

Current voting system attacked

By Trevor Pritchard

Standard-Freeholder

CORNWALL

Antiquated and unfair. A simple horse race. A mockery of democracy.

Those were some of the accusations levelled at Ontario's voting system Monday evening, during a public meeting hosted by the Ontario Citizens' Assembly (OCA) at St. Lawrence College.

The provincial assembly, established in June 2006, is travelling to each of Ontario's 103 ridings to determine whether the province's electoral system needs reform.

Based on their findings, the group – made up of one citizen from each riding – could recommend that the issue be put to a referendum before this October's general election.

Many of the speakers derided the current first-past-the-post system – in which the candidate who wins the most votes in each riding goes to Queen's Park – as not accurately representing the voters' will.

"When a map of Ontario is coloured according to party affiliation . . . one often sees blocks of the same party," said Elaine Kennedy, president of the Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry and Grenville chapter of Fair Vote Canada. "This is often not reflective of the percentage of the popular vote, just the unfairness of our present system."

Former Cornwall mayor Brian Lynch called on the province to adopt a "mixed

member" proportional representation system, in which Ontarians would have two votes: one for their local MPP, and one for an open party list of candidates.

Mixed member systems are currently used in such countries as Germany, New Zealand, and Venezuela.

Dunvegan resident Norman Konlup hoped any possible referendum question would simply ask people if they want to change the system – not to choose one specific method.

"To understand what the alternatives are (to the current system) requires a lengthy and concerted program of public education," said Konlup. "Ontario has mandated the OCA do this in six months. It is an impossible task."

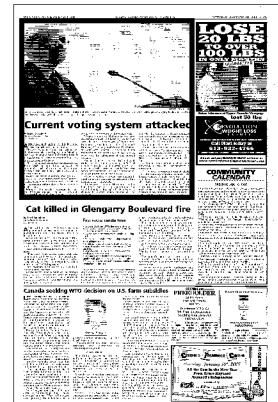
If the OCA calls for a referendum, it would require a "double majority" for a new voting system to become law – 60 per cent approval provincewide, and at least 50 per cent support in 64 of the 103 ridings.

A similar referendum held in British Columbia in 2005 fell just short of that threshold.

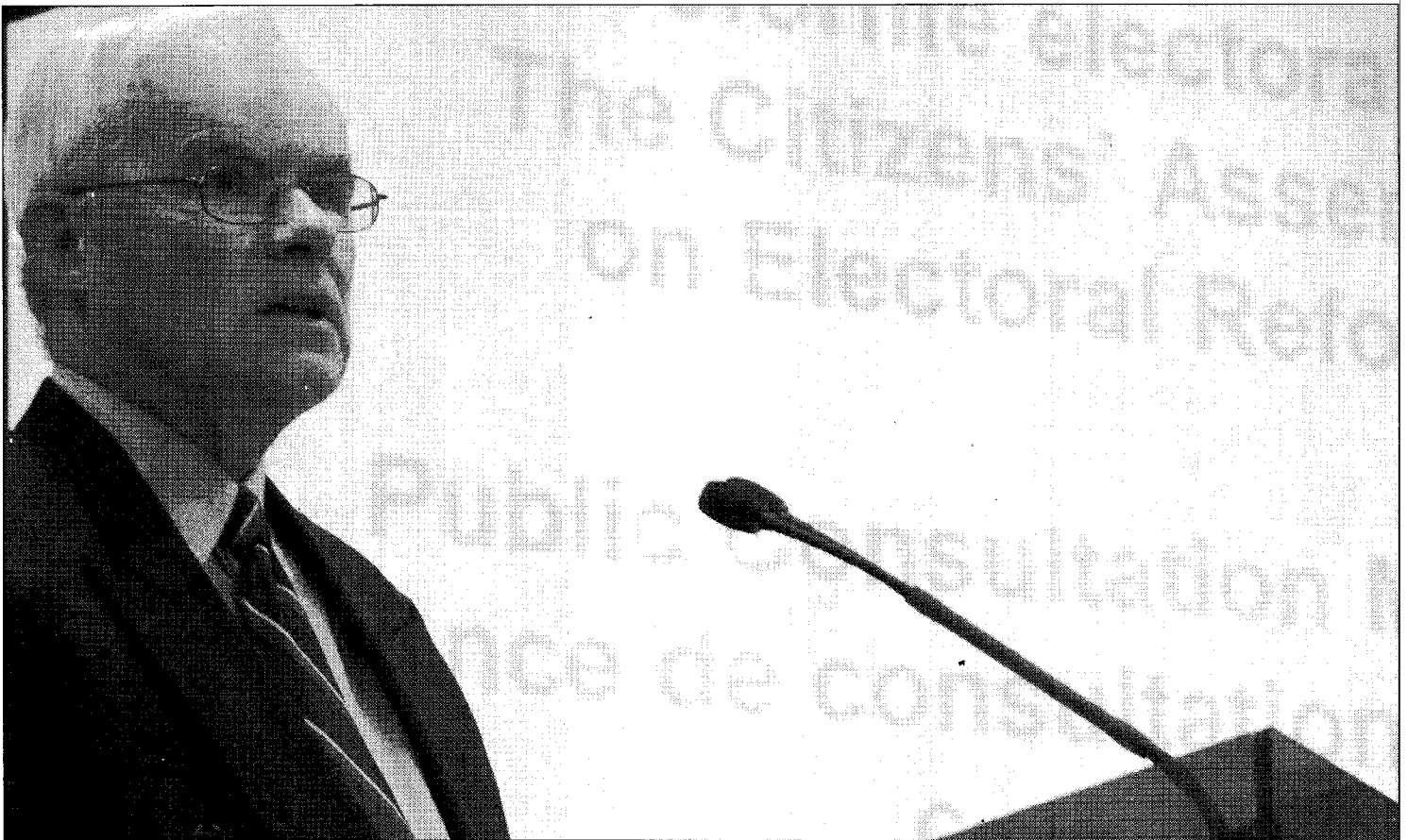
While many speakers spoke of abolishing the current system, former school board trustee Ronald Bergeron told the panelists that getting rid of political parties altogether would solve the problem.

"There are school boards in Toronto with larger budgets than (some provinces) and no one says they must have political parties in order to function," he said.

The OCA will be presenting their recommendations by May 15.



Standard-Freeholder (Cornwall, ON)			Order/Commande
			122359
Date 16.01.2007	Circ. 15080	Page 3	2 / 2



(Staff photo/Pritchard TP07011501)

Former city mayor Brian Lynch addresses members of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly. The provincially-mandated group is trying to determine whether Ontarians want change to the current first-past-the-post electoral system.