

The Sun Times (Owen Sound, ON)		Order/Commande
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Learning about elections from the experts

Have you ever been at a meeting where the speaker or speakers are so interesting that you get totally wrapped up in what they are saying and you forget that there really is a question that you would like answered?

Well that is what happened at weekend three of our learning phase of the Assembly on Electoral Reform.

We had three guest speakers on the Sunday morning, Professor Jennifer Smith from Dalhousie University, Professor David Docherty from Wilfrid Laurier, and Professor Lawrence Leduc from the University of Toronto.

Reading up on these folks you begin to realize that these just might be some of the big guns of political science in Canada.

Sitting there and listening to these folks talk passionately about their forte, you get mesmerized by the information that so easily slips from their mouths.

They speak effortlessly on electoral systems. Let us talk about these things too.

It is widely accepted that there are four families of electoral systems with a variety of different electoral systems within each family. They are:

1. Single Member Plurality (SMP) (also called First Past the Post). This is where a candidate needs more votes than any other candidate. They do not need a majority of the votes to win.

2. Majority systems require that candidates get a majority of 50 per cent plus one in order to win the seat.

3. Proportional Representation (PR). This family's distinguishing feature is that the share of seats roughly equals the share of votes received by the party.

4. Mixed Member Proportional. This usually combines SMP and PR where voters choose a local candidate with SMP and a party with the PR system.

Using this simplified explanation you can see that each one is quite unique and has its own merits.

Some allow you to vote for your local candidate, others force you to choose a party. One allows you a choice of candidates and another the choice of candidate and party.

One gives your vote more weight



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while another allows for wasted votes. Each one of these systems has its strong and weak points.

Which one do you prefer? What we have now (SMP) or something new?

Let your voice be heard by the assembly, we are open to all your input. Write us, e-mail us, or come and talk to us on Dec. 4 at the Owen Sound North Union Public Library.

By the way the question I wished I had asked was: What gems of information would you suggest we need to know before making a decision on an electoral system in Ontario?

Judging from the good-natured disagreements between our panelists there would have been three different answers.

I also believe that given a chance, each one of the panelists would have suggested a different electoral system too.

Given the variances in our speakers' opinions, I know that our task will not be an easy one.

It is the life work of each of these individuals and if they can't agree on the outcome, then our job will be a real challenge.

On the weekends that we are meeting you can see us in action with live web streaming on the TVO website www.tvo.org/citizensassembly

You can also follow along at the website www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca

If you have any questions please email me at ADroog@ontariocitizensassembly.ca

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