

Voter Equality – A Principle to Guide Election Finance Reform

Craig Henschel

5 December 2014

VoterEquality.org

Burnaby, British Columbia

The idea of “**One Vote for Each Voter**” implies that every voter is supposed to have an equal say in the laws and policies which affect them, at least at the time of an election.

In democracies, we expect elections to be moments of voter equality, even if the corridors of influence are wide open the rest of the time.

The amount of money a campaign spends, often directly affects the results. Money shapes public opinion. We all know this to be true.

I’m concerned that the principle of 'Voter Equality' is lost when some voters have the ability to contribute large sums of money to campaigns, and other voters can only contribute very modestly.

A wealthy person has many advantages over a poor person. But a wealthy person's vote is no wiser, no better, no more important and no more significant than the vote of the person of limited means.

We consider this to be a fundamental democratic truth, and so does the Canadian Charter.

‘Democracy’ is something you have, only if you have a say in the policies and laws which affect you, in equal measure to all other voters. In the healthiest democracies, voters have **Equal Legislative Power**.

For elections to be a true representation of the public will, financial contributions to campaigns should be limited to the amount that most voters can afford and only be made by individual voters, and not their corporate, union, or organizational proxies.

Why does this matter?

Faulty democracies make bad decisions.

When unequal financial contributions bias and predetermine decision making; the research, analysis, discussion and thoughtfulness needed to make appropriate and wise policy decisions, are abandoned. So we often do the wrong policies and laws.

Voters become disillusioned and alienated from their government and political representatives. Trust is lost. People stop voting, because they don't see the point in it.

Corruption

At its most basic level, not having effective limits on individual and group donations is simply facilitating influence peddling. This is corruption, in its most obvious form.

Because this type of quid pro quo corruption is currently possible, all politicians are tarnished. How can you tell which politician took money as a bribe and which politician took money as a civic contribution?

Many politicians will say that the current system isn't corrupt because they don't see themselves as being corrupt. That isn't a proof of lack of corruption. It's just self-serving thinking, which is the very heart of corruption.

As a politician, the best way to avoid being corrupt, and having to compete against corrupt adversaries, is to create processes and a political system which inherently makes corruption difficult to occur without specific corrupt intent and action. As an example, the current Senate "corruption scandal" could have easily been prevented through better processes and policies.

When politicians (for example this committee) allow corrupt practices and processes to persist by not addressing them when they are specifically tasked to do so, they are complicit for any corruption and harms which naturally follow. They do a disservice to both voters and to themselves.

Putting a few band aids on the Local Government Elections Act will just let things fester. And then, when we least expect it, some well-meaning candidate or elected official, will get in a heap of trouble nobody wants. When the scandal hits the fan, who will it hit? Them? Their party? Me? You?

It will hit us all.

Recommendation

For elections to be a true and honest representation of the public will, free of obvious corruption, financial contributions to campaigns should be limited to the amount that most voters can afford, maybe \$50 to \$100, and only be made by individual voters, and not their corporate, union, or organizational proxies.