



Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to Bill No. 1 - an amendment to the Elections Act to allow for a fixed election date.

I'm Jo-Ann Roberts, co-president of the Green Party of Nova Scotia. Participatory democracy is a founding principle for Greens in Nova Scotia and for Greens around the world.

I love coming into this building...it has such a long history of democracy and responsible government, I can imagine Joseph Howe, standing here during his Supreme Court hearing in 1835 and defending the freedom of the press. Charles Dickens sitting in the gallery at the opening of the Nova Scotia legislature in 1842.

The Nova Scotia House of Assembly has met every year since 1819, making this the longest-serving legislative building in Canada. So, it is not surprising that when we are in this place it is easy to be lulled into taking our democracy for granted. We shouldn't. Democracy is in trouble in Nova Scotia.

In our last election, which was held in the middle of the summer, more than 3-hundred and 36 thousand Nova Scotians didn't vote. 336-thousand, 6-hundred, and 29 to be exact. Close to 56% of eligible voters. Our voter turnout has been in decline for 15 years. It hasn't been over 60% since 2006. In the 1970s and 80s (with one exception, November 1984) voter turnout was between 75 and 80%.

That should worry all of us, but to those of you who are elected to represent eligible voters and protect our freedom and democracy, it should be of the greatest concern. Voting is an indicator of citizen engagement, and it is a characteristic of an engaged citizen. And by every account, declining voter turnout numbers are not a healthy sign for any country or province.

We are not alone in the country in seeing our voter turnout drop...11-million Canadians, almost a third of all eligible voters, didn't vote in the last federal election. I'm currently researching and writing a book on Saving Democracy. Obviously, it is a subject I am passionate about.

I applaud the government for introducing fixed election dates. It makes the public less cynical about politicians and levels the playing field for other parties who wish to take part in an election. Of course, that is only if fixed election dates are truly fixed and can't be overruled by the party in power with no penalty, as we saw in the last federal election. To make this legislation truly groundbreaking it should lay out the circumstances where it would be appropriate for the Premier to ask the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the House of Assembly on any date other than the fixed election

date and prescribe a penalty if it was determined a request for dissolution was made which did not meet that criteria prior to a fixed election date. I would ask this committee to consider making these improvements to the bill prior to third reading or as amendments in the future.

Finally, you have heard a number of strong arguments about the date you have chosen and I must admit I was stunned when I heard I would be voting on July 15th, 2025, and the third Tuesday in July every fourth calendar year thereafter. What!? You've got to be kidding me. And we wonder why the public thinks poorly of politicians. Of 28 occupations that were ranked by the level of respect by the public in Canada this year, elected officials ranked 24th, below bankers and lawyers, and journalists.

I asked myself, What's the rationale for a summer election? Who benefits? As you've heard it leaves out using the experience to teach students more about democracy and our electoral system. We know that in a province that has tourism as one of its biggest industries that it is a very busy time of year. And for those who are not in the tourism business, it is the time of year when families take a vacation together. I've heard the argument made that if voting is important you'll make the effort. I agree, but with a dropping voter turnout, this is hardly the time to start putting it on the shoulders of voters to make voting a higher priority.

I went back over the 64 provincial elections that have been held in Nova Scotia since 1758. Only 7 of them were in the summer, 5 in August and two in July. So, again I had to ask myself why would this government want to have a fixed election date in July? Surely it wouldn't be because summer elections have been good for the Progressive Conservative Party? So, I checked recent history.

-On July 27, 1999, the PC's under John Hamm, won a majority government. They defeated the Liberals who had been in a minority government. (sounds a bit familiar)

-Four years later, 2003, another summer election, another PC win, only this time it was a minority government.

-We all know the results of the election which was just held on August 17th. The PCs won a majority and defeated a Liberal minority government.

-You have to go back to August 22, 1933 to find a summer election that elected a Liberal government.

-The Liberals also won the election on July 27, 1920 That also happened to be the summer women were able to vote for the first time so I'm sure they turned out in strong numbers.

So if you are making your calculations based on recent electoral history you would say a fixed election date in the summer gives the Progressive Conservatives an advantage. That is the wrong reason to set a fixed election date in the summer.

Now as I said, we only have 7 elections in our history to examine. The final two are pre-confederation 1847 and 1851 and the parties were different, so it's hard to include them. Obviously, whatever the results politicians decided summer elections were to be avoided.

Every other province and the federal government seem to agree. They have all set fixed election dates for the spring or fall, none of them are in the summer.

I urge this committee, for the sake of democracy, to amend this legislation so that it includes a fixed election date in the spring or fall which will encourage citizen engagement and provide a level playing field for all parties.