



**The Vancouver Board of Trade**

Suite 400, 999 Canada Place  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6C 3E1  
Phone: 604-681-2111 Fax: 604-641-1279  
E-mail: [contactus@boardoftrade.com](mailto:contactus@boardoftrade.com)  
[www.boardoftrade.com](http://www.boardoftrade.com)

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June 2, 2004

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform  
555 Hastings Street West  
PO Box 12118  
Vancouver, BC V6B 4N6

Via Email: [submission@citizensassembly.bc.ca](mailto:submission@citizensassembly.bc.ca)

Dear Members of the Citizens' Assembly:

The Vancouver Board of Trade, founded 117 years ago, is a broadly based business association with 4,600 members. The Board is heavily involved in matters of public policy at the local, regional, provincial and national level. The best interests of our community, province and nation, including all citizens, underlie much of our policy work.

The subject of the electoral system in British Columbia has been considered by one of our task forces, which has as a principal focus matters of governance of public bodies of a variety of types. This group has considered the question of reform of the electoral system in this province, and has prepared the corresponding statement of principles shown on the following pages. We recommend these to you as a balanced, fair approach to the central question with which you are dealing.

We are pleased to have this opportunity to present our perspectives for your consideration as you arrive at conclusions affecting the future of the governance of our province.

Sincerely,

Jeff Dowle  
Chairman and Chief Elected Officer

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## THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

June 2, 2004

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There are several key principles that we believe should underlie any changes to the electoral system in British Columbia. These are:

1. The system of electing members of the provincial legislature must lend itself to stable and responsible government.

The efficient and effective conduct of the business of the province requires stable government between elections. Thus the system of elections must lend itself to establishing a majority government. On that basis, a purely proportional system of electing members would not be acceptable. The government generally would have to be formed by coalitions with the ability of minority parties to defeat the government simply by withdrawing from the coalition. The results of this are readily apparent in the instability of governments in some foreign countries.

2. A large majority of members of the legislature should be elected on a geographic basis.

There is great and justified sensitivity in British Columbia to the interests of the geographic regions which make up this far-flung province. It is logical that elected representatives should continue to be elected largely from a series of ridings covering the province, so that these regional interests are represented in the legislature and in the government. We believe that no other arrangement would be satisfactory to the people of the province.

3. Preferential ballots should be used in elections.

To ensure better representation of the judgement of the electorate, preferential ballots should be used. In this way, the elected representative of any riding would have the first or subsequent choice support of a majority of the electors in that riding. This is in contrast to the minority support that might be the case in the current system, where the candidate simply receiving the largest number of votes is elected.

4. Proportional representation should be used to elect a fairly small minority of members of the legislature.

Under the current system, a political party can receive a significant proportion of the votes in a provincial election, but have little or no representation in the legislature. For example, in the last election, one party received 13 percent of the popular vote, but has no elected members.

A fairer approach to ensuring representation by a party attracting the support of a sizeable percentage of electors would be to have, say, 25 per cent of the members of the legislature elected on the basis of proportional representation. Thus, 20 members would be elected in that way, while the other 59 would be elected from geographically based ridings.

A threshold of 5 percent might be used as a minimum for a party to qualify for proportional representation, and at that level the party would earn 1 seat. Similarly, a level of 10 percent would result in two seats. The full 20 seats set aside for proportional representation would be assigned in that way.

Given the present political and cultural makeup of the British Columbia electorate, having an electoral system with more than the relatively small proportional representation component suggested above would likely lead to political and economic instability that would be detrimental to the Province.

Given that the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly is limited to election of legislative members under a Westminster form of government, the factors listed above should be given considerable weight in the deliberations of the Assembly.