

**Minutes  
Election Advisory Committee**

**May 9, 2006**

2:00 – 4:00 pm

BC Electoral Boundaries Commission Office

#601-700 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

**Attending:**

Committee members (in alphabetical order by political party name)

BC Liberal Party: Hoong Neoh (on behalf of Hector MacKay-Dunn and Kelly Reichert)

Green Party of BC: John Hague

New Democratic Party of B.C.: Nikki Hill, Laura Nichols

Elections BC

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer (Chair)

Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

Linda Shout, Executive Coordinator (minutes)

1. Introductions and Administrative Matters

Election Advisory Committee (EAC) members and Elections BC (EBC) staff introduced themselves. Harry Neufeld welcomed new EAC members Laura Nichols and John Hague.

2. BC-STV Design and Implications

Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Linda Johnson delivered a presentation providing an overview of the different types of electoral systems, key features of the BC Single Transferable Vote (BC-STV) system and its implications for voters, the Electoral Boundaries Commission, political parties and candidates.

Political Campaigning: John Hague of the Green Party noted that parties may decide to run one candidate and encourage voters to support only that candidate, in opposition to the Citizens' Assembly goal of facilitating increased voter choice. However, Linda Johnson noted that in STV systems, getting the most first preference votes doesn't necessarily result in achieving the threshold required for election, which could exclude that candidate early in the count. This feature is called "nonmonotonicity." Political parties will have to learn how to campaign effectively under BC-STV – it is very different from campaigning under the current single member plurality (SMP) system.

Further to this, John Hague noted that if a voter's first preference is excluded this way, it seems unfair. However, voters are able to maximize their vote by expressing a number of preferences, so at least some of those preferences may be realized.

Linda Johnson distributed a publication entitled "[Campaigning under the single transferable vote: a guide for agents and parties in Scotland](#)" developed by the Electoral Reform Society ([www.electoral-reform.org.uk](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk)). The publication covers campaigning basics, candidate issues, and campaign techniques.

Counting and Transparency: John Hague suggested that, at least for the first few elections, a parallel manual count be conducted if the main count is conducted electronically, in order to build trust in the system and counting methodology.

In North America, Cambridge, Massachusetts is the only jurisdiction that uses STV (for local government elections). The alternative vote (AV), a majoritarian system, was used in B.C. in the 1952 and 1953 provincial general elections. It was not retained for a number of reasons, including the length of time it took to count the ballots.

John Hague pointed out that the public needs to understand the system. If candidates were campaigning door to door, they could explain the system to voters, but candidates are not able to devote adequate time to this. There will be a challenge to educate voters about the system, ensure they have confidence in the count and the results without overwhelming them with the intricacies of the system.

Referendum on Electoral Reform: Harry Neufeld distributed a [press release](#) regarding the Premier's decision to change the date of the referendum on electoral reform. The Chief Electoral Officer had provided information to government regarding the significant challenges of conducting the referendum in tandem with municipal elections. The referendum date was changed to coincide with the next provincial general election on May 12, 2009.

It is expected a Referendum Information Office will be established to provide the public with information on the referendum question and issues. Voters will also have information on the new electoral district boundaries under both the current SMP system and proposed BC-STV system. The [Electoral Boundaries Commission](#) will issue its preliminary report by August 15, 2007, conduct public hearings in the Fall of 2007, and present its final report to the Legislative Assembly in February 2008.

In addition, government has committed to funding yes/no committees. No public policy decisions have been made as yet by government regarding funding criteria or administration.

The Citizens' Assembly contemplated an evaluation of the BC-STV system, should it be implemented, after the third general election. This timeframe was found to be reasonable by other jurisdictions that had undergone electoral system change. An evaluation framework may be built into BC-STV legislation.

At this time, it is not known whether legislation for BC-STV will be developed and made public before the referendum is held. Government could pass BC-STV legislation before

the referendum, with proclamation being deferred until the referendum outcome is known.

### 3. Political Party Platforms on Elections BC's Website

In the previous provincial general election, EBC invited registered political parties to provide their party's platform for publication on EBC's general election website. The idea was initially discussed at the EAC meeting on [April 6, 2004](#) and reviewed again at the meeting of [January 28, 2005](#). Although the idea was somewhat controversial, there was agreement that it was worthwhile to go ahead, given the desire to increase voter participation, particularly amongst youth, by making it easier to access political party information. Committee members were asked whether they agreed that this practice should continue.

BC New Democratic Party representative Nicola Hill agreed that party platforms should be available on the EBC site, as this is a valuable tool for voter engagement. Hoong Neoh of the BC Liberal Party questioned whether it would be better for EBC, as an independent office, not to post statements and allow users to access party website links (available on the [candidates, political parties and constituency associations](#) page) for information.

Linda Johnson noted that political science professors have indicated that younger voters find it easier to access the information all in one place. Research has shown that not knowing enough about the political choices available and the fear of making a mistake is a particular barrier for young voters. They also tend to be less inclined to visit multiple sites for their information.

Committee members agreed in principle to posting political party platforms on the EBC website. For a calendared event (such as a general election), a deadline will be established for parties to submit their platforms. In the case of uncalendared events such as by-elections, parties will be invited to submit their statements once a vacancy in the House occurs.

### 4. CEO Report on Recommended Legislative Changes

Harry Neufeld has met with the Attorney General, asking him to implement the over 60 non-controversial recommendations contained in the report. Although legislative drafting for these amendments may not be onerous, the resulting Bill would be substantial and may take a fair amount of time in the House. There are also a number of public policy issues provided for government to consider. These issues may take longer for government to assess.

### 5. Other Business

No other items were raised.

### 6. Future Agenda Items

Harry Neufeld noted that prior to the last election some modest changes were made to the data format of the voters list provided to political parties (reviewed at the EAC meeting of [September 24, 2004](#)), and a commitment was made that, following the election, the EAC would discuss whether further changes should be made to the data format.

In addition, the mechanism of distributing voters lists to political parties is open to review. At the moment, a password-protected CD-ROM is provided, with signed documentation required before the password is given. However, there may be a more efficient way to provide list data on a more regularized basis, while maintaining the highest level of security.

Discussion of these matters could be done via a survey of EAC members, a special meeting of party technical personnel, or facilitated individual sessions with party representatives. Committee members agreed to raise this with their parties, and a decision will be made at the next EAC meeting on how to proceed.