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Dear Minister Gould,

First and foremost I'd like to congratulate you on your appointment to cabinet to lead the historic undertaking of improving our democracy and reforming our electoral system.

As you are well aware, this position is no meager portfolio but one that is charged with making substantial changes to the ways in which Canadians interact with their federal representatives that will have long term implications for Canada's 150 year-old democracy.

That being said, from what I have seen in your performance as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development and the energy and work ethic you have brought as a Member of Parliament, I have no doubt you are up to tackling these challenges with courage and conviction.

I am also excited about the signal your appointment sends; that there is an effort to overcome the mistakes of the past where unilateral actions taken by the government hurt the credibility of this process.

In fact, it is only when we have moved beyond our partisan entrenchment that we have succeeded in overcoming cynical notions and taken real step towards reform and enhancement of our democracy.

The formation of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform was the first example of this innovative approach. Instead of a traditional committee structure where the government holds all of the power, MPs felt it was necessary to have the seats on the committee reflect the proportion of votes received in the last election. With no party holding a majority, we would have to work together and compromise. This is appropriate given the task of reforming our voting system.

In the debate on the formation of the Committee, I was encouraged by your thoughtful words in support of its creation and the values behind it:

Electoral reform is the next step in this evolution toward a more inclusive system. We can build a better system that provides a stronger link between the democratic will of Canadians and the election results, one that motivates Canadians to take part, one that reflects our collective values of fairness, inclusiveness, gender equity, openness, and mutual respect.

To get there, the process leading to reform must also embody these values. Parliamentarians will need to set aside partisan interests and engage in a thoughtful and substantive dialogue with each other and with citizens. (House of Commons Debate; June 2, 2016)

As you correctly predicted, it was only when short-term interests were put aside that the members of the Committee were able to take the evidence provided by hundreds of experts and thousands of Canadians and come to an unprecedented conclusion. The resulting report offers a blueprint, both in its text and in its formation, on how exactly we can achieve this important goal.

It is in this vein that I would like offer another opportunity to continue with this innovative approach. Instead of having the legislation that will reform our democracy written secretly in backrooms, I suggestion we sit down together in the spirit of continued bipartisanship and write the bill together.

By co-drafting the legislation we will be stepping outside the traditional pathway of laws written unilaterally, too often in service of one party's ambitions at the expense of all others. For a matter as important as the way in which Canadians participate in their democracy, this type of collaborative approach would clearly increase the legitimacy of this process. While I cannot speak for the other parties, given their willingness to work towards consensus on this file on the committee, I would expect to find them willing to participate fully in this offer.

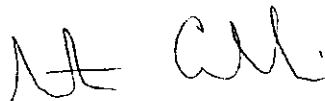
With time running out on the Liberal promise to introduce legislation to enact electoral reform within 18 months of forming government, it is urgent we begin this process immediately.

Following your initial briefings I will make myself available to meet at your earliest convenience.

Only through honest discussion, compromise and fair negotiations will we be able to achieve success on the promise to make 2015 the last election held under first past the post, and ensure every vote count, a commitment which was reiterated by the Prime Minister on the day of your appointment.

Congratulations again and I look forward to beginning this important work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'N. Cullen'.

Nathan Cullen
MP Skeena-Bulkley Valley