

## A hope that they'll keep what we have

Next October, Ontario voters - at least, those who care enough to vote - will be traipsing off to the polls to turn thumbs up or thumbs down on Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Those same voters will also have the chance to vote in a referendum - the first one in Ontario since Prohibition in 1921 - on whether or not to retain our current electoral system or adopt something called mixed member proportional, or MMP.

Let's hope they keep what we have.

Why? Because the new system - a modified version of PR, or proportional representation - would result in perpetual minority governments, where minor parties would wield far more power than the electorate meant them to have.

And, despite constant claims to the contrary from PR advocates, the new system would be LESS democratic.

First, the details.

You may recall that one of the many promises McGuinty made in the 2003 election - one of the few he has actually kept - is to have a look at electoral reform. He did impose fixed election dates, however, without any meaningful public notice or debate, a shameful way to bring about electoral reform.

So at least this time, acting on the recommendations of the so-called Ontario Citizen's Assembly - which voted 94-8 in favor of replacing our current "first-past-the-post" system - Ontarians will get to vote on whether to keep the old system or bring in a new one. A 60 per cent approval vote is needed for change. Here's how the new one would work - or not work - depending upon your point of view.

Instead of the current 107 seats after redistribution this fall - all of them represented by a single MPP elected directly by the voters in each riding - there would be 129 MPPS at Queen's Park. That's an extra 22 politicians, reason enough by itself to be wary of the proposal.

It gets worse, however. Only 90 of those "representatives" would be chosen directly by voters from newly-created, larger ridings. The remaining 29 "representatives" would be picked from a list compiled by party back-room operatives, based on the overall percentage of their party's vote. In other words, your direct vote will be watered down because the ridings will be expanded, and you won't have any direct say at all on almost 30 per cent of the politicians who would purportedly be representing you at Queen's Park.

The main argument made by those who don't like our current system - where the candidate with the most votes wins - is that governments are given "majorities" even though they do not win a majority of the votes cast.

Never mind that the system has worked - and worked rather well, actually - for some 200 years or so in Canada and many other countries in the world. The forces of change, mainly those who want to see their fringe views given more muscle, are pushing for this "reform" because they know the major parties would be perpetually handcuffed, forced into making backroom political deals in order to keep their governments afloat. Beats me how this would be an improvement over the current system.

But never mind the spurious claims of PR supporters who say it's more democratic and fairer.

Here's a practical example of what could happen in Ontario if we adopted the New Zealand model for our Legislature.

In the 1996 New Zealand election, it took six weeks to wheel and deal their way to a coalition government. (That coalition lasted two years.)

As Dr. Eric Crampton, a University of Canterbury professor in New Zealand recently wrote, "Voters did not know for a-month-and-a-half who would form the government, and ultimately had no say in the matter. Why is it fairer to voters that governments be formed by back-room deals subsequent to elections?"

The answer, of course, is that it isn't fairer. Quite the opposite.

While it may seem wrong on the surface to declare a majority government for a party which won less than the majority of the votes - which almost always happens in our system - it's still a lot fairer than this new proposal would be.

Another thing which is often overlooked by the critics of our current system is the fact that whomever wins each riding, they're elected to represent "all" of the people in that riding, not just those who voted for them.

This is not a small matter. I can't remember the last time I lived in a riding where I voted for a winner, but even so the winning politician represents my interests in the Legislature every bit as he or she represents those who endorsed that particular party.

What's more, if a partisan politician was stupid enough to ignore all those who didn't vote for him - usually the majority - his chances or re-election would be pretty weak.

You'll hear a lot over the next little while about how much better proportional representation would be. Don't buy it. It's a con job.



**National Affairs**

**Claire Hoy**

# Obscure, but irreplaceable

Most of us live our lives in relative obscurity. Few of us achieve that proverbial 15 minutes of fame when the spotlight is shining directly on us.

Most of us, we settle. We settle for mediocrity. We have fairly "normal" 9-to-5 jobs, average homes and families that range somewhere between those depicted on *The Little House on the Prairie* and *The Simpsons*.

While we exist in our little worlds, it's not to say we don't have a major impact on our circle of family and friends. When it all comes down to it, the only important fame we could ever hope for is to be a super star in our children's eyes. They are the ultimate fans, and the harsh judges, of our actions and lifestyles. They are much more valuable than a platinum-selling album. And our spouses, who openly or silently support us unconditionally, deserve a front-row ticket to the show. Contrary to belief, no one is replaceable.

There are people I miss; people who will never see me letting loose and singing into a fake microphone with the kids in the rec. room. There are those who will never witness another birthday, anniversary or miracle here on Earth.

If I could only hold them one more time, I'd make it count. I would feel like I've won again. But the prize is not tangible - it's like a gentle breath blown on dying embers. I've said goodbye to three family members over the past decade - my dad, sister and uncle. That's three too many. There's still so much yet to be done, and we'll have to toil on without them by our side or in the bleachers. Three fewer to cheer us on. A trio of voices, silent for some time now. It's like taking away a primary color from a famous painting - you just can't look at it the same way ever again. It's like removing a favorite flower from the award-winning garden.

But there's a natural source of power - cheap and never-ending energy. It comes in the form of a child. When I look into the eyes of my kids (as I'm prone to do more so these days), I feel like a superhero, but at the same time, I feel weak and oh, so humble.

My first-born princess Lexie presented Kim and I with a home-made card recently. In it she wrote: "This card comes from my heart. Remember, you made me alive. We always watch over each other."

She also mentioned since we created her she owes us a great deal.



**Mark Pavilons**

You know what they say about the plain, honest truth from the mouths of little ones. While I have some in-your-face evidence that I've helped create three human beings, I never really thought of the whole giving life thing. Creation, even after three successful attempts, still amazes me. I am profoundly confident there's much more at work than mere genetic material coming together in biological soup. No matter how you describe it and rationalize it in medical terms, creation is magical, mysterious and heavenly. It's a gift that should humble each and every one of us mortals.

As I mentioned, average people could spend their entire lives without making a dent in the social fabric. Sure, each and every one of us is responsible for several ripples in that huge pond of humanity. And, if we have close friends and family members, there's no doubt we've touched many lives in some unique and special way.

But it all ends pretty much the same way.

There's always a small box, a shoebox perhaps, at the bottom of the closet or in some corner of the garage or attic. This box is what remains of us when we're gone.

Its contents vary, but often include old letters, photos, postcards, a few favourite objects like a keychain, coin or trinket. Sometimes it contains old toys, keepsakes and a few Valentine's Day cards made by the kids when they were preschoolers. There could be an old watch, or piece of costume jewellery - none of which is valuable to anyone else - but almost priceless to the former owner.

They're memories, in one small, convenient container - our lives in a nutshell. Not grand, glamorous or cosmopolitan. Just a few pieces of what was.

Of all the dreaded tasks I've had to do over the years, wrapping up the lives of loved ones were the worst experiences. It was very sad, really, in an almost regrettable way. After three-quarters of a century on this plan-

et (in my sister's case it was less than 50 years), three ripples in the pond were reduced to a handful of knick-knacks, souvenirs and personal bits of paper. There were some strange and gawdy picture frames or odd-shaped bottle openers picked up on some Caribbean holiday decades ago.

But with each piece that I carefully wrapped or disposed of - careful not to break anything - I felt it. It was a very strange feeling, like someone standing behind you at the bus stop. I found myself smiling, instead of weeping. These crazy little items spoke, reaching out from beyond. I'm sure there was a story behind each and every article, something that made them smile, laugh or even cry.

There were things I still can't part with, like my Dad's fake Rolex I got from a guy on a street corner in New York City. There's my uncle's felt cowboy hat, adorned with feathers and pins. When he wore it his

chest widened with pride. And there's a framed print my sister bought for Kim and I for our first home.

I thought about my personal shoebox and what I'd like it to contain. I'd fill this small container with some souvenirs from trips Kim and I took in our younger years - keychains, lighters and cheesy dice from Vegas. I'd toss in the two tiny pieces of the Berlin Wall someone gave me many years ago. I'd carefully place one or two photos of me smiling from ear to ear, like the one on a bench in Cartagena or eating conch fritters in Nassau. There would be some toy tanks and airplanes and one of my watches. Perhaps I'd include my fake \$1 million bill or imitation diamond.

Not very fascinating or impressive to anyone, really. Not much of anything at all.

But everything is me. From my playfulness and concern for the past, to my search for a better life, it's all in there, if you know where to look.

Obscure, maybe. Replaceable? Definitely not!

## Heritage comes alive May 5 & 6 in the Hills of Headwaters!

The Hills of Headwaters tourism region will be participating in the Province of Ontario's Doors Open program for the first time in 2007.

Saturday, May 5 and Sunday, May 6, visitors and residents are invited to explore this sophisticated rural destination and discover 20 unique heritage sites that depict the history of this picturesque region of the province.

The mandate of Doors Open Ontario is to bring together communities throughout the province and allow them to showcase the heritage of their communities. Each year, from April to October, communities open their doors to some of their most intriguing and charming heritage sites, including commercial buildings, places of worship, gardens, natural heritage and other heritage sites.

The Hills of Headwaters has chosen 20 sites that will provide visitors with a unique look at the history of the region. From the heritage homes of our founding fathers, to the places of worship that were central in the small towns, to natural heritage sites, parks and trails, the Hills of Headwaters Doors Open program will offer something for everyone.

Like all Doors Open events across the province, admittance to all sites is free. Come and experience "these hidden heritage treasures first-hand" at Doors Open in the Hills of Headwaters May 5 and 6, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.

All Saints Anglican Church, Erin; Alton Mill, Alton; Belfountain Conservation Area; Brampton Flying Club, Caledon; Century Church Theatre, Hillsburgh; Caledon Badlands, Inglewood; Cheltenham Country Store; Devonshire Guest House, Erin; downtown Orangeville; Elora/Cataract Trailway, Hillsburgh; Erin Pioneer Cemetery; Forks of the Credit Trestle, Belfountain; McKittrick House Inn B&B, Orangeville; Melville White Church, Belfountain; Millcroft Inn & Spa, Alton; Porcupine's Quill, Erin; Top of the Hill B&B, Cheltenham; Tweedsmuir Memorial Presbyterian Church, Orangeville; Village of Erin; Westminster United Church, Orangeville.

For more, visit [www.doorsopeninthehills.ca](http://www.doorsopeninthehills.ca).