

<b>The Whig-Standard (Kingston, ON)</b>		Order/Commande
		122359
Date <b>14.04.2007</b>	Circ. <b>28000</b> Page <b>7</b>	<b>1 / 3</b>

# Citizens' assembly poised to pick electoral reform

## Ontario's current system of choosing a government is more than 200 years old

By James Wallace  
Osprey News Network

**T**HE ONTARIO CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY on Electoral Reform is poised this weekend to recommend the province adopt a new system to elect MPPs and political parties at Queen's Park.

Assembly members are almost certain to approve a "Mixed Member Proportional" system that in future would see voters choose both a local MPP to represent them in Ontario's Legislature and a preferred political party.

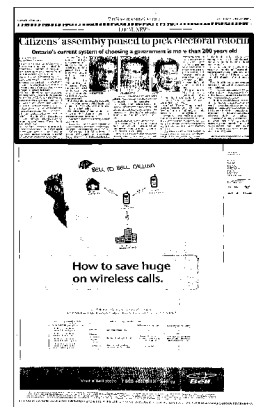
The assembly will vote on the new system today and approve a draft report detailing changes to Ontario's 200-plus-year-old electoral system tomorrow and

will issue a final report and recommendation to the government on May 15.

"Should they recommend that system, they are hoping their final report will make it clear to the people of Ontario just why they chose it and how it looks in total," Assembly Chair George Thomson, who lives on Howe Island, told Osprey News.

If the final report recommends change as expected, Ontario's Liberal government intends to pass referendum legislation that would ask voters this fall to approve or reject the new system.

Ontario currently uses what is called



a "First Past the Post" electoral system where individual MPPs run in local ridings and the party that elects the most wins power and runs the government.

Under the "Mixed Member Proportional" system, every ballot would require two votes – one for a local MPP and one for a political party.

Riding residents could, for example, vote for a Conservative MPP locally but support the Green Party with the second vote on their ballot.

Ontario's electoral map would be redrawn and the legislature expanded to 129 seats from the current 103.

That would include 90 directly elected local MPPs.

However, seat totals in the legislature would also be divided up according to the popular or second vote on the ballot.

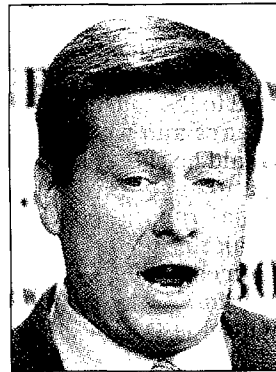
For example, if the Liberals won 40 per cent of the popular vote, they would be awarded 40 per cent of the seats in the legislature.



HAMPTON



McGUINTY



TORY

There would be an additional 39 seats filled by "list" candidates, MPPs chosen by the political parties themselves.

Assembly members have been studying electoral reform since last fall and during the deliberation phase of the meetings, decided that Ontario's electoral system should have three objectives.

It must ensure voters have strong local representation, that voters have more choice in who represents them and that the makeup of the legislature reflects the will of the people.

Under the Mixed Member Proportional system being considered, the Green Party, for example, would win 10 per

cent of the seats in the legislature if they won 10 per cent of the popular vote, even if they failed to win a single MPP at the riding level. Coalition and minority governments would be far more likely outcomes at election time.

Premier Dalton McGuinty promised during

the last election campaign to review electoral reform. The assembly's report will fulfil that promise.

NDP leader Howard Hampton and his party support changing to the new system and admit it could help his party hold more seats in the Legislature.

Hampton said a number of European countries, including France and Germany, have similar proportional systems and suggests they create governments that more fairly reflect voter intentions.

"Yes, it leads to more coalition governments and more consensus building but we think that's a good thing," he said.

Conservative leader John Tory said

he'll wait until he's had a chance to read the report and see the ballot question the Liberal put on the referendum for the Oct. 10 vote.

His caucus members privately say they have a number of concerns about the proposed system, including the creation of "two-tier" MPPs and a succession of ineffective minority governments.

Tory hinted his party may eventually have a problem with the expected recommendation.

"I believe it is more important that we reform the way Parliament works rather than beginning with the way that we elect people here," he said.

"I think you could change the way we elect people here to any method you want but if you don't change the way this place functions, give some real responsibility back to MPPs especially as an overseer of spending and other activities of government, then it won't matter.

"You can elect them any way you like and it won't matter if the way this place works stays the same which in my view is dysfunctional and is ineffective relative to what it used to be and what it should be," Tory said.

*James Wallace is Queen's Park bureau chief for Osprey News.*