

Letters to the Editor

We must increase voter turnout

Letters in the Autumn 2014 edition of *Canadian Perspectives* reflect a hopeful and persisting interest in voter turnout.

Fair Vote Canada is actively pursuing the implementation of various proportional representation models. Elections Canada focused its annual "Canada's Democracy Week" on increasing voter participation among Canada's youth. Sociologists and political strategists have studied declining voter turnout for quite some time and the results have not affected voter participation. Awareness programs for the varied voter demographics in our country have borne similar results.

While social experimentation can create change, applying any of the proportional representation models creates problems. The progressive selection of subsequent models, educating voters, administering each new electoral model, and evaluating its results could create hope that a new model might increase turnout. But the gradual changes, if they do occur, will accrue over generations and only if the political authorities carry a long-term commitment to the issue.

Regrettably, time is working against us. Canada's democracy, its civil liberties and social programs are declining. There is a need now to seriously consider the viability of mandatory voting which, incidentally, does not eliminate or hinder the added strategies of implementing popular representation or addressing the factors that affect voter turnout.

The need to increase voter turnout is urgent. Mandatory voting is not an end in itself. It should be an essential part of effective legislative reform.

It is time for a full debate on mandatory voting.

André Clément, Sudbury, Ontario



Members of the Council of Canadians' Montreal Chapter joined Eau Secours! for a rally and march in Trois-Rivières, Quebec on World Water Day to speak out against TransCanada's plans for a marine terminal for the Energy East pipeline. TransCanada has withdrawn the terminal plan.

What Canadians want?

Re: "Why Canadians won't bother voting," Autumn 2014 issue of *Canadian Perspectives*

The letter writer states that the current federal government was elected with 38 per cent of the vote.

In fact, the government was elected with votes from approximately 25 per cent of the eligible voters.

With a 60 per cent turnout of voters, and 38 per cent voting Conservative, the current government has the support of slightly less than 25 per cent of eligible voters.

On this basis, the government has trashed science, regulation powers, water resources, and more supposedly because it "knows what Canadians want."

Robert Hamm, Steinbach, MB

Social licence

A concept that has become a significant part of the popular discourse in most new energy projects is the notion of "social licence." Whether it is fracking in Newfoundland and Labrador, mining or pipelines in Quebec or the Maritimes, or LNG terminals and pipelines in northern British Columbia, industry and governments are being asked to obtain some level of permission from communities. Perceived as a form of approval and resistance for the communities or, at the very least, a direct involvement in the decision-making process, it is often viewed as a problem and another obstacle to go through by the project proponents. In addition to obtaining the

necessary government permits, companies have to negotiate "social permission."

The degree of social licence obtained is often based on three elements: the project may be acceptable, unacceptable, or acceptable with certain conditions.

For social licence to fully take place, the communities must have clear and adequate knowledge, based on independent scientific research, of the potential risks, the advantages and the impacts of a project. In other words, be able to make an informed decision based on all of the possible implications of the project that will affect their community. They must have an opportunity to engage in a meaningful discussion as to the values of the project and its development to the society at large. And they must have the ability to say "no" to a project.

In a sense, social licence is more than a moral obligation, it is a social contract to be obtained and respected. Without it, consider the project as a hostile take-over.

Raymond Cusson

Shoal Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador

Send us your letters!

Canadian Perspectives
The Council of Canadians
300-251 Bank Street
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3
Email: inquiries@canadians.org
Attention: Editor, *Canadian Perspectives*