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JAMES: B.C. election reform proposals ignored

[Elizabeth James](#) / North Shore News

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"Contributions to local government election campaigns must be limited to resident natural persons, who are also registered electors in the community. Contributions from unions, corporations, political parties/elector organizations and non-residents should be prohibited."

- J.D. Roy, Recommendation 4.01, April 14, 2010

Shortly after I called Corrie Kost to chat about campaign donations and the pros and cons of term limits for municipal councils, he sent me a link to [J. Douglas Roy's report The Revolution \(Delayed\): Why it's Time for REAL Change in B.C. Local Elections.](#)

As is usually the case with material from Kost - a veteran council-watcher in the District of North Vancouver - the four-yearold report was right on the money and relevant to our 2014 North Shore elections.

Not only did Roy's recommendations about local elections include a pertinent discussion of the consequences of uncontrolled campaign donations during and prior to civic elections, he also discussed the need for term limits and stated unequivocally that, *"The current procedure of holding local elections every three years should be retained."* (my italics, for emphasis) So who is James Douglas Roy? Why did he write the report? Roy was unavailable to speak to at the time of writing. He has a master's degree in public administration. Starting in 2004, he acted as research officer for the group British Columbians for a Single Transferable Vote. Later, his expertise was put to good use as a research officer for the B.C. Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Most relevant to this story, is that his April 2010 report was written as a detailed submission to the B.C. Local Government Elections Task Force. Among the report's recommendations:

Corporate vote:

Basing his argument on the principle of "no taxation without representation," Roy suggested that consideration be given to allowing corporations a vote according to strictly controlled criteria.

Although it may not be widely known, a nonresident property owner may vote twice - once as a resident of the municipality in which s/he lives and once as a non-resident property owner in the municipality where the other (commercial?) property is located.

I have no problem with the second idea but would need more information before I could agree to the corporate vote.

Campaign donations:

universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2012/02/policy97.pdf

A 12-page Feb. 2, 2012 statement prepared by counsel to the Board of Governors of the University of British Columbia draws no distinction between "conflicts of interest and commitment" and "perceived conflicts of interest."

It goes on to say such conflicts "undermine the public's confidence" and affect the person's ability to act "devoid of bias and personal interests."

Transposing that legal opinion to the municipal scene, voters should have a right to know details of candidates' campaign donations - before they go to the polls on Nov. 15, not after.

It is useless to discover months into a four-year term - as did City of North Vancouver residents - that members who received hundreds or thousands of corporate, union or personal dollars are now charged with making a decision that could benefit the donor(s).

Perception being everything, it simply isn't good enough to acknowledge the donations and then remain at the council table to discuss and vote on the matter.

Furthermore, although not addressed in Roy's recommendations, what I'd like to see are the threads that may connect one apparently single donor to other donors on the list.

Election cycles:

It is truly disturbing that the provincial government rode roughshod over Roy's emphatic recommendation to retain the three-year election cycle. As we have seen in all three North Shore municipalities, development applications and costly large community projects like Harry Jerome, waterfront "visions," and West Vancouver's municipal and police station facilities have spanned more than one term of the councils involved. The same applies to school district administrations in the throes of upgrading or rebuilding schools and selling off publicly owned school land assets.

Why ask experts for their professional opinions if you do not intend to heed the advice?

Term limits:

If, without consultation or referendum, we must swallow a four-year election cycle, then terms limits must be put on the table well before the 2018 election.

I used to worry that restricting councillors to a two-term limit would risk "throwing out the good with the bad." I've changed my mind after seeing some of the manoeuvrings in councils throughout Metro Vancouver and on the North Shore. And that leads to one last point for today - regional district directors: Roy's Recommendation 7.08 states "All ... representatives serving on regional district boards of directors should be elected."

Hear, Hear! Anyone who attends an all-candidates meeting on the North Shore needs to ask these questions: "Where do you stand on the matter of regional committees, especially TransLink? Will you, as you swear to do under the Local Government Act, "foster the economic, social and environmental interests" of your community first? Or will you, as often happens, "take off your municipal hat" at the regional table?"

If all goes as planned, there will be more to come on Nov. 13. In the meantime, the quality or otherwise of your government depends on you. Please don't forget to vote!

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