

Martha's Monthly

April 2006

55% and 47%: A tale of two numbers

Martha took mathematics in school when math was math, none of this *new* math stuff. So Martha can add, subtract, do long division and even tell you that 55% is a majority and 47% is not. You would had to have been on an early Easter vacation this week not to know that 55% is what Premier Klein received at the hands of his party when they were asked about his leadership at last weekend's convention. Of the 1400 delegates, 55% said they supported his leadership. So this week, he took that bare majority of support and he announced he is retiring earlier than he wanted to. He said he did not have the support he wanted. That would be the **55% support** he garnered. Not enough.

Martha would, oh so gently, remind Mr. Klein that in November 2004, when he last stood for election with his party, the Party received only **47% support** from Albertans. That is right. More than half of the voters said they did NOT support the Conservative Party. Do you know what he did then? Mr. Klein and his Conservatives called it a victory, their 4th sweeping majority in a row, and they moved to privatize healthcare and fritter away our oil royalties by increasing sales at the Brick with their \$400 "rebate cheques".

You would not be wrong to wonder if this is the *new* math or if Martha has slipped into Wonderland. **When 55% is considered poor support and 47% is considered a sweeping majority you do have to ask: *what is wrong here?***

Martha has one answer for you: it is our outdated electoral system. In Alberta, and across Canada, we still use the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system, which, as its name suggests, is much like a horse race where whoever crosses the finish line first, even if it is by a nose, wins. Under FPTP the candidate with the most votes wins the seat. In Alberta, the Conservatives under Klein won 75% of the seats even though they received just 47% of the vote.

One of the alternatives to this FPTP system is a form of Proportional Representation (PR). Now before you get all excited about new age ideas, you should know that every nation in the world that has been created since WW2 has chosen a system of PR. In fact, the only major countries still using FPTP are the US, UK, and Canada. Proportional representation takes many forms (see [Law Commission of Canada report](#)) but all systems of it would ***more accurately translate votes into seats***. In Alberta, [Fair Vote Canada- Alberta](#) has campaigned for a system of PR.

The neat thing about PR is that it has the bonus outcome of increasing the number of women who get elected. And as you know, **just 15.6% of the Alberta legislature is female**. Martha has ranted about that number more than a few

times. She put her money where her ranting is and recently joined [Equal Voice](#), a national action committee calling on all the parties to get more women elected. (They just started two chapters in Alberta - Alberta South and Alberta North - and both are waiting for you to join. Follow the links on the Equal Voice website to become a member and get on their mailing lists.)

So we have a story about numbers here. Just 15% of MLAs in Alberta are women and fewer than half the electorate voted for the Conservatives in the last election. Yet, our electoral system has rewarded the Conservatives with 75% of the seats and 100% of the power. If this math makes you want out of Wonderland then you need to write a letter and demand that Premier Klein create a Citizens Assembly, similar to the one that BC created a few years ago. Let a group of Marthas and Henrys look at the electoral system and suggest a workable model.

Copy the following letter into a new email and send to premier@gov.ab.ca, Alison.Crawford@assembly.ab.ca, newdemocrats@assembly.ab.ca, Edmonton.Riverview@assembly.ab.ca and back to us at marthasmonthly@yahoo.ca.

Premier Klein
Alberta Legislature

April 8, 2006

Dear Mr. Klein:

I, along with my fellow Marthas of Martha's Monthly, was surprised to see you adjust the date of your retirement after the leadership review on April 1st. With 55% support you actually garnered a majority of support. In many elections, including the last provincial one and the last two federal ones, the "winning party" received much less than 50% of the votes but held on to 100% of the power.

The sad reality is that our 19th Century electoral system is not appropriate any longer for this province. We need to consider electoral system reforms that will result in fairer seat allocations based on the popular vote and will result in more women being elected. There are many possible systems of translating vote share to seat share and I believe that the only way to find the right solution for Alberta is to create a Citizens Assembly made up of average Albertans, the Marthas and the Henrys, using the BC Citizens Assembly model.

I call upon you to leave a strong legacy for this province's future by making one of your last bills one that will initiate electoral reform and establish a Citizens Assembly.

Sincerely,

Your name and address

You have received this email because jennflemingbaker@shaw.ca chose to subscribe to the Martha's Monthly mailing list.

To subscribe to this list send a blank email to: martha-subscribe@womanspace.ca and then reply to the confirmation message.

To unsubscribe from this list send a blank email to: martha-unsubscribe@womanspace.ca and then reply to the confirmation message