

Editorial ? Consider all the electoral reform options

The federal government is looking at changing the way elections are currently run.

We have been hearing complaints for years about the current system, commonly known as "first past the post."

In each riding during a general election, all the votes are counted, and the candidate with the highest number is elected. Thus it's possible for residents of a riding to be represented in Ottawa by someone who the vast majority voted against.

Democratic Institutions Minister Maryam Monsef has announced the government wants the electorate buying in with whatever changes are likely to take place.

So far, there are three possible options that we're aware of (there could be more).

One, which is favoured by many, is proportional representation. Stated simply, a party that receives, for example, 50 per cent of the vote election day gets 50 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons.

Another, which we favour, is known by a couple of names, like ranked ballots, weighted ballots or preferential ballots. They allow the voter to pick their top three choices when they mark their ballots. Candidates finishing last are eliminated, and the ballots of people who voted for them are studied to see who the second choice was. Those votes are allocated accordingly until someone has a clear majority.

The third option, and one that absolutely must be considered, is the status quo. In other words, leave things as they are.

Granted, a lot of people aren't pleased with the current system, but we can see problems with the aforementioned alternatives.

Under proportional representation, the party leadership would be deciding which person becomes the MP for an individual riding.

Will that person answer to the constituents, or the party brass upstairs? We believe ranked ballots would be more democratic, but it would take an enormous amount of organization to make them work, and make them transparent.

So after all is said and done, the status quo might turn out to be the way to go.

But it is good to see the government is saying it wants the electorate involved.

To that end, the Dufferin-Caledon Federal Liberal Riding Association will be hosting a panel discussion June 19 in Caledon (the story is on page A5 of this edition of the Citizen). The panel will represent the three alternatives mentioned here.

That's the way it should be.

There are many who believe some form of electoral reform is needed in this country, but it has to be done following considerable thought and planning, as well as input from the electorate, meaning us.

There can be no benefit to any kind of reform that is rushed into, and change simply for the sake of change is not the answer.