

MLAs Should Respect Voters' Views In Plebiscite, Says Leader Of Yes Campaign

David MacDonald
Holland College

The coordinator leading the campaign in support of proportional representation says the upcoming plebiscite is too important for government not to have the money to run the vote properly.

Mark Greenan of the P.E.I. Votes Yes coalition kicked off the group's campaign Oct. 25 with a news conference at the Coles Building. He was accompanied by Kirstin Lund, chair of the P.E.I. Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and Carl Pursey, of the P.E.I. Federation of Labour.

The government recently said for the plebiscite it would cut the number of polling stations to two or three per district in order to save money, an action Greenan doesn't agree with.

"I understand the financial constraints government is under but I think this is important and is something they should find the money for."

Greenan said he wants to have a meeting with the premier to discuss this cut. He said the groups which will benefit the most from the mixed-member proportional system - youth, seniors, women, etc - will be the ones most hurt by the reduction in polling stations.

The government has spent a lot of money over the past few years on this issue, he said.

"It doesn't seem to make any sense not to do this right."

In giving out his reasons for supporting a new electoral system, Greenan said the first-past-the-post system was created in the 13th century exclusively for property-owning males. It awards a seat to whoever gets the most votes, even if it's not the majority.

"Islanders didn't choose to use first-past-the-post. It was given to us." Legislatures have been lopsided over the past number of elections under the first-past-the-post system, he said, with an 8-1 ratio of government seats to opposition party seats.

"Its failings have been all too apparent," he said.

The current system promotes confrontational politics as two dominant parties fight for majority control of the house, he said. The proportional system will benefit people in a number of ways, such as higher voter turnout and higher satisfaction with government.

Pursey agrees the new system is more effective. He said the labour federation supports proportional representation, having passed a resolution in their annual convention in 2000.

Smaller parties would benefit greatly from this system, he said.

"Smaller parties have a better chance of electing MLAs, bringing new ideas and perspectives to the legislature."

A party with at least five per cent of the vote will be able to get one seat in the legislature.

More women could be elected, as parties would be encouraged to nominate more women to create an equal gender balance on party lists, he said.

In the mixed-member proportional system, each party will offer a list of 10 people who campaign Island-wide, not for any specific district. The number of people on each list who get elected to the legislature depends on the percentage of votes that party gets.

The new system will make legislature more accountable and more representative, Pursey said.

"For the first time, Islanders will be able to vote in elections which will truly represent the will of the people."

Lund said the proportional system will allow more focus on issues affecting women. She said the current system involves "pothole politics," in which local issues affecting residents of a specific district, such as a bad pothole, are given more attention than issues affecting many Islanders, such as family violence and lack of daycare space, etc.

"There's nothing wrong with dealing in local issues. The current system rewards only for dealing with local issues and less rewards for dealing with issues on a more Island-wide basis."

The proposed system will give parties more incentive to focus on these Island-wide issues, she said.

Greenan hopes more people will be on the yes side as they learn more about the system's benefits. He also urged MLAs to respect both the commission's findings and the results of the plebiscite.

He said he doesn't agree with Premier Pat Binns' decision to only consider the results of the plebiscite if 60 per cent of voters support the new system, noting that many majority governments, such as Binn's first government in 1996, came into power with less than 50 per cent of decided voters.

"In a democracy, 50 per cent plus one should rule."

David MacDonald is a student in the Journalism Program at Holland College.

Continued from page 14

year begins and a large amount of PCs connect to the network.

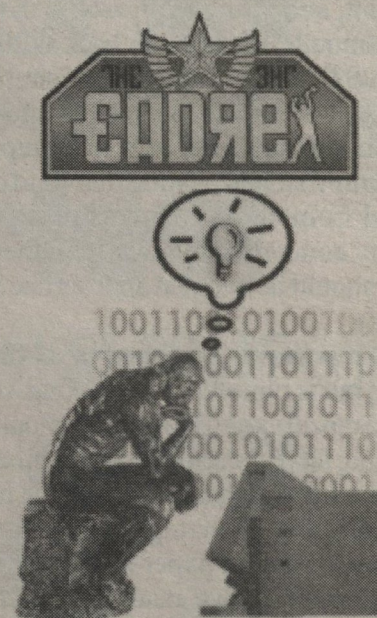
"If parents bought their children a PC from Future Shop and brought it straight to residence, the computer would already be far out of date in security protection when it joins our network," says Gagne, outlining the difficulty of protecting against a flood of incoming computers.

But changes have been slow to take place in the past and remain difficult, even a year after the university overhauled its network.

"Students always get disconnect[ed] in residence and we had a lot of trouble with the Internet at the beginning," says second-year psychology major, Jennifer Dorian. She mentioned similar problems last year on residence, when the Internet had been much slower than normal.

"Plans revolve around [the] academic year, any major changes [will] take effect next September," says Russel, citing difficulties in implementing changes.

-With files from Roman Kharzin



**Did something piss you off?
Want to see more of ...?
Bored out of your mind?**

Then email us!
upeicadre@gmail.com