

LIBERAL BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2012 POLICY SESSION REPORT

Name of session:

“Evidence Based Policy: Democracy and Good Governance”

List of all participants (including moderator, panellists, Caucus reps, NPEP representative and rapporteur):

Martha Hall Findlay, Moderator

Stéphane Dion, Caucus Member

David Eaves, Panellist

Maryantonett Flumian, Panelist

Mary Pynenburg, NPEP

Justin Trudeau, Rapporteur

Approximate number of delegates/observers in attendance:

Room was filled to capacity

Key points raised by Caucus rep:

- Discussed the motion before members on moving to a preferential ballot as best alternative voting system.
- Suggested that the electoral system we have today artificially exaggerates support for parties in each region, and that this is something we need to correct.
- Said a voting system change should not weaken the federal parliament – which is why pure proportional representation system would be bad.
- We should not support alternative voting systems which would create two tiers of MPs - one from the riding, and one from the region.

Key points raised by panellists:

David Eaves

- You can spend an enormous amount of political capital changing the voting system, but this is not really something that everyone wants, nor is it the critical issue for better governance.
- Preferable to focus efforts of change how we govern ourselves - people are not voting in elections because they are frustrated with the status quo.

- Frustration can be expressed through the example of the differential time it takes to receive information from an Access to Information request versus a Google search: 30 days v. 30 milliseconds; this enormous disconnect is what frustrates people.
- Central question in front of us is can we maintain the values of our key institutions while blowing up the structures?
 - Ex: value of universal health care v. rejection of how the current system works for most Canadians.
- We don't do open government based solely on transparency; making it easier for citizens to access information to investigate and create solutions to problems is also key.

Maryantonett Flumian

- 15 years ago, Canada was a global leader in good governance practice; our position has been declining since, in spite of technological evolutions
- Moving from more passive governance to a system whereby citizens want to be involved in policy creation and convinced of the utility of policy decisions (citizen centred service)
- What roles will governments, citizens, NFPs assume in a world increasingly defined by mass collaboration?
- How does the demand for citizen-centric services condition change?
- How do we manage expectations in a more transparent world; how do we impose accountability? How do you manage expectations?
- Like the creatures in an ecosystem, the contribution of each person is different, but each is valuable and important.
- Foundations of good government – openness and transparency.
- The parties that will be most successful will be the ones that act like un-parties.

Key points raised by NPEP rep on member feedback and online resolutions:

Mary Pynenburg

- Thank you for the opportunity to address this session on behalf of National Policy Chair, Joan Bourassa, and my provincial, territorial and commission colleagues.
- I would like to briefly introduce the Democracy & Good Governance policies that were presented on the Liberal Party of Canada Biennial convention web site and the discussion of Liberals that has been conducted over the last few months. This group of ideas includes good Governance, generally and Liberal Party of Canada governance specifically.
- Under the general heading of **Governance** there were policies put forward regarding:

79. Preferential Balloting System

- Members were very engaged on this issue with a high level of support (223 votes).

- Many members agreed with this resolution. They believe that this is the key to revive democracy in Canada and will provide better representation for Canadians in the House of Commons.
- For it to be successfully implemented, the public needs to be properly educated. The system needs to be made very clear.
- Some members agree in theory to this resolution, but believe that this is the wrong time to implement it. They argue that it looks to be a purely partisan attempt to solidify the Liberal vote, and could reflect badly on the Party.
- Other members disagree with this resolution entirely. They say that attempts at changing the voting system have been defeated in three provinces already. Still other members argue for Proportional Representation.

21. Electoral Reform

- Members are divided on this resolution but it had substantial level of engagement (184 thumbs up votes). Members who support the resolution say that it is a viable solution to remedy the democratic deficit in Canada.
- The members who do not support the resolution say that it could come off as an attempt to cement the Liberal Party in place as the “Natural Governing Party” and may therefore be more of a burden than anything else.
- Members on both sides of the debate discuss the effects of the system in Australia.
- Some members also propose a system of Proportional Representation. Further, it is also suggested that electoral reform should follow a referendum.

24. Long Form Census

- There were only a couple comments on this resolution but significant support (143 votes). The comments **unanimously** agreed that the long form census is essential for informed decision making.

90. Parliament and the Senate

- Members’ comments only discussed Senate aspect of this resolution. (*Research and prepare an action plan, to enable knowledgeable Citizens to consider changes in the electoral system to ensure better and more effective representation in government: 1. Strike a national independent broad-sector Commission to study in-depth the most democratic method to appoint members to the Senate;*)
- and did not focus on the other aspects of the resolution: (*2. Establish a plan in cooperation with provinces to empower Municipalities; 3. Promote international Democracy and Good Governance by leading by example.*)

A couple of members argued for the complete abolishment of the Senate.

- Most members preferred retaining a more democratic Senate. A sample comment: “I firmly believe in the value of a sober second thought, however I think a more democratic method of appointment could ensure that the worth of such second thought would be more appreciated.” (Janneth Davies)
- Some members suggested connecting the distribution of Senators to the election results by Proportional representation of the provinces. Other members suggested that involving the provinces in the appointment or election of Senators could help improve federal-provincial relations.
- It was also said that any change to the Senate should have broad public support.

19. Democracy

- There were only a few comments on this resolution.
- Some members agreed with the resolution, saying that it is a good step towards remedying the democratic deficit.
- Other members think that it does not address the real problems causing the democratic deficit.

13. Establishing Rules for Accession to Canada

- Both of the two members who commented on this resolution were in support. They believed that nations such as Turks & Caicos among others should be able to join Canada if they were to decide to do so.

52. Preserving a Representative Supreme Court of Canada

- Both members who commented on this resolution did not agree with it. One member commented:
- “It’s disappointing to see LPCBC allow such a resolution to get this far.” (William Clissold)
- While another believed this resolution rejected bilingualism.

85. A Ministry for seniors

- The majority of members who commented indicated their support for this resolution. One member expressed:
- “A Ministry for Seniors is long over due. The problems seniors are facing today are numerous so a stronger voice in the government is needed to ensure our voices are heard.” (Patricia Certosim)
- One member, although he agreed that seniors needed more services to be available to them felt that this would be better left in the hands of the Provincial government.

5. Fisheries-Gender Based Analysis

- The two members who commented on this resolution shared different opinions. One member questioned as to the placement of this resolution in the “governance section”. The other

member offered an explanation as to why they thought that this resolution was important in saying:

- “In a time when the numbers of women entering the fisheries is rising we need information about their work, their remuneration, their successes and their problems. How else are we to find solutions that work?” (Dianna Porter)
- Under the general heading of **Liberal Party Governance** there were policies put forward regarding:

9. Policy on Running Candidates

- The situation surrounding this resolution was unclear and members’ comments asked for clarification. Members reiterated that the party leader should not be able to arbitrarily disqualify candidates from a riding. This may explain why there was relatively less support on line for this resolution (25 votes)

18. Democratic Renewal

- There were a lot of comments in this resolution. (271 votes on line)
- Most of the comments agreed that there needs to be something done to renew the Party. However, most members also agree that a new commission is not the way to go, or it needs to be on a much tighter schedule than two years. As one member put it, we need “action not commission”.
- Although some members agreed to the resolution provided that the timeline is shortened, others suggested more direct ways of resolving the problem. Some suggested Party referendums on change items, or that proposals for changes are put to a vote.
- Other members agreed with the committee idea. The democratically based forum holds the commission accountable to the members of the Party. One member even suggested making the committee a permanent part of the Party to deal with ongoing issues and keep the Party up-to-date.
- Some other comments on this resolution included the need for a redefining of Liberal values, and a debate over eliminating the PTAs and strengthening the EDAs. Members in support of eliminating PTAs said that the federated structure distracts from the real issues and causes too many administrative problems. Members against this idea said that it would lead to a disconnect between EDAs and the national office.

109. Maintaining a Current Membership List

- Members who commented on this resolution agree that membership lists are essential for all EDAs and the Party. However, how these lists are achieved and kept up-to-date was discussed.
- Some members believe that the system is already in place through Liberalist, and just needs to be made more accessible to all ridings. Others believe that all the databases should be amalgamated.

- Members support the idea of automatic email notifications of membership expiry, as well as having a place on liberal.ca to update contact information.
- Some members commented that, although this is an important problem, it is an administrative issue and not one that concerns policy.
- In conclusion, these Democracy & Good Governance policies were submitted from across our country, as were the variety of on line comments from party members.
- It is clear that evidence based policy discussion is essential for the success of each one of these policies; so I look forward to hearing what you have to say today.

Highlights of Q and A session:

Q – How can we help keep the democratic reform agenda moving forward into a platform, and what can we do as citizens to implement this in our communities?

A – (Dion) I think the preferential ballot system is the best. I support it because it will civilize the political debate in Canada. This is an easy first step. (Eaves) A key question is how do you architect for participation. Enbridge was mandated to disclose information publically, which made it easy for citizens to participate. We need to do this here. The UK did the same thing with wait times in hospitals. You must architect for openness.

Q – Question about resolution 79. Current voting system denies representation to 50% of voters. Resolution 79 does the same thing. Why are we supporting this?

A – (Dion) I think 79 is an improvement, a critical first step. It would be different if it was the only thing we wanted to do. I think 79 will civilize political debate, and help encourage feelings of respect, as well as interest in voting, and it is easy to do now.

Q – Why is climate change not up front and centre in our resolutions?

A – (Dion) If we have a balloting system that actually reflects the wishes of Canadians, it would be easier to make progress on issues like climate change where there is consensus amongst Canadians.

Q – How do we make improvement to open democracy and good governance?

A – (Eaves) 311 number for the entire country to build collaboration on problem – also enables quick action on local problems, and simple questions, Can also be a stepping stone to larger dialogues. This is also a good means of generating conversations and feedback. (Flumian) Don't tell me you can solve poverty if you can't answer the phone for a week – are you relevant. Start with relevance, demonstrate, and make sure the mechanisms are responsive and rapid. Allow fierce debate to rage.

Q – How do you reconcile the complexity of the policy process to the desire for simplicity that seems to underwrite national conversations on these things?

A – (Flumian) If you engage in outcomes rather than process. But you have to architect in participation. We keep adding on top rather than taking away in government. If we decided tomorrow to do deal with climate change, we would realize we do not have the governing structures to make this happen.

Q – How would we move forward on real proportional representation?

A – (Dion) Many members may feel that Resolution 79 does not go far enough, but I think step-by-step is the way forward. (Trudeau) Understand, this won't necessarily help us as a party to win more seats – we may lose more seats. But this is good for the country.

Q – How do you combat the push of rugged individualism in our society that seems to get in the way.

A - (Eaves) I think we are more individualistic, but I don't think that is a bad thing, I think being secure as an individual opens the door for collaboration, rather than acting as a barrier to it. It is when you feel unsafe that you stop participating. (Flumian) At the heart of that, is a discussion of the nature of the welfare state. Normally we take the average of what people want and build a program around it. (Eaves) Public policy is still build around industrial delivery rather than custom-tailored delivery to suit individual needs.

Q – How to we articulate a need for change without coming across as hypocritical given that we have never done this before.

A – (Dion) You will always be accused of hypocrisy, but that cannot stop you from doing the right thing.

Q – What is the evidence in charge of alternative voting as opposed to proportional rep?

A - (Eaves) It depends on your goal. I have not seen a long term increase in country's that make a switch. However if you are seeking to increase the range of views that are heard in the HoC, there is a good reason to do this. (Dion) There is a lot of research, some in support, some not. What we have to ask ourselves is how best can we do this, and AV is the best. (Trudeau) – I happen to be a very polarizing figure and AV would likely hurt me. But I think we need to find ways to build a system that moves away from polarizing figures and starts to encourage candidates that can have a broader appeal because they have to have a broader appeal. (Flumian) – History should be a teacher, not a life sentence.

Q – Does our party have any information on why eligible voters don't vote?

A – (Dion). There are a lot of studies. I agree that voter system change does not totally change this trend, but I think that a change will help encourage people because even if their first choice has no chance, the fact that a second choice might. It will also hopefully encourage parties to work together which can make our politics more civil.

Q – How to we get innovative new ideas for the party. How can we engage you and your colleagues on this?

A– (Eaves) There is a great report from the UK (Power to Engage task force). Rather than expecting people to come to you, you have to go to them and engage them on their terms about their issues.

Q – How many people participated in discussion of the resolutions for the party?

A – (Pynenburg) There were thousands of people who participated.

Positive/negative feedback from audience and general mood in the session:

There was very positive feedback from delegates and the participants. Delegates made particular mention of the thoughtfulness of the interactions with panelists, and felt the session was engaging and smoothly executed.

Conclusion (consensual objectives for the next 24-months, key elements of a work plan to guide us to the 2014 Policy Biennial):

The discussion revolved around two pillars. First, there was passionate discussion and debate about whether and how to change the voting system. The second was to reimagine how citizens can engage in decision-making.