making every vote count

THE CASE FOR ELECTORAL REFORM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA
BRITISH COLUMBIA CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM

FINAL REPORT
DECEMBER 2004

CONTENTS

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY MEMBERS   Chris C. Andersen, Victoria • Margaret Anderson, Prince Rupert • Claude Armstrong, Blind Bay • Sharon Arola, Sparwood • Lianne Ashley, Vancouver • Mohamed Z. Assim, Burnaby • Brooke Bannister, Richmond • Art Beaumont, Metchosin • Nancy Bednard, Vancouver • Wendy Bergerud, Victoria • Deb Beuk, Anmore • Ferdinand Beyer, Maple Ridge • Jack Blaney, Vancouver • Cheryl Blaschuk, Cloverdale • Julie Ann Boehmer, West Vancouver • Georges J-P Boucher, Lumby • Nick Boudin, Vancouver • Gladys Doreen Brown, Midway • Lill Brulhart, Surrey • Diana Byford, North Saanich • David Callaghan, Abbotsford • Ingrid Carmichael, Chilliwack • Barbara Carter, White Rock • Katie Cavaletto, Kamloops • John Chapman, Nanaimo • Wilf Chelle, Buick • Diana Cochran, New Westminster • Dorothy Coombes, Victoria • Linda Ann Crawford, Vancouver • Tanis Dagert, Lantzville • Edith Davidson, Delta • Ann M. Davis, Vernon • Sally de Luna, Vancouver • Donna Karen Dew, Coquitlam • Manjit (Manju) Dhaliwal, Abbotsford • Richard Peter Dignard, Roberts Creek • Darleen Dixon, Fort Nelson • Lana Marie Donnelly, Colwood • Linda Dorey, Coquitlam • Mary Richeal Drew, Burnaby • Jean Jacques Michel Ensminger, Ladysmith • Caroline S. Fader, Richmond • Linda Fantillo, Campbell River • Shoni Field, Vancouver • Ian Fleming, Langley • Allan Wallace Flemons, New Westminster • Darin Follestad, Kelowna • Paul Arthur Galbraith, Spillimacheen • Cliff Garbutt, Vancouver • Navjot (Jyoti) Gill, Vancouver • Wendy Gonsalves, Westbank • Ken Gosling, Creston • Vickie Mae Gowing, Ymir • Dan Green, Prince Rupert • Rev. Richard Hall, Courtenay • Derrick Harder, Surrey • Lee A. Harris, Kamloops • Sandra Patricia Hart, Terrace • Darryl Blake Hawkins, Cobble Hill • Ian Hay, Aldergrove • Craig Anthony Henschel, Burnaby • R.B. (Bob) Herath, Surrey • Janet Hewsick, Victoria • Lynn Hill, North Vancouver • Angela H. Hsu, Maple Ridge • Firmin Hung, Vancouver • Geraldine Hurst, Burnaby • Beverly Huseby, Abbotsford • Peter A. Indyk, Delta • Neall C. Ireland, Vancouver • Adina Irimescu, Burnaby • William F. M. Jackson, Dawson Creek • Mary Jarbek, Prince George • Susan W. Johnson, Surrey • Raymond Jones, Kamloops • Robert Jones, Campbell River • Sheri Keller, Kelowna • William Dean Kilsby, Chilliwack • Frankie Kirby, Vancouver • Barbara Köhne, East Sooke • Jay Konkin, Surrey • Evelyn Emily Krenz, Richmond •

making every vote count

"We are here to invent a new way to engage citizens in the practice of democracy...."

To the Honourable Geoff Plant, Attorney General, and

To the people of British Columbia

The members of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform feel exceptionally honoured to have been given this historic opportunity to serve British Columbians on a matter so central to our democracy.

Our mandate was to assess different models for electing members of the Legislative Assembly and to recommend whether our current system for provincial elections should be retained or whether a new model should be adopted. Elsewhere, such a task has been given to politicians or to electoral experts. Instead, British Columbia chose to make history and to give this task to the voters.

For eleven months we have studied voting systems, we have listened to thousands of British Columbians in 50 public hearings and received and read 1,603 written submissions. What we most wanted to learn was what values, hopes and desires should underlie our electoral system and which principles should direct our decisions and recommendation. This work has led us to the following recommendation:

The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform recommends our province adopt a new voting system, which we call "BC-STV." This single transferable vote system is customized for this province. It is fair and easy to use, and it gives more power to voters.

BC-STV is easy to use. Voters rank candidates according to their preferences.

BC-STV gives fair results. The object is to make every vote count so that each party's share of seats in the legislature reflects its share of voter support.

BC-STV gives more power to voters. Voters decide which candidates within a party, or across all parties are elected. All candidates must work hard to earn every vote, thereby strengthening effective local representation.

BC-STV gives greater voter choice. Choosing more than one member from a riding means that voters will select members of the Legislative Assembly from a greater range of possible candidates.

On May 17, 2005 the referendum question placed before all voters will be this:

> *Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform? Yes/No*

We know that a new voting system will take time to become a smooth working part of our political life and we believe that it should be reviewed after it has been used for three provincial elections and that citizens should be involved in the review.

_____

In the rest of this report we compare our current voting system with BC-STV. We outline how BC-STV will work and why we believe this system will best serve this diverse province. A second volume, the *Technical Report*, addresses all aspects of our work and deliberations in detail. Information on how to get a copy of the *Technical Report* can be found on the last page of this report.

Together these two reports complete our work. The next decision belongs to all British Columbians.

making every vote count

Basic values

Through our work and by listening to British Columbians, we have identified three basic values which we believe should form the basis of our electoral system. These are:

Fair election results through proportionality
Democracy is "rule by the people," therefore, the results of an election—the number of seats won by each party—should reflect the number of votes each party has earned from the voters. The results—votes to seats—should be "proportional."

No electoral system does this perfectly, but that does not reduce the importance of proportionality. Proportional election results are the fairest election results. The preference of voters should determine who sits in our legislature. That is fair.

Effective local representation
Each community has a distinct personality; each makes its own unique contribution to our provincial life. To be effectively represented, each community needs the opportunity to choose the people who speak for it in the legislature, and to hold them accountable in democratic elections.

Effective local representation has long been a principle of our democratic tradition. It is central to our electoral politics. Strengthening local representation should be a test of any electoral reform.

Greater voter choice
As citizens, we all are responsible for the health of our democracy, and therefore we must have the fullest possible opportunity to choose the candidates that best represent our interests. Our choice in elections should include choosing among party candidates, as well as across all parties. To give voters a stronger voice, greater voter choice should be part of our voting system.

In addition to these values, two issues were consistently highlighted in our discussions on choosing an electoral system.

The voter and political parties
There is a groundswell of opposition in this province to the current imbalance of power between voters and parties. Indeed, some of the submissions we received called for banning parties on the grounds that they so dominate electoral politics that local representation is undermined by party discipline and practices, and voter choice is stifled.

While concerned about this imbalance, we recognize that parliamentary government depends on parties to conduct elections, organize the work of the legislature and carry out the business of government. We believe that the solution lies in adopting an electoral system that encourages voters and politicians to work together in a balanced partnership.

The voter and majority, coalition and minority governments
Most often in Canada—both provincially and federally—parties that form majority governments earn much less than half of the vote, but take well over half of the seats. These are called "artificial majorities." Nonetheless, Canadians are so familiar with single-party majority governments that we easily assume they are the natural outcome of elections.

A majority government, real or artificial, will claim a mandate and act on it. And it can easily be held accountable at the next election. However, we are convinced that the simple nature of majority governments should not override the basic values of fair election results, effective local representation, and greater voter choice. Most other successful western democracies do not depend on majorities, yet have stable and effective governments, governments that often are both inclusive of different interests and consensual in making decisions.

We have all seen ineffective or divisive majority governments, and we have seen progressive and successful minority governments that work through legislative coalitions, particularly the federal governments of the 1960s. We believe that our electoral system should not override fairness and choice in favour of producing artificial single-party majority governments.

The current system of voting in BC

The case for majority government

For most of our history this province has used a "single-member plurality" electoral system, popularly referred to as "First-Past-the-Post" (FPTP). The first candidate to cross the finish line—the one with the most votes—wins the seat and represents the local district in the legislature. Governments are formed by the party with the most seats. It is a simple system.

Supporters of FPTP typically argue for its ability to produce majority governments, often cautioning against the unequal power small parties might exercise in coalition or minority governments. Governments with a legislative majority may claim a mandate for action. They do not have to bargain with other parties to act on their policies, but can plan and take the administrative and financial decisions necessary to implement their program. Similarly, at election time, voters know who is responsible for the government's successes or failures and can clearly indicate which party they wish to govern the province.

This tendency toward majority government is FPTP's most important feature: without it, British Columbia would not have had majority governments throughout much of its recent history. In fact, British Columbians have only rarely given one party a majority of their votes.

Does FPTP meet the needs of British Columbia?

A basic principle of FPTP is local representation—every corner of the province is represented in the legislature. Voters directly choose who they wish to represent them and their community, with every area of the province choosing one representative.

We believe local representation must be a fundamental objective of any British Columbian electoral system. However, although local representation based on the FPTP system has worked in the past, it is now seen as too easily compromised in at least two ways.

◆ Citizens wishing to support a particular party must vote for the single candidate the party offers and not necessarily for the local candidate they may prefer. This often means that the real competition is for a party's nomination and not for the voters' support on election day.

◆ Party discipline quickly turns members of the Legislative Assembly into party advocates rather than local advocates. Many British Columbians now see MLAs as providing "Victoria's" voice to the people, rather than the people's voice to Victoria.

FPTP is a simple system—voters need only place an "X" beside the name of an individual. However, FPTP does not promise or provide fair election results. There is no logical or systematic relationship between a party's total share of the votes cast and its seats in the legislature. Local candidates do not have to win a majority in their district to win a seat. In exceptional cases—for example, in British Columbia in 1996—this meant that the party with the most votes lost the election. Governments elected with fewer votes than their opponents are not legitimate in a modern democracy.

The FPTP system can produce other undesirable outcomes. In the 2001 election, the opposition was reduced to two of 79 seats in the legislature, despite winning 42% of the popular vote. Not only is this obviously unfair, it weakens the opposition so greatly that the legislature cannot hold Government to account. The very principle of responsible government, the heart of our constitution, is thrown into question. Many citizens understand that the current system is responsible for these results and believe that they are neither fair nor acceptable.

A great many British Columbians told us that political parties too easily dominate this system, that it produces a style of local representation that is easily stifled by party discipline, that it fails to connect voters' decisions with election results, and that it offers minimal choices to voters. We agree.

BC-STV: a new way of voting in BC

BC-STV is a "single transferable vote" (STV) system. The main feature of these systems is that, rather than marking an "X" beside one name, voters number candidates from most favourite to least favourite (*i.e.*, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). If a voter's favourite candidate (#1) is not elected, or has more votes than are needed to be elected, then the voter's vote is "moved" to his or her next most favourite candidate (#2). The vote is transferred rather than wasted. The aim of this system is to make all votes count.

We are recommending that British Columbians adopt BC-STV as their voting system. We are convinced that this system best incorporates the values of fair election results, effective local representation, and greater voter choice.

Fair election results
Proportionality—ensuring that each party's share of seats in the legislature reflects its actual share of votes—is the basis of fair election results. A proportional system needs multi-member districts so that the share of seats in the legislature can reflect the votes cast by British Columbians and that voters can elect candidates that represent their true preferences.

Proportionality is not possible in our current single-member districts, so electoral districts will be amalgamated to provide between two and seven members for each new district. To provide for the fairest results, districts will be designed to have as many members as possible. The number of MLAs in the legislature will not necessarily change; nor will the number of MLAs for any particular region change.

BC-STV will produce fair results but not the kind of extreme fragmentation that different proportional systems have promoted in countries such as Israel.

Effective local representation
There are two road blocks to effective local representation in British Columbia. The first is geographic, the second political. BC-STV removes both of these.

Geographic: MLAs are expected to represent their local communities. In British Columbia this can mean providing effective representation for citizens that live in relatively small, densely populated urban areas, or in large, thinly populated rural areas of the province. Those of us from the

BC-STV BALLOT

- Three members to be elected
- Number the boxes in the order of your choice
- Write the number "1" in one of the boxes and then show as many other preferences as you wish.

Smith, Freda	APPLE PARTY	4
Gill, Steven	APPLE PARTY	1
Howard, Brenda	APPLE PARTY	2
Roberts, Saul	INDEPENDENT	3
Jansen, Doug	PEAR PARTY	6
Wong, Lisa	PEAR PARTY	
Lewis, Peter	PEAR PARTY	
Savoie, Christine	MANGO PARTY	5

First preferences—a 1 in the box next to a candidate's name—are counted first. Second and subsequent preferences are counted only as needed.

rural and more remote corners of the province understand the problems that long distances create for participating in public meetings or contacting an MLA.

BC-STV will adapt to different regional needs. Electoral districts in our new system will be organized to reduce these difficulties while ensuring proportionality. In the north and south-east this means adopting districts of two to three members. In the south-central and south-west of the province this means new districts of between four and seven members. The number of members for each region will remain the same; no region will lose representation, but each will contribute to better proportionality.

- Electoral districts have more than just one MLA.

- Voters rank the candidates in the order of their preference—1, 2, 3, 4 etc.

- The number of votes needed for election (called the quota) is calculated.

- Everyone's first preference vote is counted.

- Any candidates that reach the quota are elected.

- If a candidate has more votes than necessary those votes are not wasted but transferred to the voter's second choice.

- If no one is elected the person with the fewest votes is dropped and their votes transferred to the voter's next preference.

- The process continues until a district has elected all its MLAs.

- Few votes are wasted so most voters make a difference to getting someone elected.

- Because this is a proportional system the number of seats a party wins matches their share of the popular vote.

*A full description of the technical aspects of the proposed system can be found in the section entitled "The Recommended BC-STV Electoral System" in the *Technical Report*.

Political: In our current electoral systems, political parties, not voters, control the way MLAs represent their communities. BC-STV corrects this imbalance by being voter-centred and candidate-focused: to be elected, candidates will need to put communities first.

Greater voter choice

BC-STV increases choices, allowing voters a much greater say in determining who will be their local representatives. It allows voters to choose between candidates and parties, it lets voters show which candidates they prefer and in what order, and it ensures that their preferences count. This will provide increased opportunities for candidates from under-represented groups.

BC-STV is also the only proportional system that allows independent candidates a real chance to be elected. Although increasingly rare, we believe that independents must have opportunities to participate in our provincial elections equal to candidates who work through political parties.

BC-STV responds to British Columbia's basic values. It provides for fair election results, effective local representation, and greater voter choice, and it best balances these three values of electoral politics. Similar systems have been used successfully—in some cases for decades—to elect members to various positions in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland, countries that share our Westminster parliamentary tradition. The Irish government has twice tried to use referendums to abolish STV, but the voters said "No." This is a system designed by voters for voters.

Ballots and by-elections

Ballots in multi-member districts can be organized in a number of ways. Because we know that parties play an important role in our parliamentary system, and because some British Columbians will want to vote for a party, we are recommending that candidates be grouped by party on the ballot. However, in order to ensure that no candidate or party benefits from the order that names appear on the ballot, we recommend that both be randomly ordered on individual ballots.

We further recommend that when a legislative seat becomes vacant, the by-election to fill the seat should use the same ballots. Where there is only one seat to be filled, the winning candidate will need to get 50% + one of the votes cast to be elected.

What happens if we adopt BC-STV in BC?

If British Columbians vote to accept the BC-STV electoral system on May 17, 2005, the politics and governance of our province will change.

For some British Columbians it is clear that the greatest change—and the greatest regret—will be the loss of easily achieved majority governments. BC-STV can produce a majority government if a majority of voters vote for one party. While this is possible, the province's history suggests that governments under the new system will likely be a minority or a coalition of two or more parties. This will mean a change in party organization and practices; parties will need to be more responsive to the voters and less adversarial with their opponents and partners.

Our electoral districts will grow geographically under BC-STV, but the number of voters per MLA will not change. Voters will have more than one MLA representing them in Victoria, more than one person to turn to for help. Because each district is likely to elect members from different parties in proportion to the votes cast, voters may well be able to go to an MLA who shares their political views. This will help provide more effective local representation.

Perhaps the most significant change for voters and candidates will strike closer to home. There will be no more "safe seats" that a party can win no matter who it runs as its candidate.

Changes for voters
Voters will have more power. This means voters will make more and different kinds of choices.

For example, voters will be able to consider candidates and parties, rather than simply putting an "X" beside one person's name. Staunch party supporters will be able to rank their party's candidates. Both of these changes will mean that candidates will have to work hard to earn voters' first preference support.

Changes for candidates and MLAs
With the loss of safe seats, no candidate, including sitting MLAs, will be able to count on winning election. Under BC-STV, voters will decide which of a party's several candidates are elected in each district. A party's candidates will compete not only against those in other parties for first preference support, they will also compete against candidates from their own party. Recognizing that they may not be "first preference" on enough ballots to win a seat, candidates will need to encourage supporters of other candidates to mark them as their second or third preference. This need to appeal to a greater number of voters should lower the adversarial tone of election contests: voters are unlikely to respond positively to someone who aggressively insults their first choice.

In order to stand out from other candidates, MLAs will need to clearly represent their districts. This will reinforce effective local representation and encourage MLAs to resist party discipline when it is not in the community's interests. MLAs will have to work harder to ensure that their party's positions reflect their constituents' views.

Changes for parties
Parties will run several candidates in the new multi-member electoral districts. This should encourage parties to nominate a diversity of candidates within a district so that they can appeal to the groups and interests that have been under-represented or ignored in our current "winner-take-all" FPTP system.

Because the voter will have real power in determining who is elected, parties will have a reason to involve more citizens in their organizations and to make their nominating processes more open and accessible. Because legislative caucuses will include MLAs whose continuing electoral success will depend on representing their local communities, regardless of party policies, the pressures of party discipline will decrease. Our politicians will be better able to represent faithfully the interests of our communities, as well as the province as a whole.

And finally, a party's strength in the legislature will reflect its actual support among voters—not more, not less. Having lost the ability to win artificial majorities, parties will have to learn to work together. This will not reduce the competitive character of British Columbia's politics, but it may engender a more consensual style of decision-making in which broad agreement is sought for major policy changes.

Changes for the Legislative Assembly

The most immediate and dramatic change to the Legislative Assembly will be that its power to choose and effectively supervise governments will be restored. The basic theory of our parliamentary system is that governments are chosen by, and are responsible to, the legislature. However, the presence of strictly disciplined parties, enlarged by artificial majorities, has reversed this principle, making the legislature a creature of the government.

BC-STV will end artificial majorities. Governments will need to depend on winning the support of a majority of the legislature and will be able to pass only those laws that a majority of MLAs support.

The Legislative Assembly will adapt to these new realities. MLAs will be more sensitive to local interests, and the concerns and hopes of voters will be more commonly heard in the legislature. At the same time, legislative committees will take on a more important role in debating and deciding important public policy issues.

Changes for provincial governments

The BC-STV system will end majority governments built on a minority of votes. No single party will be able to implement a platform without meaningful public debate in the legislature.

Unless a majority of voters support candidates from one party, future governments will likely be minorities or coalitions of more than one party. Some coalitions will form before elections in the hope of attracting enough votes to gain a majority; others will form when the elected members find out how much support the voters have given them.

Coalition governments, and the more consensual decision-making they require, are normal in most western democracies. The experience of coalition governments in other successful parliamentary systems has been positive and we expect no less from our elected representatives and parties. Governments will depend on members from different parties deciding to work together and making agreements that command broad public support. With BC-STV, the people will get the government they vote for.
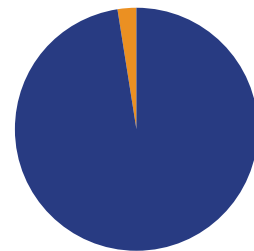
THE CHANGE IF BC-STV HAD BEEN IN PLACE IN THE LAST ELECTION
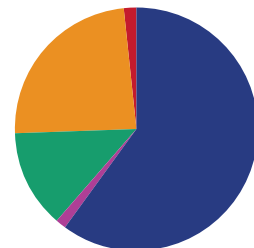
% of popular vote province-wide

LIBERAL	58%
NDP	22%
GREEN	12%
MARIJUANA	3%
UNITY	3%
OTHER	2%
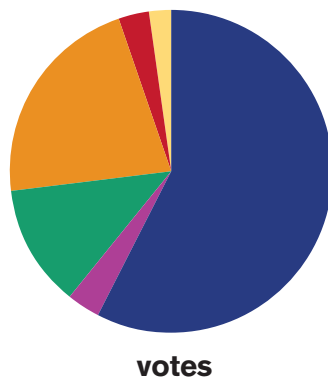
votes

seats under the current system

seats under BC-STV

In conclusion

We are convinced that British Columbia will improve its practice of democracy by adopting BC-STV. Election results will be fairer, reflecting a balance between votes and seats, voters will have more choice and candidates will work harder to earn their support. Political parties will remain at the centre of the electoral process, but they will give up some of the excesses of party discipline and the adversarial style that alienates many voters. The Legislative Assembly will be strengthened in its ability to hold governments accountable.

No one in the Assembly is so naive as to think that BC-STV will answer every call for change or correct every inequality or inefficiency in our province's political system. We have come to believe, however, that by changing the electoral system we can build a political climate that is more faithful to the values that most British Columbians want as the foundations of our political life.

British Columbians have an unprecedented opportunity to take control of some of the most important rules of democracy. After considering all of the options—including doing nothing—we are convinced that by adopting the BC-STV electoral system the voters will create a system where they, the voters themselves, are closer to the centre of the system. In a democracy, that is what "fair" is about.

Jack Blaney

ON BEHALF OF THE 160 MEMBERS OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM

Other issues raised by British Columbians

Our mandate as a Citizens' Assembly was focused and clear. This helped us complete the task we were given on time and on budget, and led us to our decision to recommend the BC-STV electoral system.

A number of other issues were also raised by the thousands of British Columbians who spoke to us at public hearings, community meetings and through their formal presentations and submissions. As these issues are beyond our mandate, we deliberately did not engage in sustained debate on them, nor do we presume to make any recommendations or discuss them in detail here. However, the fact that they speak to the deep concern many citizens have for the health of our democracy gives them a place in our second volume, the *Technical Report*.

In brief, the non-mandate issues raised in this process were:

◆ **Enthusiasm for citizen involvement in electoral reform**. This discussion reflects both the wide public approval of the government's decision to create a Citizens' Assembly and the importance of encouraging public debate and involvement on issues important to our democracy.

◆ **Facilities for access to local MLAs**. British Columbians attach a great deal of importance to strong local representation and the need for MLAs to stay in touch with their districts. This is of particular concern in Northern and rural ridings.

◆ **The role and operation of political parties**. British Columbians recognize the central role of political parties in the democratic process, but believe that more openness and responsiveness —particularly in the nomination process and issues related to parliamentary reform—would help reduce what are often referred to as gaps in the democratic process.

◆ **Public participation in BC's democracy**. British Columbians are concerned with declining voter turnout and increased public cynicism, believing that we need to build a more participatory political process. A system that fully involves women, First Nations peoples and minorities would make a major contribution to strengthening our province's democracy.

From selection to decision-making:
How the Assembly completed its work

Prior to the last election the Liberal party made a commitment to:

◆ Appoint a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform to assess all possible models for electing MLAs, including preferential ballots, proportional representation, and our current electoral system;

◆ Give the Citizens' Assembly a mandate to hold public hearings throughout BC, and if it recommends changes to the current electoral system, that option will be put to a province-wide referendum.

The membership of the assembly "is to be appointed by a random selection process."

In September 2002, the government appointed Gordon Gibson to advise on the mandate and make up of a citizens' assembly. Mr. Gibson's *Report on the Constitution of the Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform*, tabled on December 23, 2002, led on April 30, 2003 to the creation of a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. On May 16, 2003, the legislature unanimously appointed Jack Blaney, former president of Simon Fraser University, to the chair of the Citizens' Assembly. Dr. Blaney brought together the core staff for the Assembly

The following sections briefly describe the Assembly, how it was formed, how members were selected, the training members participated in and the deliberations that took place from September 2003 to December 2004. A detailed description of the work of the Assembly can be found in the *Technical Report*.

SELECTION PHASE

Choosing the Assembly

The members of the Citizens' Assembly were chosen at random from the province's 79 electoral districts. The process began with Elections BC, "a non-partisan Office of the Legislature," updating the BC voters list in the late summer of 2003.

From that list, Elections BC drew a randomized list of 200 names for each electoral district—100 males and 100 females per district. These names were grouped by age (*i.e.*, 18-24, 25-39, 40-55, 56-70, 71+) and gender to produce a list representative of the provincial population.

In mid-September 2003, Assembly staff sent an initial letter to 15,800 British Columbians randomly selected by Elections BC. This letter explained the purpose of the Assembly, outlined the major tasks and responsibilities of an Assembly member, and asked recipients to consider participating in the Assembly. Responses to the letter were grouped by electoral district, gender and age cohort.

Elections BC produced a second set of 200 randomly selected names for districts where not enough responses were received to represent the district adequately. In the end, a total of 23,034 letters produced a positive response from 1,715 men and women.

This pool of names provided the basis for invitations to one of 27 selection meetings held at various locations across the province. Nine hundred and sixty-four men and women attended these meetings where staff provided an overview of the Citizens' Assembly and described what would be expected of members, as well as the eligibility criteria set by the legislature. Attendees confirmed their eligibility and willingness to serve, then had their names placed in a hat.

A draw was then held and one female and one male from each electoral district were selected until 158 members had been chosen.

A review of the Assembly members at that point made it clear that the province's First Nations peoples were not represented. To address this, the government was asked to amend the *Terms of Reference* so that two people could be selected from the aboriginal community.

This was done, and every person who attended a selection meeting but was not selected in the first round was canvassed to determine their aboriginal status. People who confirmed aboriginal status (and their interest and eligibility) had their names placed in a hat and one man and one woman were selected, bringing the number of members to 161, including the chair of the Assembly.

Over the course of the selection process, but before the Assembly met in session, eight people who had been selected withdrew for different reasons. They were replaced by random draws taken from the pool of names of people who had put their names forward at the selection meeting for their area.

A detailed examination of the Selection Phase is included in the Assembly's *Technical Report*.

LEARNING PHASE

The members of the Citizens' Assembly presented a wide variety of backgrounds and experience: they reflected the diversity of this province. They also had varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of electoral systems, so a three-month Learning Phase was provided to prepare members for the tasks and challenges represented by the mandate.

The Learning Phase consisted of six weekend sessions held between January 11th and March 26th, 2004. The sessions were conducted in Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue located in Vancouver. Kenneth Carty and Campbell Sharman, political scientists from the University of British Columbia, designed and delivered the learning sessions. An advisory committee of experts from various universities and other groups assisted with the design of the program.

Leading international experts Elizabeth McLeay from New Zealand and David Farrell from the United Kingdom conducted one weekend session. David Farrell was also the author of the primary text provided to all Assembly members.

Each weekend session typically consisted of three major presentations, each delivered in an interactive lecture style, supported by presentation and pre-session reading materials. Following each presentation, the Assembly broke into 12 discussion groups facilitated by political science graduate students from the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. The discussion groups provided the members an opportunity to increase their understanding of the learning materials and the lectures, and to discuss the principles and practices of electoral systems. The Learning Phase was supported with a well-maintained website.

Assembly members also learned how to work together, developing a set of "Shared Values" and approved policies to guide their work and the deliberative decision processes of the Assembly.

The Learning Phase culminated in the publication of the *Preliminary Statement to the People of British Columbia*. The *Statement* outlined the Assembly's progress and expressed the values the Assembly thought should be part of the province's electoral system. The *Statement* also provided a basis for discussion during the public hearings.

A detailed examination of the Learning Phase is included in Assembly's *Technical Report*.

shared values
DEVELOPED BY THE ASSEMBLY

- respect people and their opinions
- challenge ideas not people
- listen to understand
- commitment to the process
- focus on mandate; preparedness
- simple, clear, concise communication
- respect inclusivity: all members are equal
- positive attitude
- integrity

PUBLIC HEARINGS PHASE

Fifty public hearings were organized throughout the province during the months of May and June 2004. Hearing locations were chosen to allow the greatest number of citizens to attend. The hearings were scheduled from 6:30 to 9:30 pm on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) and from 1:30 to 4:30 pm on Saturdays.

From four to sixteen Assembly members attended each hearing. Each of these Assembly panels included members from the local electoral districts, the neighbouring districts and at least one member from another region of the province. This mix helped Assembly members to gain an understanding of the local issues and concerns of citizens in all parts of the province.

In the course of the public hearings, approximately 3,000 British Columbians attended presentations given by 383 people. Following the formal presentations, the hearings were opened to all attendees for comments and suggestions, and for discussions with Assembly members.

A summary of each formal presentation was posted to the Assembly website where it was available to other members of the Assembly and the public. The dominant themes of the presentations included the need for change, more proportionality, local representation and increased voter choice. Contact with the public continued throughout the province as Assembly members met with community groups, service clubs and schools. Many presenters and attendees commended the government for initiating the Citizens' Assembly.

The other significant opportunity for public participation was through written submissions. Over 1,430 individuals made 1,603 submissions to the Assembly, the majority via the Assembly's website where they were posted for public scrutiny. Over time, submissions began to refer to previously posted submissions, creating a running dialogue.

A research staff member read each submission as it was received and prepared an abstract. A full set of abstracts was then provided to each Assembly member along with a summary of submissions and a searchable data file organized by category. As with the presentations, the submissions overwhelmingly supported the adoption of a new electoral system. Many provided detailed examples and arguments supporting their position.

At the conclusion of the public hearings, the Assembly met in Prince George to review what they had heard and read. The Assembly also approved a plan on how it would approach deliberations and decision-making in the fall.

A detailed examination of the Public Hearings Phase is included in the Assembly's *Technical Report*.

DELIBERATION PHASE

The Deliberation Phase brought the Assembly's work to a conclusion. During sessions held at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue from September to November 2004, Assembly members considered what they had learned through study and research, and what the people of British Columbia had told them. Members framed their discussions within a well-defined set of democratic values: fair (proportional) electoral results, effective local representation, and greater voter choice. The first sessions focused on the features of electoral systems that best reflected these values.

This included a series of formal presentations on various electoral systems from people that the Assembly had identified in public hearings as excellent representatives of their respective positions.

Members then moved from a discussion of fundamental principles to an examination of what a new electoral system for British Columbia might look like, and how it would operate. The Assembly did this by building two detailed models, one

a "single transferable vote" (STV) system, the other a "mixed-member proportional" (MMP) system. Each system addressed the basic values, but they did so in quite different ways. The final discussions involved a careful and systematic comparison of the two alternatives. Members explored not only how each system worked and the consequences of adopting one or the other, they also considered the effect each system would have on how our political parties work, on the legislature, and on the pattern of government in the province. At the end of a thoughtful and comprehensive debate, the members made their choice.

ASSEMBLY VOTE – OCT 23, 2004

Which of the two alternatives would best serve British Columbia?

MMP – 31   STV – 123

Having clearly identified an electoral system that could provide effective local representation, fair election results, and greater voter choice, the Assembly then went through a thorough review of the current electoral system. Members had

decided to recommend a change only if they were convinced that the proposed alternative was demonstrably superior to the current system. This led to a comparison between the STV system and the current FPTP process. Members then took two important decisions.

ASSEMBLY VOTE – OCT 24, 2004

Do we recommend retaining the current First-Past-the-Post electoral system in British Columbia?

YES – 11   NO – 142

Do we recommend the STV (BC-STV) system to the people of British Columbia in a referendum on May 17, 2005

YES – 146   NO – 7

The final sessions of the Deliberation Phase were devoted to shaping the STV system to meet the particular needs of British Columbia, and producing the Assembly's final report and recommendation.

A detailed examination of the Deliberation Phase is included in the Assembly's *Technical Report*.

mandate

The mandate of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform is outlined in the Order-in-Council: *Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform Terms of Reference*—issued May 16, 2003*.* The complete *Terms of Reference and Duties of the Chair* can be found in the Assembly's *Technical Report*.

The *Terms of Reference* which speak most directly to the Assembly's mandate are:

1. The Citizens' Assembly must assess models for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly and issue a report recommending whether the current model for these elections should be retained or another model should be adopted.

2. In carrying out the assessment described in section 1, the Citizens' Assembly must consult with British Columbians and provide British Columbians with the opportunity to make submissions to the Citizens' Assembly in writing, and orally at public meetings.

3. If the Citizens' Assembly recommends under section 1 the adoption of a model for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly that is different from the current model:

a. the model must be consistent with both the Constitution of Canada and the Westminster parliamentary system; and

b. the model must be described clearly and in detail in its report.

4. The assessment described in section 1 must

a. be limited to the manner by which voters' ballots are translated into elected members; and

b. take into account the potential effect of its recommended model on the government, the Legislative Assembly and the political parties.

In addition, the *Terms of Reference* speak to the Assembly's responsibility to produce a report on its final recommendation.

10. The Citizens' Assembly must present its final version of the report described in section 1 to the Attorney-General no later than December 15, 2004, for tabling in the Legislative Assembly.

11. On presentation of the final version of the report to the Attorney General, the chair may arrange for the publication of the report.

note from the chair

Never before in modern history has a democratic government given to unelected, "ordinary" citizens the power to review an important public policy, then seek from all citizens approval of any proposed changes to that policy. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform has had this power and responsibility and, throughout its life, complete independence from government.

I want to acknowledge this unique gift by first thanking Premier Gordon Campbell for creating the Assembly. While several community leaders promoted the idea, it was the premier, in collaboration with Attorney General Geoff Plant, who took the steps necessary to create and secure the Assembly.

I also want to recognize the role of the provincial legislature. The *Terms of Reference*, as well as the conditions governing any referendum, were approved by the Legislative Assembly in unanimous votes. Members of our Legislative Assembly united in making history.

The members of the Citizens' Assembly—British Columbians who unstintingly gave their time and energy—demonstrated how extraordinary ordinary citizens are when given an important task and the resources and independence to do it right. Over the eleven-month course of the Assembly, only one of 161 members withdrew and attendance was close to perfect. Their great and lasting achievement is the birth of a new tool for democratic governance.

With an impressive commitment to learning so many new concepts and skills, and with a grace and respect for one another in their discussions that was truly remarkable, the Assembly members demonstrated a quality of citizenship that inspired us all. My deepest thanks and regard go to each and every one of them.

The idea of a citizens' assembly—its unique authority and its importance as a democratic process—clearly exerted a powerful force, attracting highly-talented staff, researchers and administrators to its cause. Their work enriched the Assembly's work, and all staff members performed their tasks with exceptional professionalism and integrity. Twelve-hour days, seven-days a-week were common: they willingly provided anything that the Assembly needed to get the job done and done right. In each session's evaluation Assembly members consistently gave to staff their highest marks.

The facilitators—graduate students in political science from Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia—were also exceptional. These outstanding, exemplary colleagues deserve enormous credit for the Assembly's achievements.

All Assembly members and staff are indebted to Gordon Gibson. At the government's request, he prepared the *Constitution of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform*.

With few variations, we followed Mr. Gibson's clear and sensible plan. And, during the Assembly's tenure, I often consulted Mr. Gibson for his wise, helpful and objective advice.

I also want to thank and recognize the contributions of Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer, and Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, of Elections BC who were essential and very helpful partners throughout the Assembly's work; Neil Reimer, David Winkler and Carol Anne Rolf of the Attorney General's ministry who helped us use government services in ways that supported our independence; members of the Research Advisory Committee from the University of BC, Simon Fraser University and the University of Victoria; community leaders who helped to promote the idea of a citizens' assembly; and the staff of the Delta Vancouver Suites and Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, who adopted us as a special family.

And the heartiest of thanks to those citizens who attended hearings and made presentations and submissions, and to all British Columbians—your support made possible this wonderful invention in the practice of democracy.

Jack Blaney

JACK BLANEY, CHAIR

FURTHER READING

The source book used by the Citizens' Assembly for a general discussion of STV is:

Farrell, David M, *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*
Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001, especially chapter 6.

References to a range of information on the STV electoral system from a variety of countries can be found on the Citizens' Assembly website. Go to **www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public** and enter 'STV resources' in the search box.

A lively animation of how the BC-STV system works can be found on the Assembly website.

TECHNICAL REPORT: CONTENTS

- ◆ Final Report
- ◆ The Recommended BC-STV Electoral System
- ◆ Other Issues
- ◆ Designing and Implementing the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform
    Selection Phase
    Learning Phase
    Public Hearings Phase
    Deliberation Phase
- ◆ Communications
- ◆ Supporting Materials

Copies of the *Final Report* and the *Technical Report* are available at public libraries, universities and colleges throughout the province. They are also available at www.citizensassembly.bc.ca.

The provincial government intends to open a Referendum Information Office. Phone Enquiry British Columbia (604-660-2421 or 1-800-663-7867) or email EnquiryBC@gems3.gov.bc.ca for contact information.

Cary John Laing, Brentwood Bay • Janet Loewen, Langley • Sheila MacDermott, Penticton • Jack MacDonald, Victoria • Kimberlee Ann MacGregor, Surrey • Glen Wallace Mackinnon, Nanaimo • John S. Mak, Burnaby • Nancy McAskill, Burnaby • James Lorne McConaghy (Jr.), Prince George • Tanya McDonnell, Kelowna • Allan A. McKinnon, Cranbrook • Amanda Medley, Dawson Creek • Thea Elaina Melvin, Ladysmith • Marijke Merrick, Delta • Michele Miller, Kimberley • Russell Miller, Grand Forks • Robert Monk, Quesnel • Evelin J. Morrison, Prince George • Cherie Mostrovich, North Vancouver • Clara D. Munro, Sicamous • Tony Naccarato, Williams Lake • Linda Nicolaisen, Nanaimo • Kenneth L. Nielsen, Vancouver • Harley Nyen, Kelowna • Tina Marie Ouellette, Fort St. James • Stephen Jay Paetkau, Vancouver • Susan E. H. Patry, Merritt • D. Craig Peterson, Richmond • Don Phillips, Maple Ridge • Stan Pietras, Princeton • Vlad Andrei Popa, Vancouver • Michael Pritchard, Hazelton • Gene Quan, West Vancouver • Shawn S. Rai, South Surrey • Anna Rankin, Quesnel • Colin Rudy Redekop, Surrey • Jill Reilly, Vancouver • Lynelle Denise Ridewood, Mission • Heide Riemann, Courtenay • Ann Rushlow, Vancouver • Steven R. Sage, Fraser Lake • Aaron Schallié, Cloverdale • Wolfgang (Wolf) Scholz, Kitimat • Frederick Shum, Vancouver • Dalbir Sidhu, Surrey • Priya Singh, Surrey • Jakob Skovgaard, Ladner • Ralph Smith, North Vancouver • Ray Spaxman, West Vancouver • Jerry Stanger, Port Coquitlam • John Stinson, Penticton • Jacqueline Tait, Gitwinksihlkw • Sharon Taylor, Abbotsford • Cory Jay Thiessen, Chilliwack • Ron (Sam) Todd, Burnaby • Tom Townrow, Vancouver • Arlene Susan Tully, Vancouver • Rosemary Tina Vanderbilt, Victoria • Joanne Vander Meulen, Smithers • Darren van Reyen, Victoria • Ron Walberg, Abbotsford • Charles Burnett Walker, Surrey • Douglas William Waller, Prince George • Betty Garvin-Walters, Port Coquitlam • Robert G. Westfall, Coquitlam • Anne Whitelaw Dykes, Roberts Creek • Sylvia Williams, Langley • David Wills, Vancouver • Norm Womacks, Kelowna • Wayne Daniel Wong, Vancouver • Susan Patricia Wood, Qualicum Beach • Bradley Warren Yee, Coquitlam-Westwood • Deborah Young, Lone Butte • Jeremy Charles Young, Victoria • John M. Zall, Abbotsford • Fritz Zens, Port Alberni • Jack Zhen Zhang, Richmond • Ilene E. Zurowski, Kamloops

CITIZENS'ASSEMBLY
ON ELECTORAL REFORM