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Canada 

A new face with some fresh ideas

A new era has begun at The Scope.

As you probably know by now, Michelle Minnoch has left the newspaper. I'm your new editor, reporter and photographer, and hope to continue the success she has had.

I've lived in Innisfil for the last 13 years, with the exception of a brief two year stint in the print journalism program at Loyalist College in Belleville. I've worked for The Orillia Packet and Times, Midland Free Press and Barrie Examiner during the last few years.

They've all been great experiences, but I wanted a challenge.

This is my first editor's job. While I'm sure some of the job requirements will take a bit to get acquainted with — newspaper layout being the best example — I certainly guarantee well edited and quality news, and good photography.

I've spent the last few years covering various levels of government. The Scope has a long history of covering Innisfil's municipal political scene, and I fully plan to continue that tradition. The newspaper has also been a bastion for

Comment

by Chris Simon

details on community events, sports, police updates, and county government coverage. I don't intend to change that.

However, I'd like to introduce several changes to the newspaper over the coming months, in an effort to serve readers better.

I encourage readers to submit story ideas and photography.

Ideally, I'd like to start a weekly community photo page. Readers can now submit photos of anything ranging from birthday parties and Thanksgiving celebrations to business openings. I especially encourage outdoor photography, like the changing of the fall colours, a gorgeous red sunset or a close encounter with deer. Just keep it safe and clean.

We're also asking for feedback. I certainly do

not expect everyone to agree with future editorials.

Submit a letter to the editor, and it just may get published. If you have a story idea, or would like us to write about something we're currently not, call or submit an e-mail. While the newspaper will never be able to cover every story idea or community event, it will continue to provide solid, accurate and fair coverage of Innisfil.

Finally, I'd like to start covering community events before they happen. I believe a short preview story and photo will be beneficial and help generate interest for many community events. Organizers can also submit information and story ideas by calling or e-mailing our newsroom.

If you have a photo, story idea or letter to the editor, please e-mail thescope@rogers.com. Within the next few weeks, The Scope will also receive a new toll free phone number. Until then, please feel free to call Simcoe-York Publishing at 905-729-2287.

Time to reform our electoral system

Letters From Our Readers

Dear editor:

On October 10th, while we are deciding between our three traditional political parties, the people of Ontario will be given a unique and historic opportunity to radically reform our entire political system. The option will be to replace our current electoral system, known as First Past the Post with a new system known as Mixed Member Proportional Representation. For the first time in our great province's history we will be given the opportunity to make our elected legislature reflect the way we vote.

First Past the Post has been used in Ontario since colonial times and the way it works is simple to understand. The province is divided into constituencies or ridings covering different territories, each constituency has a seat in the Ontario Legislative Assembly (provincial parliament) and every four years candidates from various political parties, some not from political parties run against each other to contest those seats. The political party with the largest number of seats, or the party that has the confidence of the majority of elected members is than allowed to form a government until the next election. This system allows for individual regions to elect local representatives, however severely disenfranchises the people of Ontario in many ways.

Because seat distribution is decided entirely on the basis of individual ridings,

the number of votes received province wide, or nation wide regarding federal elections is rather irrelevant. Political parties can and usually do win a majority of seats in the legislature while only receiving a minority of votes from the people. With a majority government the leader of the winning political party now has the ability to do as he or she pleases, within constitutional limits of course until their mandate is over. Canadians have been taught for a very long time to think of minority governments as being bad and majority governments as being good. This is an untrue message trumpeted by the traditional political parties.

When a political party has won the majority of seats in the legislature it does not need to rely on the votes of other parties to pass legislation and govern, giving it virtually unchecked power. When a party only has a minority of seats it must than cooperate with other parties and is not given a "free political ride" for the next four years. Meaning it is kept accountable. Let's take a look at the kind of parliaments both provincial and federal that our electoral system has given us. In the previous federal election the Canadian people chose to give the Conservative Party of Stephen Harper a minority with only 36% of the vote and 124 seats, punishing the Liberals with losses and rewarding the NDP with some minor gains. However the separatist Bloc Quebecois, a party which to put it simply does not support Canada and does not run candidates

outside of Quebec were again the biggest winners in the election as they were able to hold the balance of power with relatively few votes nationwide.

Would we continue to see unstable minority parliaments under proportional representation? Absolutely not, First Past the Post rewards parties that have their support concentrated in particular regions, while simultaneously punishing parties that have their support spread out across the nation. The Bloc Quebecois came in with 51 seats and only 11% of the popular vote, the NDP on the other hand, a party which is federalist and supports Canadian unity came in with only 29 seats despite winning 18% of the vote. So in spite of winning one million votes more the NDP was still left ineffectual and the Bloc Quebecois with it's low percentage of the vote has become the most influential opposition party. This isn't the only time that our system has allowed regionalist parties, parties many consider as hostile towards other regions of Canada to win a disproportionately high number of seats. The rightwing, ultraconservative, Reform Party and its successor the Canadian Alliance also dominated the opposition benches because of their concentrated support base out west.

Perhaps the biggest injustice of the last federal election was the fact that so many votes were literally wasted, wasted because they did not and could not have gone toward giving a voice toward those voters. More

than 650,000 Canadians cast their votes for the Green Party of Canada in 2006, electing absolutely nobody to speak for them. This is because not a single Green candidate came a head in any constituency. Meanwhile less than the same number of Liberal voters out east were able to elect more than 20 Liberal MPs. More than 400,000 Canadians in big cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver voted Conservative yet could not elect a single representative from their area. Taking all of this into consideration how can you say that the people's voices were heard in 2006?

What is the alternative and how does it work? Well Mixed Member Proportional Representation combines the best of both our current system and Proportional Representation, a system where the power of political parties is proportionate or equal to the number of votes they receive. Under the new system, MMP, 90 seats in Ontario would be elected the way they are now based on geographic representation, however 39 seats will be elected based on party preferences. This means that people will cast their votes for a local representative as they do know and than on a second ballot cast their vote for their preferred political party. In spite of what opponents of electoral reform have been saying this will not take any power away from voters or put it into the hands of politicians when it comes to choosing representatives. Political parties already choose their candidates without the involvement of the general public, under this new system we will all vote for

our local candidate chosen the same way and than for our preferred party. The parties will all publish party lists containing the names of their candidates for those 39 seats, so you will know exactly whom your vote is going towards.

When the election is over the number of seats held by each political party will reflect the number of votes it has received. In almost every developed democratic nation that uses this system it has come to produce stable and effective governments that by the nature they are elected are held more accountable to their people. We could finally say goodbye to the arrogant majority governments of the past which despite only receiving support from on average 37-45% of the electorate went onto win a majority of seats in the legislature and in many cases make divisive decisions not in the interests of the majority. Under this new system both in Ontario and nation-wide, we will see the right conditions for proper and effective coalitions between political parties exist. This is a brilliant electoral system which has served nations like Norway, Sweden, Germany, Scotland, Wales, the Netherlands, New Zealand and South Africa too name but a few very well.

On October 10th cast a vote for yourself, a vote to increase your own personal power over your elected officials and over those who govern you. Seize this historic opportunity as I will and vote yes for Mixed Member Proportional in the upcoming referendum.

Chris Gilmore, Innisfil