



Fair Vote Canada
Newsletter

Représentation équitale au Canada
Bulletin d'information

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This semi-annual newsletter includes articles previously circulated in Fair Vote Canada email newsletters and posted on the FVC web site over the past six months.

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Toronto Media Ignoring Citizens' Assembly (Sept. 11, 2006)

The January 2004 launch of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was a major media story in 2004 in British Columbia, with extensive newspaper, radio and TV coverage. In contrast, not a single reporter attended the opening of the Ontario Citizens Assembly. The only related story in a Toronto newspaper was entitled "Beware of Citizens' Assemblies", written by the Ontario political affairs columnist of the Toronto Star. The lack of mainstream media coverage itself became a story in a feature article in Toronto's major alternative weekly.

FVC Calls On New NB Premier to Hold Referendum (Sept. 19, 2006)

On September 18, the majority of New Brunswick voters failed to give their support to any single party, while the voting system handed majority control to the party finishing second in the popular vote.

"In a democracy, you would think any party failing to win a majority of votes should not have majority control of the legislature," said FVC Executive Director Larry Gordon in a press statement. "You would certainly not expect a party coming

in second place to be given complete control of the political agenda."

Fair Vote Canada commended former Premier Lord for his June 2006 commitment to hold a binding referendum on the mixed member proportional voting system recommended by the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy. FVC formally called upon premier-elect Graham to honour the former premier's pledge for an electoral reform referendum in 2008 and to honour a majority decision by New Brunswick voters in that referendum.

Yukon Election Produces Phony Majority Government (Oct. 11, 2006)

While Yukon election news reports focused on the return to power of Dennis Fentie and the Yukon Party, those voters who studied the actual election returns could see yet another distorted outcome. A solid majority of Yukoners voted for other parties, while the voting system gave the Yukon Party a majority of seats and complete control of the legislative agenda.

Fair Vote Ontario Campaign Expands (Oct. 22, 2006)

As the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform continues with its internal education phase, the Fair Vote

Ontario (FVO) campaign is expanding operations. FVO will be rallying people to contact the Citizens' Assembly in support of fair voting principles and voting systems.

Ontarians will be invited to make online submissions to the Assembly beginning October 23. The Assembly will also hold 37 public meetings across the province between late November and the end of January.

FVO campaign activities are being reported in more detail in the Fair Vote Ontario e-newsletter.

Ontario Referendum Threshold: Undemocratic Roadblock to Democratic Reform (Oct. 24, 2006)

Fair Vote Ontario called today's Ontario government announcement of a 60 per cent electoral reform referendum threshold an "undemocratic roadblock to democratic reform". The government's legislation also requires that majority support be attained in 60 percent of the ridings.

"We have commended and still commend the Liberal government for setting in motion an independent citizen-driven process for electoral reform," said Larry Gordon, Executive Director of Fair Vote Canada. "But that process will be tarnished and public cynicism about politics, politicians and government will only increase if the referendum threshold is manipulated to ignore a clear majority decision by the electorate. If the threshold announced today is actually applied, then a small minority could block an electoral reform supported by a strong majority of Ontarians."

Fair Vote Ontario is calling on the McGuinty government to follow the example of former New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord who had pledged to hold an electoral reform referendum and accept a 50 per cent plus one majority decision because, as he put it, that is "the

traditional number for democratic decisions."

Axworthy, Des Rosiers, Dranoff, Hurtig and Trent join FVC National Advisory Board (Dec. 1, 2006)

Fair Vote Canada (FVC) President Stephen Broscoe welcomed five new members to the FVC National Advisory Board, which is composed of prominent Canadians from a wide variety of backgrounds and all points on the political spectrum.

Dr. Lloyd Axworthy is President, University of Winnipeg, a former cabinet minister and a former Nobel Peace Prize nominee. **Nathalie Des Rosiers** is Dean, Civil Law Section, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, and former President of the Law Commission of Canada. **Linda Silver Dranoff** is a family law lawyer, writer and media commentator and a major contributor to the expansion of women's rights in family law. **Mel Hurtig** is an author, publisher, well-known economic nationalist and founding chair of the Council of Canadians. **Dr. John Trent** is a political scientist, writer, media commentator and former Secretary of the International Association of Political Science.

Senate reform bill: PR voting is a democratic reform priority, but put first things first (Dec. 14, 2006)

The reform of Canada's core democratic institutions is an urgent priority and fair, or proportional, voting systems should be used for the election of all elected legislative bodies, said FVC President Stephen Broscoe, in response to the Senate reform bill tabled by the government on December 13.

Fair Vote Canada commended the Harper government for its willingness to take strong action on democratic reform and proposing a proportional representation (PR) voting system, as indicated in Senate Appointment Consultation Act.

However, Broscoe emphasized that the government should turn its attention to the first and most urgent priority -- beginning a citizen-driven process to determine the best electoral system for electing MPs. Job one in democratic reform is the adoption of a fair voting system to allow Canadians to elect a truly representative House of Commons and legitimate majority government, he said. Consideration of Senate reform or abolition should only be considered after citizens have determined and adopted the best voting system for electing their MPs.

Ontario Citizens' Assembly and Student Assembly look favourably at fair voting systems (Dec. 1, 2006)

At their November 18-19 session, the members of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform did an initial ranking of voting system values. Their top priority, by a large margin, was proportional representation. The other top priorities were regional representation, demographic representation and voter choice. Assembly chair George Thomson emphasized that this was a very preliminary exercise, primarily to help Assembly members get used to dealing with trade-offs among competing values.

Meanwhile, the Ontario Student Assembly on Electoral Reform, composed of high school students, held its weekend forum from November 15-19. At the end of the forum the students voted on their preferred voting system for Ontario, with a majority choosing mixed-member proportional (MMP) and a strong minority choosing the STV proportional system. Few students opted for non-proportional systems.

Quebec government to delay electoral reform (Dec. 1, 2006)

On December 13, Benoit Pelletier, Minister responsible for the reform of democratic institutions, announced the Quebec

government will again delay implementation of its proposed mixed-member proportional voting system. After public consultation earlier in the year, the government promised to respond with a modified bill in the fall.

Now the government says it will seek the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec on the effects of the proposed changes, with a response expected within six months. In addition, the government will set up another all-party committee to consider changes. These delays mean a new bill is very unlikely before the next election.

FVC active at Liberal leadership convention (Dec. 10, 2006)

Thanks to a very active contingent of FVC volunteers, thousands of Liberal leadership convention delegates are now aware of FVC's call for federal electoral reform. FVC volunteers distributed several thousand flyers that highlighted the use of a proportional voting system to elect convention delegates.

Of the many hundreds of delegates who discussed the issue with our volunteers, about 80 per cent agreed with using some form of PR for federal elections. Unfortunately a resolution from the Manitoba Liberal Party calling for an all-party task force to study and recommend alternative voting systems, with a subsequent national referendum, was defeated.

Multiple calls for a Citizens' Assembly in Quebec (Dec. 20, 2006)

In reaction to the Quebec government's further delaying of electoral reform, three calls have been issued for creation of a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, former minister for democratic reform for the Parti Québécois, Paul Cliche, author of the book "Pour réduire le déficit démocratique: le scrutin proportionnel" and David Litvak, a former activist in the Mouvement pour

une démocratie nouvelle, have all declared support for a Citizens' Assembly process. Litvak stated "the idea of a citizen-based reform process is making its way in Quebec."

Rafe Mair joins FVC National Advisory Board (Jan. 10, 2007)

Well-known broadcaster, political commentator, lawyer, author and former B.C. cabinet minister Rafe Mair has joined the National Advisory Board of Fair Vote Canada. Mr. Mair has had a longtime interest in democratic reform, and served as the B.C. minister responsible for constitutional affairs leading up to the patriation of the Canadian constitution.

Fair Vote Ontario calls on Citizens' Assembly to act on historic opportunity (Jan. 15, 2007)

Fair Vote Ontario's formal submission to the Ontario Citizens' Assembly presented the case for scrapping first-past-the-post voting and adopting a fair and proportional voting system.

"For more than two centuries Ontarians have endured the undemocratic consequences of a primitive and dysfunctional voting system," the submission emphasized. "The Assembly has an opportunity to lead citizens toward something better."

Fair Vote Ontario slams referendum threshold at committee hearing (Feb. 5, 2007)

Joe Murray, Fair Vote Ontario (FVO) Chair, and Patrick Boyer, lawyer, former Progressive Conservative MP and FVC National Advisory Board member, called on the Ontario Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs to scrap the 60% supermajority referendum threshold in Bill

155, the Ontario electoral reform referendum enabling bill. Boyer asked Committee members to support the Select Committee on Electoral Reform's proposal for a simple majority threshold.

Dr. Dennis Pilon, University of Victoria political scientist and FVC National Council member, spoke to the committee via teleconference.

"Apart from the recent PEI and BC referendums, no voting system change decision in Canada was ever subjected to a super-majority rule," said Dr. Pilon. "In fact, the establishment of all Canadian federal and provincial voting systems was by a simple majority vote of the designers...[and] all western countries have seen the establishment of their voting systems or any changes in their voting systems handled either through a simple majority vote of parliament or a simple majority vote in a referendum."

IN MEMORIAM: DORIS ANDERSON (1921-2007) (March 3, 2007)

Canada's electoral reform movement has lost one of our greatest and most respected champions. Doris Anderson, feminist, editor, author and activist passed away on Friday, March 2, after dealing with poor health for the past year.

Many Canadian women first came to know of Doris as the editor of *Chatelaine* from 1957 to 1977. Several years later, she led the campaign that resulted in Section 28 of the Charter of Rights, guaranteeing equal rights for women and men.

When visiting European countries for research on her fourth book, *The Unfinished Revolution* (1991), Doris developed a keen interest in electoral reform. Having seen the more successful political advancement of women in countries using proportional voting systems, she became a vocal proponent of electoral reform in Canada.

She was the Fair Vote Canada President from 2002-2004 and played the lead role

in recruiting several dozen high profile Canadians to serve on the FVC National Advisory Board. FVC was very fortunate to have had leadership from someone so highly regarded and who brought great credibility to this fledgling citizens' group, before she left the organization in 2004. Her many speaking engagements during that time and afterwards put the need for electoral reform in front of many audiences across the country.

Doris made many contributions to many causes, the fight for PR being just one of them. Her passing is a tremendous loss for those causes and a loss for Canada.

Quebecers not alone in desire for democratic voting (March 16, 2007)

An alliance of Quebec reformers speaks for most Canadians with its call for the abolition of an unfair voting system, says Fair Vote Canada.

Quebecers leading the call for fair voting and proportional representation in that province include Claude Béland of the Quebec Movement for Democracy and Citizenship (Mouvement Démocratie et Citoyenneté du Québec), Louise Paquet, of the Feminism and Democracy Group (Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie), Mercédez Roberge of the New Democracy Movement (Mouvement démocratie nouvelle) and Mireille Tremblay of Quebec Democracy Watch (l'Observatoire québécois de la démocratie).

Criticism greets government's "consultation" on electoral reform (March 25, 2007)

The Conservative government's so-called "consultation" on electoral reform has been greeted with widespread skepticism and criticism from respected commentators and the general public alike.

"The process is a bit of a sham," said Fair Vote Canada President Stephen Broscoe. "What's needed is a true national citizens'

assembly along the lines of previous provincial initiatives in British Columbia and Alberta," he continued. "Instead, the government has outsourced the consultation process to the Frontier Centre, a think-tank which is known to be opposed to electoral reform."

"This is worse than doing nothing at all," continued Broscoe. "It gives the appearance of doing something on the file, when in fact nothing useful is being accomplished whatsoever."

Quebec reacts to election results with overwhelming call for voting reform (April 1, 2007)

In the wake of the March 26, 2007 Quebec election, citizens' groups, former politicians and other notables all across the province are calling for immediate reform to the voting system.

At a press conference on April 1, a group of notable Quebecers [called on the government](#) to hold the next provincial election under a system of proportional representation, and launched an on-line petition in support of the initiative. Another online petition calls for a [Quebec Citizens' Assembly](#) along the lines of previous assemblies in British Columbia and Ontario.

"Electoral reform is long overdue in Quebec, as indeed it is in all other jurisdictions in Canada," stated Fair Vote Canada President Stephen Broscoe. "Fair Vote Canada calls on all parties in the new Quebec National Assembly to move forward immediately with changes to the voting system."

Fair Vote Ontario anticipates Vote Yes campaign launch in May (April 1)

A major grassroots campaign for a Yes victory in an October 2007 referendum will likely be launched in May, according to Fair Vote Ontario.

Today the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform identified its preferred

alternative voting system for Ontario – a mixed member proportional (MMP) system. The Assembly will decide on April 15 whether to recommend that system over the status quo, a decision that would trigger an electoral reform referendum to be held with the next provincial election on October 10, 2007.

nominated in advance of the election by each party.

It's Now Official – October 10 Referendum in Ontario! (April 15, 2007)

The Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform will recommend that Ontario adopt a mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting system. At their weekend session, Assembly members voted 94-8 in favour of recommending the MMP system, a decision that triggers an October 10, 2007, provincial referendum.

The final vote was the culmination of a seven-month process. The Assembly, a body of 103 randomly chosen Ontario voters, began its work last September. Assembly members studied electoral systems for three months and then held a two-month public consultation. For the past two months, Assembly members deliberated on whether to recommend a new system.

In February, the Assembly decided to develop detailed models for two alternative voting systems, both forms of proportional representation: mixed member proportional (MMP) and the single transferable vote (STV). In March, the Assembly selected MMP as its preferred alternative. In early April, the deliberation focused on whether to recommend their MMP model over the current system.

The Assembly's MMP model will have 90 ridings and 39 at-large, or list, seats. Voters will be able to cast two votes, one for a local candidate and one for a party. The party votes determine what overall share of seats each party will have in the legislature. If a party deserves more seats than it wins in riding elections, that party also receives list seats to ensure its share of seats reflects its share of votes. List seats are filled by list candidates,