

**ADRIANE CARR'S PRESENTATION
TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM
VICTORIA, BC – SEPTEMBER 27, 2016**

- My name is Adriane Carr. I am a Vancouver City Councillor, former Deputy Leader of the Green Party of Canada and former co-founder and Leader of the Green Party of BC.
- In 2002 I was the citizen proponent under BC's *Recall and Initiative Act* of the *Initiative to Establish a Proportional Representation Electoral System in BC*. I undertook this initiative because of the highly unfair results of the 2001 BC election under first-past-the-post: 77 of 79 seats won by the Liberals with 57.6% of the vote; 2 seats won by the NDP with 21.5% of the vote no seats for the BC Green Party with 12.4% of the vote.
- BC's *Recall and Initiative Act* requires that the proponent provide the legal wording of the act that could be passed should the initiative be successful. That required research, which was initially undertaken for me by Dr. Brahm Weisman, former Director of UBC's School of Community and Regional Planning. He presented me with an analysis of various electoral systems, with a recommendation that the best for BC would be a mixed member proportional representation system (MMPR), because it incorporated our current system of voting for a local riding representative, thus making it easy for citizens to understand, and topped up a party's seat-share to equal its vote-share, thus making it fair and making every vote count—which was the primary concern of voters.
- In preparing the legislation I went to New Zealand, which adopted Mixed Member Proportional Representation in 1993, to determine what worked well and what could be improved. I talked to citizens, MPs, and the Chief Electoral Officer, learning that:
 - the 5% vote threshold for a party to get seats topped up was viewed as reasonable: allowing representation for some but not too many smaller parties
 - MPs acted the same in terms of representing voters regardless of whether they were elected as local riding representatives or from “top-up” lists
 - Citizens liked the two-vote ballot and its results: achieving proportional representation with a broader mix of parties
- My Pro Rep Initiative – or Free Your Vote Campaign, as it was popularly called – focused for many months on public education – printing and distributing about 400,000 newspapers explaining how a new voting system would work. In the 90-day petition period (from May 13 to August 12, 2002) 4,002 volunteer canvassers collected the signatures of 98,165 British Columbian voters, although not enough to meet the required 212,473 signatures (10 percent of registered voters in every riding). We collected the signatures of more than 10 percent of the voters in nine constituencies: Comox Valley, Kelowna-Lake Country, Malahat-Juan de Fuca, Nanaimo, Nelson-Creston, North Island, Powell River-Sunshine Coast, Saanich North and the Islands, Victoria-Beacon Hill. Canvassers all over BC said, “Most of the people I talk to sign the petition. All we needed was more time!”

- Following my Initiative the BC government established the Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform. I attended every open meeting of the Assembly as they learned about and deliberated different voting systems. My appraisal is that the Citizens Assembly model is appealing but far from perfect. The citizens themselves were open-minded and keen. Unfortunately, the two professors who educated the Assembly members, in my judgment, showed bias towards the Single Transferable Vote system, of which they were both experts, and skewed the information they gave and didn't give to assembly members, for example calling MPs elected from party lists "zombie politicians" who "rise from the dead" after failing to be elected in a riding seat; and refusing to act on a request from one Assembly Member to have other Assembly Members test sample MMP and STV ballots with voters, after his own tests showed that citizens far preferred the simplicity of the MMP ballot.
- In 2005, BC citizens voted 57.5% in favour of "the Citizen's Assembly recommendation" for electoral reform, including a majority in 77 of 79 ridings. But in 2009, when given the specific details of an STV system for BC, only 39% of citizens voted for reform. Many people did not like the proposed STV system because the ballot and vote-counting were complicated and because it was based on geographically large rural ridings with fewer (2 or 3) elected representatives compared to the geographically smaller urban ridings with up to 7 elected representatives per riding, meaning that more citizens would have a good chance of their first preference vote counting towards electing a representative in an urban area than in a rural one. In other words, the fairness and proportionality of the outcome varied. One key reason why I had originally chosen an MMP system over STV for my Initiative was the fact that to deliver a proportional representation result, it is generally acknowledged that STV ridings need to elect more than 5 members and preferably 7 members. (In a 5-seat riding, a candidate needs 16.7% of the vote to be elected; in a 7-seat riding a winning candidate needs 12.5% of the vote.) But in an area with skewed population distribution like Canada, that would mean all of the NWT, Nunavut, Yukon and the top part of most of the provinces would be one riding if the goal of proportionality was to be achieved!
- On the issue of what kind of voting system would be the best for Canada, I recommend Mixed Member Proportional Representation:

 - It could be based on our current ridings, which means no long, expensive process of electoral boundary review, which we have just gone through in Canada.
 - In my thousands of conversations with voters during my Pro Rep Initiative, virtually everyone liked the idea of two votes: one for a local riding representative and one for the party of their choice knowing their party vote would help achieve a fair election outcome.
 - Using our current ridings and one of two votes for a local representative makes it familiar and an easy transition for citizens.
 - The proportionality could be achieved through a "top-up" of seats so that a party's share of vote equals its share of seats. "Top-up" candidates could come from a party's prepared list, or by moving sequentially down the list of non-elected candidates for each party, ranked by their percentage of

vote, until the party has a share of seats proportional to its share of overall country-wide vote.

- The extra Members of Parliament could be accommodated in the House— if this committee acts quickly--in the \$3 billion renovation of the Parliament Buildings currently underway.
- I am agnostic on the issue of on-line voting, understanding that this would be popular with youth, but concerned about confidentiality of the vote.
- I support mandatory voting: I've visited Australia and talked with people there who say it simply becomes a part of life and civic duty, there are few spoiled ballots, and anyone who has a legitimate excuse doesn't pay a fine.
- On the issue of ranked ballots: I urge the Committee to reject this as an alternative to proportional representation. It is not proportional, frustrating to many voters who only have one party or candidate preference, and a diversion from achieving the real electoral reform that people want: a proportional representation system where all peoples' votes count and a party's share of votes equals its share of seats.