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Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform
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On behalf of Unifor's 310,000 members, I am here to emphasize to you the importance that we place on implementing electoral system in time for the next election.

I want to get straight to the point of the discussion over the past week, because it seems to us at Unifor that this process is coming quickly to a moment of truth.

According to remarks from the Prime Minister and also from Minister Monsef, "broad based support" for change is a prerequisite for changing the system. The chief electoral officer has said we need "the broadest possible consensus."

Let me very direct with you: There is a broad base of support for electoral reform.

You have the most recent EKOS survey from only a week ago – 60% want the government to fulfill its election pledge that we have had the last First Past the Post Election.

True: support for specific options is less decisive – but still there is clear broad based support.

Support for PR – 46%. Support for the current system 29%. Support for preferential ballots 26%.

In other words – there is one clear alternative to the present system – proportional representation.

Further – and this is our main point to the majority of you today – the overwhelming majority or consensus that some of you are looking for rests entirely in your hands.

Our members and most Canadians believe that they have voted for change. They have voted for the principle of change, expecting that you will implement that decision with specific reforms that are understandable and explainable to our members and our communities.

This committee has the capacity, the mandate and the information on voting systems that is needed to bring forward a majority position on electoral reform and when you do so, the vast majority of Canadians will support you.

To be clear, your majority agreement for a new voting system will be reflected in majority public support.

If you fail to do your job, don't hide behind Canadians who will, of course, be confused and disappointed.

I would suggest to you that Unifor members are reflective of Main Street Canada.

In August, our national convention affirmed that electoral reform is the single most important issue to be addressed in Canadian democracy. Our members reflect the national view of an alternative – we unanimously endorsed a proportional representation system for Canada.

We did not get into the weeds of the particular kind of PR system. We say that is your job.

We support the principle of proportionality to make sure that every vote counts and to make false majorities impossible.

We want fewer reasons to vote strategically and more opportunity to vote for a hopeful, progressive future. We want more reasons for young people and all those who have been alienated from politics to engage and participate in the democratic process.

In our view, when Canadians think about electoral reform they want the system to change so that all votes directly impact the composition of Parliament – instead of the situation in 2015 where an estimated 9 million votes are without reflection in parliament.

I want to comment also on the idea that has been floated that smaller reforms could be implemented with a smaller consensus.

This is very fuzzy thinking.

First, support for the present system is pretty much limited to the core base of the previous government.

Support for “preferential ballots” – which we assume is what is meant by “smaller reforms”-- is even less. So there is not more support for a smaller reform. Frankly, there is not a single person in Unifor who has spoken out in favor of ranked ballots as the preferred option for reform. So I urge you not to go down that rabbit hole.

The way to get this done is for the majority of you to agree on the principles that represent Canadian opinion and values, and then to propose an electoral system that best implements those principles.

In our opinion the core issue is that Canadians want a different system that eliminates false majorities. We have too much experience that these false majorities produce extremist, ideological governments that do more harm than good.

Canadians want less partisanship in politics and more cooperation that produces good public policy.

It means that we all have to look forward to a different kind of government with the knowledge that it is far less likely that any one party will dominate in the way that we have become accustomed.

But we will still have stable government. In our opinion we will have more stable government and the incoming government will not spend the first year repealing the extremist agenda of the previous government.

We will still have parties with distinct alternative policies. We will need more political leadership, not less.

And it is that political leadership we need and expect now.

If the majority for electoral reform fail to take this opportunity, it will be a long time before these conditions come around again.

Our union and history will judge harshly those responsible for failure.

Unifor members are ready for change now and we are expecting you to lead that change to ensure that a new proportional voting system is in place for the next federal election.