

Backgrounder: Democratic Reform

Earlier this year, an investigation in the *Globe and Mail* uncovered allegations of illegal donations made by lobbyists on behalf of their corporate clients. An RCMP investigation into the allegations is currently underway.¹ B.C. has some of the weakest electoral finance laws in the country. Practices of cash-for-access fundraising and the massive influence of corporate and union donations in our political system have drawn international scrutiny.²

A B.C. Green government would make substantial reforms to campaign finance rules, the lobbying industry and government advertising. We would also introduce proportional representation and make other democratic reforms in order to ensure British Columbians are best represented by the officials they elect.

Political Finance Reform

1. A B.C. Green government will ban monetary and non-monetary contributions from non-individual entities (including corporations and unions) and non-residents of BC.
 - The BC Green Party imposed its own ban on non-individual contributions in September, 2016.
2. A B.C. Green government will place annual limits on individual contributions that are in line with current federal limits.
 - Under federal law, only individuals are allowed to make contributions to political entities according to strict annual contribution limits.
 - The maximum amount an individual can contribute to a federal registered political party in 2017 is \$1,550.

¹<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/investigation-of-political-donations-in-bc-referred-to-rcmp/article34266086/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/world/canada/british-columbia-christy-clark.html>

- The maximum amount an individual can contribute in total to all registered associations, nomination contestants and candidates of each registered party is \$1,550.
3. A B.C. Green government will ban members of the Executive Council (Cabinet) from engaging in partisan fundraising activities while in office and explore similar restrictions for all MLAs.
- This commitment specifically addresses cash-for-access fundraising practices that are currently rampant in British Columbia.

Lobbying Reform

1. A B.C. Green government will institute a multi-year prohibition on lobbying for former Senior Public Office Holders (SPOH), similar to federal prohibitions in the Lobbying Act, 2008.
- Senior Public Office Holders include:
 - Ministers of the Crown or Ministers of State;
 - Political staff in the offices of Ministers of the Crown or Ministers of State;
 - And senior executives such as Deputy Ministers, Chief Executive Officers, Associate Deputy Ministers, Assistant Deputy Ministers and others of similar position and rank.
 - Former SPOHs would be prohibited from:
 - Working as consultant lobbyists;
 - Working for an organization and carrying out lobbying activities on behalf of that organization; or
 - Working for a corporation if lobbying constitutes a significant part of their work on behalf of the corporation.
2. A B.C. Green government will increase penalties for violations of the Lobbyists Registration Act, similar to federal standards in the Lobbying Act, 2008.
- Penalties would include:
 - Financial penalties;
 - Bans from work in the lobbying industry;
 - Incarceration.

3. A B.C. Green government will conduct a comprehensive review of the Lobbyists Registration Act, including the Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists' mandate, to ensure that our democratic institutions and the interests of British Columbians are adequately protected from the influence of special interests.

Electoral Reform

1. A B.C. Green government will introduce a proportional voting system in time for the 2021 provincial general election.
 - Many analysts say that the “first past the post system” reinforces feelings of disempowerment amongst citizens, because it is possible for a party that receives 40% of the vote to form government, and a party that receives 30% of the vote to get few or no seats.
 - This feeling of disconnection leads to low voter turnout, and a lack of trust in politicians and the system. Democratic reform will enhance representation, and encourage collaboration between political parties.
 - Consultation will take place on the exact form of proportional representation to be adopted.
2. A B.C. Green government will lower the legal voting age to 16.
 - Studies indicate that those who vote the first time they are eligible to do so are more likely to continue voting throughout their lifetime than those who do not vote the first time they are eligible.³
 - Lowering the voting age to 16 will mean that youth may be able to vote when they are still in high school and taking civics courses that will educate them in politics and our parliamentary system of government. They will be more informed and engaged in our democratic process the first time they vote. Schools may also coordinate their own “get out the vote” program for eligible students in conjunction with existing “mock votes” and debates for ineligible students.

³<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21716030-young-voters-are-becoming-disillusioned-elections-catch-them-early-and-teach-them-value>

3. A B.C. Green government will change the fixed date of provincial general elections to October.

- Moving the election date to October will enable the budget to be passed and be a more efficient use of public sector resources.
- The *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* fixes the third Tuesday in February as the date when budget estimates must be tabled.
- Since the budget estimates debate often lasts until June, the budget tabled in the February immediately prior to the fixed election date of the second Tuesday in May does not receive royal assent prior to dissolution.
- This has several ramifications:
 - The government must run on interim supply until the new government is able to introduce and pass a new budget;
 - Public servants' time and effort is wasted preparing a budget that will never be passed;
 - The incumbent government is able to use the budget as an election tool which signals their platform for the upcoming election.

Transparency & Accountability

1. A B.C. Green government will establish a public watchdog to oversee government advertising and communications.

- Government has a need to communicate with the public about its programs and services, and about how public money is being used.
- In the period before an election, there is the risk that government will use this advertising for partisan purposes. This happens because it is difficult to define in legal terms what is and what is not "partisan".
- The public watchdog will act as a neutral body that reviews government advertising and communications to ensure that expenditures are reasonable and serving the public good, as well as review complaints about advertising.

2. A B.C. Green government will work with the Auditor General of BC to develop an annual performance scorecard for government.

- The annual performance scorecard will chart the government's performance in transparency, accountability, the management of the assets and the business of the province.
- The annual performance scorecard will give the public an independent assessment of how the government is doing and how it can improve the representation of and delivery of services to British Columbians.

3. A B.C. Green government will introduce legislation to establish a Provincial Budget Officer to provide independent and objective analysis to the Legislative Assembly on the state of the province's finances, the government's estimates and economic trends and to estimate the financial cost of any proposal for matters within the Legislative Assembly's jurisdiction.

- The Provincial Budget Officer (PBO) would be modelled after the Federal Parliamentary Budget Officer, and would be accountable to the Legislative Assembly.
- The PBO's mandate will be to provide independent, authoritative and non-partisan financial and economic analysis. The PBO will support MLAs and legislative committees with objective research and analysis on fiscal and economic matters.
- The PBO will be appointed for a term of seven years.
- The PBO will have access to relevant information within departments, agencies as well as Crown corporations to better inform the economic and fiscal analysis provided to Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Committees; and
- The PBO will cost election platform proposals at the request of political parties to provide a non-partisan assessment of a party's fiscal plans.