

## **Reform of Parliament**

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1. Most Canadians want to live in a democracy but at present neither chamber of Parliament is democratic.
2. The Senate is appointed and in its composition offends massively against the equality rights of Canadians – an undeniable and incurable reality which could be mitigated only by constitutional amendment.
3. The House of Commons, which supplies the governments, is elected by a winner-take-all method which consistently leaves half of all Canadian voters unrepresented. The Commons exaggerates regional differences and grossly misrepresents the expressed preferences of Canadian voters. On the legitimacy and accountability scales it is far from democratic.
4. The urgent priority in Canada is to reform the House of Commons, and the process of forming governments, by providing every Canadian citizen with an equal effective vote and equal representation. The nation's greatest need is a democratic House of Commons and legitimate majority government.
5. Some claim the Senate provides strong regional representation and sober second thought on legislation passed by the House. The current chamber represents the regions poorly and its sober thoughts, when they occur, lack democratic legitimacy.
6. The constitution of Canada guarantees the existence and composition of the Senate. Its entrenched composition bears little resemblance to 21st century Canadian realities.
7. The government's current attempt to reform the Senate through a piecemeal approach is doomed to failure. The election of some Senators by some provinces almost guarantees constitutional challenges by provinces whose interests are compromised by the archaic allocation of seats and great confusion about the status of the Senate in relation to the House of Commons. Senate reform can only be legitimate when all the main issues – method of appointment/election, allocation of seats among provinces, and the powers of the Senate in relation to the House – are resolved and then implemented at the same time.

Canadians must be consulted through a referendum on the options for Senate reform. Such a referendum must include an option for abolition.

A reformed, democratic Senate would require the following changes:

- (1) A constitutional mechanism to ensure the supremacy of the House over the Senate.
  - (2) A fair redistribution of Senate seats among the provinces.
  - (3) Senators must be elected to a set term through proportional representation within each province.
  - (4) Property restrictions must be abolished.
8. The difficulty of finding the consensus required to make constitutional changes regarding the Senate is high. Fortunately, there is another path to better regional representation and sober second thoughts about lawmaking.

9. A House of Commons in which all Canadians are equally represented (i.e. a House elected using a fair and proportional voting system) will guarantee that all regions are democratically represented in the lawmaking process. Rather than the regional misrepresentation of today's House of Commons, the variety of partisan views in every region would be heard and the total or near-total domination of any region by any single party would end.

10. Provincial legislatures are not federal institutions, but premiers routinely speak to federal political issues and currently, most provinces are governed by parties who failed to gain support from a majority of voters. In a similar manner, without constitutional amendment, the voices of the provinces would have more credibility if fair and proportional voting systems were used to elect provincial legislatures.

11. Given the positive effect that voting reform for the House of Commons and provincial legislatures would have on regional representation, Fair Vote Canada recommends that it be pursued prior to any process to reform or abolish the Senate.