

**Minutes
Election Advisory Committee
May 1, 2003**

1:30 p.m., May 1, 2003
Office of the Ombudsman
1111 Melville Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

Attending:

Committee Members (alpha by Party):

Green Party: Pamela Munroe

Liberal Party of BC: R. Hector MacKay-Dunn, Kelly Reichert, Cathy Nobes

New Democratic Party of BC: Russ Neely, Gerry Scott

Unity Party of BC: Tim Bonner

Elections BC:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer (Chair)

Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

Nola Western, Director, Electoral Finance

Absent:

Marijuana Party: Rob Gillespie

Welcome and Introductions:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer, called the meeting to order and welcomed the Committee members. All attendees introduced themselves.

Administrative Matters:

Initially the meeting was being audio-taped to facilitate minute-taking. There was substantial consensus among the representatives that the taping should be discontinued. Taping ceased 14 minutes into the meeting.

Nola Western reviewed administrative matters in relation to the meeting facility and attendees' expenses.

Role and Expectations of the Committee:

Harry Neufeld distributed excerpts from the *Election Act* regarding the role and composition of the Election Advisory Committee. It was agreed that in future, attendance will be limited to the number of representatives each registered political party is allowed under the *Election Act*.

In certain circumstances, the Chief Electoral Officer will authorize the parties to have specialists attend. The specialists will be allowed in the Committee room only for the duration of their respective agenda items. As well, Elections BC may bring experts and other outsiders to address the Committee.

As far as possible, written documents will be provided in advance to Committee members so they can

prepare for meetings. This will preclude the requirement for immediate feedback on items tabled at meetings, and provide an avenue for written responses from Committee members to Elections BC.

Meeting minutes will be much more generalized than in the past. On request, members' specific statements and positions will be noted in the Minutes.

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform:

Copies of the press release introducing the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform were distributed. The Committee discussed the use of the provincial list of voters as a means for selecting the Assembly. Because use of the provincial list of voters for this purpose requires a Regulation by the Chief Electoral Officer, the *Election Act* necessitates that the Chief Electoral Office consult with the Committee. The Committee discussed the completeness and accuracy of the voters list in the context of this proposed use. There were no objections to using the voters list to select members for the Citizens' Assembly.

Legislative Change: Recent and Pending:

Committee members were provided with the *Election Statutes Amendment Act - 2002*, which contains the most recent amendments to British Columbia's *Election Act*. Nola Western highlighted the major changes.

Linda Johnson discussed the Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding prisoners' voting rights. As a result of the decision, it is expected that British Columbia's *Election Act* will be amended to allow voting by individuals serving sentences in federal prisons. The Committee was advised that upon passage of such an amendment, it is the intent of the Chief Electoral Officer to publish a notice in the BC Gazette waiving the six-month implementation period. The *Election Act* requires consultation with the Election Advisory Committee prior to publication of such a notice.

The Committee also discussed the status of a Request for Legislation, which if passed, would no longer permit use of the provincial list of voters for jury selection or other non-electoral purposes. Such an amendment would allow Elections BC access to federal voter data.

Linda Johnson gave an update on the status of the amendments to the *Election Act* recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer in the Report on the 2001 General Election. These amendments were discussed at the most recent Committee meeting.

Committee members were asked to advise the Chief Electoral Officer in writing by the end of July 2003 of any further recommendations for amendments they would like to have considered.

The question arose of whether the Committee should be consulted on issues regarding the *Recall and Initiative Act*. It was agreed that Committee representatives are welcome to recommend amendments to the *Recall and Initiative Act* despite its being outside the Committee's mandate. Hector MacKay-Dunn recommended that consideration be given to amending the *Election Act* to include recall and initiative issues as part of the Committee's mandate. Concern was expressed that proponents of recalls and initiatives would not have a similar opportunity, and that perhaps the *Recall and Initiative Act* might warrant its own forum for discussion.

Anticipated Requirement for Enumeration:

Handouts showing voter participation in British Columbia and other Canadian jurisdictions were provided. Statistics show a broadening gap between numbers of eligible and registered voters. Harry Neufeld informed the Committee that he believes he cannot recommend cancellation of the enumeration legislated for May 2004, however, a traditional door-to-door enumeration is no longer efficient or cost-effective.

A discussion paper on voter registration was provided to the Committee members. Feedback on the most appropriate approach to effective enumeration was requested to be sent to the Chief Electoral Officer by the end of June 2003. The members were advised to note that the number of registered voters in British Columbia has decreased somewhat because of a purge process undertaken prior to the 2002 Treaty Negotiations Referendum.

Alternate methods of enumeration and voter registration were discussed, including enumerating by mail and online voter registration. The importance of voter signatures was underscored, as they are necessary for verifying recall and initiative petitions, and mail-in ballots like those used in the 2002 Referendum on Treaty Negotiations. As well, Elections BC is reviewing recent studies by Elections Canada on increasing youth participation in the electoral process.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be called in approximately four months' time, before Elections BC meets with the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in the early Fall.