How We Vote Town Hall
Courtenay-Comox
February 7, 2018

Introduction and Mock Election

Over one hundred people attended Ronna-Rae Leonard MLA's How We Vote Town Hall in Courtenay BC to discuss electoral reform. Prizes were offered to encourage a wide variety of participants, while setting an upbeat tone for the event, and the town hall was advertised broadly. Local facilitator, Meaghan Cursons, M/C'd the evening. The event began with brief presentations from MLA Leonard and Spencer Anderson, a representative from the Comox Valley Fair Vote chapter.

A mock election was then held to demonstrate different outcomes in an election using First Past the Post (FPTP) versus Proportional Representation. Upon entry into the event, attendees were handed a ballot, shown below, with a number that corresponded to one of 10 ridings. Once the event was underway, participants were instructed to select their top choice to elect a Pet Parliament and then place the ballot in the appropriate ballot box for their numbered riding.

Please mark your
favourite pet with an X.

☐ Bird
☐ Cat
☐ Dog
☐ Horse
☐ Snake

Ninety- nine people participated in the election and the results were tallied by volunteers and the results using both FPTP and Proportional Representation were shared with the room. Interestingly, two ridings experienced a tie which was broken by a quick draw. The results of the election are detailed below:

FIRST PAST THE
POST

Party	Bird	Cat	Dog	Horse	Snake	Winner
Riding #1	2	4	2	0	1	Cat
Riding #2	0	3	6	0	2	Dog
Riding #3	1	2	4	1	1	Dog

	Bird	Cat	Dog	Horse	Snake	Winner
Riding #4	0	1	5	3	1	Dog
Riding #5	1	3- *won in draw*	3	2	1	Cat
Riding #6	1	4	5	0	0	Dog
Riding #7	0	4	5	0	0	Dog
Riding #8	3	3	3- *won in draw*	0	1	Dog
Riding #9	2	2	2	1	3	Snake
Riding #10	1	2	2	2	3	Snake
# of ridings won per party under FPTP	0	2	6	0	2	
Total votes per party:	11	28	37	10	13	
Grand total of votes cast:	99					

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Party	Bird	Cat	Dog	Horse	Snake
Total # of votes per party (from bottom of previous page)	11	28	37	10	13
Grand total of all votes (from previous page)	99				
Party votes divided by total votes = % of vote	11%	28%	37%	10%	13%
# of ridings won per party under PR	1	3	4	1	1

When the votes were tallied in a First Past The Post system, the resulting Pet Parliament was a Dog party majority with 6 Dogs elected in 6 ridings, followed by 2 Cats and 2 Snakes. This

majority was achieved with 37.37% of the popular vote. When the ballots were counted in a simple proportional system, the resulting Pet Parliament was a minority Pet Parliament with 4 Dogs, 3 Cats, 1 Bird, 1 Horse, and 1 Snake. This voting exercise stimulated the discussions that followed.

Group Discussion

Following the mock election, participants were asked to engage in table discussions. Each table had a volunteer facilitator from Fair Vote to assist in answering some questions and keep the conversation on track. Three questions were posed to the tables and following the discussions, each table reported out to the room in a plenary session. The report was not intended to express consensus, but rather, the variety of comments and points raised. The questions were:

- Why are we considering electoral reform? (What's not working with FPTP)
- What Values should be represented in our electoral system? (What matters most to us in a democracy, both in voting system and in our resulting government)
- Should there be public funding of pro and con campaigns? Other process issues?

Themes

Following the small table discussions, the groups came together to share what had been discussed at each table.

In reviewing the materials from all tables and the discussion that followed a number of themes emerged which highlighted the concerns and values of Courtenay-Comox Voters. These are presented in order of frequency of occurrence at all of the tables.

Proportion of votes does not usually equal proportion of seats elected

The most frequently expressed concern about our current FPTP system surrounded the disparity between popular vote and seats represented in the legislature. Many tables felt that FTTP has created a sense that individual voices are not being heard within a system that is not representative of the population of British Columbia.

More collaboration between parties and less partisanship

A reoccurring theme at many of the tables surrounded the importance of cooperation and collaboration within the legislature and the importance of working together for British Columbians in a less adversarial way. The concerns about adversarial politics extended to the election period and participants felt that a system of proportional representation would hopefully break down some of the partisan barriers to help MLA's feel empowered to represent their home constituencies free from partisanship.

Local Representation

Like the previous theme, the importance of local representation presented itself during both the pre-and post-election period. The primary concern from most tables was that, no matter what

system is implemented, it is essential that each community have local representation in the Legislature to strengthen the MLA's ties to their riding and ensure rural/ urban considerations are taken into account within the government. In addition, some participants voiced concern that only swing ridings get attention from political parties during the election period under the current system and that ridings need to be developed in a way that make logical geographic sense.

Diversity of representation and ideas

As a whole, participants communicated hope that a system of proportional presentation would allow for a greater diversity within the legislature through a mix of more political parties and independents who more accurately represented the diverse make up of British Columbia. It was felt that this increased diversity would hopefully allow for more inclusiveness and result in individuals feeling heard.

Poor voter turnout

A common complaint with FPTP was low voter turnout, particularly with younger people. Conversely, participants of the town hall thought that a system of proportional representation would restore some faith in the electoral system and result in better turnout. Greater education, possible mandatory voting, and increased engagement with high school students were all highlighted as additional measures to improve voter turnout.

Implementation of new system

In discussing introduction and implementation of a new system, participants, overwhelmingly, stated that the public needs to be well informed and the system needs to be explained in a way that is easy to understand (including a clear question on the referendum). There was concern about public feelings surrounding the complexity of proportional representation so participants were clear that the details of the system do need to be explained so that there is greater public knowledge.

Limit Public Funding

In response to the question about public funding, the majority of tables felt that some public funding should be provided to ensure balanced information and limit large lobbyist groups. It was suggested that only two groups on either side of the issue should be funded and that the funding be very limited. Should these groups seek private donations, they should be subject to the same rules as political donations and all financial records should be transparent.

Additional Questions

The following questions were submitted by the tables for follow up:

1. How does it work for very small partied/independent candidates?
2. Is there per vote funding from the provincial government?
3. Can you fill out the consultation questionnaire more than once?
4. Should there be a threshold of turnout for the referendum?

Report prepared by Tasha Page, Constituency Assistant to MLA Leonard February 28, 2018

1. **Why are we considering electoral reform? (What's not working with FPTP)**
   - Proportion of votes does not usually equal proportion of seats elected*******
   - Population ratios are uneven per riding
   - Younger people not voting**
   - Wasted votes**
   - Number of seats need to represent percent of popular vote*****
   - Do not want to have to vote strategically*****
   - Want to encourage people to vote*
   - Stop swings of policies – costs us money
   - Encourage cooperation between parties and avoid pattern of confrontation**
   - Swing ridings only get attention/money from parties
   - FPTP does not represent enough people*
   - Voices aren't heard
   - We need a greater diversity of views and opinions and less partisanship****
   - Too "party political' with antagonistic attitudes**
   - It's not fair *
   - Another system may lesson attacks
   - It's all or nothing
   - Because parties want us to look at it
   - Strengthening MLA's ties to riding
   - Simple doesn't mean smart ((FPTP)
   - Current system does not represent all parties
   - FPTP must require voter engagement at all times, not just during elections
   - Potential new parties and new ideas
   - Take the power away from the parties
   - Splits the country against itself
   - False majorities
2. **What values should be represented in our electoral system? (What matters most to us in a democracy, both in voting system and in our resulting government)**
   - Young people should vote in bigger numbers
   - Better voter turnout overall **
   - Local representation*****
   - Rural-urban considerations*
   - More collaboration among MLAs/parties******
   - Not appointing regional reps but electing them*

- Important to have choice of parties/independents**
- Individuals need to feel that their vote counted to avoid cynicism and apathy
- A minimum threshold of pop-vote to be eligible to sit
- Freedom from bias/influence from lobbyists and their financial support
- New system needs to be explained in a way that is easy to understand**
- Individuals need to trust the system that is implemented*
- Accountability for those in power- represent the community not the party*****
- Population ratios per riding need to be corrected*
- Ridings need to geographically logical not spread out*
- Need high school registration
- No religious dominance
- One group should not be able to monopolize money
- Less confrontational within campaigns***
- Less rhetoric
- We need 50/50 gender balance (our government should be representative of the population) ***
- Independence for individuals and parties*
- Inclusiveness and fairness
- Allow for more parties*
- Must have a structure to become a party
- 4th or 5th effort at PR
- People should be more informed/educated about government system and issues
- Progressive legislation diminished under PR
- Protect democracy
- Mandated voting*
- Prove the value in voting
- A government that listens to me
- More competitive elections
- Response to local concerns*
- Empowered representatives
- More responsive policy

3. **Should there be public funding of pro and con campaigns? Other process issues?**
   - Yes- balanced info***
   - Clear question on referendum**
   - 3rd party advertising is a problem
   - limit money from each spokes group*****
   - limited funding (same as political donations)***
   - only two groups funded/ speaking to each side of the issue**
   - education needs to be an unbiased presentation of models
   - ability to vote for people without a fixed address is important*
   - only public funding for pro and con campaigns*
   - do not use "they don't need to understand process"*
   - should be taught in school
   - The only way to keep big money lobbyists from taking over is to have public funding*
   - 50% is too low a margin. Should be 60% because it is such an important issue
   - no- funding does not equal objectivity

- Make it easy to vote*
- Transparency and record of all funds
- Advertising controlled
- Yes- way less than regular election

Questions from the tables:

1. how does it work for very small partied/ independent candidates?
2. Is there per vote funding from the provincial government?
3. Can you fill out the consultation questionnaire more than once?
4. Should there be a threshold of turnout for the referendum?

Plenary Notes from the Town Hall on Proportional Representation
Hosted by Ronna Rae Leonard, MLA
Wednesday February 7th
Prepared by Meaghan Cursons

Problem with the Current System:

- Votes don't feel representative
- Confrontational campaigns
- Ideas outside of 'party lines" rejected
- Too much 'party power'
- Frustration with polarized parties, doesn't encourage working together
- Diversity if not represented
- MLA's cant represent their community, party power is too big.
- Stop telling people they don't need to understand the details – we WANT to understand the details.
- Young people are more cynical
- False majorities
- Small differences can make a BIG difference in seat counts
- Balkanized regions/urban rural splits
- With FPP – votes do not + seats
- Low voter turnout, people not voting
- Greater diversity is needed
- Strategic voting is a problem, things are antagonistic
- More choices and less partisanship is needed.
- We need to correct the huge swings between parties, between elections
- We want civil politicians, franchised voters, more diversity and to end strategic voting
- % votes does not + &% of seats - this is the problem
- Cooperation needs to be more encouraged

Values that should guide the pursuit of Pro Rep

- Independence of candidates
- Regional differences should be addressed
- Voting is like consuming, more than yes or no, more choices
- Diverse views need to have a voice
- Increasing voter turn out matters, this should be a goal
- I want the chance to vote for both a person and a party (ok if they're different)

- Clear explanation of process, structure of pro rep government needed
- We need to stop being afraid of/avoiding the complexity, people can handle it.
- Government should mirror the population
- Honesty, transparency, clarity, fiscal clarity, less politicized spending, local impact
- Cooperation, all people in BC should feel represented
- Eliminate/reduce strategic voting
- Local representatives are important, local matters
- Stronger policy, better candidates, no 'safe' seats, larger pool to draw on
- Local representative IS important, a rep who responds to local concerns
- Candidates and MLA's will learn greater skills of collaboration
- Elections would have more competition.
- Regional representative should be elected and NOT appointed by party
- % of votes should equal % of seats
- Those elected need to represent all of the community
- MLA should represent the community, not the party
- Scale/size of regionals must be reasonable
- We need to trust the system to want to vote
- But new model Needs to be easy to understand

Should public funds be spent on the official Yes and No Campaigns?

- Limited funding OK but new donations rules should apply
- Must do outreach to reach those of no fixed address, mail in ballot poses problem for that
- Perhaps? Mixed options are our table on this.
- Funding should be limited and fair, both sides need to keep track of ALL donations/revenue
- Yes, but cap it and limit it per riding
- No money should be allowed from outside BC
- Simple info packages are needed, the questions need s to be clear and simple
- Yes! Reaching high school students and youth also
- Sure, but who gets $, who decides that? How do we monitor it?
- Tracking all donations important
- Public funding only, no private, no 3rd party campaigns
- Should be balanced
- No 3rd party advertising should be allowed
- Clarity of referendum question is CRITICAL
- YES! (public $) Keeps the lobbyists out
- Not sure, but for sure we don't want any business, 3rd party influence
- Maybe we should consider compulsory voting or lowering voter age.
- YES to public funding but who gets the funding? Government should decide. Minimal donations only
- *education is critical! Not a 'campaign' but actual citizen education.