NEWS UPDATE

Expert tells right-to-die trial drugs did not kill former nun

DUNCAN | Monique Charest, who the Crown contends committed suicide with an illegal helping hand, died with enough drugs in her body to make her drowsy but not to kill her, a court heard Friday.

Testifying before a B.C. Supreme Court jury, Dr. Stuart Huckin, a toxicologist, said an analysis of Charest's blood revealed a variety of drugs, including morphine, Gravol, sleeping medications, and Phenobarbital.

Under cross-examination, Huckin said the concentrations of the various drugs were at a level that would make a person sleepy, possibly even unconscious, but in his opinion they were not high enough to cause death.

Charest, a 64-year-old former nun who evidence has shown was a paid member of the Right to Die Society, was found dead in her Duncan apartment on Jan. 7, 2002. Evelyn Martens, 74, of Langford is charged with aiding and abetting a suicide. Martens is also facing a second count of the same charge in connection with the June 26, 2002 death of Leyanne Burchell, of Vancouver.

The jury has already heard Charest had decided to use a suicide method involving a plastic bag fitted over her head. The bag was connected by a hose to a tank of helium from a balloon kit to displace all the air inside. Testimony has also indicated Charest had spoken of a terror of being incapacitated by a stroke and subsequently sent to a nursing home where she would no control over her pain-filled body.

Victoria Times Colonist

Six candidates to battle for Surrey-Panorama Ridge seat

SURREY | Six candidates will battle it out in the Oct. 28 Surrey-Panorama Ridge byelection.

Former Liberal MLA Gulzar Cheema was elected to represent the riding in 2001, but resigned his seat in May to run in last June's federal election.

When the deadline for candidate nominations closed at 1 p.m. Friday, six hopefuls had signed up to take their shot at a seat in Victoria.

Mary Polak is running for the Liberals, Jagrup Brar for the NDP, Adriane Carr for the Green party, Shirley Abraham for Reform B.C., David James Evans will represent the B.C. Conservative Party and Joe Pal is running as an independent.

Cheema won in 2001 with 58.8 per cent of ballots cast. The NDP got 19.9 per cent, the Greens, 8.8 per cent and Reform B.C. took 2.5 per cent.

Of the 31,600 eligible voters in the riding in 2001, 23,750 registered to vote and 70 per cent of those cast a ballot. Advance polls for the byelection will be held from noon to 9 p.m. Oct. 20-23 at the Newton branch of Surrey Public Library, 13795 70th Ave.

Surrey Now

WEEKEND EVENTS

Decision time

VANCOUVER | Today is voting day for City of Vancouver residents. Voters will decide whether they want to keep the current at-large system or make the switch to wards. You can vote at any one of 44 different voting locations throughout the city, between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. For the voting location closest to you, see pickone.ca, call the election office at 604-873-7681, or see page A2 of today's *Sun*.

Fun 'n' games

Calling all board-game enthusiasts: Your chance to test-drive new games, from the high-tech Scene It to wicked trivia challenges, happens today and Sunday at Richmond Centre, where Mattel's North American board-game tour sets up shop. *6551 No. 3 Rd., today, 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., free.*

Smart sounds

Will listening to classical music make kids smarter even after they're born? Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's Classical Kids' concert series presents *Beethoven Lives Upstairs*, the story of how a young boy's life is affected by Ludwig van Beethoven boarding at his house. *Orpheum, Sunday, 2 p.m; for tickets call 604-876-3434.*

Ulterior designs

You want to check out Bruce Mau's super-hyped Massive Change: The Future of Global Design exhibition at Vancouver Art Gallery. But you also want to do something with the kids. Ergo: Super Sunday. It's a chance for families to experience the exhibition together, with guided tours and crafts such as building a city out of clay and making a model of an environmentally friendly vehicle. *Sunday, 12-5 p.m., Vancouver Art Gallery, 750 Hornby, 604-662-4719.*

Stylin'

Vancouver Fashion Week combines with the Home Show to create an event at which you can shop for closet organizers and the clothes to fill them at B.C. Place today and Sunday. Highlights include fashion shows, makeup and designer-of-the-year competitions and satellite events at various venues. *Entry to B.C. Place is $10; for information call 604-687-3890.*

Alt-country band Eldorado

Rattle shake

Featuring the city's finest roots and pop bands such as Eldorado, Herald Nix, Ronnie Artur and his Orkestrio, Gay, R.A.D.I.O and Geoff Berner, the first annual Rattle Shake music festival is an ambitious multi-venue happening that should provide steady delight for even the most discerning music fans. *Continues today, Sunday and Monday, at Ironworks, 235 Alexander; Railway, 597 Dunsmuir and The Main, 4210 Main; tickets at the door.*

THE DAILY SPECIAL

THE LEGISLATURE

POLITICS | As the assembly gets down to the brass tacks of selecting a system, here are the choices on its ballot

BY NEAL HALL
VANCOUVER SUN

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY
REDESIGNING DEMOCRACY

In the next few weeks, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform will get down to the nitty-gritty details of what kind of election system would be best for B.C.

One of the key details to be decided: If a new electoral system is chosen, how would the ballot be structured?

The assembly must decide whether the party names should be listed on the ballot alphabetically, or in random order.

Assembly members face the same issue in deciding how candidates' names should be listed — alphabetically or by random selection.

The 160 randomly selected members of the assembly like the concept of random selection.

In an earlier meeting last month, members decided that the names of candidates should be "rotated" on ballots so that those listed first do not get an unfair advantage.

This would mean that a number of different ballots would have to be printed for each constituency. Political scientists call it the Robson Rotation.

But it's still possible the assembly could scrap that idea when it comes down to the final decision. As assembly chair Jack Blaney says: "Nothing is decided until everything is decided."

The assembly, however, has already decided that three key values for a better election system are that it should be more proportional, which would correct some of the voting distortions of our current system; it should allow more voter choice, and it should provide local representation.

During its deliberation phase, the assembly has decided to build two "ideal models" of potential new electoral systems.

Last time it met, it designed a model Single Transferable Vote system (STV). The other system, to be designed this weekend, is a Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP).

During its next weekend session of Oct. 23 and 24 at Vancouver's Wall Centre for Dialogue, the assembly will narrow the choice down to one potential new electoral system, then compare it with our current First Past the Post system (FPTP) before deciding whether to retain FPTP or recommend a new system.

The assembly must deliver its final report to government by Dec. 15. If it recommends a change, a referendum will be held during the next provincial election on May 17, 2005. If approved, it is expected to be implemented by the following election, in 2009.

Here's a rundown on the two alternative election systems now under consideration:

Mixed Member Proportional combines a single-member plurality system (our current electoral system) with a proportional representation list system to achieve a legislature whose party composition roughly reflects the proportion of votes cast for each party.

This means that if a party wins 35 per cent of the popular vote, it gets 35 per cent of the seats. Once votes are counted, the number of constituency seats won is subtracted from the total share of seats won by each party. If necessary, the number of seats then is "topped up" from a list of candidates.

Most lists are ranked by the party, which allow parties to promote more women and ethnic minorities being elected.

In practice, it works like this: If a party wins 40 per cent of the total 100 seats but only elects 25 candidates at the constituency level, 15 more party members are added to the legislature from a party list, resulting in the top 15 being selected from that list.

Under MMP, voters are required to vote for both their choice of local member and preferred party, although this is sometimes combined into a single choice for a candidate and party.

In New Zealand, which adopted an MMP system in the mid 1990s, voters get two votes — one for the local candidate and one for the party.

This system also has been adopted for the German lower house, the Bundestag.

The other type of proportional representation system is Single Transferable Vote. One of two families of proportional representation, STV is based on the idea that the range of political opinion in the community should be mirrored in the legislative assembly.

STV aims to make the legislature more proportional by giving each party a share of seats that roughly reflects its share of the popular vote. If STV were adopted in B.C., electoral districts would be combined to create larger ridings of two or more MLAs.

STV uses a preferential ballot that allows voters to choose more than one candidate by ranking candidates according to preference — 1, 2, 3, and so on. Ballots are counted in a way that ensures the candidates with the highest preferences are elected.

The vote-counting procedure may be more complicated than the current system but the principle is straightforward — that a variety of minority as well as majority opinions are represented in the assembly, provided the minorities have a large enough proportion of votes to cross the threshold for representation.

This threshold is set by the quota of votes needed for representation and can vary widely, depending on the particular STV system to be used. The purpose of the threshold — which could be set at five per cent of the popular vote — is to reduce the number of smaller, "fringe" parties.

The STV system, used in Ireland since 1922, requires no list candidates and allows voters to elect candidates, sometimes from rival parties, within multi-member districts. Malta and Tasmania have also adopted STV.

David Farrell, author of *Electoral Systems* — a book used by the citizens' assembly — says STV systems are more candidate-based while MMP systems are more party-based, which leads to centralized, top-down political campaigns, with tighter controls imposed on candidates.

Farrell says ballot structure can influence the behaviour of voters and politicians, noting that under an STV system, political campaigns are more decentralized and there can be more faction-fighting between candidates of the same party running in the same riding.

"In party-based electoral systems," Farrell writes, "where the voter is choosing between parties and not candidates, there is little hope of mandating the politicians (apart, that is, from the mandate given to the parties) and therefore we can expect a greater tendency for politicians to act as trustees."

In such systems, the author adds, the principal "voting constituency" of individual politicians is not the voters — the electorate — "but rather the 'selectorates' who determine whether the politician will appear on the list and in which position."

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Five members to be elected (ballot with candidates grouped by party, party ranked randomly, candidates ranked alphabetically)

Red Party Candidates	
Angela	
Harley	
Julie	
Nick	
Paul	
Blue Party Candidates	
Brad	
Dan	
Edith	
Ian	
Lianne	
Gold Party Candidates	
Claude	
Frankie	
Gladys	
Manjit	
Ron	
Independents	
Katie	

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Red Party Ca
Nick
Paul
Julie
Angela
Harley
Blue Party Ca
Brad
Lianne
Edith
Dan
Ian
Gold Party Ca
Manjit
Frankie
Ron
Gladys
Claude
Independents
Katie

The 160 members of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform meet in the Asia Pacific Hall of the Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

MONDAY

THE DAILY SPECIAL LOOKS AT:

| DELTA |

School district continues to see decline in student enrolment

The Delta school district has come very close to its enrolment prediction of last spring, but it's not all good news.

As of the end of September, the school district had 30 more students than it predicted, bringing the total to 16,918.

Assistant superintendent Marjorie Higginson said the school district continues to experience declining enrolment, with 216 fewer students than last year.

However, there's no pattern of decline in either North Delta or South Delta, a consideration for parents concerned about potential school closures.

"It's pretty much even, all over the district," Higginson said at this week's Delta school board meeting. "That's troublesome for us."

Accurate enrolment projections usually mean a smoother transition into the new school year, complete with fewer staffing concerns.

Delta Optimist

| THE PROVINCE |

Pensions for disabled to be increased soon

Thousands of British Columbians surviving on disability benefits will probably see their first real increase in over a decade very shortly.

The last time disabled people saw a government pay raise was in 2000, when singles were given an increase of about $15 a month, but that was immediately eaten up by a hike in the price of bus passes. There are 53,230 disability benefits cases in B.C, with the payments supporting 64,864 people, including family members. Another 12,613 are people with persistent multiple barriers, with payments supporting 16,137 people.

"The last increase before that [2000] was in 1993," said Margaret Birrell, executive director of the B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities.

Human Resources Minister Susan Brice confirmed Friday that the government is planning to increase disability benefits, but would not say how much of a boost people should expect. Rates for disability assistance range from $786 a month for a single person to $1,240 for a mother with two children.

| SURREY |

Chelali set to challenge Hogg in South Surrey provincial riding

Gordon Hogg could find himself engaged in a heroic struggle when next May's provincial election rolls around.

South Surrey resident Mohamed Chelali is seeking the NDP nomination in Surrey-White Rock, a riding held by Hogg since '97.

Chelali vaulted to international fame on July 14, 2002 when he helped tackle an assassin intent on gunning down French President Jacques Chirac during the Bastille Day parade in Paris. He and two other men subdued the would-be killer as he raised a rifle to fire on Chirac as he passed in the parade.

Last November, France's ambassador to Canada draped the Legion of Honour, France's premier medal for bravery, around Chelali's neck in Vancouver.

Chelali, 48, was born in Algeria and moved to France in his early 20s. In 1992, he brought his family to Canada. He holds master's degrees in international business and education, an engineering degree in oil economics and teaches French at Langley's R.E. Mountain secondary school.

Surrey Now

| WASHINGTON STATE |

Oil spill spreads about 10 kilometres, coats two birds

An oil spill stained Tacoma's Commencement Bay and spread to beaches on nearby islands Thursday, polluting an ecologically rich area where grebes, ducks and other birds winter.

Washington State Department of Ecology investigators were unsure how much oil had spilled or where it came from, agency spokesman Larry Altose said. The coast guard was reviewing a list of ships that had been in the area.

The oil spread over about 10 kilometres around the southern tip of Vashon Island north of Tacoma, and tainted nearby Maury Island.

The U.S. Coast Guard said it appeared to be a heavy-grade industrial oil that can coat beaches, form tar balls and does not easily evaporate.

U.S. and state wildlife agencies received reports at least two birds were found coated in oil, said Joan Jewett, spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Cleanup operations included three boats skimming oil from the surface and protective booms.