



Voting on Proportional Representation in British Columbia

Submission

By

The Canadian Union of Public Employees
British Columbia Division

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Who is the Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia (CUPE BC)?

CUPE BC is the largest union in BC, representing over 87,000 members in more than 160 locals across the province. We represent workers in a large variety of sectors both public and private including municipal, library, K-12 education, post-secondary, community social services, health, and transportation.

Democracy is very important to our members across the province. Our locals actively encourage their members to vote in all elections - federal, provincial, and municipal. Our union activists try to explain to their members why voting is important, and often have conversations with individuals who are politically apathetic sometimes due to the limitations of our current electoral system.

Our Recommendations:

- 1. Ballot Question:** The ballot question should be a specific question asking British Columbians if they want to continue with our existing First-Past-the-Post electoral system OR if they want to adopt a more proportional election system that is linked to a transparent public process to choose a specific proportional system.
- 2. System Review and Second Referendum:** British Columbians should be assured that if a new proportional electoral system is put in place, the chosen system will be subject to a mandatory review by Elections BC and a referendum to ensure support for the new system after at least two election cycles.
- 3. Public Education:** Elections BC should be provided with a mandate and additional funding to provide impartial information about the pros and cons of proportional representation and the various system options, prior to, during and after the referendum.
- 4. Limiting the Influence of Big Money:** The referendum should be subject to regulations that limit the amount of money that can be spent by third-party advertisers at least at the same level as in provincial election campaigns.
- 5. Referendum Timing:** The referendum should not occur at the same time as the 2018 General Local Elections.

1. Ballot Question:

The ballot should be as simple and as clear as possible. It should focus on the core question for British Columbians: ‘Are you satisfied with the current First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system, or do you support the province’s plan to change to a more proportional system?’

The question should have a preamble printed on the ballot that explains the transparent public process that will be used to choose the new electoral system. The post-referendum election system selection process should involve significant and transparent public input and be managed by Elections BC, or a similar independent entity.

The question preamble should also reassure British Columbians that the chosen system will serve the public interest rather than primarily partisan interests. It should reassure British Columbians that the proportional system put in place will continue to promote accountability through the ability for the public to directly vote for candidates (not just political parties). It should also reassure British Columbians that local regional representation will be preserved and that there will be no reduction of seats in any part of the province (also not a huge increase in seats).

2. System Review and Second Referendum

The ballot should also state that if the referendum passes, the new electoral system, chosen through transparent and democratic process, will be subject to a review by Elections BC. This review will determine if the new system is working well, if British Columbians are satisfied with the new system, and how it could be refined for improvement.

After at least two election cycles, there should be another referendum providing British Columbians the opportunity to confirm that they would like to keep the new modernized proportional representation election system in place or that they would like to revert back to First-Past-the-Post. This will help BC voters feel more comfortable trying out a new electoral system.

3. Public Education

Prior to the referendum, Elections BC should be provided with a mandate and additional funding to provide impartial information about the pros and cons of proportional representation, and the various system options. This should be done in consultation with academics, both for and against proportional representation, to ensure that the materials are impartial.

4. Limit the Influence of Big Money

To ensure a fair campaign and limit the influence of special interests, the government should apply third-party advertising regulations. These should come into effect the same day as the legislature adopts the referendum question(s). The attorney general should select an official proponent and opponent group who will run campaigns during the referendum campaign period. These groups should

be provided with a minimum of \$500,000 each to run their campaigns. This will enable proponent and opponent groups to run effective campaigns that reach the public and promote meaningful public debate. Furthermore, proponent and opponent groups should be subject to spending limits of no more than \$0.50 per registered voter.

The regulations that are used for electoral organizations in a provincial election, related to donations and financial disclosure, should apply to the proponent and opponent groups for this referendum. Smaller donations limits could be considered to encourage meaningful engagement with the public (e.g., Quebec imposes a contribution limit of \$100).

Third-party advertisers should be regulated in a way that does not limit free speech, while limiting the influence of potential big spenders. Third parties should only be required to register if they spend more than \$5,000 on province-wide advertising or \$1,500 within a single constituency. Such small amounts of spending are not of concern to the public, since they are unlikely to significantly alter the public debate. Allowing modest amounts of spending ensures that small groups can participate in the public debate without unnecessary constraints and complications. In general, third-party advertisers that spend more than this amount should be subject to, at a minimum, the same regulations that apply during a provincial election.

In this referendum debate, provincial parties will likely be viewed as private entities with clear vested interests in the referendum. Therefore they should also be subject to the same third-party advertising regulations that apply to other organizations.

5. Timing of the referendum

The referendum should not overlap with the 2018 General Local Elections in the fall, which have a campaign period of September 22nd to October 20th 2018. The referendum should preferably be in June 2018, before the summer, or in November after the General Local Elections.

Respectfully submitted:

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