



## **Semi-Annual Newsletter – Fall 2006**

***The following articles are from the monthly email newsletters published by Fair Vote Canada.***

### **FVC ELECTION RESULTS ANNOUNCED (April 22, 2006)**

Results of the Fair Vote Canada National Council election were announced at the Annual Meeting. Rick Anderson, June Macdonald, Dennis Pilon, Wendy Bergerud and Peter Black won three-year terms on the National Council. John Baglow won a two-year term.

Ontario members also elected five at-large positions on the Fair Vote Ontario campaign council. The successful candidates for the one-year terms were: Joe Murray, Jacqueline Sharp, Helen Riley, Kevin Peck and Gary Shaul.

### **SELECTION PROCESS BEGINS FOR ONTARIO CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM (April 25, 2006)**

Elections Ontario has begun a process to select 103 Ontarians to serve in the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. More than 120,000 randomly selected voters were invited by mail to express interest in serving in the Assembly. From among those expressing interest, a pool of voters in each riding will be invited to orientation and selection meetings in 16 regional centres across the province. At those meetings, one Assembly member and two alternates will be chosen for each riding. In 52 ridings a woman will be chosen and in 51 ridings a man will be chosen.

The selection process will be completed on or before July 14. The first meeting of the Assembly will take place on September 9-10. The Assembly will make its recommendation to adopt a new voting system or to retain the current system by May 2007. If a new system is proposed, a referendum will take place in conjunction with the October 2007 provincial election.

### **SECOND B.C. REFERENDUM POSTPONED UNTIL MAY 2009 (April 27, 2006)**

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell announced that the second referendum on the BC-STV voting system, recommended by the B.C. Citizens' Assembly, will take place with the next provincial election in May 2009 rather than with the B.C. municipal elections in November 2008.

Fair Voting BC (FVBC) supported the delay. As originally announced, a Yes decision in the November 2008 referendum would have meant the new voting system would have been used in the May 2009 provincial election.

"It was our considered opinion that the short transition time from the current system to a new system would have made it difficult to implement, and would have provided the No side with a powerful argument against a Yes vote", said FVBC President Bruce Hallsor.

Unfortunately, Premier Campbell reaffirmed his intention to once again apply a 60 per cent super-majority threshold for implementing the new system, a move criticized by both FVBC and Fair Vote Canada as undemocratic.

## **FVC NATIONAL COUNCIL ELECTS 2006-2007 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (May 15, 2006)**

The fifteen member FVC National Council elected the following officers for 2006-2007.

Stephen Broscoe was elected President. Stephen lives and works in Vancouver, and is also on the board of Fair Voting BC.

Rick Anderson was elected Vice President. Rick lives in Merrickville, outside of Ottawa, and is a political commentator and director of the Fireweed Democracy Project.

John Deverell was elected treasurer. John lives in Pickering, outside of Toronto, is also chair of Labour for Fair Voting and treasurer of Fair Vote Ontario.

Dennis Pilon was elected Secretary. Dennis teaches political science at the University of Victoria and has written extensively on electoral reform.

June Macdonald was elected to the At-Large position. June lives in Toronto, is an educator and chair of Women for Fair Voting.

"I would like to thank outgoing President Wayne Smith for his outstanding leadership and dedication to Fair Vote Canada", said newly elected President Stephen Broscoe. "I look forward to working closely with him and benefiting from his experience and expertise."

## **COUNTDOWNS NOW UNDERWAY FOR THREE PROVINCIAL REFERENDUMS (May 15, 2006)**

As the article below indicates, a third province has scheduled an electoral reform referendum. Assuming the Ontario Citizens' Assembly recommends a new voting system, Ontario will hold a referendum on October 4, 2007. New Brunswick voters will decide on an MMP proportional voting system on May 12, 2008 and British Columbians will have

their second referendum on the BC-STV proportional system on May 12, 2009.

"For the first time in Canadian history, a significant number of Canadian voters will be given a golden opportunity to scrap first-past-the-post voting and bring in better alternatives," said Stephen Broscoe, President, Fair Vote Canada. "We have to rally Ontarians to encourage their Citizens' Assembly to recommend a fair and proportional system, and then rally voters in all three provinces to vote Yes. We're getting closer and closer to the big breakthrough, so this is the time to pull out all stops to make fair voting a reality in Canada."

## **FAIR VOTE ONTARIO CALLS FOR A FAIR REFERENDUM PROCESS (June 8, 2006)**

Today Fair Vote Ontario (FVO) supporters began a campaign to press the Government of Ontario and opposition leaders to honour a simple majority decision by voters in the expected October 2007 provincial referendum on a new voting system.

On June 1, FVO Chair Joe Murray issued a call for volunteers to help with the campaign. In his call, Murray said:

"Our priority in the next 30 days is for volunteers to contact their MPPs by email, letter, phone and/or in person, to press for a fair referendum process. Both BC and PEI had similar referendums in the past year. In both cases, the premiers scrapped traditional democratic practice by setting super-majority thresholds for the referendum. They required the Yes vote to reach or exceed 60% to trigger implementation of their new proportional voting systems.

Premier McGuinty and the Leader of the Official Opposition have yet to announce if they will honour a majority decision by Ontarians. Our message to MPPs in the coming weeks is to apply the same democratic principle – simple majority rule – to this referendum decision by citizens

that they apply to their own decision-making at Queen's Park."

Today all FVO volunteers received an FVO fact sheet to give to their MPPs: *Let the Majority Decide: Ontarians Deserve a Fair Referendum on Fair Voting*. Meanwhile FVO is planning a series of activities to draw public and political attention to this unresolved aspect of the Ontario electoral reform process.

### **DATE SET FOR NEW BRUNSWICK REFERENDUM ON A NEW PROPORTIONAL VOTING SYSTEM (June 20, 2006)**

Today Premier Bernard Lord announced that New Brunswick voters will vote in a referendum on May 12, 2008, on whether to adopt a mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting system for future provincial elections. In addition, Premier Lord also became the first premier to state he will accept a simple majority decision (50 per cent plus one) rather than the extraordinary 60 per cent thresholds set in the B.C. and P.E.I. referendums.

Premier Lord did add a second condition, stating that the reform would not be implemented even with majority support unless the referendum turnout exceeded 50 per cent. The referendum will be held in conjunction with municipal elections, which traditionally have a low turnout.

The Premier's referendum commitment came in the official government response to the January 2005 report of the Commission on Legislative Democracy. During the press conference, Premier Lord stated he personally supports adopting an MMP voting system, but the government may finetune the specific model proposed by the Commission:

"I've been in favour of this for quite some time. I like the concept of Mixed Member Proportional," Premier Lord said. "Whether it will be the one developed by the Commission or a similar modified model that will be proposed to the public remains to be seen . . . we're embracing the

concept, the principles . . . The model recommended by the Commission is a good one, with good principles, but governments still have the right to reconsider, the government can always modify it if it wants to."

### **FVC CALLS ON PREMIERS McGUINITY AND CAMPBELL TO FOLLOW LORD'S COMMITMENT TO MAJORITY RULE ON ELECTORAL REFORM (June 21, 2006)**

Fair Vote Canada is calling on Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell to join New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord in accepting a majority decision by voters in their respective electoral reform referendums.

Yesterday, Premier Lord became the first Canadian political leader to announce he would accept a simple majority referendum decision on whether to adopt a new voting system based on proportional representation.

While Premier Lord said he would also require a 50 per cent voter turnout, he stated that "Fifty percent has been the traditional number for democratic decisions. . . we're just satisfied with fifty percent."

In the May 2005 referendum in British Columbia, nearly 58 per cent voted in favour of adopting the proposed BC-STV proportional voting system. Premier Campbell did not act on that majority decision, saying it fell short of his super-majority threshold of 60 per cent. He subsequently announced a second referendum will take place in May 2009, but stated the same 60 per cent threshold will be applied.

In Ontario, as voters are now being selected to serve in the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, Premier Dalton McGuinty has not yet announced if he will accept a 50 per cent plus one decision by voters in any subsequent electoral reform referendum. The Fair

Vote Ontario campaign has been pressing for a commitment similar to that just announced by Premier Lord.

"We are delighted an increasing number of Canada's political leaders are now allowing a citizen-driven electoral reform process to assess and approve the use of new, more proportional voting systems," said Stephen Broscoe, President of Fair Vote Canada. "However, every Canadian should expect and demand that basic democratic principles will be honoured when citizens make decisions – particularly when they are deciding on how to build a better democracy. If the majority want a new voting system, so be it. If a majority want the status quo, so be it. We strongly urge Premiers McGuinty and Campbell to follow Premier Lord's leadership in that regard."

### **ROBERT BATEMAN JOINS FVC NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD (July 31, 2006)**

Internationally acclaimed artist and naturalist Robert Bateman has become the most recent prominent Canadian to join the National Advisory Board of Fair Vote Canada. In addition to his interest in electoral reform, Mr. Bateman supports many ecology and conservation causes. His work appears in many public and private collections and art museums. His one-man museum shows throughout North America often attract record-breaking crowds. Three books of his art *The Art of Robert Bateman*, *The World of Robert Bateman* and *Robert Bateman: An Artist in Nature* have set sales records. He has received numerous awards and honorary doctorates.

### **ONTARIO POLITICAL LEADERS REMAIN SILENT ON A FAIR REFERENDUM PROCESS (September 7, 2006)**

As the Ontario Citizens' Assembly begins its work, the Premier and opposition leaders remain silent on a key element of the reform process.

"Again, we commend Premier McGuinty for honouring his election commitment to convene this historic Citizens' Assembly. Ontario is only the second jurisdiction in the world to have an independent citizen-driven electoral reform process," said Joe Murray, Chair of the Fair Vote Ontario campaign. "But neither the Premier nor opposition leaders have announced their commitment to accepting a majority decision by Ontario voters in an electoral reform referendum."

"In two other provinces where similar referendums were held, the premiers said they would 'let the people decide', then raised the bar, setting unprecedented referendum threshold requirements for enactment," said Murray.

In British Columbia and PEI, the government set a double-super-majority threshold, requiring 60 per cent support, plus majority support in 60 per cent of the ridings. Before those two events, there had been no provincial or federal referendum or plebiscite in Canadian history requiring anything other than a simple majority.

"In BC, a solid majority of nearly 58 per cent voted yes for electoral reform, but a government being returned with only 46 per cent support said that wasn't good enough," said Murray.

In June, New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord announced a provincial electoral reform referendum in 2008, assuming his re-election, and stated he would accept a simple majority decision because that is "the traditional number for democratic decisions."

The all-party Ontario Select Committee on Electoral Reform recommended that a simple majority decision be used in Ontario, but with the additional requirement of majority support in two-thirds of Ontario's ridings.

Murray noted that adding that requirement, because of the significant differences in the number of voters in Ontario ridings, could allow as few as 14 per cent of the voters to stop a reform

that is supported by a significant majority (figure based on voter turnout in the last provincial election).

"We urge Premier McGuinty, Official Opposition Leader John Tory, and Ontario NDP Leader Howard Hampton to follow Bernard Lord's example and do the right thing. If a majority of Ontarians want reform, so be it. If the majority wants the status quo, so be it. Do not say you will 'let the people speak' and then set conditions where a minority of voters can veto democratic reform for everyone," Murray said.

### **ONTARIO CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY HOLDS FIRST SESSION (September 11, 2006)**

The long-awaited convening of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform took place at York University campus on the weekend of September 9-10. One hundred and three citizens, representing every riding in the province, began their work to determine whether Ontario needs a new voting system.

Assembly Chair George Thomson welcomed the 52 women and 51 men who will be meeting on several weekends each month through the fall and winter to learn about voting systems. They will hold public meetings across the province from late November to the end of January, as well as accept online submissions beginning in late October. The Assembly will make a recommendation in April or May on whether Ontario should adopt a new voting system. If they do recommend a new system, that recommendation will go to a referendum, all but certain to be held with the October 4, 2007 provincial election.

The agenda for the Assembly's first weekend session included an introduction to the role of voting systems. To gain first-hand experience on how different voting systems can produce very different outcomes, the Assembly used three different voting systems to select their

snacks for the three coffee breaks on the second weekend.

To wrap up the weekend, Assembly members discussed what they expect elections to accomplish. The next five weekend sessions will go into detailed reviews of all major voting systems.

The Citizens' Assembly sessions are open to the public.

### **FAIR VOTE ONTARIO CAMPAIGN MOVES INTO HIGH GEAR (September 11, 2006)**

For the next four months, the Fair Vote Ontario campaign will be rallying Ontarians to encourage the Assembly to recommend the best possible fair voting system for the referendum. Volunteers are needed to help spread the word in local communities by distributing materials, writing letters to the editor, arranging opportunities for FVO speakers and more. Those who can help in any way are encouraged to contact us as soon as possible.

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