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Ottawa Journal: Electoral Reform

By David Tilson, MP

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On May 10, 2016, Liberal Ministers Dominic LeBlanc and Maryam Monsef announced the Liberal government's plan for a special Parliamentary committee to study changes to the voting system, and to have that committee report back to the House by December 1, 2016.

The process set out by the Liberals is entirely unacceptable and stacks the deck in their favour.

In effect, they are attempting to rig the 2019 election.

The Conservative Party insists that Canadians must have the final say, in a national referendum, on any proposed changes to how Canadians elect their MPs.

Whatever the plan, and whatever the process, Canadians want a vote---yes or no---before the government tries to change the voting system.

That is what Canadians deserve from their government, and that it what the Conservative Party will continue to push for. When a government wants to change the basic rules of democracy, everyone must have a ?say.

All options should be on the table, and Canadians should not be denied the choice to say ?No.?

Our best examples of voting system consultations in Canada---the citizens' assemblies of British Columbia and Ontario, and the in-depth studies in Prince Edward Island---all concluded with a referendum. That's the standard of behaviour that Canadians now expect.

No government in Canada has tried to impose a new voting system without a referendum since the early 1950s. The last time it was tried, the politicians were rigging the system. Voters saw this and rightly punished them for it.

A referendum on the Liberal plan is the only way to ensure any change has the clear support of Canadians, and that the government's plan is fair and transparent. A near-consensus of editorial and opinion commentary has urged the government to put any proposal to a referendum. Recent polling confirms that Canadians want the same thing: they want a vote. The Prime Minister has been clear in saying that he won't hold a referendum because he doesn't think he can win one. The Prime Minister simply doesn't trust Canadians to give him the right answer.

This government has already developed a track record of promises broken for convenience, and without remorse. I have no faith that this Liberal government will deliver on its promises of open-mindedness, and thorough, fair consultations with Canadians on electoral reform.

A committee of ten parliamentarians, no matter the makeup, is not, and never will be, a substitute for all Canadians having their voices heard directly in a referendum. Providing only seven months for this committee to report its findings, on such a broad range of topics, and after more than six months of delay, is disrespectful to Parliament and to Canadians who want their voices heard.

The government could have chosen to make the votes of all Canadians count when forming this committee. Instead, the Liberals chose to entrench their majority and deny committee voting rights to fully half of the opposition parties.

The Liberals have ensured they can impose their pre-determined agenda on this committee, and have given opposition parties no meaningful way to ensure that the committee's recommendations are reflective of the will of Canadians.

The principles put forth by the government---which were eight, but are now seven, grouped under five headings---are contradictory, and therefore are nothing less than an exercise in Liberal vanity, crafted to allow the government to justify the pre-determined outcome it intends to impose on Canadians.

This government is cynical and shameless when it asserts a mandate to impose change that is the result of a parliamentary majority it clearly believes to be ill-gotten under the current voting system. It cannot have things both ways.

Remember, only 39.5% of Canadians voted for the Liberals nationally. This does not equate to a mandate to unilaterally change our electoral system.