

<b>The Whig-Standard (Kingston, ON)</b>			Order/Commande
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## OUR VIEW

# Wake up to democracy

**M**OST PEOPLE," GEORGE THOMSON WRYLY admitted to a Toronto newspaper this week, "don't wake up in the morning thinking about electoral reform."

But for better or worse, the former Kingston judge now must. As *The Whig* reported yesterday, Thomson will chair a provincially appointed Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform to look at whether the traditional first-past-the-post voting system is best for Ontario or needs fixing.

It's an ambitious exercise for the 103 brave delegates who will make up the assembly, and who will report their conclusions to Ontarians in about a year. Yet, to most of us, it all seems rather torpor-inducing. As Thomson says, we don't normally start our days breathlessly wondering if proportional representation would be better for our health and, if so, how we can best introduce reform into our balloting system.

So why this exercise? Simply because democratic reform is all the rage just now?

As editorials in this space have pointed out, political fashionistas are currently toying with limited terms for senators, fixed election dates for MPs and, closer to home, four-year terms for municipal councils. This spring, there was even a flurry of renewed interest in giving student trustees a vote to go along with their seats on school

**REFORM**

**Citizen's**



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**assembly  
arcane,  
but perhaps  
essential**

boards.

It's not just about being a la mode, however.

This very week, federal civil servant Chuck Guite was found guilty of five counts of fraud stemming from the sponsorship scandal. In part, that fraud took

place because of weaknesses in Canada's democratic accountability.

It is also a week in which 15 Canadians appeared in a courtroom (another two are already behind bars for gun smuggling) for apparent terrorism-related crimes, actions that could have fiercely undermined democracy if carried out.

The arrests themselves challenge our democratic system. The men are held without full access to the information uncovered by investigators, according to their lawyers, who are also complaining of limited access and a guilty-until-proven innocent mentality among the public.

Meanwhile, the prime minister is now surrounded

by another layer of security and shuttled around in a heavily armed vehicle. There is talk in the nation's capital of further restricting public access to Parliament Hill. If our freedom to enter public buildings there, in Toronto or even in Kingston becomes more difficult, we have ripped a petal from our blossoming democracy.

If the basic rights of the accused are violated, we have ripped away another. And if what is reported to have been the intent of the arrestees proves true, we can conclude that they and their ilk see democracy merely as a nuisance, a fragile plant easily torn from its roots.

All of this is why we should realize the value in groups such as Thomson's modest, if seemingly arcane, citizens' assembly. These Ontarians are attempting to root democracy deeper, by exploring whether there are ways to ensure individuals' voices are heard more effectively.

That's the real reason democratic reform is "cool." Ontarians should wish Thomson and his group well, and take the time to carefully consider whatever conclusions they eventually reach.