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HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Elizabeth May

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Minister Pierre Poilievre
Minister of State (Democratic Reform)
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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January 4th, 2014

Dear Mr. Minister,

The President of the Green Party of Canada, Paul Estrin, received a scanned letter from you just before Christmas, on December 23, 2013. The letter itself was undated, but requested Green Party proposals for changes to the Elections Act to be received by January 4, 2014.

As you can imagine, due to the holidays, this was challenging. A copy of this letter on stationery will reach you by Monday. I certainly look forward to meeting with you to discuss options.

For now, I am submitting our proposals by email.

The crisis in declining voter turn-out and citizen engagement should concern all political leaders. Over the course of this fall's prorogation, I held a series of town hall sessions in locations across Canada on the theme of "Saving Democracy from Politics." The encouraging news is that in nearly every location, from Dawson City to Halifax to Vancouver to Winnipeg, the meetings were packed. Hundreds of people showed up in most cities. In Toronto, the Hart House event, sadly, had as many people leaving disappointed as were able to fit in the room.

I share this experience as I see it as confirmation that there is an appetite for public discussion on how we can rescue democracy. As I mentioned to you when we attended an event in your riding during Ramadan in July 2013, I urge you to take your process "on the road" to meet with as many Canadians as possible.

While the reasons for declining voter turn-out are complex and multi-faceted, nevertheless some common themes emerge. I would like to set out a few of the policy changes that the Green Party believes would improve the health of our democracy.

1. Move away from First Past the Post so that every vote counts. New Zealand made the transition most recently and their process would be worthy of study for possible application to Canada, as both share Westminster Parliamentary system within a constitutional monarchy.
2. Repeal the changes to the Elections Act requiring government issued photo ID in order to be allowed to vote. These changes have resulted in voters within certain groups (students, seniors, First Nations, the homeless) being denied their franchise. Our problem in Canada is not voter fraud (people voting more than once); it is people voting less than once.
3. Eliminate television advertising by political parties – both outside and within writ periods. This is done in many countries around the world (the UK, Brazil, Belgium, Switzerland, to name a few). The attack ad is used as a form of voter suppression. It is not possible to ban certain types of messages; ad hominem attack ads are hard to control through censorship. What other countries have done prevents the most invasive form of ad- the television message that hits voters between the eyes when home and watching the Stanley Cup, for example. Other countries mandate all broadcasters to provide equal access to free public service messages, explaining the party's platforms.
4. Remove the requirement for the Leader's signature on the nomination forms for candidates, to eliminate a tool of coercion on Members of Parliament and candidates, as proposed in Michael Chong's private members bill, as well as in my own. Allowing MPs to better speak for their constituents will increase citizen engagement and voter turn-out.
5. Restore the per vote subsidy, at any level. For many voters, knowing that any amount of financial support went to the party of their choice was an incentive to vote.
6. Pursue proposals from Queens University Centre for the Study of Democracy to improve the campaign debates by holding more debates and reducing the focus only on leaders by holding debates involving ministers and Shadow Cabinet Critics put forward by Opposition Parties. More exposure to issues should increase public awareness of issues in elections and increase engagement.

I appreciate your willingness to consider some of these reforms as you embark on a critical exercise. I wish you the best of luck and the height of wisdom.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth May, O.C., M.P.
Member of Parliament for Saanich-Gulf Islands
Leader of the Green Party of Canada

