

On Seat Vacancies in STV

Last weekend you made considerable progress in designing an STV system for consideration. The Assembly was, however, divided on the question of seat vacancies. This is a complicated design decision in STV systems because there are various options and none is a perfect solution. The ‘footstool’ document outlines four options. We have narrowed these four options down to a few central issues and on Saturday morning you will be asked to make the following decisions in this order:

1. *Should seat vacancies be filled using a by-election, or should some other method be used?*
2. *If some other method is to be used, you will have to choose one of the following three options: recount, replacement list, or appointment.*
3. *Do you want to use a combination of methods? (e.g. recount for the first year after an election and a by-election after that)*

Options

The by-election option gives voters direct influence over which candidates are selected to fill vacant seats. By-elections are, however, comparatively expensive and they do not tend to preserve the proportionality of the original election results.

The other methods—recount, replacement lists, appointment—do not give voters direct influence over which candidates are selected to fill vacant seats. On the other hand, these options are comparatively inexpensive and tend to preserve the proportionality of the original election results.

For more detailed information about each of these options please refer to the “footstool” document.

What you’ve said...

The following is a set of notes taken on Weekend 3 of the Deliberation Phase during a plenary discussion about STV seat vacancies. These excerpts will give you some sense of where your fellow assembly members stand on this issue. These notes do not represent a full transcript of the discussion but instead highlight some of the points made during the discussions.

I thought that if you had a party person, you could just choose another party person but if you had an independent person then you could have a by-election.

You just look at the original results and choose who’s next in line. The only argument I see against that...is if you’re a Liberal and your person is out for whatever reason and the next person is Conservative...it’s cheap, you’re not running additional polls for a by-election. At the end of it, I’ll go and vote in a regular election, but I don’t care about a by-election...just give me the next guy.

In order to have a by-election you have to use a different kind of election. That will confuse people even more.

We agreed to a recount, but we felt that if it was over 2 years later voters might change their minds because of what the government's been doing, then we'd go to a by-election. I agree with the last person because you never know what will happen between an election and a by-election.

By-elections perform a useful function: they give voters a chance to give the government a 'report card' between elections.

What interests me is after the issue of size of legislature the next one that keeps coming up is cost. From my point of view continue with a by-election that's the way we do things now. Democracy costs money, people have died for us to have the right to vote. There's a long history and principles, not just in Canada, if someone ceases to serve you, you look at the way things are.

If someone's fallen from grace, I think people should have the opportunity to say they don't want him there. Cost shouldn't be an issue. The second place guy may no longer be eligible...he may have got himself into jail...and suddenly you've got someone in jail who's an elected MPP.

If there are only 6 to 12 months left at the end of the term would you still want to have a recount? If somebody went to jail is he still eligible to be elected?

You could use another example...if someone's left the country...we'll have to find out about eligibility, what behaviour disqualifies a candidate.

If somebody's running for election, they run at the time of the election, they're not necessarily going to be on standby for 4 years.

I have a problem with a by-election because then you're using AV and the whole point of STV is proportionality.

*When you pick the next runner up that runner up was put there by the people. If it's 6 months to the next election, would you call another election?
Typically no, but that would be up to the government at the time.*

When we vote we assume the persons we vote in would be there. It's hardly undemocratic to select the next runner up, if you're concerned about the behaviour of the runner up you can have a morality clause.

*We decided for the replacement list because that person who takes the place was seen on election day and assessed along with the original winner and has already been approved in absence...
So you'd know who the replacement would be at the time of the election, and that'd be a factor in your vote.*

Perhaps if you know you're going to be a replacement you're going to conduct yourself in a way that's appropriate.

I like the idea of leaving it vacant, because if you have three people representing you and for whatever reason one person is gone you still have two people representing you. It doesn't cost any money and you don't have to go back and vote.