

1. Would you agree that provincial legislation, to be the most legitimate, should be approved by a majority of elected MLAs representing a majority of voters?

Bills introduced in the House of Assembly must receive three readings and are classified, based on their content, as: Public Bills, Government Bills, Private Members' Bills, Private Bills and Local Bills. It is also important to note that during the progression of legislation, it goes to committee for public input. Public Bills are referred to the Law Amendments Committee. Private or Local Bills are referred to the Private and Local Bills Committee. Both the Law Amendments Committee and the Private and Local Bills Committee hear representations from any interested persons. Committee of the Whole House on Bills is a stage which affords a line by line consideration of the Bill as written.

These stages are important to note, because at each reading a vote is taken in which a majority of members are required to vote in the affirmative in order for the Bill to progress to the next stage. At Law Amendments Committee, Members hear from all interested persons from the public who either have a stake in the Bill, or simply a general interest. The public has the opportunity to present their thoughts and their suggestions to the Committee for changes as they feel will improve the Bill. The Committee may then make amendments based on these presentations if they agree that it would improve the Bill.

As the rules now stand, there are a number of occasions for which a majority vote must take place before a Bill reaches Royal Assent, as well as opportunity for the public to comment and make suggestions.

2. Voters need and should have fair and effective representation in a democracy. Yet in Nova Scotia, members of minority groups including African Nova Scotians, Aboriginal persons and others have historically been under-represented in the House of Assembly. No Aboriginal person, for example, has ever been elected to the House. As well, despite making up half of the provincial population, women are also under-represented (currently only 23% of MLAs are female). Do you feel this under-representation of women and minorities needs to be rectified?

The under-representation of women and minorities in the House of Assembly is an issue which must continually be addressed. We believe that all of our provincial parties work hard to ensure that all voices are heard though various means. We also believe that more work needs to be done. There are a number of theories which arise both in the academic world and through practical experience which attempt to better understand why under-representation persists.

At the end of the day, however, the voice of those in each riding who nominate candidates and eventually elect Members, must be respected.

3. Do you agree that the share of the vote a party receives in an election should be close to the share of seats it receives in the legislature?

This is an interesting question as it alludes to various models of voting models such as varying degrees of proportional representation has developed a substantial amount of literature and academic debate over the past years. Academics, and those jurisdictions which have alternative voting procedures in practice, have uncovered a number of positive features as well as challenges to the various forms and models of representation. Voter engagement is a very important goal and deserves thoughtful discussion.

4. In its final 2012 report, The Nova Scotia Electoral Boundaries Commission recommended that the Nova Scotia Legislature “initiate a process involving both extensive critical examination and public consultation on the current electoral system as well as possible alternatives to it”, and “establish a process for consulting with key minority groups, in particular the Acadian and African Nova Scotian communities, for the purpose of determining alternative means for achieving fair and effective minority representation.” Do you support these recommendations, and, if elected Premier, will you in your first mandate initiate these processes?

The Commission states: “The distortions introduced by the current system, whereby only one member can be elected per constituency, with no allowance made for popular vote totals, can be a disincentive to political participation.” The key question becomes what model would best make room for some level of allowance, and what is the most effective approach to address this situation. Additionally, the redistribution process uncovered some concerns around the difficulty of ensuring minority representation under our system as currently structured.

The Commission notes that discussions are taking place in provinces across the country. We should continue to have this discussion in order to establish clear goals for any reform of the electoral process. Fundamentally, it is paramount that the people of Nova Scotia must be the foundation of these discussions, and close consideration must be given to those voices who have been historically under-represented. Our electoral system is fundamental to the question of how we govern ourselves.

5. As party leader, would you ensure that a process (which includes public consultation) to make the provincial electoral system more fair and proportional is a condition of your support for any minority government?

Regardless of electoral results on October 8th, the Liberal Party will remain committed to a democratic system that fairly represents to views of Nova Scotians.

6. Currently, Nova Scotia electoral law does not require candidates and political parties to release election campaign financing information in advance of election day. As party leader, and in the interest of transparency and voter awareness, would you develop or support legislation that would require all political parties to release election campaign donation lists before any election day?

The current law has been effective in making public financial information for parties and candidates. This is an important feature in keeping our elections transparent. Attention must be paid to accuracy and official agents must be afforded the ability to ensure that their work is precise, detailed and complete. The reporting deadlines strive to ensure this balance between timeliness and accuracy of public reporting

7. In the interest of transparency and voter awareness, will you and your party's candidates voluntarily release your campaign financing information in advance of the October 8th 2013 election?

All financial information and documents for the Nova Scotia Liberal Party will conform to the law.