

To: Rich Coleman. MLA

From: Julia Milstead 27356 - 30 Ave.

Aldergrove, B.C. V4W 3J6

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RE: ELECTORAL REFORMS

I have many thoughts about electoral reform. However, when asked about a particular reform, it's hard for me to respond because the particular reforms proposed aren't explained. Several years ago I heard about some people pushing for a reform that would essentially cause people to have to vote in a group. So if you belonged to a certain group, your group would vote. I do NOT like that idea at all! I want my single vote to represent my own thinking and not to have my vote swallowed up by some group I have to belong to in order to have a group vote on my behalf. More recently a "representational" system is being proposed. I have no idea whether "representational" would be group voting or not, so I don't want to say whether I'd like a "representational" system or not.

One thing that does concern me is our multi-party system. It's not that I don't like having several choices. In principle, I do like having several choices. What I don't like is when the majority of voters don't want a certain candidate, but they are not united on who they do want, it generally causes the one that the majority don't want to get voted in. That's a serious problem with our system. The problem is that our voting system is designed to work best in a two party system. In order for a multi party system to work democratically, there would need to be changes to our voting system. If there were 5 candidates, we should be asked to rank them 1 to 5 from best to worst. The ballot could have a smiling face by the #1 and a frowning face by the #5. That way, if there was a candidate that the majority did not want to get in, that information would show up in the ranking of #5 given to that candidate by many voters, even if they each chose someone different to rank as #1. Too often, voters are afraid to vote for the candidate they really like because they are afraid of splitting the vote of those who are against a certain other candidate. Thus the voting rarely reflects how British Columbians really think.

Another thing that bothers me in both Canadian and British Columbian politics, is that the candidates can promise anything, but there is no law holding them to their promises. So the people might vote for someone based on the promises made, but what they thought they were voting for doesn't happen.

I also don't like is that one party gets into power and changes things the way they want to in one direction. Later another party gets into party and undoes it all and changes everything in another direction. The climate for business, healthcare, education, various social services, transportation etc. get pulled back and forth this way and that way without the general public

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having any say in the matter. it's just a tug-of-war between politicians, and what the public experiences is continual instability that has serious effects on our daily lives. it's depressing, and there is nothing the public can do about it. I think this is the main cause of Canadian apathy and grumbling. We can't really change anything, so we just grumble.

if every time there was an election, there were some referendum items on the ballot that were binding no matter what party gets in — then we could gain some stability. We could vote something in that will happen even if a different party gets in later. For instance, the last time Social Credit was in, there was an antique car museum in Langley, there were plans for light rapid transit to go further in Surrey, to go into Coquitlam, and to other areas. These plans came after much public consultation and was clearly the will of the people. At that time we were in a good financial position to do those projects. Then NDP got in and Harcourt closed the museum. He squished the plans for a Coquitlam skytrain and had the Westcoast express built instead saying it was cheaper. I thought it was only a band aid solution to the major transportation problems of Greater Vancouver. Even if it was cheaper, I knew it would not be long before the government would realize that a skytrain was still needed. By the time NDP realized that, they had squandered most of the money and couldn't really afford to build the skytrain they built in Coquitlam. If they had not built the west coast express, they would have had the money they needed for the skytrain project. Anyway, what this illustrates is how a newly elected government can completely bring to ruins any good done by a previous government. Each government is only trying to ensure the previous government doesn't get to leave a positive legacy. It has nothing to do with what is good for the people of British Columbia. I think a lot of money gets wasted when governments act to undo what previous governments have accomplished. Each government should be building upon what has been previously done instead of continually tearing down and starting over. We never really get going as a province because of this continual tearing down and restarting in a different direction. This is very discouraging to the public who see good things started that only get derailed by the next government. Businesses can't predict what policies the next government will have, so they can't feel sure enough to make long range plans for their businesses, if a binding referendum occurs, then a newly elected government would inherit a mandate they have to abide by. That mandate would carry on to subsequent governments unless the public requests a referendum to reverse the previous mandate. We would begin to see some stability in our province. And if the federal government would do the same, we could see some stability in Canada as a whole. Once a government is mandated by the people to do something, then 5, ten, even twenty years later, even after several changes of government, that mandate should still be in place. I think the public should be able to generate referendums. If the public outcry is great enough, there should be a referendum in between election times. Otherwise referendums should occur at the same time as an election in order to keep the cost of referendums down. But the public should be given time to engage in the process of formulating referendum questions prior to any election.

I also find it disturbing that the government in power gets to call when the election will occur to their own political gain. It has nothing to do with when it is best for the province or for our country. I think there should be a set schedule for elections which can only be changed if

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there is sufficient public outcry to hold an earlier election. Pressure from opposing parties should not enter into the equation, nor should the political agendas of the reigning party have anything to do with when an election is called.

Sometimes I might like the leader of one party, but in my own electoral district I might like someone in a different party. So I think we should be able to vote directly for the premier as well as vote for our MLA.

I believe that municipal governments should also become more democratic in the same manner as the province in all of the ways mentioned above.

I believe the GVRD should continue to be a separate government from the governments of each municipality but it should be directly elected by the public and have no appointees. The GVRD government should comprise of leaders elected by the public in the GVRD as a whole and it should also include an elected representative from each area. Living in Aldergrove, I've experienced already what it is like for the needs of a small town to get swallowed up by the needs and agendas of a larger municipality. I do not want Aldergrove to be even more swallowed up by the GVRD if they do away with individual city and municipal governments such as I recently heard talk of

I believe that the BCTF should be elected by the general public. In the past, the BCTF has been riddled by leaders that had an agenda against Christians to try to make it so Christians aren't allowed to teach in the public schools. While I agree that homosexuals should not be discriminated against or harassed, I do not think shifting the discrimination to be against Christians solves the problems. In an eclectic and free society, those for or against any issue should not be discriminated against for their beliefs. Thus those for and those against homosexuality are going to have to learn to live alongside of each other without trying to get the other to be not allowed to teach. Holding a view against something is not discrimination. Not allowing someone to hold a certain job because of their beliefs for or against something is discrimination. The BCTF has been claiming to represent the public. Unless they are elected by the public with the public's full knowledge of what their agenda is, then they are not representing the public.

I believe that criminals have the right to humane treatment. But I do not think they should be afforded all of the same rights and freedoms as the rest of society. In regards to elections, it bothers me that pedophiles can vote for someone who will be lenient toward pedophiles. I think that there should be a difference between someone who has committed a crime, and someone who is by nature a criminal. There is a difference between someone who stole something once and someone who lives a life of crime and finally got caught once. Our judicial system should be able to designate certain persons as "criminals" and such people should not be allowed to vote for the duration of their sentence.

in the early 90's, I experienced a federal referendum, which some people say failed, but

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which I think was a great success! it succeeded in telling the federal government what the public really thought. The public didn't think what the government wanted them to think, so the government thought it failed. What the public thought was that all the provinces should be treated fairly. And so they should be. The government pulled a sneaky trick which fortunately did not work. I was working in mental health group home at the time. An enumerator came to the group home which had 29 residents and asked who were Canadian citizens who were capable of voting. A week later another enumerator came

who said the first enumerator was wrong — that all Canadian citizens should be allowed to vote. We could not designate anyone capable or incapable. I accompanied this enumerator around to all of our residents and listened to her ask if they were Canadian citizens. One said “I don’t know.” The enumerator asked “Where were you born?” The person answered “I wasn’t born. I was thrown by the power into a cabbage patch.”. And that is just one of the crazy answers this enumerator got. She registered most of the people in the residence. Shortly after that, a government led group campaigning for a “yes” vote came to visit the residence and they gave a presentation to the whole residence. There were no plans to have a “no” group come in with a presentation. Thus the government deliberately registered incapable people and tried to tell them how to vote. On voting day, they set up a means for voting to take place right in the residence. They thought they had their yes vote in the bag after using such unscrupulous tactics. But Canada’s resounding “no” vote foiled them in spite of their manipulative actions. I know that many have fought long and hard for the rights of mentally ill people. For the most part I am glad of the progress made in getting these people rights. But something is obviously wrong with what happened here. And there is obviously something wrong with trying to win votes from such vulnerable people. If they had staged a debate or presentation of both pros and cons, it wouldn’t have been as bad. But it was bad enough that they came in and registered people who were not capable of understanding what they were voting for in the first place.

The manner in which people are registered to vote is very insecure in light of events that have taken place over the last decade. People don’t have to show any kind of ID. when registering to vote. They don’t have to prove they are Canadian citizens, they can just state that they are citizens. it would be so easy for terrorists or members of organized crime groups to get into this country and register themselves as voters and vote for someone on their side. We should have much more security involved when registering people to vote. The future of our province, nation, and world is at stake. I think that is an important enough reason to be more careful about registering voters. Our governments seem to have been more interested in getting large numbers registered than in being careful about whether they are qualified to be registered.

Many British Columbians seem afraid of democracy. It seemed that way when we had a referendum regarding negotiations with Indian bands. Many seemed afraid that the public would not vote for the general good of all concerned but would vote selfishly. I think democracy can work for the general good of all if it is run properly. In order for democracy to work well, all the cards have to be put out on the table before voting. The pros and cons of various options need to be laid out on the table. We need to know costs, we need to know the effects on the general public and the effects on various groups of people. We need all the pertinent information in order

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to vote intelligently and caringly. Thus hastily called elections with only one month before voting, such as our Prime Minister just called, takes away the opportunity for the public to become informed before voting. It makes a show of democracy, but it is not democracy in truth. It is just a game. Do we really know what we are voting for? I think “no”. But in a properly run democracy, the people can have the power to shape a better province and country. I think we could bring stability and direction to our country -

discover what we as a nation really think -- and maybe we could find some unity and a sense of what we as a people together stand for. I think we could gain a sense of identity as a province and nation if we learn what the majority of Canadians really think on certain issues and if we have the power to bring about what the majority of us want. I think we should have a better run democracy in B.C. ... and in Canada.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Milstead

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