we will examine other systems, consult with Ontarians, issue a report recommending whether Ontario should retain the current system or adopt another model.

So now I know you are asking why do we need a Citizens' Assembly? As one of my fellow Durhamites said to me, "If it ain't broke don't fix it." And that is exactly the point, is it broke? Does it need fixing?

The heart of Ontario's democracy is a system of regular elections that allow citizens to choose the people who will represent and govern them. When that system reflects the values of citizens, it produces a democracy that is rich, vital and strong. Does our current system do this for us?

We at the Assembly are being asked to examine the electoral system and determine whether it continues to reflect the values of Ontarians.

I don't know whether the system needs fixing or not. I don't have the facts yet. For that matter, I really don't know very much about the way we vote for our members of provincial parliament. I am starting at square one, with no set notions as to what should or should not be done.

This is why I am writing this column. As I go through this learning process under the leadership of Dr. Jonathan Rose, an associate professor of political science at Queen's University, in the next few months, I will keep you up to date as to what I have learned. This way we can all learn and decide for ourselves if there needs to be changes made.

Sometime during the period from late November to mid February there will be a public consultation period where I will be hosting a forum type event. I look forward to hearing your opinions. At this event, all of your views will be recorded and brought back to the Assembly, where all the information from all the forums will be presented and discussed.

During this deliberation phase we will need to put together a plan for Ontario and decide if all, some, or none of our current system needs adjusting. This report, with our recommendations, will be handed in to the Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal by May 15, 2007. Should the decision be made that changes ought to occur, the Ontario government has promised to hold a referendum to determine if that alternative will be implemented in the province. For the first time in history, we Ontarians will have the opportunity to participate in a full, open debate on our electoral system. It will come back to you to vote on in the next provincial vote.

Well that's it for now. In my next column, I'll let you know what happened at the first meeting of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

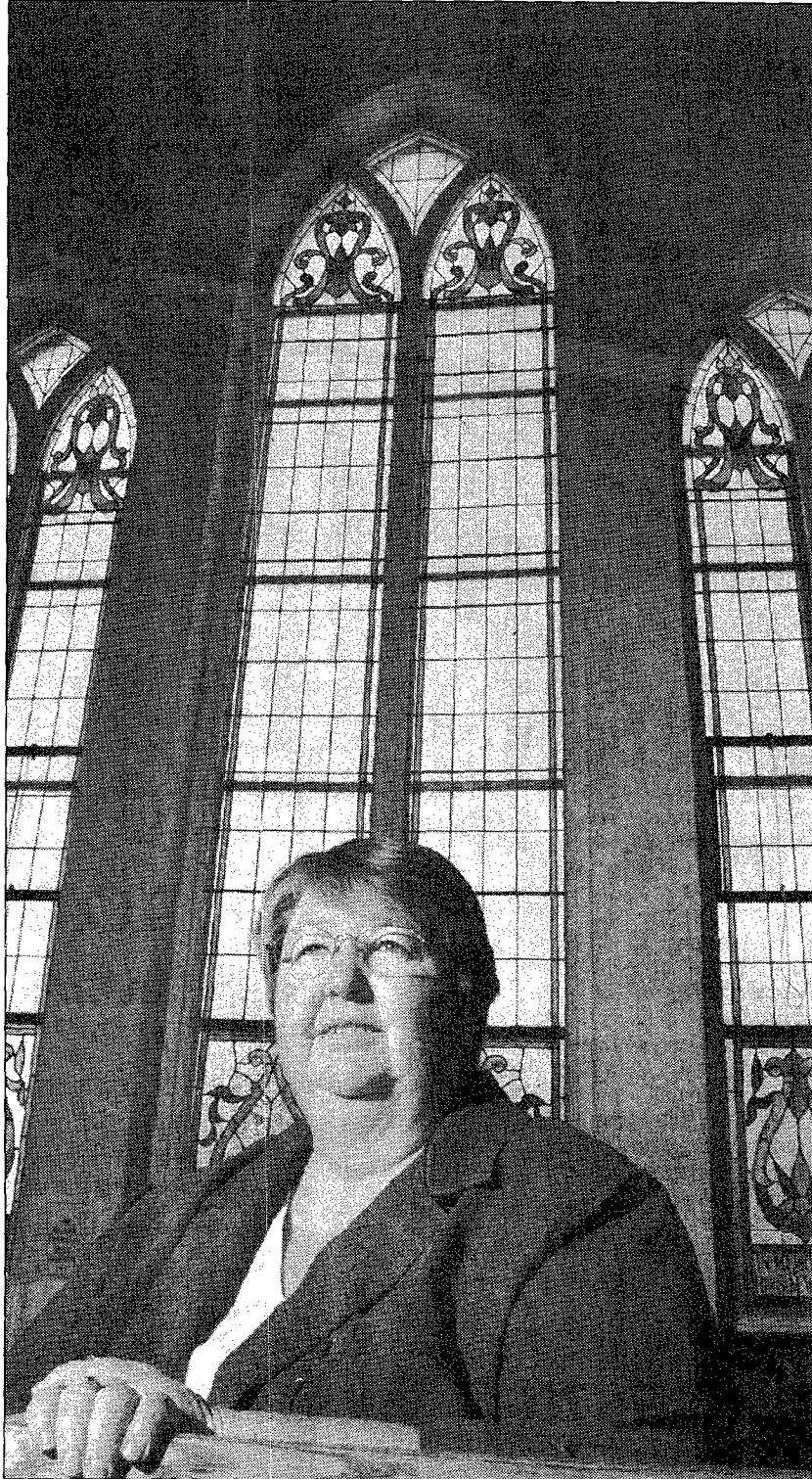
If you want to follow along there are press releases about the information that we are learning and photographs on the Assembly's website. www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca

Arita Droog
Durham



SUN TIMES PHOTO

Arita Droog represents this area at the Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform.



Editor: