

# The Legislature Sits, the Canadian Chamber Meets, Electoral Reform Referendum Goes Out

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In August, I wrote about how busy we were in Chamber world, even though it was summer. Now, gazing at September-October-November-December, July-August was a stroll in the park. This month, we focus on international trade, among other issues. On Friday, September 28, we welcome the British Consul-General in Vancouver, **Nicole Davison**. She's featured at our inaugural fall Chamber luncheon, and will speak knowledgeably on BREXIT, CETA, and the importance of free trade. Nicole represents the UK in BC, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories and has served in South Africa, Bangladesh, the Ukraine, China and Croatia.

That's an easy segue to promoting the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's newest initiative, 'Keep Trade Free'. **Perrin Beatty**, President & CEO of the CCC tells us that the objectives are simple: "First," he says, "we are advocating for freer trade within North America and around the world. Second, we are building the case for a modernized NAFTA that will grow Canada's economies and make us globally competitive." The coalition website [www.keeptradefree.com](http://www.keeptradefree.com) will keep businesses and partners updated. Our Chamber has joined and is helping spread the word. Meanwhile, we also remain hyper-focused on inter-provincial trade barriers *within* Canada; our policy resolution demanding action goes to the Canadian Chamber floor in Thunder Bay at the annual policy session on September 23. Still on the subject of trade, the Chamber hosted TAP workshops earlier in the summer in Kelowna. TAP (Trade Accelerator Program) sponsored by World Trade Centre Vancouver allowed attendees to receive full bursaries, and learn how to navigate the complexities of the global trade ecosystem; how to leverage Canada's deep trade and investment resources; and, take advantage of tailored, face-to-face coaching and advice. We'll offer the TAP program again in the next 12 months, helping Okanagan businesses to expand into this key market area.

The Electoral Reform Referendum is getting closer. The mail-in ballots will be sent out starting October 22, with a deadline of November 30 for mail-back. Our Chamber is not opposed to the concept of electoral reform, but we remain strongly opposed to the current process as it has been laid out by the Government.

BC's chambers voted to support a new 2018 policy resolution: "Engaging Business and Community on Electoral Reform" proposed by the Kelowna Chamber and the Kamloops Chamber. It recommended that the BC government appoint a non-partisan panel to determine the likely outcomes of an alternative system *prior* to holding a referendum, similar to the 2004 Citizens' Assembly; that they clearly define the system of proportional

representation being considered, well in advance of any referendum; and that they confirm that no changes be implemented unless there is a clear majority overall (i.e. 60% in favour) and the referendum is supported in a majority of BC's 87 ridings.

Attorney General **David Eby** on May 30 recommended that the referendum include two questions. The first: choose between the current First Past the Post voting system and a Proportional Representation system. The second: choose among Dual Member Proportional, Mixed Member Proportional, or Rural-Urban Proportional. (Not clear on what that second question is? Don't worry. You're not alone.)

This referendum marks the third time the provincial government has asked British Columbians to vote on potential changes to our voting system. BC Chambers want to ensure there is adequate public consultation and education on possible changes to our voting system. Better consultation with British Columbians on the impact of various untried Proportional Representation systems would help ensure voters have a clearer understanding of all options. Unfortunately, thus far details and productive discussions on the topic that have engaged British Columbians have been sadly lacking. This is particularly concerning when you consider how important this issue is.

The Kelowna Chamber is hosting a panel discussion next month (October 17) with the two government-appointed "sides" (Yes and No). We'll welcome **Bill Tieleman**, from "No BC Pro Rep"; Bill's a former journalist and NDP political strategist. We will also welcome a speaker from "Yes to PR": **Maria Dobrinskaya**, spokesperson for the "Yes" side, and former co-chair of Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson's Vision Vancouver party. Each side received \$500,000 in funding from the provincial government to make their cases to the electorate.

We are looking forward to this Kelowna Chamber luncheon; we see it as an important educational opportunity for all of us. This is a key issue not just for 2018 but for the future of our province for decades to come and could have long-resonating effects on business, the rural-urban divide, and the cost-effectiveness of our public institutions. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month, the Kelowna Chamber takes part in a media event held alongside the UBCM annual convention in Whistler. We will join with Chamber colleagues from around the province in supporting many mayors and councillors, representing both targeted and not-yet-targeted municipalities for the province's proposed Speculation tax as they speak out against the tax.

The Kelowna Chamber has been outspoken against this punitive, anti-Canadian tax which is hurting our small businesses, sending "go away" messages to our friends, visitors and fellow Canadians from outside BC. Municipalities don't have a say in whether or not this tax is applied to their communities – that's just wrong.

Finally, our run-up to the Chamber's "Reel Business Excellence Awards 2018" continues. Completed nomination packages roared in throughout August from our 323 nominees in 11 categories. At an October 4 lunch-matinée, we'll celebrate all our semi-finalists – selected by our independent judging committee – prior to our gala on Wednesday October 24, when old-style Hollywood glam will be front and centre as we take over the Delta Conference Centre celebrating all our guests, semi-finalists, winners, and sponsors. Thanks to our long-standing presenting sponsors **BDC** and **Farris LLP**.

New members at time of writing include: **Unifirst; Do Some Good; Orbis Sports; Jaxsin Excavating; Pacific Western Brewing Company; Edmonton International Airport; KIDS HELP PHONE; Southern Interior Construction Association (SICA); IPMC Smart Technologies Inc.; 1007246 BC Ltd.; Madera Millwork; Desrosiers Cook Associates – Century 21; Park Stone & Tile; Kelowna Pool Tables; The Pluminators Plumbing & Heating.** *Welcome All!*

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