

January 29, 2009

REFERENDUM ON ELECTORAL REFORM

On May 12, 2009, a province-wide referendum on electoral reform will be held in conjunction with the general election. Voters will choose whether the existing First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) or a single transferable vote (BC-STV) electoral system should be used to elect members to the provincial Legislative Assembly.

A similar referendum held in conjunction with the 2005 General Election narrowly missed one of two approval thresholds required to pass. Given the strong support for STV in the 2005 referendum, and post-event polling that indicated that many voters did not feel fully informed about the electoral system recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (BC-STV), Government committed to a second referendum in its Throne Speech on September 12, 2005.

The Referendum Question

The 2009 referendum question is:

Which electoral system should British Columbia use to elect members to the provincial Legislative Assembly?

- The existing electoral system (First-Past-the-Post)
- The single transferable vote electoral system (BC-STV) proposed by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

The Threshold

For the referendum to be binding, the approval level must be:

- 1) at least 60% of the total popular vote, province-wide, AND
- 2) more than 50% of the votes in at least 51 of the province's 85 electoral districts.

If the two thresholds are met, government is required to introduce legislation to implement BC-STV in sufficient time for it to be in place for the May 2013 General Election.

Voter Education

Referendum Information Office

- In February 2009, the Ministry of Attorney General will establish the Referendum Information Office, with a mandate to provide objective information to voters about both electoral systems.

Proponent and Opponent Groups

- The government is also making \$1 million in funding available to registered proponent and opponent groups. On January 12, 2009, the Ministry of Attorney General selected a proponent group (British Columbians for BC-STV) and opponent group (No STV).
- The *Electoral Reform Referendum 2009 Act Regulation* set out a process for interested organizations to apply to the Deputy Attorney General. The selection was based on an applicant's eligibility and an assessment of their experience and capacity.
- On February 2, 2009, the Chief Electoral Officer will give each group \$435,000 in funding to undertake public information campaigns to support and oppose BC-STV. A further \$65,000 will be provided to each group on April 1, 2009.

Neutral Information Available at All Voting Opportunities

- In accordance with section 25 of the *Electoral Reform Referendum 2009 Act Regulation*, the Chief Electoral Officer will make information regarding FPTP and BC-STV available at every voting opportunity. The Chief Electoral Officer will also make available maps of the electoral districts under both electoral systems.

New Financing Rules

- Only registered proponent and opponent groups and registered referendum advertising sponsors can sponsor or conduct referendum advertising from February 1 to May 12, 2009, inclusive.
- There are no spending limits for registered referendum advertising sponsors or proponent or opponent groups.
- Referendum advertising and election advertising cannot be combined except by registered political parties and candidates.

Chronology of Events Leading Up to the 2009 Referendum on Electoral Reform

- April 2003 – The Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform was established with a mandate to examine electoral systems and advise the Legislative Assembly on whether the province should retain the single-member plurality system currently in use, and if not, to recommend an alternative electoral system.
- December 2004 – The 160 members of the Citizens’ Assembly recommended that the province adopt a proportional electoral system known as the single transferable vote (STV) electoral system. The particular variant of the STV family of electoral systems recommended by the Citizens’ Assembly is called BC-STV.
- May 17, 2005 – Elections BC administered the Referendum on Electoral Reform in conjunction with the 2005 General Election. Voters were provided two ballots – one for the candidates in their electoral district and one for the province-wide referendum on electoral reform. There were two thresholds that had to be met for the referendum to pass; over 60% of votes province-wide had to support STV, and over 50% of votes in at least 60% of the electoral districts had to be in favour of STV. The yes vote surpassed the 50% threshold in 77 of 79 electoral districts, but the province-wide vote was 57.69% in favour—2.31% below the required threshold to pass.

For information on the ballot question, First-Past-the-Post, and BC-STV, visit the Referendum Information Office’s website at BCreferendum2009.ca .

For more information on referendum advertising or voting opportunities, visit Elections BC’s website at www.elections.bc.ca