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Submission to the B.C. Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform (July 24, 2025)

Democracy Watch calls on the MLAs on the Committee to recommend all the changes needed to ensure democratic politics across the province and to stop foreign interference, and for all B.C. parties to work together to enact the changes into law as soon as possible.

Many changes needed to make B.C. elections and political system actually democratic, honest, ethical, open and fair. The same changes are also needed to stop foreign interference.

No one in B.C. politics is effectively required to act honestly, ethically, openly, representatively or to prevent waste, and so the system is the scandal and it is not surprising that it produces scandalous political decisions and actions regularly, and discourages voter engagement and participation in political processes.

It is not surprising at all that many B.C. voters are turned off politics given that false election promises, dishonest spin, excessive secrecy, secret and unethical lobbying, conflicts of interest and ministers and top government officials profiting from their own decisions, and waste of the public's money are all legal, and the political donations and third-party spending systems amount to legalized bribery, and the vote counting system often gives majority power to parties that are supported by a minority of voters.

The only way to increase voter engagement and participation, and to stop the undemocratic, unethical, dishonest influence of foreign interference by governments and foreign agents on B.C. politics, is to make the key changes needed stop all undemocratic, unethical and dishonest influence, and to require democratic engagement with voters during and between elections.

To have an actually democratic political and election system that encourages and increases voter participation and democratic engagement, and to stop foreign interference, the top 10 most important changes that need to be made and applied to everyone (politicians, appointees, political staff, public servants) in the

provincial and municipal governments, and in every government and government-funded institution across the province, and to lobbyists and interest groups and voters, are as follows:

1. Enact an [honesty-in-politics law](#) that allows for complaints to the provincial Conflict of Interest Commissioner about broken promises, and about dishonest statements made anywhere (including in the legislature) by anyone, including [fake online posts](#) during election campaigns, with mandatory high fines as the penalty. [Click here to see](#) a detailed report on stopping dishonesty, disinformation and misinformation.
2. Require all provincially regulated industry and service sectors (property and auto insurance, financial and investment services, health care institutions, energy and water) to include a notice in their mailings and emails to customers inviting them to join and fund [citizen watchdog groups](#) for each industry and sector, and increase royalties for all resource development sectors and put the money raised into a fund that citizen watchdog groups jointly oversee and use for jointly decided initiatives.
3. Establish a [Public Appointments Commission](#) whose members are approved of by the leaders of parties that receive more than 5 percent of the popular vote in the election and/or have seats in the legislature, and require the Commission to conduct public, merit-based searches and choose a short list of a maximum of 3 candidates for all Cabinet appointments (including all [watchdogs, police chiefs and provincial judges](#)), and then have an all-party committee required to choose who is appointed from the short list. [Click here to see](#) a detailed policy paper on how to make law enforcement independent, timely, transparent, fair and effective.
4. Enact a [meaningful public consultation law](#) that requires broad, in-depth public consultation with voters (including legislature committee hearings) before any government or government institution makes a significant decision, and [free and empower MLAs](#) to represent voters and hold the government accountable by [restricting the powers of the Premier](#) and all party leaders.
5. Ban gifts and loans from businesses, unions and other organizations, and (as in Quebec) limit individual [political donations](#) to \$100 annually and, (if parties can prove it is needed) establish per-vote and donation-matching public funding, and ensure election spending and reimbursements apply equally to all parties and candidates. [Click here to see](#) a detailed policy paper on how to ensure a democratic donation and loan system. Also, restrict advertising spending by third parties to an amount based on the actual number of members of the third-party organization (and have a very low spending limit for individual and business third parties as they don't represent anyone other than themselves). [Click here to see](#) a detailed policy paper on how to stop unethical, undemocratic influence by third-party individuals and interest groups.
6. Prohibit everyone in politics from participating in any way in any decision-making process if they have even the [appearance of a conflict of interest](#) (even if the decision applies generally), and prohibit top politicians and

- officials from having investments in businesses, and ban anyone who leaves politics from communicating with anyone involved in politics about their decisions for 3-5 years (depending on the relationships and power they held in their former position). [Click here to see](#) a detailed policy paper on how to ensure ethical political decision-making.
7. Require everyone in politics to disclose through an online registry any communication they have with any politician, political staff, appointee or public official with regard to decisions they are making, and prohibit lobbyists from giving gifts or doing favours (including helping with political campaigns or fundraising) to close the [secret, unethical lobbying loopholes](#) that now exist. [Click here to see](#) a detailed policy paper on how to stop secret, unethical lobbying.
 8. [Strengthen the freedom of information law](#) by reducing loopholes, applying it to all government and government-funded institutions, requiring that records of all decisions and actions be disclosed regularly, and giving the Information Commissioner the power to order changes to government institutions' information systems (as in Britain), and to penalize violators of the law, and [ensure effective whistleblower protection](#) by strengthening the rules and powers of the B.C. Ombudsperson to protect all whistleblowers who disclose wrongdoing in the public and private sectors.
 9. Change the [voting system](#) to ensure a more accurate representation of the popular vote results of each election in the seats held by each party in the legislature (and in city councilors elected) while ensuring that all elected officials are supported by, and are accountable to, voters in each riding/constituency (with a safeguard to ensure that a party with a low-level, narrow-base of support does not have a disproportionately high level of power in the legislature) – and actually fix election dates (as many countries have, as much as possible in our system).
 10. [Reduce waste of the public's money](#) by prohibiting omnibus budget bills, and empowering the Auditor General: to approve or reject all significant spending proposals based on an assessment of whether the proposal clearly commits to comply with all waste-prevention requirements, and the projected amount to be spent is realistic (to ensure truth-in-budgeting); to audit all government and government-funded institutions (including the legislature and MLA offices); to prohibit government advertising if it is misleading or partisan; to order changes to clean up the financial management of any institution, and; to penalize violators of spending and procurement rules.

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