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Minutes
Election Advisory Committee

June 13th, 2007

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10:00 – 12:00
Office of the Representative for Children and Youth
#901 - 808 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

Attending:

Committee members (in alphabetical order by political party name)

BC Liberal Party: Hector Mackay-Dunn, Kelly Reichert
British Columbia Marijuana Party: Michelle Rainey
Green Party: Sven Biggs
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

Harry Neufeld welcomed members, noting this is the 20th meeting of the Committee. The first meeting was held in the summer of 1995, following the enactment of the *Election Act*.

Harry Neufeld reviewed the history, legislative mandate and structure of the Committee for the benefit of new members.

2. Single Transferable Vote (STV) Election Administration – Research Update

Linda Johnson noted that EBC has a small budget to continue research on STV from a legislative and administrative procedures perspective. This early research will ensure Elections BC can immediately provide input into required STV legislation should voters choose to adopt the BC-STV electoral system in the 2009 referendum.

Scotland, October 2006 and May 2007: In October 2006, Jill Lawrance (Director, Event Planning and Management) and Linda Johnson attended a conference of election administrators in Scotland, where preparations were underway for the introduction of an STV model for local government elections. The model is almost identical to the one proposed for provincial elections in BC. Elections for both local councils and the

Scottish Parliament (which uses a closed list mixed-member proportional system) were scheduled to be held at the same time on May 3, 2007.

An electronic counting system was also being introduced in the 2007 elections. Like BC-STV, Scotland's STV model uses the full Weighted Inclusive Gregory (WIG) method for surplus transfers – considered the most fair of all STV models, but more complex from a counting perspective.

Linda Johnson noted that key public policy decisions and legislation for the elections were not finalized until February 2007.

In May 2007, Harry Neufeld, Linda Johnson, Jill Lawrance and Bob Jasperse (Director of IT) were granted official observer status for the Scottish elections. Observers from Elections Canada, Elections Ontario, and the Canadian and Australian parliaments also attended. There was a great deal of interest in the implementation of STV, but also in the electronic counting system, which was designed to read and interpret hand-written numbers on paper ballots.

The media reported significant problems with the elections. In fact, the counting system itself, as well as voting and counting for the local government (STV) elections, went well. However, the design of the Scottish parliament ballot and lack of adequate instructions on marking the ballot resulted in high numbers of *parliamentary* ballots being rejected. The lateness of legislation and public policy decisions likely contributed to these problems.

Where there were problems with the electronic counting system, they were due to ballots being folded and the high number of rejected ballots for the parliamentary vote, which had not been anticipated.

Ron Gould, former Deputy Chief Electoral Officer at Elections Canada, has been appointed to head an inquiry into the elections.

Linda Johnson noted that the electronic counting system is effective but expensive. The ballot scanning machines, which can read about 1.5 ballots per second, cost $80,000 each. Standalone computer networks, including many ballot scanners per network, were deployed in the 31 counting centres around the country.

Problems with scanning and adjudicating ballots slowed the delivery of election results in Scotland. However, if a similar system were used in B.C. it is likely that results would be available later on election night in smaller urban areas. Rural areas may take longer, as all ballots must be returned to a central voting place before counting can begin. A range of options, including networking some of the rural voting places and counting centres, will be considered.

BC-STV Manual Count Simulation: Elections BC staff recently conducted a manual count simulation using 1,500 machine-generate and hand-marked ballots. The count was

fully manual, using WIG and a fully randomized ballot. The count was successful, indicating that a manual count of BC-STV ballots is possible, although it does take time.

Harry Neufeld noted that, should the referendum require implementation of BC-STV, the Committee's advice will be sought immediately following the vote in order to make recommendations on needed legislative change and public policy decisions. If needed, legislation will need to be passed well in advance in order to allow enough time to prepare for the first BC-STV election in 2013.

3. BC Electoral Boundaries Commission Update

BC-EBC Update: Harry Neufeld reported that the Commission's preliminary report will be publicly released on August 15th. Public hearings around the province, as required by the *Electoral Boundaries Commission Act*, will start in early September and conclude in mid-November. The final report must be submitted by February 15th, 2008. Legislators will decide whether to adopt the report or amend the boundaries proposed by the Commissioners.

The Act requires the Commissioners to meet with MLAs last, before submitting their final report. Two meetings will be held in November for MLAs to provide their input.

Impact on Political Parties: Linda Johnson noted that until the Legislative Assembly has amended the *Electoral Districts Act* and Royal Assent has been granted, Elections BC cannot implement the new boundaries. That may leave only 11 months to implement the boundaries before they come into effect at the Dissolution of the House. Elections BC will also be redistributing voting areas based on the new district boundaries and address and population changes.

Key dates and information regarding redistribution will be communicated to parties this fall. Elections BC hopes to have new street index and electoral district maps available to parties by late 2008.

Linda Johnson reminded Committee members that those parties with registered constituency associations must deregister and then re-register their associations under the new electoral district boundaries. Electoral Finance staff will provide advice and support to political parties to help them through this process.

Harry Neufeld noted that GIS shape files for both the preliminary and final district boundaries will be made available to the parties at no charge.

4. Future Focus of EAC Meetings

Harry Neufeld reviewed the section 16 of the *Election Act* regarding the role of the Election Advisory Committee. The Committee was intended to advise the Chief Electoral Officer on the functioning of the Act, particularly regarding the electoral

finance provisions, and to facilitate adoption by the House of recommended legislative changes.

The Committee has not been functioning as contemplated. Currently, financial agents are providing frequent and useful feedback to Elections BC staff on the functioning of the electoral finance provisions of the Act. The Committee has been very effective in reviewing recommended legislative changes. However, most meetings consist of Elections BC staff providing information to Committee members about planned changes in administrative arrangements. Some members commented that because they were not provided briefing material in advance they were unable to provide useful advice.

Committee members agreed that future meetings should focus on Committee members advising the Chief Electoral Officer on the functioning of the *Election Act*. One meeting per year is sufficient for this purpose, and will take place after the House rises each spring. Committee members and Elections BC will suggest agenda topics.

Committee members discussed the Act's requirements for the Chief Electoral Officer to consult with the Committee on certain matters, such as the implementation of changes to the *Election Act*. Members noted that some consultation has taken place by email in the past, and that does not allow for a full, active and effective consultation.

Committee members agreed that any future consultation not conducted in person would take place by teleconference rather than email. The Chief Electoral Officer committed to providing briefing materials in advance whenever possible to ensure full and informed discussion.

5. Political Party Information Sessions

The Deputy Chief Electoral Officer noted that, in fairness, all parties should have equal access to the election administration information previously provided only to Committee members. Elections BC proposes to host a yearly political party information session in addition to the Election Advisory Committee meeting. All political parties will be invited to send up to three representatives to the meeting.

At the meeting, senior Elections BC staff will provide information to parties relevant to the electoral business cycle. This fall, for example, topics would include an overview of Elections BC, the role of the Election Advisory Committee, electoral district and voting area redistribution, and Elections BC products and services. In 2008, the meeting would focus on key pre-election information, such as the nomination process, access to the voters list, and campaign finance rules.

Elections BC is considering locating the meeting in Richmond to facilitate transportation for participants attending from outside the Lower Mainland. The meeting will run from 10:00 – 3:00, and lunch will be provided. Elections BC will not pay travel costs, but there will be no registration fee.

Parties will have the opportunity to provide confidential feedback. Notes and presentations from the session will be posted to the Elections BC website, and a newsletter will be sent following the meeting to all parties, so those who cannot attend the meeting may still have the benefit of all the information.

A survey will be sent to all political parties by the end of June asking whether they will send representatives and what topics they suggest for the agenda.

Committee members agreed that the yearly political party session is a good way to impart information fairly and ensure parties have equal access to key process issues and instructions.

6. Other Business

No other business was raised.

7. Next Meeting

In accordance with the decision at this meeting, the next meeting of the Election Advisory Committee will take place in Spring 2008 unless otherwise required by section 16 of the *Election Act*.