SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

FIRST REPORT OF THE
SECOND SESSION SIXTY-FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO
THE WHITE PAPER ON DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL
- A PLEBISCITE QUESTION -

April 15, 2016
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal received its mandate on July 9, 2015, to guide public engagement and make recommendations in response to the White Paper on Democratic Renewal. The committee presented its interim report to the Legislative Assembly on November 27, 2015.

Since that time, the committee has continued its study of electoral systems, and hosted a series of six public consultations in communities across the province in February and March 2016. The committee focused on further discussion, comparison and evaluation of electoral systems with the goal of refining both the format and the content of a plebiscite question.

The public engagement and consultation efforts placed an emphasis on four options for an electoral system for Prince Edward Island. These were the first-past-the-post system with the addition of seats for leaders of political parties which receive a certain threshold in the popular vote; the preferential ballot as a method of selecting members of the Legislative Assembly; mixed member proportional representation; and dual member proportional representation. Prince Edward Island’s current first-past-the-post system was also discussed. The committee presented a number of potential formats for the plebiscite question at these consultations and on its website. Participants were surveyed as to their preferences, and additional comments were collected.

Along with input received through the community consultations, the committee received written submissions, emails, web comments, and social media responses, all of which contributed to consideration and analysis of a plebiscite question, in terms of both structure and composition. Throughout the process, the committee remained sensitive to the expressed opinions from the public of Prince Edward Island that a plebiscite question must contain choices that suit the province’s specific political and social environment.

In its interim report, the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal recommended that the plebiscite be supervised by Elections PEI, and Elections PEI have the responsibility of exploring ways of conducting a plebiscite, which should include consideration of alternative methods of voting for ease of access and convenience of the public; that the right to vote in a plebiscite be extended to those Island residents aged 16-17 years; that a plebiscite take place during November 2016, and be preceded by a six month educational campaign on the options to appear on the ballot. Building on those recommendations, and based on community
consultations and extensive consideration, the committee is pleased to present the following recommendations to the Legislative Assembly:

1. That a plebiscite question take the form of a multi-option ballot listing five electoral systems, including the province’s current system, to be ranked by a voter in order of preference. The committee further recommends that voters be free to rank as many, or as few, of the five options as they wish.

2. That the following electoral system options be presented on a plebiscite ballot, in alphabetical order:

   Dual Member Proportional Representation
   First-past-the-post (the current system)
   First-past-the-post Plus Leaders
   Mixed Member Proportional Representation
   Preferential Voting

3. That specific parameters be considered for two of the above-listed options:

   (a) In the case of First-past-the-post Plus Leaders, that a threshold of 10% in the popular vote be achieved by political parties in order to assign a seat to party leaders.

   (b) In the case of Mixed Member Proportional Representation, that open lists of candidates be incorporated into a model of mixed member proportional representation, so that voters have a degree of choice among the candidates presented by way of party lists. The committee also recommends that the fraction of seats comprising the proportional component be approximately one-third of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly; and, further, that these seats be compensatory or “top up” seats.

4. That Elections PEI be tasked with ensuring that voters throughout the province receive clear and impartial information about a plebiscite voting process, the date of a plebiscite, a plebiscite question, and the content of the choices appearing on a plebiscite ballot.
5. That electronic voting be utilized in a plebiscite to maximize both access and convenience for the electorate, provided that standards for security, accuracy, privacy, integrity, cost-effectiveness, and auditability can be assured.

6. That a plebiscite question be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank the following electoral system options in your order of preference, 1 through 5 (with “1” being your most preferred):</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ Dual Member Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ First-past-the-post (the current system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ First-past-the-post Plus Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Mixed Member Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Preferential Voting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beyond consideration of a plebiscite question, other matters relating to democratic renewal were brought before the committee and will be included in upcoming reports to the members of the Legislative Assembly as further input is sought and recommendations are finalized.

The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal thanks all of those who attended the community consultations, submitted written comments, filled in surveys, and in many other ways contributed to the committee’s work in clarifying a plebiscite question. It was evident throughout the process that the people of Prince Edward Island remain committed to a high level of democratic ideals, and take pride in their participation and involvement in the vibrant political life of this province.
INTRODUCTION

Mandate
By virtue of the unanimous adoption of Motion 33, debated on July 9, 2015, the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal was created and directed to guide public engagement and make recommendations in response to the White Paper on Democratic Renewal.

The text of the motion follows:

WHEREAS there will be an Electoral Boundaries Commission established in 2016 as required by the Electoral Boundaries Act;

AND WHEREAS it is time to review our current democratic and electoral processes;

AND WHEREAS the government of Prince Edward Island has released a White Paper on Democratic Renewal;

AND WHEREAS engagement with the public and persons with expertise is of the utmost importance when considering the topic of democratic renewal;

AND WHEREAS it is desirable to accurately define the questions to be considered by the public;

AND WHEREAS it is desirable to have considered advice and recommendations regarding changes to current democratic or electoral processes;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that a five person Special Committee of the Legislative Assembly, consisting of Jordan Brown (Charlottetown-Brighton) (Chair), Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker (Leader of the Third Party), Hon. Paula Biggar (Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy), Janice Sherry (Summerside-Wilmot), and Sidney MacEwen (Morell-Mermaid), be created to guide public engagement and make recommendations in response to the White Paper on Democratic Renewal.
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Calendar of activities – January to April 2016
Members of the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal participated in six in camera meetings in the January to April time frame. The committee met on January 12, 2016, to plan its work for the upcoming months; and on March 15, March 24, March 29, April 7, and April 12, 2016, to discuss its report to the Legislative Assembly. A total of six community consultations, with a focus on a plebiscite question in terms of content and format, were hosted in communities across Prince Edward Island. In addition, the committee held one public meeting on March 1, 2016, to receive submissions on topics related to democratic renewal, specifically with regard to election financing.

Beyond the scheduled public meetings, the chair of the committee made presentations at the University of Prince Edward Island (Political Science 202, Politics and Government of Prince Edward Island); the Rotary Club of Hillsborough, Charlottetown; and at the District 22 and District 18 Liberal Association Annual General Meetings. Committee member Sidney MacEwen spoke on the topic of democratic renewal at the provincial Annual General Meeting of the Prince Edward Island Progressive Conservative Party on October 24, 2015. Committee member Peter Bevan-Baker attended a number of meetings in the late March time frame contributing to the discussion on democratic renewal: March 22 (Clyde River), March 26 (New Dominion), March 28 (Emyvale), and March 30, 2016 (Bonshaw).

Community consultations
The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal embarked on a second series of public consultations across the province in February and March 2016. Information on five electoral options was presented for public response and comment. These were the current first-past-the-post system with the addition of seats for leaders of political parties which receive a certain threshold in the popular vote; the preferential ballot as a method of selecting members of the Legislative Assembly; mixed member proportional representation; dual member proportional representation; and the current first-past-the-post system.

The goal of these consultations was two-fold: to solicit opinion as to the format of a plebiscite question and to determine which electoral systems would appear on a plebiscite ballot for the consideration of voters.

The committee incorporated suggestions received at the first round of community meetings, held in the fall of 2015, to make the events as welcoming and inclusive as possible. At each
community consultation, the chairs were arranged in a circle, with committee members seated among others in attendance. The chair offered a brief introduction to the work of the committee, following which a video was shown giving a high-level overview of the options under consideration for inclusion on a plebiscite ballot. The remainder of the meeting was given over to informal comment, questions and responses on a variety of topics related to electoral systems and plebiscites. Participants were asked to complete a short survey on four options for a plebiscite question, and asked for other comments they might wish to put forward. There were no formal presentations, and pre-registering was not required. Feedback from members of the public on this arrangement was positive.

The committee hosted a series of six such meetings in communities across Prince Edward Island in February and March 2016, as follows:

- Tuesday, February 9 (7 pm), Murphy’s Community Centre, Charlottetown
- Thursday, February 11 (7 pm), Morell Regional High School, Morell
- Tuesday, February 23 (7 pm), Central Queens United Church, Hunter River
- Thursday, February 25 (7 pm), Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 6, Tignish
- Saturday, February 27 (2 pm), Loyalist Lakeview Resort, Summerside
- Tuesday, March 1 (7 pm), Murphy’s Community Centre, Charlottetown

The community consultations, along with the more formal meeting held on March 1, 2016, provided a forum for dialogue, debate and deliberation among those interested in democratic renewal. As well, additional written briefs, letters, comments and survey responses from interested and concerned residents of Prince Edward Island, and beyond, were received during this time frame. Many people exhibited a high degree of commitment, attending multiple consultations and communicating with the committee throughout the process. A complete listing of those providing input to date, a total of 190 identified individuals and groups, is attached to this report as Appendix 1. Attendance at the February and March community consultations totaled 170 persons. Of these, just over 100 completed the survey on the format of a plebiscite question. Overall attendance at public meetings and events has totaled close to 1,000 persons since the beginning of the consultation phase of the committee’s work on democratic renewal.
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Communications
At the beginning of the consultation phase of its work, the committee launched a comprehensive communications plan to ensure it gained the broadest possible public input to fulfill its mandate. These efforts continued throughout the second phase of the committee’s work in the first quarter of 2016, and utilized a balance of traditional and social media to maximize exposure and opportunities for the public to become engaged in the process.

Print advertising

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Community Forums: Your Views on a Plebiscite Question
Hosted by the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal

You are invited to join the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal for a discussion and informative exchange on a potential plebiscite question to determine how Islanders elect Members to the Legislative Assembly.

Schedule of Community Forums:
- Tuesday, February 9 (7 pm)
  - Murphy's Community Centre, Charlottetown

- Thursday, February 11 (7 pm)
  - Morell Regional High School, Morell

- Tuesday, February 23 (7 pm)
  - Central Queens United Church, Hunter River

- Thursday, February 25 (7 pm)
  - Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 6, Tignish

- Saturday, February 27 (2 pm)
  - Loyalist Lakeview Resort, Summerside

- Tuesday, March 1 (7 pm)
  - Murphy's Community Centre, Charlottetown

For further information on the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal please refer to the committee's website at www.assembly.pe.ca/democracerenewal or call 902-364-5970 or toll-free 1-877-314-5518.

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Forum communautaire:
votre opinion au sujet d'une question plébiscitaire
Présenté par le Comité spécial sur le renouvellement démocratique

Vous êtes invité à vous joindre au Comité spécial sur le renouvellement démocratique pour participer à une discussion et à un échange informatif sur une question plébiscitaire potentielle en vue de déterminer comment les Insulaires élisent les membres de l'Assemblée législative.

Horaire des forums communautaires:
- Mardi 9 février (19 h)
  - Murphy's Community Centre, Charlottetown

- Jeudi 11 février (19 h)
  - École Morell Regional High, Morell

- Mardi 23 février (19 h)
  - Église unie Central Queens, Hunter River

- Jeudi 25 février (19 h)
  - Hôtel 6 de la Légion royale canadienne, Tignish

- Samedi 27 février (14 h)
  - Loyalist Lakeview Resort, Summerside

- Mardi 1er mars (19 h)
  - Murphy's Community Centre, Charlottetown

Pour obtenir plus d'information sur le Comité spécial sur le renouvellement démocratique, veuillez consulter le site Web du Comité www.assembly.pe.ca/democracerenewal ou composer le 902-368-5970 ou le 1-877-314-5518 (sans frais).

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www.assembly.pe.ca
Additionally, the public was invited to respond to other issues put forward in the White Paper on Democratic Reform: modernizing the practices of the Legislative Assembly, election financing, the role and responsibilities of members, among others. These advertisements appeared in The Guardian and Journal Pioneer on February 20 and February 24, 2016; and in The Eastern Graphic, West Prince Graphic and, in a French-language version, in La Voix Acadienne on February 24, 2016.

Digital media
Social networking tools, specifically Facebook and Twitter, were utilized to reach target audiences. Facebook posts promoting the schedule of community consultations were boosted in advance of each meeting, which proved to be an effective and low-cost strategy to target residents in specific geographic areas. Facebook “likes” during this time period totaled 165. More significantly, the number of Facebook “shares,” which are more visible and encourage engagement, was 112. Twitter total impressions reached 11,639 over the same time period.

Content continued to be added to the website of the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal (www.assembly.pe.ca/democraticrenewal) including news releases, advertisements, the schedule of the 2016 community consultations, additional reference materials, and information about electoral systems. Materials provided to the committee as part of the public
consultations, or received as formal briefs, were posted to this website, as were transcripts of the public meetings. Visitors to the site were able to fill in an on-line form, providing brief comment to the committee on aspects of the committee’s work and, more generally, democratic renewal. In addition, a short survey requesting feedback with regard to the preferred format for a plebiscite question was also available on the website.

**Video**
The committee’s website featured a brief video which outlined a number of electoral systems, including the current, first-past-the-post system. The script, in both French and English, was also available on the website. Produced by Communications PEI with development input from the staff of the Legislative Assembly, the video was screened at the community consultations. The script was narrated by Jeff Collins, Sessional Lecturer with the Department of Political Science, University of Prince Edward Island. An introduction was done by committee chair, Jordan Brown. Response was generally positive and a number of suggestions for improvement were offered by viewers. The committee notes that this was a first for a legislative special committee, and thanks all those involved with the video’s production.

**Coverage – traditional media**
Print and broadcast media played a central role in communicating the work of the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal to the public of Prince Edward Island. Interest on the part of local media, print and radio was strong in the January to March 2016 timeframe. In total, 47 articles were published informing the public about democratic renewal, a plebiscite and related matters. Concurrently, *The Globe and Mail* published a series of articles in January 2016 which focused on electoral reform which, while the work of the committee was not directly referenced, contributed to a high-level of interest provincially in this issue.
DEFINING A PLEBISCITE QUESTION

Format for a plebiscite question
The details of a structure for, and content of, a plebiscite question occupied much of the committee’s time in early 2016. Throughout its consideration, the committee focused on one principle: that a plebiscite question should allow the people of Prince Edward Island to decide what kind of electoral system they want. The White Paper on Democratic Renewal proposed that a plebiscite question, to be defined by the Special Committee, be constructed as a preferential ballot on three voting options: the current system, a preferential ballot, and proportional representation. The committee was guided by the instructions in the White Paper on Democratic Renewal, but not constrained by them as it focused on the content and format of a plebiscite question.

The committee concentrated first on a proposed format for a plebiscite question, recognizing that content would necessarily depend on the chosen configuration.

In addressing the format of a plebiscite question, the committee considered a number of alternatives: that voters should be presented with a question measuring their desire for change; that a plebiscite question be binary in nature, offering a choice between the current system and one alternative; or that a plebiscite question should be of two parts, the first to broadly gauge public opinion and, for those who desire change, survey their preferences; or that voters should be asked to rank their electoral systems from a list that includes the current system.

Five options for structuring a plebiscite question were considered by the committee:

1. A general one part question assessing the public’s desire for a change from the current system or, phrased in the alternative, assessing the public’s desire to retain the current system;
2. A specific one part question offering a choice between the current system and one other system;
3. A two part question in which the first part assesses the public’s desire for a change from, or retention of, the current system, followed by a list of electoral system options from which a single preference would be selected;
4. A two part question in which the first part assesses the public’s desire for change from, or retention of, the current system, followed by a list of electoral system options which would be ranked in order of preference (with “1” being the most preferred, “2” being the second most preferred, and so on);
5. A list of electoral system options which would be ranked in order of preference (with “1” being the most preferred, “2” being the second most preferred, and so on).

Each option possessed advantages and disadvantages, all of which were thoroughly explored and debated.

The committee considered the merits of having more choices on a plebiscite ballot, as compared to an “either-or” decision and, as a result, discarded the options that were designed to achieve a simple majority (that is, option 1 and option 2).

From the remaining options, the committee considered which would be the most inclusive and democratic. Further, the committee discussed which format would offer the most accurate analysis of voter opinion, and which option might be most likely to engage the public of Prince Edward Island. Accordingly, it was decided not to proceed with option 3, which offered voters a single choice from a list of alternatives.

The committee gave serious consideration option 4, a two part question in which the first part assesses the public’s desire for change from, or retention of, the current system, followed by a list of electoral system options which would be ranked in order of preference (with “1” being the most preferred, “2” being the second most preferred, and so on). However, as compared to the Option 5, a list of electoral system options to be ranked, the committee concluded that the opportunity for engagement would not be as great, as a voter could simply respond to the first part of the question while leaving the second part of the question unanswered. Accordingly, the committee recommends a plebiscite question be a list of electoral system options to be ranked in order of preference by a voter.

Next, the committee gave careful thought, and discussed at length, the number of electoral system choices that might appear on a plebiscite ballot. While opinion was mixed on the ideal number of alternatives to present to the public of Prince Edward Island, the committee concluded that a multi-option ballot of five electoral systems, including the province’s current system, would be the best approach to allow voters to express fully their choices. Each option represents an electoral choice that satisfies, in some degree, what participants in the consultations identified as being important, for example, reflecting the wishes of voters, producing majority governments, representing the interests of minorities, and so on.

The committee acknowledges that there are a variety of forms of multi-option voting. In some, voters are free to select only one preference; in others, a voter may choose two or more options from a list; and in others, voters are required to rank all of the options. While the committee
encourages all voters to cast a full slate of preferences, it has decided to recommend that voters be free to rank any number of options.

Content of a plebiscite question
The world of electoral systems is crowded and complex. There is no simple answer to which electoral system is best: all systems have strengths and weaknesses. While no one system can deliver equally on all desired outcomes, the committee relied on input received over its seven-month consultation phase, conducted in communities across the province, to determine which options to present by way of a plebiscite.

Principles of proportionality and fairness, diversity of representation, accountability of individual members to their constituents, increased voter influence, effective government, robust opposition, and high voter participation were identified as being important results of an electoral system. The committee sought to present a range of choices by way of a plebiscite question that would encompass these goals, and permit the electorate of the province to determine its democratic future. Rather than an in-depth exploration of the complexities of each system, consideration was given, in more general terms, to those systems that would satisfy the principles of representation, transparency and accountability.

As such, the committee recommends that the following electoral system options be included on a plebiscite ballot:

- **Dual Member Proportional Representation** is a proposed alternative to other systems that result in proportionality. In summary, this electoral system calls for a transformation of single-member districts into dual-member districts. Districts would be amalgamated to accommodate this. At the ballot box, voters would still mark a single “x” on the ballot, as they now do for the current electoral system in the province, but the vote cast would be for two ranked candidates running under the same party banner. The first seat is assigned by plurality; and the second seat is assigned to achieve a proportional result at the provincial level. This means that the first listed candidate on the ballot wins a seat in the same manner as the current first-past-the-post electoral system. The most popular candidate in every district joins the legislature. The second seat for each district is allocated to make the province-wide outcome of an election proportional. Historically, Prince Edward Island has some experience with dual member ridings. Prior to 1996, the province had 16 dual-member ridings, an arrangement which dated from the abolition of the Legislative Council in 1893. While the structure of dual member proportional representation differs significantly, Islanders would be familiar with the concept of being able to bring issues to either, or both, of their two district representatives.
o **First-past-the-post (the current system)**, also known as single member plurality, is used for elections in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and India. For its supporters, the main advantage to this system is that it is a simple and straightforward method of electing members to the Legislative Assembly, each of whom represents one electoral district. Voters indicate their support for one of the candidates; and the seat is awarded to the person who received the most votes, but not necessarily the majority of the votes. The result is that the distribution of seats among the various political parties does not reflect the distribution of the popular vote, and there can be a large number of voters, often a majority, who do not support the winning candidate. For proponents of proportional systems, the cost in terms of fairness to third and fourth parties is not outweighed by the benefit of simplicity. Nonetheless, a first-past-the-post electoral system supports a central feature of political life in this province, that is, constituents have a single, recognizable member of the Legislative Assembly to approach with their concerns.

o **First-past-the-post Plus Leaders** is based on the province’s current electoral system with the addition of seats awarded to leaders of political parties which receive a certain threshold in the popular vote. This means that the popular vote would count towards electing party leaders. Their constituencies would be the entire province, and they would not run in a local district. The committee recognizes that this may mean that the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly may fluctuate, depending on the levels of support for various political parties, but believes that this incremental change to the electoral system has the potential to bring a diversity of voices to the legislative chamber. The committee recommends that a threshold of 10% in the popular vote for a political party be reached in order for its leader to receive a seat.

o **Mixed Member Proportional Representation** combines elements of Prince Edward Island’s current electoral system with proportional representation. It is a hybrid system which presents voters with a double ballot. One vote is for a selection from a list of candidates in a single member district; it is identical to first-past-the-post. The second vote is for a political party, and those seats are filled by candidates presented on a list from a political party. The second vote allocates seats to parties by attempting to compensate for any disproportionate results in the first-past-the-post constituency elections. The more evenly divided the first-past-the-post seats and the party list seats, the more proportional the result will be in the Legislative Assembly. A mixed member proportional system combines the familiarity of first-past-the-post with the fairness of allocating seats on the basis of the popular vote. During its consultations, the committee
received a number of submissions from proponents of mixed member proportional representation. In general, there was support for what is termed “open lists” in structuring the system which means that voters cast their ballots directly for candidates put forward by the political parties. In contrast, “closed lists” are those where the political party determines the order in which its candidates receive seats. The committee concurs that open lists are preferable and recommends that open lists be incorporated into a model of mixed member proportional representation for the province so that voters have a degree of choice among the candidates presented by way of party lists.

- **Preferential Voting**, sometimes referred to as alternative voting, may be employed as a method of filling single seat constituencies. The ballot structure differs from first-past-the-post, in that voters express their preferences by ranking the candidates on the ballot. They write a “1” beside their first choice, “2” beside their second choice, and so on. To win a seat, a candidate must receive the majority of votes cast (that is, 50% + 1). If no majority exists after the first count, the lowest placed candidate is eliminated and that candidate’s votes are redistributed in accordance with the second preferences on those ballot. This continues until a candidate receives a majority. This system is not designed to produce a proportional result, but does allow for a greater degree of voter choice in the final outcome than does first-past-the-post.
EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Public Education Phase
As was the case throughout the public consultations held in the fall of 2015, many participants emphasized the need for a comprehensive public education campaign on options for electoral systems prior to a plebiscite taking place. As examples of this, the committee heard comments such as:

“Education needs to be extensive and interactive if this whole exercise is to mean anything.” (participant, community consultation, February 11, 2016);

“A substantial education exercise is absolutely critical if we are to get an informed result in any plebiscite.” (participant, community consultation, February 11, 2016);

“[We] need lots of public education before the plebiscite so we understand fully the options, along with the pros and cons of each, and the implications in them.” (participant, community consultation, February 27, 2016);

“It should be possible to educate the people so that this small province could be an example to the whole of Canada that we know what we are doing politically.” (participant, community consultation, February 27, 2016);

“So much depends on the level of public awareness and understanding of the implications of their choices. Take the time to educate the public. This is critical to a fair outcome on the plebiscite.” (participant, community consultation, March 1, 2016);

“[I] would recommend taking the time so as to understand the pros and cons of each system as it would apply to PEI. This requires the time to educate Islanders with more complete and easily understood explanations.” (participant, community consultation, March 1, 2016).

The committee endorses these suggestions, and recommends that a public education campaign be an essential focus of the efforts leading up to a plebiscite. The goal should be to provide useful knowledge to the public on the electoral systems which appear on a plebiscite ballot. It is the committee’s intention that this information will be accessible and be offered in a variety of formats.
The committee discussed a number of approaches to an education campaign to be conducted in advance of a plebiscite, including the importance of maintaining a neutral position in communicating with the public. As a result, the committee recommends that Elections PEI be tasked with ensuring that voters throughout the province receive clear and impartial information about a plebiscite process, the date of a plebiscite, a plebiscite question, and the content of the choices appearing on a plebiscite ballot. A multi-pronged approach will be necessary, as will sufficient time to organize and conduct an educational campaign. Components should include, but not be limited to, advertising on television, radio and in print; an internet strategy including a website, interactive electoral models and digital advertising; a telephone information hotline; information pieces distributed by mail; and public outreach activities.

Timely and accessible information will foster debate with regard to the electoral options, providing voters with the necessary background they need to make informed choices. This is the ultimate goal of the committee. Proponents of the various alternatives are encouraged to complement the process with public discussion with regard to the merits of each electoral system.

The committee remains keenly interested in this pre-plebiscite phase and proposes to fulfill an advisory role for Elections PEI in the conduct of the education campaign.
OTHER MATTERS

Voter participation in a plebiscite
While the committee is not putting forward a recommendation for a specific threshold for voter participation in a plebiscite, it has reviewed the matter carefully. In general terms, the committee believes the outcome of a plebiscite must be considered in concert with voter turnout, and, in reaching this conclusion, compared the results of two provincial plebiscites. The 1988 vote with regard to a “fixed link” saw a 65% voter participation, with 59.5% of those voting in favour; while the 2005 plebiscite on electoral reform saw a 33% voter turnout, with just over 36% voting for a change in the electoral model.

The committee strongly encourages Islanders to learn about the various options being proposed for this province’s democratic future, to become engaged in the debate, and to vote in a plebiscite. A clear expression of the will of the population of Prince Edward Island will be the result.

Other issues – election financing and other reform measures
The committee received recommendations on a number of issues beyond the plebiscite question and preferred electoral systems. These included improvements to the role of the elected member, the advantages and disadvantages of political party activities, the way and to what degree election campaigns are financed, strategies to involve more women in public life, and improvements to the parliamentary calendar. The committee reports that it will continue its consideration of these issues, and others as raised in the White Paper on Democratic Reform and put forward by Prince Edward Islanders, and submit recommendations to the Legislative Assembly in its next report, anticipated to be in the fall sitting of 2016.

Thanks to contributors
The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal is grateful for the input and involvement of all of those who have contributed to the consideration of Prince Edward Island’s democratic future. It was clear throughout the consultation period that the people of this province constitute a vibrant political community where citizens respect each other and are active participants in democracy.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal is pleased to make recommendations to the members of the Legislative Assembly in several areas: the format of a plebiscite question; the content of a plebiscite question; and a public education campaign to precede a plebiscite. The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal recommends:

1. That a plebiscite question take the form of a multi-option ballot listing five electoral systems, including the province’s current system, to be ranked by a voter in order of preference. The committee further recommends that voters be free to rank as many, or as few, of the five options as they wish.

2. That the following electoral system options be presented on a plebiscite ballot, in alphabetical order:

- Dual Member Proportional Representation
- First-past-the-post (the current system)
- First-past-the-post Plus Leaders
- Mixed Member Proportional Representation
- Preferential Voting

3. That specific parameters be considered for two of the above-listed options:

(a) In the case of First-past-the-post Plus Leaders, that a threshold of 10% in the popular vote be achieved by political parties in order to assign a seat to party leaders.

(b) In the case of Mixed Member Proportional Representation, that open lists of candidates be incorporated into a model of mixed member proportional representation, so that voters have a degree of choice among the candidates presented by way of party lists. The committee also recommends that the fraction of seats comprising the proportional component be approximately one-third of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly; and, further that these seats be compensatory or “top up” seats.

4. That Elections PEI be tasked with ensuring that voters throughout the province receive clear and impartial information about a plebiscite voting process, the date of a plebiscite, a plebiscite question, and the content of the choices appearing on a plebiscite ballot.
5. That electronic voting be utilized in a plebiscite to maximize both access and convenience for the electorate, provided that standards for security, accuracy, privacy, integrity, cost-effectiveness, and auditability can be assured.

6. That a plebiscite question be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank the following electoral system options in your order of preference, 1 through 5 (with &quot;1&quot; being your most preferred):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____ Dual Member Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ First-past-the-post (the current system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ First-past-the-post Plus Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Mixed Member Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Preferential Voting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respectfully submitted,

Jordan Brown, Chair
Special Committee on Democratic Renewal
APPENDIX 1

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