

The Daily Post (Lindsay, ON)		Order/Commande
		122359
Date 16.04.2007	Circ. 5800 Page 1	1 / 2

Assembly wants electoral change in Ontario

JAMES WALLACE
Osprey News Network

TORONTO - The Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform is recommending the province adopt a new system to elect MPPs and political parties at Queen's Park.

On the weekend, assembly members approved a Mixed Member Proportional system that in future could see voters choose both a local MPP to represent them in Ontario's legislature and a preferred political party.

The assembly, which includes Marie McLaren representing Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, voted on the new system Saturday and approved a draft report Sunday detailing changes to Ontario's 200-plus year old electoral system. It will issue a final report and recommendation to the government on May 15.

Assembly chair George Thomson told Osprey News the assembly hopes its "final report will make it clear to the people of Ontario just why they chose it and how it looks in total."

Ontario's Liberal government intends to pass referendum legislation that would ask voters this fall to approve or reject the new system.

See: Two . . . on Page 2



The Daily Post (Lindsay, ON)			Order/Commande
			122359
Date 16.04.2007	Circ. 5800	Page 1	2 / 2

Two votes on every ballot

Continued from Page 1

Ontario currently uses what is commonly called a First Past the Post electoral system where individual MPPs run in local ridings and the party that elects the most MPPs 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 their 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 divvied 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.

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.

Ontario's current system does have warts.

"We have a system now where political parties can win 35 per cent of the popular vote, 55 per cent of the seats in the legislature and 100 per cent of the power," said one assembly observer.

Under the Mixed Member Proportion-

al system, 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.

And 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 and the assembly's report will fulfill that promise.

NDP leader Howard Hampton and his party supports changing to the new system and admits 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 Liberals put on the referendum.

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 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."