



4th Session, 37th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE
CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON
ELECTORAL REFORM

Vancouver

Wednesday, September 24, 2003

Issue No. 6

JOHN LES, MLA, CHAIR

ISSN 1705-9852

Published under the authority of the Speaker

In addition to printed transcripts, Hansard Services publishes transcripts on the Internet and broadcasts Chamber debates on television.

www.leg.bc.ca/cmt

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE
CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM**

Vancouver
Wednesday, September 24, 2003

Chair: * John Les (Chilliwack-Sumas L)

Deputy Chair: * Jeff Bray (Victoria-Beacon Hill L)

Members: * Ida Chong (Oak Bay-Gordon Head L)
Kevin Krueger (Kamloops-North Thompson L)
Blair Lekstrom (Peace River South L)
* Rob Nijjar (Vancouver-Kingsway L)
* Joy MacPhail (Vancouver-Hastings NDP)

** denotes member present*

Clerk: Craig James

Witnesses: Dr. Jack Blaney (Chair, Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform)
Marilyn Jacobson (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform)
Dr. Leo Perra (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform)

CONTENTS

Special Committee on the
Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

Wednesday, September 24, 2003

	Page
Citizens' Assembly Progress Report.....	33
J. Blaney	
M. Jacobson	
L. Perra	
D. MacLachlan	
Other Business.....	41
J. Blaney	
M. Jacobson	

MINUTES

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM



Wednesday, September 24, 2003
9 a.m.

Boardroom, Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform
2288-555 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, British Columbia

Present: John Les, MLA (Chair); Jeff Bray, MLA (Deputy Chair); Ida Chong, MLA; Joy MacPhail, MLA;
Rob Nijjar, MLA.

Unavoidably Absent: Blair Lekstrom, MLA; Kevin Krueger, MLA

1. The Committee received a progress report regarding the status of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.
Witnesses:
Dr. Jack Blaney
Dr. Leo Perra
2. The Committee reviewed applications for the communications positions with the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.
Witness:
Dr. Jack Blaney
3. The Committee met *in camera* regarding the communications positions.
4. The Committee met in public session.
5. **Resolved**, that the Committee endorse the appointment of Marilyn Jacobson and Don MacLachlan in the communications positions.
6. The Committee adjourned at 10:30 a.m. to the call of the Chair.

John Les, MLA
Chair

Craig James
Clerk Assistant and
Clerk of Committees

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2003

The committee met at 9:03 a.m.

[J. Les in the chair.]

J. Les (Chair): It is 9 o'clock. The schedule says we start at 9 o'clock, and we have a quorum, so I'm going to call the meeting to order and turn the floor over to Dr. Blaney to give us an update on what's been happening in the last month or so.

Citizens' Assembly Progress Report

J. Blaney: Thank you very much. We very much appreciate this opportunity to tell you what's happening, because actually, a lot has been happening in the last month or so, and we've been very busy. We have a full staff complement now, and some of my colleagues are here. I think you've met Susanna Haas before. You've met Leo before, because you confirmed him. Marilyn Jacobson and Don MacLachlan are here, and others may kind of appear at the door and look in. I think we've put together a super group of people.

I might hit some highlights. We are going to give you some material that you can take away in terms of our activity reports. I'd like to deal first of all with the budget, because it's a fairly major matter in terms of what we receive and how we manage it. If you remember, in my confirmation here, I indicated rather candidly at my first glance at the budget that we probably don't have enough money to do exactly what the Legislature asked us to do. We have now had an opportunity to look at it in great detail, and we've come to the same conclusion except that we can now show why and where.

[0905]

Clearly, when we moved from 79 members to 158, the budget was increased by about \$900,000. It was doubled, and many of the costs doubled. Meeting expenses were simply underestimated on both budgets — both the Gibson budget and the revised budget. I did have a chance meeting with the Attorney General and indicated that we were short of something like \$670,000 to do precisely what was indicated in the Gibson report and what was approved by the Legislature if we did all those things. His response was quite clear — that there are no more funds and that the government, of course, is facing major budget challenges. So that was fine.

You also remember I indicated in my confirmation that whatever budget is allocated, we would live with it. We as a team have looked at it, and we have felt that we're not going to compromise the three essential up-front phases. There's the learning phase, where the members learn about different electoral systems; the public hearing phase, where they go out in the community and listen to their fellow citizens; and the third phase, which is the deliberation, where they think about what all they've heard and whether or not we ought to have a change and, if so, what.

There was a fairly large, sizeable item — something over \$800,000. Leo, I think it was about \$850,000 —

something of that order — for producing householder reports that would go to each household in the province — that is, a report after the learning phase, which is which three or four we are going to look at further; a report at the end of the deliberation phase; and a report on the assembly as a whole. That is three householders.

We have decided and have informed the Attorney General that they will not happen. Frankly, I'm not concerned about that, and my colleagues are not concerned about that either. The \$700,000 is a lot of money. If we can save that and still communicate with the people of B.C., then I think that's a win for everybody.

We found that the brochures that went out to everybody, which you've got a copy of — these householder brochures... A lot of people got them who never knew they got them. We've done a couple of little tests. One quick test I did of that was when I was in Prince George, speaking to the Prince George Rotary. There were about 60 people there, and I held up the brochure and described it in detail. I said it's even got a picture of me on it and all this other kind of stuff. I asked: "How many remember receiving this?" Three hands went up. I've run into a lot of people and asked if they received it, and they have not. Now, those who've been waiting for it have received it, because we were attentive to it. I'm not so sure that the householder kind of reports that look like another flyer, or whatever it is, are necessarily attended to anyway.

Marilyn and Don have been working with the media. I'm going to report on this later in more detail. We have large reason to believe that we're going to get very good media coverage. As a matter of fact, I can cover it now. The *Vancouver Sun*, particularly, has committed to doing two supplements on the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and producing summaries of the kinds of reports and conclusions that we're going to make. A pending meeting with the *Province* will probably go likewise, and we've been having very good response from the community newspapers.

Our plan, then, is to put all reports on line electronically, so they'll be available electronically. We'll announce their availability in all the various media, we will certainly let all news stations know it, and we will send from here a hard copy to anybody who asks. The budget still allows about \$85,000 for printing various kinds of reports and sending them to anybody in the province who wishes them. We'll put them in the libraries; we'll put them in the schools. Of course, being available electronically means they can be put anywhere where they can receive that.

The feeling we have around here is that we might even do a better job of communicating the reports to the public of B.C., because we know we have to.... We can't just say: "Well, it's been dropped off at every household, and it will be okay." We know we have to make very extreme efforts to ensure that the people of B.C. who are interested will get a report.

Maybe at this point, Mr. Chair, we should have any kind of questions or comments that your members might have.

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): I agree. The people who are going to be interested at those various phases are going to seek the information out. Others would probably get frustrated that tax dollars were being spent to give them something they didn't ask for.

How do you envision it, though, if there were a referendum question on May 17, 2005? Clearly, at that point there's going to need to be a lot of information available for voters, because they're going to be asked a very specific question that's going to have a lot of background to it. How do you see that being communicated?

[0910]

It's one thing if the citizens' assembly comes up and says: "We haven't come to consensus on a change; therefore we're not recommending a change." That's one report. The other report says: "We're going to have this form." Do you see, at that point, your role and your organization's role as being the ones to make sure everybody knows about that? Or do you think that falls, perhaps, to the Legislative Assembly or somebody else? At that point, now we're on a whole different course. Who steers it and gets the information out to voters?

J. Blaney: Well, actually, Mr. Bray, that is our responsibility. We do have, as I indicated, \$85,000 still in the communications budget for doing reports. We intend to save as much as we can from our contingency of \$400,000. That would be a very high priority for us in terms of communication funds. We will use all the means I have indicated, such as electronic means. We certainly hope the press will cover this in great detail — indeed, hopefully will report the referendum question and the rationale for it word for word, as our report will spell out.

My hunch is that we have some confidence we'll get that kind of support but will have to then make, really, every extra effort to get reports out ourselves and hard copies to anyone who wants them. My hunch is that we can probably cover that well, because we are as concerned as you are that that would be important for us to do. My colleagues might....

Do you want to comment any further on that?

M. Jacobson: One of the things we want to do is develop partnerships. One of the partnerships we're looking at is with the education community. Hopefully, even after we come to an end at the end of December of next year, the partnerships will continue to communicate. We hope to provide some packages that can be used in the education community and different things like that.

L. Perrra: The only other thing — as the Gibson report indicated — is that if a change is recommended by the assembly, there's an expectation that it'll move into a different level and that there'll be a fair amount of discussion on that. That will increase the level of awareness, and then people can simply say copies are available with admission.

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): I think different groups will all take different.... It's preserving the actual decision and the rationale so that there's at least a starting point that somebody who has a particular view on that referendum question doesn't co-opt the whole genesis of that question — that the citizens' assembly's work is sort of the foundation for which debate may occur in the higher realm. It sounds like you're working on various ways to ensure that actually exists after December. I think that's critical, because the debate will happen. It's to make sure that people have the source to get the clear information.

J. Blaney: That they have access to our objective report. We will, if that happens.... If there is a referendum, if that is the recommendation of the assembly, then we will be also, in late November or early December, thinking about how we continue our activity in that regard. As I say, there are some funds to do that. We'll save as much as we can. Indeed, our office might have to be there for a little bit longer than the planned time just so we can get those reports out.

R. Nijjar: In retrospect I'm glad you never received the \$670,000 or \$700,000, because being responsible for the taxpayers' money, I have a hard time seeing how it was necessary to do the three householders. Creating the circumstances where you had to get rid of them is.... I'm happy about that.

That brings me to my question: do we see your budget? Will we see the details of your budget?

J. Blaney: Absolutely, immediately. You can have a copy today.

L. Perrra: We can print it off for you and pass it out to you.

J. Les (Chair): Would you like a copy?

R. Nijjar: Yes.

J. Les (Chair): Okay. That'll be made available to you.

J. Blaney: Everything we have is certainly for your access, but everything we have is public.

I. Chong: Is it on your website?

J. Blaney: Is it on the website?

L. Perrra: No, not yet. I mean, we're in the process of getting the website developed. We just put out an RFP on the website. I hadn't thought about putting the budget up on the website.

J. Blaney: Should we electronically give it to the secretary of the committee?

J. Les (Chair): I think that would be wise. If you provide it to Craig, he can provide it to the committee

members. Whether it's material that needs to be on the website, I'm not sure that's particularly relevant. You want to keep the focus very much — at least that's my view — on the work the committee is doing as opposed to the administrative detail.

J. Blaney: There's nothing in the budget that is.... Indeed, it's an expansion of what the Gibson report has. It's just line detail. It's a very detailed budget, but we'll be very happy to.... We'll give it to Craig, and all committee members will have it.

[0915]

J. Les (Chair): Okay. Any other discussion on budget? Okay, let's move along.

J. Blaney: The other major matter which we should talk about before a number of activities is that we have sent out 200 letters per riding, beginning about two or three weeks ago, beginning with the northern ridings. Some of those letters.... I'm going to turn this over to Leo, because he knows much more about it than I do.

Some of these letters have not yet gone, and we're not getting quite the response that we had hoped from the 200, let's say, for Peace River North or something like that. We are getting enough people to ensure that we get our two members, but they're not in large numbers, largely because, I think, the commitment is huge. So I'm going to turn it over to Leo to tell you what's happening with numbers of acceptances.

L. Perra: To date we have 33 electoral districts that the letters have been sent out to. That's 6,600 letters that have gone out. There are a fair number of undelivered letters; about 7 percent are coming back undelivered at this point. The number of yes responses is about 5 percent. We have about 250 people who have responded yes. The number of yes responses represents about 90 percent of the people who do respond to us, so we have about 20-some-odd people who have said no, they're not interested. There are still a few incomplete forms that we have to contact people on, because they don't necessarily always check off all the boxes or they leave out their electoral district. What we've been doing is contacting these people on the telephone numbers or e-mail addresses they've left with us.

The number of males seems to be a little higher than the number of females in terms of the response — not by much. But 138 males have responded — interested in serving — and 112 females, which is surprising to me. I would have thought it would have been closer. But remember that the 33 districts that we've sent information out to are really on the periphery of the province, because we thought we'd get to those districts first before winter sets in and so on. We'll be working the lower mainland in the beginning-through-November period. Those letters haven't gone out to the lower mainland communities yet. I believe we've sent the letters out to the Saanich meeting, which would be the periphery of the southern Island, and then Victoria will be in mid-November as well.

We were quite excited. I think we sent the letters out on a Friday or maybe even Thursday, and the next day we had our first response, so we were on a high that this was really going to roll. But it's been a bit of a challenge, and we're still looking at whether or not we want to do another reissue to try to get ourselves closer to the 20 people that we've been trying to shoot for as a target.

J. Blaney: For the Fort St. John meeting, which is set for October 14.... If this is the first meeting where we'll choose our first members, what do the numbers look like for that?

L. Perra: Okay, Peace River North at this point is 11 people, and the range is seven and four — male, female — and Peace River South is, surprisingly, three and three. So there are only six people in Peace River South that identified themselves at this point as being interested. Prince George — the numbers are a little bit better up there — is 12, 23 and 13, depending on which of the three districts out of Prince George. The urban ones certainly have a higher level of activity. Peace River North has a lot of people from the Fort St. John city, so it's quite easy for them to come to the meeting because it's in Fort St. John. But the people who have to travel from Peace River South are thinking about it a lot harder.

R. Nijjar: How insistent will you be that you have 20 people before you hold a meeting?

L. Perra: Oh, we won't. If we decide to send out another letter, it's going to be on a tight schedule. We'll just go with the 20 if we have it or whatever number we have. But we'll want to make sure that at least we have one of each gender at each meeting...

J. Blaney: ...who is eligible.

R. Nijjar: So what is a minimum number that would...? Suppose in one riding you had six and the other one you had 11. Would that be considered do-able?

L. Perra: I would say so.

[0920]

J. Blaney: We will send another letter to those two ridings, but if we have seven persons there — three, four of that gender, whatever — we will go, especially if they're eligible. The second letter, which is just about to go to them, says: "Thank you very much for your interest. Now, please read over these things very carefully." It's about the eligibility. They'll get that, and one or two may look at it and find.... They may exit. When you think about it, this is a big commitment. We're asking 11 weekends over 11 months, plus public hearings plus a lot of reading and everything else.

Susanna and everyone else around here — Marilyn, Don.... We've tried to make the letter as friendly and as

easy as possible to read, but you still have to communicate some fairly sophisticated information, and some people may have some difficulty with that. I'm not surprised, when you think about it, especially in the very northern areas, that the response has been like this.

That's a very long answer. Yes. We'll go with six or seven if they're eligible, because all we need, again, is one man and one woman. They are randomly selected, they randomly got the letter, and we will then randomly select from the ones that are there.

R. Nijjar: I'm sure that from all our points of view, the fact that only six or 11 people applied doesn't in any way take away from the legitimacy of the process. But the media, which is always going to look for something to bash our heads with, may say.... I would assume that they would instinctively say: "Here is something that is not reflective of the community, and here is something the community is not buying into, because look, only six people applied. What flawed system is this that only six people are selected?" I raise it only so that you may prepare for that beforehand — I'm sure you're aware — in case that does happen.

J. Blaney: Yeah, we will.

J. Les (Chair): Keep in mind, though, that if there are fewer than 20 people that respond, I don't think it in any way detracts from the legitimacy of the process, in that the people are still randomly selected at the end of the day. You know, it is to be expected that you're going to get something less than 20 given, as Dr. Blaney has pointed out, this is an exercise that's going to require a significant commitment. I don't expect that every British Columbian is going to be able to make that kind of commitment over the next year or so.

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): I agree too. Also, this is the first tranche, so it will probably pick up some awareness and momentum as you continue the process. The first round, probably, is also going to be so new that people really aren't even aware of it. They might get this letter and not really clue in yet that this is part of this whole citizens' assembly thing. I think that there will be some momentum as well.

Certainly, in Peace River South you're starting to get down to.... One of the processes of the regional meeting is self-selection. What happens if all three men self-select themselves out of the process for Peace River South? Is there a contingency to deal with a riding that will not...? They may all say: "I can't give that commitment," or "I choose not to."

L. Perra: The contingency we had — if we had, let's say, the 20, and that meant ten, and they all self-selected out — is that we would then go back into our pool and try to extend or expand the invitation list. Our commitment is to get one of each gender, and if the three people self-select themselves out, then we'll try to go out after more and use the time between now and December 30 to get that one there.

J. Blaney: We have reserve lists, which Elections B.C. has for us — again, an additional 200 persons randomly selected. What we really want out of each meeting, of course, is four names: a male and a female that are randomly selected, and another male and female that'll be randomly selected — although it won't be much of a secret who are on reserve, if there are only a few people there. A person, between, let's say, November 30 — or whatever time they are selected, and November 20 is the last one — and January 10, for some reason might decide: "I'm not going to do it." Then we have to go to our alternate. So we want to choose those as well.

L. Perra: I mean, we'll also have a cut-off date for some districts set up today, and that was for administrative purposes to get the invitation letters out. We're just not going to cut off letters that come in tomorrow or the rest of this week. We'll continue to receive them.

J. Blaney: We will preserve the random process, and if we have to have additional meetings and go back to Prince George or Fort St. John, we will do that and maintain the random process. We'll keep that clean.

J. Les (Chair): Let me run this by you. I'd be interested in your response. When we arrive at December 1, 2004, do you really expect that all 158 will still be on board, or do you see a little bit of attrition going on? Personally, I do. How much of that would be reasonable to expect?

[0925]

J. Blaney: Well, it's hard to know. When January 10 comes along, and by December 1, let's say, we've got our 158, I would not be surprised if three, four, five, six or seven — something of that order — finally decide, "This is too big of a commitment for me," or something has changed in their lives. That's when we go to the alternates who are there. After January 10, as you know, we don't go to alternates. After January 10 if there are dropouts, as the legislation applies, we need to lose 25 percent of the members before we can then go back and select more. My hunch is that I don't think that would happen.

If you'll remember the Gibson report, he did a couple of focus groups of people to try and determine what the response rate might be. Of course, this kind of set our expectations, in a sense, and they felt that the response rate would be something in the order of about 50 percent. It's very difficult to give a hypothetical case to somebody and say: "Here's an exciting kind of thing. Would you be a member?" It's: "Yeah, I might do that." But if you give them a real decision to make — "You're going to have to give up 11 weekends, plus travel, plus the reading, plus some public hearings over the course of the year" — I think that's a totally different kind of question.

It's hard to test, because one is hypothetical and the other is real. I have been asked at various times to think about being a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Sure. But when you're asked exactly, and I see what you guys do.... No way. [Laughter.] I think hypothetical and real is different when you make a decision, so it was very difficult to predict this. I also think, as Leo says, that the numbers will be higher as we get closer to the metropolitan areas.

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): I think the critical thing to note from this, then, is that there are contingencies that still preserve the random process. I don't think there's any question that you'll get your 158 through this process. I think that's what is critical to know. There are some contingencies, but I suspect that the numbers of responses will increase as you continue on the process. It's good to hear that you're prepared if a couple of ridings pose some challenges.

J. Blaney: The people who are interested are really interested, by their letters. The other thing is that we've found that a person might get this, a female, and say: "I can't do it, for various.... But can my husband do it? He really wants to do it." We're getting that kind of response.

I. Chong: Following on with the question John posed to you, Jack, once the process starts and people drop off — if that were to happen — unless it gets below 25 percent or you hit 25 percent, you can't bring anybody in. But let's say you're not even at that point, and you get one or two dropouts. Let's say those two dropouts are both from the same electoral district. You're into week 4 and one person drops out, and then in week 6 the other person drops out, but that's all that you've had drop out so you're not at the.... What do you do? Can you proceed with an electoral district not represented?

J. Blaney: I think we have to, by the legislation that's there. I don't think we have any option there.

The other thing, Ida, is that it's actually emphasized both in the Gibson report and the OIC terms of reference — and we're emphasizing in everything that goes out to people — that they're representing British Columbians.

I. Chong: Yes.

J. Blaney: We're choosing by each riding so that they are geographical. On the first run at it, there's geographical representation. It's stratified, as you know, for geography, gender and age. Then what comes out we know will be balanced by gender, but on the other kinds of things, we just have to hope everything works out well.

We're really emphasizing that they're representing British Columbia. When we do our public hearings, we will ask them to go to one or two hearings around where they are, but we're also going to encourage some members to go elsewhere. People from Vancouver will go off to Fort St. John and wherever, so they kind of get a sense of this province.

I can tell you that one of the things I've picked up as I've been in Prince George, Cranbrook and else-

where — and you know this really well — is that I get on the radio.... This is really kind of extraneous, but I get on the radio in Prince George, and the first two or three questions are not about electoral reform or the citizens' assembly at all. They're about how tough things are up in the interior.

Although it's not part of the agenda, we're going to have to deal with this, because there are differences throughout the province. We want the citizens who have come together to feel, as kind of a group, that they understand what's going on in all parts of the province.

[0930]

I. Chong: That's good. I appreciate you making that clarification. Communication of that may have to be well prepared and thought out, I guess, in the event that one or two electoral districts may end up being not represented, but then the citizens' assembly still has its integrity intact as a result of the members representing all of British Columbia. It's just unfortunate that those geographic regions have had to opt out because of those circumstances.

J. Blaney: When something like that happens — and it's unlikely, but who knows? — I probably would make a very special effort to get up to wherever it is, Fort St. John or whatever, myself and meet with people, have some public forums and talk to people.

I. Chong: Good.

J. Les (Chair): Okay. We're all done on that one?

I. Chong: Yes.

J. Blaney: Those are the two major items: the budget and the responses to our invitations. I'm going to just quickly hit some highlights of other activities, but we're going to give you a copy of my activity report. We're not giving it to you now because you would read it rather than listen to me. If I put my reading glasses on, I'll be ready to read it.

These letters have gone out to 16,000 people. The second letter is now going out to those who have replied. If you're interested, later we'd be very happy to give you a copy of the second letter. It's quite detailed, and we've tried to make it as clear as possible. We've tested it on people on the street and everything else, and we think it's clear. If you like, we'll give you a copy when you leave. If you have any comments on it, we'd be delighted to get it.

We have 26 selection meetings planned. The first one is in Fort St. John on October 14. The last one is in Vancouver on November 25. We're also going to pan to this list of activities. We're going to give you a list of all the meetings, where they're located and the dates. My hunch is that you'll probably want to know, especially when the meetings are in your areas. We're finalizing where we're going to meet and staffing and everything else. That's a great logistical problem.

Ken Carty and Campbell Sharman are our two professors, our two PhDs, our experts in electoral systems. They are quite busy now planning the learning phase and the process by which people will learn, what we will deal with in plenary sessions, what we deal with in small group discussion sessions. They're choosing instructional materials, a book that's available. They will also be writing materials for this. That's really going on right now.

In terms of meeting with other groups, I've been very busy, but I've also had a meeting with Grand Chief Edward John and Jody Wilson. So did Leo. I'm speaking to the First Nations Summit on Friday. We're talking about what we're doing and how they can take part and be involved.

We are doing guidelines and criteria for public submissions. Already we've had many requests, and so we're giving them the draft guidelines right now. We are going to try to encourage on-line submissions so that the submissions on-line, of course, can be accessed on-line too. All the submissions we receive, of course, will be recorded on-line so that anyone who wishes to know what submissions we received from whom will see them there.

One question we're wrestling with right now — and we'd be very happy to have your feedback on this one — is that a number of groups, and probably quite a few in the end, will want to make a submission to the assembly as a whole. As you know, we go through the learning phase, and then we go to public hearings. This is where we'd like people to make submissions — that is, personal presentations — in Fort St. John, Victoria.... There are going to be 42 of these.

L. Perra: Planning about 41 or 42.

J. Blaney: So, in 41 or 42 places we're going to have public hearings. That's quite extensive. Nonetheless, some people will want to make submissions to the assembly as a whole. The first nations, I know, want to make a presentation to the assembly as a whole. Right now what we think we're going to recommend to the assembly, because I think it's the assembly that makes that decision, is that it's not in the learning phase, because we want the members to suspend judgment and think about all options. Then, we don't want to detract from the public hearing phase. We want people to come and interact with their assembly. We're thinking right now that on the first weekend of five weekends in the fall — that is, the deliberation phase — we would have people make presentations to the assembly. Then, of course, the assembly would take the next four weekends to decide — should there be change and, if so, to what. That would be a day and a half.

We don't know how many people want to make presentations. In total, there are about ten or 12 hours that the assembly would meet. If there are a hundred submissions or presentations, you divide it by the time available or whatever. We may work on criteria, such as maybe only one presentation per political party or something of that sort.

I'd be very happy to have your response. My hunch is — well, it's not a hunch — that people do want to make presentations to the assembly as a whole. My hunch is that the assembly members will probably want that to happen too. I think that it would also look pretty good.

[0935]

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): You always have to err on the side of letting people make presentations as opposed to limiting it, but I think what could happen.... I'll use the Finance Committee as an example. Every year there seems to be a concerted effort by a particular group to be at every single hearing to make a presentation — in essence, to say that this is the feeling of the whole province, when it's actually one particular group. It's the widget-makers that are at every public hearing to present, and often they make very much the same presentation.

I think that if you were to allow a group that's going to have in essence an expanded presentation to the whole assembly, some understanding would have to be there that they can't also make sure they get somebody into each of the 41 communities to make the same presentation. I mean, if they're going to make the grand one, I don't think they can take up spaces everywhere else if there's some special concession to allow them to do this.

If you were going to do this, there would have to be a guideline that says this isn't just Jeff Bray who's coming. It is the overarching representative group of first nations or, you know, seniors. They really are representing a provincial body, because that's why they're going to the full 158 as opposed to the one in Prince George or the one in Vancouver. I think you always have to err on the side of letting people present, but you don't want those groups that are also going to probably have more staff resources to really put the lobby on these 158 and take 15 minutes in every city as well as doing the grand presentation. I think there would have to be some understanding that this is in lieu of sending your people to each one of those meetings.

J. Les (Chair): Anybody else with any thoughts?

R. Nijjar: I have a lot of thoughts on this.

J. Blaney: We are going to err on the side of being accessible.

J. Les (Chair): You know, sometimes it's quite wrong to try and anticipate every eventuality that might occur. These things sort themselves out over time, I always believe, and at the end of the day most people that we deal with and interact with are reasonable people. If, as Jeff suggests, people have made presentations elsewhere in the province, I think they would probably take it as reasonable that they wouldn't be expected to make a presentation in front of the entire assembly. Those kinds of trade-offs, I think, are quite reasonable.

I can easily think of a couple of people who are going to make it their business to travel around the province and go to each one of the 41 meetings...

A Voice: Yep.

J. Les (Chair): ...and that, too, will happen. There's no doubt.

J. Blaney: In the end, of course, it's the members of the assembly who will make that decision.

J. Les (Chair): Sure.

J. Blaney: We will put a proposal before them, but it will be their decision. My hunch is that they will want to be as accessible as possible. We are letting people know through our letters — which are available, by the way, on the Web. People can draw down these letters and look at them. Right from the beginning, they're going to be the focus of media attention. Don and Marilyn have already given brief little suggestions about handling the first meeting. You know, they're going to say, "How did you vote in the last election?" and things of this sort. We're trying to guide them.

We will also give them some help when they come, in terms of being lobbied. I mean, they're going to be lobbied. Any organization that wants change would be crazy not to lobby. That's how things get done. That's how politics works. That's democracy. But we will give them some guidance in being lobbied and how to handle this and how to report this back to assembly members and things of that sort. I, too, have faith that they'll be able to handle this.

J. Les (Chair): Sure.

R. Nijjar: I'll make a suggestion. We all agree that the public process, public participation, has to happen. From my experience and my colleagues' experience, because we've done so many of the public hearings, after a while you start to learn the politics behind public hearings — politically, how it works; who's doing what; why they're doing it and so forth.

For a new person coming into a public hearing process — and the general public usually does not participate in public hearings — they are going to be like a green MLA. They sometimes see more... Well, to put it nicely, sometimes people think that a presenter is coming with the purest of intention of just giving their view and that they have no other intention other than just seeking the best system for British Columbia, while really behind the scene there's a lot more going on.

[0940]

Is it possible, then, for the team here to make sure that the assembly receives a backgrounder on each group that is presenting, because each group has a context in which they're presenting that is important for...? Maybe you don't agree, but I think it's important for the assembly members to understand the context in

which that organization is presenting rather than not knowing the political history or the background of that organization.

J. Blaney: We are doing some guidelines right now for those who wish to make presentations. Of course, they have to state who they are, what the organization is and the usual kinds of things that they have to present. So we'll know what organization they represent.

We are together for 11 months, and my hunch is that the members will become quite informed about these things. I think they'll chat with each other, and I somehow have faith that they will handle this kind of lobbying well, and in the end they'll make their own decision.

J. Les (Chair): Good morning, Joy.

J. MacPhail: My apologies.

J. Les (Chair): That's all right. We knew you were going to be late, so that's okay.

Right. So we're done with that item, are we?

J. Blaney: Thank you for your comment on that. Well, other than that, we'll go through quite quickly the rest of the kinds of activities we're doing.

We're doing a lot of work on our website. I don't know much about websites, so I can't tell you.... We are expanding it and enhancing it so that people can interact with the website. We're getting lots of visitors on our website already, even before it's enhanced, from all across Canada, New Zealand, England and whatever. There's a lot of interest in what we're doing.

You have heard this before and you know it. What we are doing here in B.C. is something that no democracy in the history of the world has ever done. We are giving unelected people an enormous amount of influence on an important public policy question. It is that process, not electoral reform, that's getting an enormous amount of attention.

I don't know if there's anything else you might want to say about our website, because I have run out of everything I know about websites.

D. MacLachlan: Well, just that the plan is to expand it and deepen it and put up as much material as we can on the website so that it's accessible to the public. We're also looking at a more private website for the members of the assembly that they can use to get more detail — stuff like travel arrangements and so on — for themselves and also put a forum on the members-only site so they can securely and privately chat with each other and exchange thoughts and ideas.

J. Les (Chair): Just on that, obviously, you need to provide a private section of the website for members to do their travel arrangements as you suggest, but be very careful that of 158, there are going to be some who have never turned a computer on. You want to be sure,

by making that service available to the majority of them, that you don't alienate some of them.

D. MacLachlan: Exactly.

J. Les (Chair): That's very important.

D. MacLachlan: In the same vein, we're going to be extremely careful to design a website operation that's simple and downloadable and operable throughout B.C. We know that in a lot of areas people rely on pretty old-fashioned browsers and dial-up systems, so we'll have to make the site as friendly as we can for them too.

J. Blaney: I think the website will include all the learning materials that are planned to be used with the members of the assembly about different electoral systems, their strengths, their weaknesses. It will all be on the website the day of the use so that schools, colleges and interested citizens throughout the province can take all of this down and take a look at it.

Hopefully, a lot of people will do that. There's a little bit of evidence — not a little bit, but a fair amount of evidence — that I'm starting to read now in terms of what's happened in New Zealand and Scotland and whatever, where they have had discussions on electoral reform. It's very difficult to get the average normal citizens involved. It's not a subject that excites people. I was talking to someone who was a consul general here from New Zealand, and she said that in spite of an unbelievable amount of publicity, investment in the press, things going to people's houses and everything else, the awareness level was very, very low.

We're trying two different kinds of things in terms of how to engage people, and we particularly are going to try to work with the schools and colleges and whatever to get people engaged. Everything will be accessible too.

We've had a very good meeting. Marilyn and Don had a very good meeting with the *Vancouver Sun*. They're going to do at least two special editions, two special supplements on the citizens' assembly. They're going to report somewhere in December, I think. They're going to do a special section on what it is and who the members are from all over the province, and they want to do a kind of continuing report on what we do and what the reports will be and whatever.

Ms. MacPhail, I'd be very happy to give you a brief summary of what I reported prior to the meeting — okay?

J. MacPhail: At the end, sure. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

J. Blaney: There are two items of some importance that I'd be happy to tell you about — okay?

J. MacPhail: Good. Yes, thank you.

[0945]

J. Blaney: A similar meeting with the *Province* is planned, as well as with the *Globe and Mail*. We've been

working with a lot of radio stations. They've been very, very good. I've been on a number of radio stations in Cranbrook and Prince George and here and elsewhere, and they seem to be extremely responsive to our requests. They're going very, very well. We're looking at partnerships with CBC TV and Knowledge Network — they do some seven-, ten-minute video segments — and with educators as well.

That's a very brief update. We have for you, and we'll give them to you at the conclusion of the meeting, a few pages of our activity report — the kinds of things we've been working on. We'll also give you, as I indicated, a list of all the locations and dates where we're going to have our first selection meetings. As I say, the first one is going to be in Fort St. John on October 14. We will, of course, announce the meeting, and I'll probably phone down to Rafe Mair and other people — all the media that are interested — and let them know who the first members are. The last one is November 25 in Vancouver.

I think that ends my report. I'm happy to....

J. Les (Chair): Okay. Any other questions of Jack on activities?

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): I'm just wondering if you might, in the same way you've done with the *Province* and the *Sun*.... The *Victoria Times Colonist* is the major daily for all of Vancouver Island. I don't know if they'd be interested, but it'd sure be great for the Island if they took the same interest that the *Sun* has, so I might suggest you try the *Times Colonist*. For Campbell River and those places, that's the major daily they read.

J. Blaney: We will, clearly, after our first meeting in Fort St. John — following that morning — be working with Don and Marilyn to make sure every media who is interested will know who the first two or the first four members are. We will tell everybody who that is and hope that the story will be picked up. The local community papers really like that kind of thing, and I think they'll cover it quite well.

R. Nijjar: When you speak of local community papers.... I appreciate the *Times Colonist's* vast readership, but papers like *Sing Tao* and *Ming Pao* have enormous readership that the general public doesn't know about. I hope they are included in the scheme of larger papers.

J. Blaney: They and Fairchild TV have actually been here more often than almost any other media agency. Absolutely, we'll be in touch with them. We also have two members of staff who can speak the language if necessary.

D. MacLachlan: Fairchild's news director is my next-door neighbour, so....

J. Les (Chair): Is there an ability to use the legislative channel for any of the proceedings?

L. Perra: We were raising that question, and I don't know where we're at on it.

M. Jacobson: We're still looking at it.

L. Perra: We're still looking, yeah. We thought that it might be possible to maybe use it in the off hours. I mean, we do our sessions on Saturday and Sunday, and the main plenary sessions maybe could be done on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon or something like that.

J. Les (Chair): Okay, no further questions at this point? We're then going to move on to the second item on the agenda, which is the staff selection process. We have a couple of interviews, and for the purposes of that, we're going to move in camera.

The committee continued in camera from 9:48 a.m. to 10:20 a.m.

[J. Les in the chair.]

J. Les (Chair): Okay, we're back in open session now, and I'm pleased to report that the special committee has confirmed the appointment of both Don and Marilyn.

We're looking forward to the work as it progresses and your involvement in that. Congratulations to you both.

Some Voices: Thank you.

Other Business

J. Les (Chair): Under the topic of any other business, Jack, do you have any other items?

J. Blaney: No, except to remind you that we do have a copy of the letter that's going out to those who've indicated interest, and the activity report and list of locations — things which we would like to give to you before you leave.

J. Les (Chair): And we'll get that from you on our way out of here.

M. Jacobson: Could I just add that this is still draft form, so if you have any input, we'd love to receive it.

J. Les (Chair): All right. Joy, you have another item?

J. MacPhail: Just one item, and it may be crazy, so feel free to push back.

I was trying to think of some way of using the citizens' assembly, which is very successful at the high level — the opinion leaders' level — but getting at the interest of the public....

I've been following the California recall situation extremely carefully. It's bizarre — how it has just taken

over politics down there like crazy. However, it is about electoral reform. The California recall situation, which I didn't realize until I.... I was trying to figure out this bizarre way of why they have to vote one Governor out and at the same time select who they want to replace.... Well, that situation has been answered through electoral reform in other areas of the country — other areas of the world — but it is part of reforming the electoral process.

Everybody, at least in North America, is consumed with it now, so I was going to put it to you, Chair, that perhaps a postmortem on that recall situation as it relates to electoral reform — not in any way where you take a side at all, but just having people from California come here to join you in maybe a public discussion or whatever....

The reason why I say it's related to electoral reform is because other jurisdictions have said that with proportional representation, where there's a minority government, part of the weakness is if you vote the government out, how do you carry on continuous government? There have been answers to that question, some successful and some not.

You don't even have to be pro PR to examine this question. It could almost be an examination of stability by the status quo, but it is a way of engagement in an exercise where no one.... This electoral reform that's going on there is the most bizarre thing I've ever seen, but it is going to have a major impact.

J. Blaney: Can I respond?

J. Les (Chair): Sure, yeah.

J. Blaney: It's a good question, because we're going to have to think hard about that. Our mandate actually, you know.... In a sense what we're called, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, is a bit misnamed, because it's not about electoral reform in the true sense of embracing a whole number of things. As you know, when it passed the Legislature it said that it's about how votes translate into seats. There are a whole number of exclusions that we don't talk about: redistribution, electoral finance, reserved seats and all this. It's about how one votes and determines who sits in the House, so it's not about recall or any other kinds of electoral reform. The government has already made one reform in terms of the dates; the elections are every four years.

[1025]

The mandate is really quite narrow in focus, and my hunch is that's the way we're going to keep it. If it gets into other.... That's substantial enough — to look at various kinds of voting systems. There are about five families of various kinds of voting systems. I'm starting to learn a little bit about it myself. Clearly, what we have now — proportional representation and a whole bunch of other kinds of combinations — is difficult enough to embrace in five or six weekends and then consider maybe two or three and then go forward. My hunch is that if we get into whether or not we should

have recall — we have it on the books — it would probably take an enormous amount of time and become quite politicized.

That's not our mandate. My hunch, Joy, is that I am, as chair, going to probably work very hard to keep the assembly members focused on what our mandate is. It's going to be quite easy to get into "over there, over there" and not basically understand what mixed proportional representation really is all about, what the pluses and minuses are, what the pluses and minuses are of our system, etc. It's a long answer only because I've thought about it a lot, and I think we have to keep focused.

The last comment I'll make — and I'll only elaborate if you ask me to — is that what we're doing here is sometimes called by the experts "deliberative democracy." We have citizens together for 11 months, and they have a lot of time to think about this public policy question. It is almost the antithesis of what they're doing in California. There's a whole bunch of literature that studies how people behave and how their minds work when they're polled on something, or there's a referendum on something, and what difference it makes if people actually engage in a process of learning about something with fellow citizens and experts coming in — a huge difference.

What we're doing in terms of process is so extraordinary relative to what anyone else has done in a democracy in the world.... There have been citizens brought together in the United States on something called "deliberative polling" for three days. They bring 500 randomly selected citizens together. They are totally advisory to anybody who wants to listen — or nobody in particular — and then they go away. Nobody has ever brought together citizens like we are doing for 11 months and whose outcome is something which could actually determine public policy.

What we're doing is so different than what's happening in California, and it's something, I think, that all British Columbians can be very proud of. We are really setting the trend. We are doing something that's.... That's why our website is being hit from New Zealand, England, Scotland and everywhere in the United States.

J. MacPhail: I'm going to push back on you a little bit. It's called recall, but I have come to the conclusion after studying it — because they're also selecting the next Governor as well — that it is: how do you change leadership under a first-past-the-post system? That's where I would push back on you that it's not just about recall, because they have this second step of choosing the next Governor as well. I investigated this, and I said it is so bizarre that you have to do this double ballot. There are systems in the world that have different styles of choosing their elected people where you can change leaders without, in a way, through the.... The way you

change our governing leaders is also related to how you elect your original people. That's what I'm saying.

I understand and I fully appreciate, especially with the sensitivities around the word "recall" in this province.... It is a system that is almost in a state of absolute goddamn paralysis now because it's a first-past-the-post system. That's all I'm going to say.

J. Blaney: Can I respond again?

J. MacPhail: Yeah.

J. Blaney: Actually, our mandate also says that we can only discuss parliamentary systems. That is, it is how votes determine who sits in the Legislature within parliamentary systems.

J. MacPhail: I see.

J. Blaney: And of course, in California you elect the executive separately from the members of the assembly, and we are not to look at that. We are told very explicitly not to look at that. And you know what?

J. MacPhail: It's too bad. It's a missed opportunity, if you ask me. It's got everybody.... I mean, my 15-year-old kid is following this.

J. Bray (Deputy Chair): For the Terminator.

J. MacPhail: It's true, but all of a sudden it's about.... Are you going to put a politician that says, "Hasta la vista," in charge? What does that mean in terms of the rest of the...?

J. Blaney: That's a big difference between the Americans and ourselves. We have a parliamentary system, and they have a republican system, even in the States. Now, that might be the next citizens' assembly.

I've got a list, by the way, of how we will be judged as successful — it's one page, and there are about seven or eight or nine or ten things — which I'm happy to share with you, by the way.

J. Les (Chair): We actually have it.

J. Blaney: Oh, you've got it.

One of them is that it'll be done again on some other public policy issue. It might be done on that issue or something else.

J. Les (Chair): Great. Any other issues for this morning? We're all done? Okay.

The meeting is adjourned, and we will meet again whenever Jack decides we need to.

The committee adjourned at 10:30 a.m.