

NO MORE PARTY POLITICS

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May 29, 2004

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Introduction

Lawsuits, police investigations, scandals and raids are commonplace today as public disillusionment, cynicism and mistrust continue to grow towards our elected politicians. Many British Columbians think that politicians do not keep their election promises and appear to have indicated their displeasure by the increasingly low voter turnout at the election polls.

What is the real reason people are not voting? Barely half the people eligible will head to the polls in the next provincial election. Why this lack of political interest by the citizens of British Columbia? Why do voters think their votes will not matter? Why is the whole election process so confusing and viewed as a foregone conclusion before it even takes place? Is this a sign that the citizens of British Columbia have lost their faith in the present party-politics system of government?

We are promised responsible, accountable management of our tax dollars but instead are subjected to the waste of millions of tax dollars because of party politics. This public money could be better spent towards health, education and social programs in order to provide a sound social and economic base for the greatest number of people in our society. Constant legislative and policy changes that occur because of “party ideology” are expensive and contribute to an unstable society that in turn affects those citizens that are less fortunate and dependent on the government to survive.

Instead of spending 4.5 million dollars of public money trying to find a way to make the “political party” allocation of votes work in our present electoral system we should instead be examining what the “political party” is costing us. We should be questioning if the “political party” system meets the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* of all voters and candidates equally in the electoral process.

Instead of spending millions of dollars on an adversarial relationship with the aboriginal people in British Columbia we should be looking at ways to include their leaders in the electoral and parliamentary system so that constitutionally protected aboriginal rights are represented in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly.

We must have fair and impartial administration of the electoral process if we want diversity and equality within the electoral system and we must be prepared to make changes to legislation that will give equal rights to all candidates and voters in the electoral process that will stand the test of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada Constitution Act, 1982*.

Proposal

I propose a non-partisan representative direct form of democracy that will better accommodate the economic, social and political needs of our multi-cultural society. That we adopt a consensus democratic system of voting that allows us to vote for an independent candidate that represents our regional interest by a majority win single vote without political party representation. That we expand our electoral boundaries to include all territories that are protected by the *Canada Constitution Act, 1982* and that fall within the electoral areas in British Columbia including lands held in trust by the federal government for the aboriginal people.

A consensus democratic system that will provide a method to deliver all citizen's opinions and insights into matters that concerns the people of British Columbia. We need to make changes to electoral legislation that will allow for the citizens of British Columbia to utilize recall law and citizen-initiated referenda electronically in order that the citizens and the elected government can share legislative power.

We need changes to electoral legislation that ensures that the voter can only vote for the candidate in his or her own constituency and that their vote does not count in a second count that is established by party membership tally of votes. All candidates should share equal rights within the present electoral system and should enjoy the same equal opportunity to be Premier, a member of Cabinet or a member of the Official Opposition.

Independent candidates are required to meet the same legislative, financial and legal obligations that a political party candidate does, but only their name appears on the provincial ballot form whereas the political party candidate name and party are both used in the count after an election to determine which party will form the new government. At present, the party that wins the most seats in an election automatically produces the Premier and then the Premier picks the Executive otherwise known as the Cabinet. The Independent candidate does not share the same opportunity to form the new government and/or the official opposition as the party member candidate does in our present electoral system. The existing legislation does not give equal electoral rights to independent candidates and registered political party candidates. We need an electoral system where all votes would count equally for all candidates in the electoral process.

Status Indians, aboriginals and the Metis people of British Columbia have protected rights under the *Canada Constitution Act, 1982*, that flows from existing treaties that are in place and from *Supreme Court* decisions that recognize their aboriginal rights. In 1960, aboriginals with "registered Indian status" were permitted to vote in federal elections yet today there appears to be no representative in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly of the aboriginal right of the Indian or Metis citizens of British Columbia. Instead we have an adversarial relationship and uncertainty at a growing social and economic cost to both the non-aboriginal and aboriginal citizens in our society.

Federally reserved lands that are held by the federal government on behalf of the aboriginal people are presently being fast tracked to produce "self-government". At the end of the day the proposed system will continue to exist under the Superintendent of Indian and Northern Affairs but with status Indians having increased administrative and legal responsibility for the reserved lands. It appears that "self government" is more about separation rather than unity and equal participation in the governing of our province and country.

Government has a constitutional responsibility to protect the individual that elected them as their representative in the Legislative Assembly. We elect people to serve in the provincial Legislative Assembly yet; our elected representatives are unable to represent us. Party discipline gets between what voters want and what their representatives can do in the Legislature creating a centralization of power, and limiting the ability of the Members of the Legislative Assembly to represent their constituents. Ministers of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia need to be able to represent the people that elected them. We need independent candidates that are duty bound to the people and not a political party or their party leaders. Voters are able to elect representatives, but they are not able to remove representatives between elections.

Party politics in our electoral system has contributed to an increased cost of recall legislation as individuals attempt to change the balance of power by attempting to recall elected members for "political" rather than "performance" reasons. Recall, referendums and plebiscites are expensive, slow, labour intensive and have a high failure rate. The last referendum is estimated at costs that total \$9 million and were for aboriginal land claims and self-government issues.

Utilization of modern technology would provide for a low cost method of delivering an on-line database driven web site for all electoral processes including voting, referendum and recall initiatives. Voters could access a virtual town hall by Internet that would empower them to take an active role in the voter registration and electoral process. Electors could make all desired transactions, at any time and from any Internet terminal, by accessing a single Internet site where information and education on upcoming elections, candidates, referendums, plebiscites and recalls would be available to them.

Another emerging problem with our present representative political party democratic system is the increasing cost of political campaigns which lends the candidates to making deals with well heeled supporters for legislation favorable to those supporters once the candidate is elected. This affects public policy and appears to be related to present and past political scandals as candidates and parties attempt to meet the high cost of political campaigns. Again what is the true cost of party politics to the people of British Columbia?

The present system makes it almost impossible to do anything about the members of government until an election. Presently there is no guarantee that the candidate that you vote for will continue to represent you as elected members change political parties

during their political term. Parties' merge parties 'change and parties' die as candidates scramble to maintain their political careers instead of doing what they were elected to do and that is to serve the people of British Columbia.

There is no accountability for the millions of dollars spent to accommodate the "political party" within our present electoral system. Party politics obscures simplicity and choice for the voters in the electoral process and violates the equal rights of the independent candidate and the voters in British Columbia.

Political parties represent special interests that financially compete for control of the provincial government through its endorsement of different groups, societies, organizations, corporations and private individuals in order to win enough seats to form the government. The winning party leader automatically becomes the Premier that picks the Cabinet, which forms the new government until the next election. In our present electoral system, the role of individual Ministers of the Legislative Assembly is simply to follow the directives set out by the Premier.

Party politics lead to 'no opposition governments', which can generate numerous recall attempts. Recall campaigns are expensive and are not designed to be a method to correct the unbalance that the present electoral system has created in the Legislative Assembly. A majority government can become arrogant, insensitive to public opinion, unwilling to compromise, and too easily dominated by its leader. The public then become victim to an "absolute power corrupts absolutely" environment for a four to five year period without any available parliamentary or electoral process to remove the premier and/or cabinet member from their duties should they be acting outside the best interests of the people of British Columbia. If we elect individual candidates instead of party owned candidates, we will be free to create legislative teams that report to the people and not their political party.

Summary

The consensual system of democracy will produce a government that is responsive, open, honest and accountable to the citizens of British Columbia. The consensual system of democracy will allow members of the legislature to represent their constituents and their geographical area and yet still provide an opposition to the government. The consensual system of democracy meets the mandate of the Citizens Assembly and is capable of being combined with modern technology to deliver an electoral system that increases the democratic participation of the people while reducing the administrative cost of the electoral and parliamentary side of government.

List of Recommendations

If this province's elected government is truly sincere in sharing legislative power with the people, it will change the legislation, rules and regulations that conflict with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada Constitution Act, 1982*, by providing equal rights to all candidates and voters in the British Columbia provincial election process.

I recommend that we make changes to existing legislation that will allow voters to participate in the electoral and legislative process by ensuring that the citizens are able to remove an elected member of the Legislative Assembly that is not performing in the way that they promised their constituents. We need changes to electoral legislation that will create performance reviews of our elected representatives that is subject to the *Canada Constitution Act, 1982*, the *British Columbia Recall Act* and the Criminal Code of Canada. Performance reviews should be tabled in the Legislative Assembly and available to the citizens of British Columbia via the Internet.

British Columbia, like other provinces, territories and the federal system, uses a first-past-the-post approach to elections, where the candidate with the highest total number of votes wins the seat. We should retain this process but change the ballots because the present system means parties' can form majority governments even if they do not get a majority of the popular vote, which effectively disenfranchises the rights of the voters and the independent candidates.

I recommend that we make changes to the legislation for electoral boundaries in order that all constitutionally protected areas within the electoral areas of the province of British Columbia are included in order to ensure that aboriginals are capable of producing a Member of the Legislative Assembly that represents their constitutionally protected aboriginal right within our political system.

I recommend that we amend current legislation to create the type of electoral system as described:

"The Northwest Territories is one of only two federal, provincial or territorial jurisdictions in Canada that operate under the consensus system of government rather than the system of party politics. Within this system, all Members of the Legislative Assembly are elected as independents in their constituencies. Once elected, the Members travel to the Legislative Assembly where a territorial leadership meeting is held. After they meet, the first order of business is the secret ballot election of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The importance placed on the role of the Speaker still exists.

After the election of the Speaker, Members turn their focus to the election of the Premier. In the selection process, candidates are nominated, and then given twenty minutes to present their platforms, after which the floor is opened for questions from the other Members of the legislature. Each Member is restricted in the number of questions, which may be asked of the candidates vying for Premier. Once questioning is concluded, a secret ballot vote is held. The candidate who garners the majority of the votes is selected Premier. The election of Cabinet Ministers is next on the agenda. Again, candidates are nominated and given an opportunity to outline their platforms before a secret ballot vote.

The consensus system of governing is more in keeping with the way that aboriginal peoples have traditionally made decisions. Unanimous agreement is not necessary for decisions to be made, motions passed, and legislation enacted. A simple majority carries the vote. Members, who are not in Cabinet, are referred to as Regular Members. They become the unofficial opposition in the House. They are responsible, through questioning and through standing committees, for holding the Government accountable and responsive to the people. As Cabinet consists of only some of the Members, Regular Members exert considerable influence on many of the decisions and the direction of the government and policy.⁽¹⁾

We need to limit the amounts that candidates in elections can spend; and to discontinue donations from individuals or groups that are outside of government. If the provincial election were delivered electronically, a campaign web site could be provided for each candidate. Changes to the *Income Tax Act* could allow for only direct expense deductions. For example, if a candidate travels to a community event to promote her or himself in an election then that would be considered a direct reimbursement. Third parties should not be permitted to donate money to candidate's campaigns. We need to protect the spending limits on candidates; otherwise, groups allied to particular candidates will have influence over the elected member of the legislature after the election and therefore could interfere with the elected members relationship to their constituents. We also need to protect individual candidates from being targeted by expensive ad campaigns to which they could not respond because of both their own limited funds.

I recommend that we make the electoral system more accessible by exploring new mechanisms to facilitate processes by which electors add, update, and/or confirm their elector information between and during electoral events. Modern technology will allow for on-line registrations to vote on-line with secure access and will accommodate changes to existing legislation that will increase the democratic participation of "all" voters in British Columbia. In addition, an electronic system will reduce the overall cost to deliver the electoral service to the citizens of British Columbia.

The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral reform is estimated at a cost of \$4.5 million dollars. Past referendums and recalls total the millions if not billions of tax dollars, add the financial and social cost of party politics to the mix and one can quickly see that we can not longer afford to finance the political will of special interest groups that are intent on running the government.

"If liberty and equality, as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost. Aristotle, 384 BC - 322 BC"

Attachments

- ❖ Elections BC:
<http://www.elections.bc.ca/>
- ❖ Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories:
<http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/VisitorInfo/NWTStyleOfGovernment/index.html>

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/>