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(la version française suit)

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FVC council sets broader electoral reform agenda

The Fair Vote Canada National Council is continuing to act on the excellent input from last summer's Future Directions process, which engaged members online and at an Ottawa conference to discuss the strategic direction of Fair Vote Canada.

The process strongly reaffirmed that FVC's primary mission is to fight for the adoption of fair and proportional voting systems in elections at all levels. However, members also indicated considerable interest in cautiously expanding the FVC mission to include related electoral reforms.

To that end, the FVC National Council has adopted the following positions:

Campaign Finance Reform: support for banning corporate and union campaign contributions for elections at all levels (i.e., adopting the regulations already in place for federal elections, and provincial elections in Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia).

Democratic Nominations: support for requiring that all parties use democratic processes for selecting candidates, thereby ending the power of party leaders to appoint candidates.

Voter-Directed Party Subsidies: currently the parties receive \$1.90 in public funding each year for every vote received in the previous election. Given that first-past-the-post voting forces many people to vote strategically rather than sincerely, this system forces some voters to trigger subsidies to parties they do not support. FVC will promote adoption of a

voter-directed subsidy program, in which voters can vote as they wish, but separately indicate which party they want the annual \$1.90 subsidy to benefit.

“Our primary emphasis will always be fair and proportional voting systems,” said FVC President Bronwen Bruch. “But this broader mandate gives us a means of reaching and engaging a much broader audience in the electoral reform movement. It’s an exciting opportunity.”

Major victory on municipal campaign finance reform in Toronto

On December 3, the Toronto City Council, in a 29-12 vote, adopted a ban on corporate and union campaign contributions, aligning Canada’s largest city with the federal government and provincial governments in Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, who have similar bans in place.

Fair Vote Canada staff, chapter leaders and members worked on the campaign in partnership with Vote Toronto, a local reform group whose work in recent years led to the breakthrough.

“We’re delighted with this victory,” said Larry Gordon, Executive Director of Fair Vote Canada. “The ban is becoming a national standard for campaign finance reform. Additional campaign finance regulations are needed, but this step clearly indicates elections at all levels must be citizen-focused, citizen-centred and citizen-driven. We need both a fair voting system that gives equal value to every vote, and election campaign regulations that force candidates to engage directly with individual citizens to gain campaign contributions and votes.”

Fair Vote Canada will be encouraging its supporters across the country to press the remaining provinces to adopt the ban and further strengthen campaign finance regulations.

Update on political scientists’ call for action on electoral reform

In the October newsletter, we reported that FVC was organizing an urgent call for electoral reform to be co-signed by Canadian political scientists.

“We won’t be releasing the statement and names until an appropriate moment, probably sometime close to the upcoming federal election,” said Bronwen Bruch, FVC President. “However, I can report we’re very happy with the response so far. Right now we have well over 100 co-signers including the president-elect of the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA), five former CPSA presidents, the current Secretary General of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) and a former IPSA secretary general. Quite a high-powered list!”

New study on Ontario referendum reaches opposite conclusion to prior study

The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) recently published a study by political scientists Laura Stephenson and Brian Tanguay on public attitudes after the 2007 Ontario electoral reform referendum. The authors concluded that even had people become familiar with the proposed mixed member proportional (MMP) voting system, the majority would have voted against it. Dr. Stephenson repeated that conclusion on a recent TV interview on TV Ontario.

This is opposite to the conclusion reached by political scientists Fred Cutler and Patrick Fournier in their 2007 study. Based on their surveys, the Cutler and Fournier concluded if the public had been adequately informed "the result would have been 63 per cent for MMP and 37 per cent for the existing system - exactly the mirror image of the actual outcome" (quote taken from their Oct 2007 Globe and Mail article).

Why the big difference? As stated in their study, Stephenson and Tanguay "asked people whether they were familiar with the MMP system....[which]...provided us with a *subjective measure* of how well people *thought they were informed* about the electoral reform proposal" (emphasis added). The study did not actually test respondents' knowledge of the proposed voting system - e.g., many people "knew" that the MMP system meant that party leaders appointed people to sit in the legislature. The only problem with that widely accepted "knowledge" is that it wasn't true.

In contrast, Cutler and Fournier's study included objective knowledge testing on both the proposed voting system and the citizens' assembly process that produced the recommendation for reform.

Unfortunately, IRPP refused a request by Fair Vote Canada to publish either a letter or article on the Cutler and Fournier study, pointing out the different conclusions and methodology.

Is Canada a "banana republic" or "the new Italy"?

Dr. Peter Russell, professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, and former president of the Canadian Political Science Association, said the major party leaders' aversion to majority coalition government may provoke a constitutional crisis. Russell fears that Canada is "fast becoming a basket case -- the banana republic of the parliamentary world". He outlined his concerns at the [Eighth Annual Templeton Lecture](#) in Winnipeg on October 15.

Meanwhile, Dr. Henry Milner, a leading electoral systems expert, recently wrote about Canada's world-class democracy deficit:

"Political science undergraduates used to learn about Italy as the model of dysfunctional political institutions, characterized by frequent elections and constant uncertainty under minority governments at the mercy of shifting political alliances. Italy transformed its electoral institutions in the 1990s, and while hardly perfect now - as the antics of Signor

Berlusconi demonstrate – it has lost its place as model of dysfunctionality among stable democracies to, of all countries, Canada."

For the complete article, see the Winter/Spring issue of *Inroads: The Canadian Journal of Opinion*, page 6.

FVC Council vacancies filled until spring election

The FVC National Council appointed two members to fill vacancies on the Council until the next election in spring 2010. The Council appointed Mark Greenan, former president of the National Capital Region Chapter and Shoni Field, former member of the BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and spokesperson for the recent BC referendum campaign.

"We're thankful Mark and Shoni were willing and able to pitch in until the next election," said FVC President Bronwen Bruch. "Nominations for the spring election will be open in February, so it's not too early for members to be thinking about nominations for the six seats that will be up for election."