

**Citizen Engagement:
Democracy At Its Best**

David Elton
President, Max Bell Foundation

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Citizen Engagement: Democracy At Its Best

I am pleased to be here tonight and to have been given the opportunity to present the 8th Mel Smith lecture. I had the privilege of knowing and working with Mel Smith, beginning in 1978.

Mel Smith

I first met Mel Smith in 1978 when, as a young Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Lethbridge I joined the Canada West Foundation as Research Director and was given the task of writing a position paper on reforming Canada's political institutions. Mel Smith was at that time British Columbia's senior public servant responsible for constitutional matters.

From 1978 until his passing our paths crossed frequently as we sought not only to contribute to the restructuring of Canada's political institutions, but also to improve numerous different public policies here in British Columbia, throughout western Canada, and within Canada.

Mel Smith was clearly an excellent example of a citizen engaged in his community, and that is primarily what I want to talk to you about tonight. He was a man who believed in the concept of public service, someone who was actively engaged in trying to make our society a better place by committing his time and energy to not only think, write and talk about how certain aspects of public life could be improved, but also by getting involved with others in promoting positive change.

My presentation to you is about citizen engagement. There are two aspects of this topic which I will address tonight. The first aspect to be addressed is the opportunity citizens have to become involved in their community and the extraordinary impact a single citizen can have on the political system. The second aspect of citizen engagement to be addressed is the responsibility of the political system to provide ordinary Canadians with the opportunity to become engaged in public policy.

This presentation is not just about a political science concept of citizen participation and institutional processes, it is also about gambling and an oil and gas business entrepreneur. It is about electing Senators and an irrigation farmer. It is about a school librarian reforming the education system both here in British Columbia and across Canada. Finally, it is about people who have been very successful at making

money and what they chose to do with that money to help make Canada a better place to live in.

Before I talk to you about gambling, electing senators reforming school systems, and philanthropy, let me take a few moments to talk about the concept of citizen engagement, which as far as I can tell is by in large synonymous with what we use to call political participation when I taught political science.

Citizen Engagement

Elections and the process of running for public office, campaigning and voting is probably the most common thing people think about when a phrase such as “citizen engagement” is used. Undoubtedly the reason most of us think of elections when we think about people getting involved in politics is because this is the single most important political event in the life of a democratic society when a majority, or at least a large minority of the governed get to decide who will rule them. This is for many citizens one of the few overt political activities they undertake.

The second most common image of citizen engagement is that of a protest. Here a group of citizens takes to the streets in an effort to force government into changing a particular regulation or practices such as clear cutting forests, or specific labor laws, or education policies, etc. These kinds of events often involve a relatively small number of citizens who use as a last resort protest to express their inability to change the status quo.

Probably the most poignant example of a single person protesting in public is the picture of a young person standing in front of a tank in Tianamen Square. Both of these examples, elections and street protests, are good examples of citizen engagement, but they are simply the proverbial tip of the iceberg when it comes to citizen participation. Most meaningful citizen engagement takes place between elections, often out of sight of cameras or reporters, and well before people become frustrated enough to take to the streets.

So what is meant by the phrase citizen engagement? Probably the best way to define this concept to point to examples – like the two examples I’ve already given – that of elections and political protests. Clearly, in each of these political events citizens get involved with politics. For most citizens voting is more or less a spectator sport where they simply pick the player, team, or issue that either appeals to them the most or has the greatest likelihood of meeting their expectations. Those that choose to engage in protests are often passionately committed to a specific

outcome, and want to directly impact a specific program, policy or regulation that often directly benefits or harms them.

Other equally obvious political activities that exemplify citizen engagement would be participation in any one of a wide range of special interest groups that seek to have government programs and policies changed. These groups include citizens seeking to improve the financial wellbeing of a wide range of industries such as forestry, automobiles, agriculture, fisheries, people advocating greater funding for daycare, schools, seniors, etc. The regulated use of off wheel vehicles in mountain parks, gambling, pornography, drugs, and the like are also hot buttons that move citizens to engage in politics.

In sum, citizen engagement really covers everything connected to very common phrases that each one of us either utter or hear others complain “someone has got to change the way things are done around here”, “there ought to be a law” or even “it just isn’t fair”.

There is quite a distance to be traveled for engaged citizens between the desire to see something change and the realization of that change. Contained within the journey between the desire for change and its realization also lies apathy, cynicism, alienation, and a feeling of personal powerlessness to do anything to impact significant changes in major government policies, and programs.

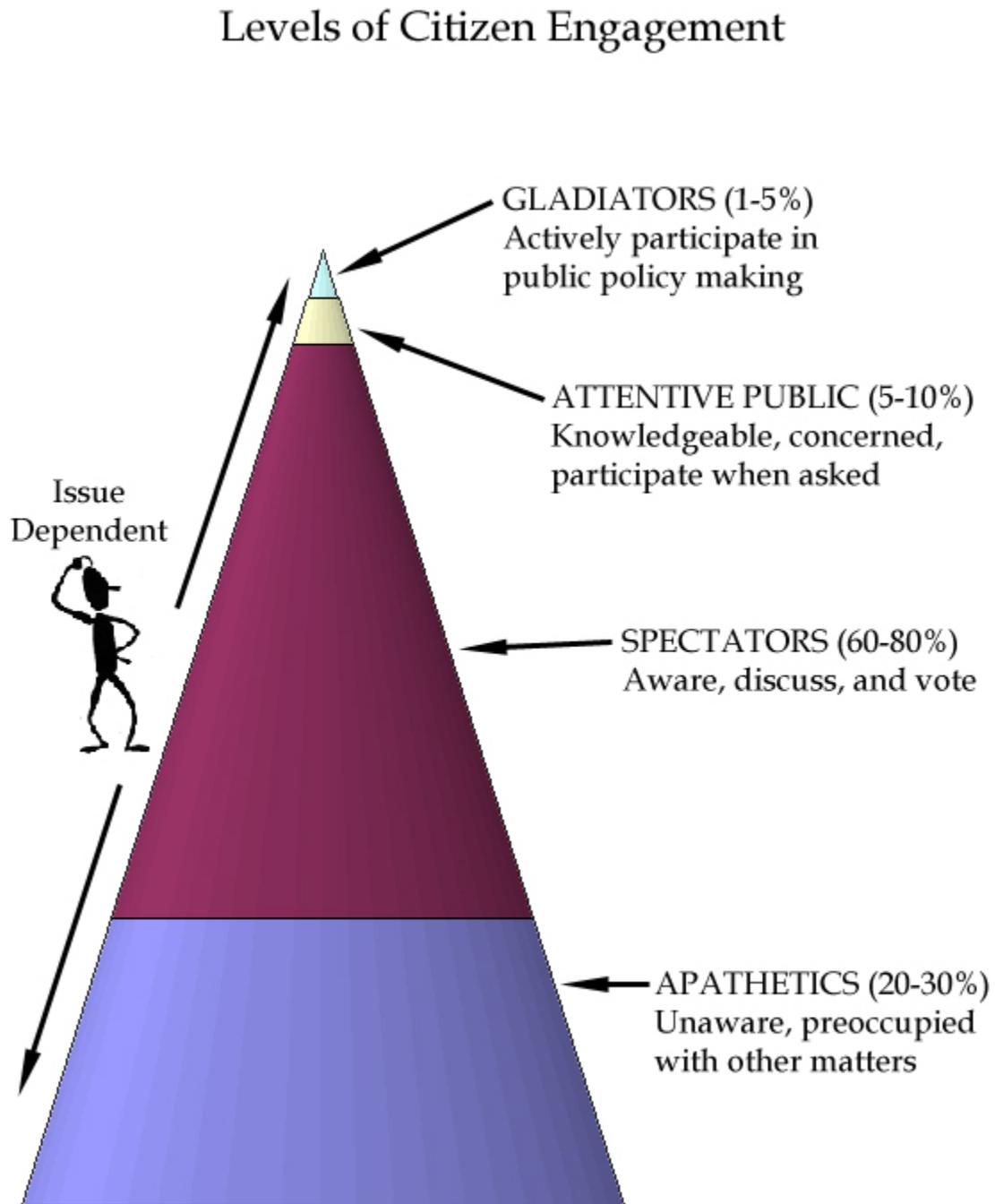
As you can see from the diagram in Figure 1, very few Canadians tend to engage in politics. The hierarchy of citizen engagement depicted by the pyramid in Figure one shows quite clearly that on any given public policy issue there are seldom more than one percent, or even a fraction of one percent of the population that become actively engaged - that become the gladiators in the political arena. Most of us, on most issues, choose to be spectators, or even are by in large apathetic about most issues. This is not necessarily a bad thing because none of us have the time, resources or inclination to spend our entire lives engaged in public policy issues. Each of us must choose how much time, energy and resources we will carve out of our already busy lives to become knowledgeable about a given topic, much less become political gladiators.

My message to you tonight is twofold, and really quite simple. First, my experience as a political scientist, and as an active participant in dozens of projects both large and small regarding public policy, has taught me that there isn’t anything in society that can’t be improved or changed by citizen engagement, by you, me or others that share our commitment to improve society. Second, it is my experience that our

society would be substantially more democratic if both governments, government agencies, and voluntary associations did more to encourage ordinary Canadians to become engaged in influencing public policy.

Now, having told you not only what I want to talk about, but also what my conclusions, are, let me provide you with some evidence to substantiate my conclusions.

Figure 1: Levels of Citizen Engagement



Gambling Addictions – Government and Individual

A few moments ago I told you that part of my presentation to you tonight was going to be about people who were moved to become active in the political process. My first example is of someone who became concerned about the dramatic increase in gambling in our society and decided to take on city hall.

Many of us here tonight have, over the past few years become concerned about the dramatic increase in gambling that has taken place in our society, and in particular about the role that provincial governments have played in encouraging gambling. For example, I am one of those Canadians that believe provincial governments have become addicted to gambling revenues. And, according to a Victoria Times cartoon of a few years ago that depicted former Premier Glen Clark attending a gambling anonymous meeting, there are many British Columbians that share this conviction.

Although it may seem implausible to many young Canadians, gambling was actually outlawed in Canada in 1892. The Criminal Code of Canada declared a complete ban on all gambling activities, except, of course, those specifically permitted by Government. For nearly seven decades, from 1892 until 1969, only bingos and raffles sponsored by charities, pari-mutuel betting on horse races, and games of chance at fairs and exhibitions were permitted. Several private members bills were introduced throughout the 1960's to legalize gambling but none were passed into law.

When I was in high school in the late 1950's it was against the law for Canadians to buy a lotto ticket, which at the time were called sweepstake tickets. I remember having someone come up to me at school and offer to sell me an Irish Sweepstake Ticket – the only kind of lotto ticket I had ever heard of. It was as though I was being offered an illegal drug of some sort. I bought the ticket not only for the remote chance that I might win a large sum of money, but also for the thrill of feeling like a rebel and being able to secretively flash the ticket to my friends to prove that I owned contraband.

My next brush with gambling was when I went to University in the United States in the early 1960's and read a book entitled The Red Carpet, which was all about organized crime and gambling in Las Vegas, Nevada. It all seemed very questionable, if not criminal and far removed from my somewhat puritan upbringing in Calgary, Canada.

In 1969 things began to change in Canada with regards to gambling and it was stimulated by governments seeking to generate money to pay for Olympic games. The Criminal code was amended to allow provincial and federal government's to sell lottery tickets and almost overnight provincial governments began to receive large annual revenues from the sale of Lottery tickets. The lottery sales were so lucrative that provincial governments subsequently entered into an agreement with the federal government to gain a monopoly on the regulation of gambling and provinces set up crown corporations such as the British Columbia Lottery Corporation.

In 1985 there was another amendment to the Criminal Code of Canada. Provincial governments gained the right to "conduct and manage" video gambling devices such as video lottery terminals and slot machines. This change in the criminal code gave provincial government's complete control over the licensing, regulation, and operating of gambling activities.

The changes to the Criminal Code mentioned above were made with either the tacit approval, or at the request of many Canadians. There was limited vocal opposition to these changes as many charities and all citizens benefited either directly or indirectly from the revenues generated from gambling activities.

At the present time gambling in Canada is by any definition big business. There are now over 87,000 gambling machines (one for every 281 Canadians), 33,000 lottery ticket centres, over 60 permanent casinos, and 25,000 licenses to run bingos, temporary casinos, raffles, etc. Provincial governments generate net revenues of from 100's of millions per year to in excess of a billion dollars in the case of Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec. Literally thousands of charities benefit from the money raised through gambling.

Extensive citizen engagement regarding the scope and magnitude of gambling in Canada is a relatively recent phenomenon and has grown as provincial governments have expanded gambling activity. The primary factors stimulating opposition to gambling has been objection in principle to the idea of gambling, based primarily upon a belief that gambling is a corruptive influence and that it has a very negative impact not only on the person that gambles, but also on the well being of their families, friends, fellow workers and the community as a whole. Depression, financial ruin, family violence, abandonment, divorce, theft, and even suicide have all been directly linked to addictive gambling.

At the present time expenditures on gambling averages over 1000 per year per household. For approximately 2% to 6.3%, or from 400 thousand to 1.2 million adult Canadians that exhibit moderate or serious problem gambling behaviors, the annual costs to their households are frequently in the \$10,000's and often catastrophic.

In Alberta, my home province, VLT's were actually introduced in community bars from 1992 through 1995 and following a widespread consultation with Albertans in 1995 the number of VLTs in the province was capped at 6000 machines. So where does citizen engagement fit in the gambling issue? What have individual citizens who believe gambling is harmful done to limit gambling in their community, in their province? Well, in fact, individual Canadians have done, are doing, and will do much to impact gambling in their community, province, and even throughout Canada.

By the early 1990's public objections over government sponsored gambling had grown to the point that government's began to curtail VLT's. In 1995 British Columbia, for example, had 55% of those voting in several public plebiscites opposed the placement of VLT's in their communities. To this day British Columbia does not have VLT's in hotels, bars and restaurants.

Calgarians for Democratic Choice (CDC)

In 1997 there were many people in Calgary muttering "something should be done to stop the spread of VLTs". There were frequent human interest stories in the media regarding the personal tragedies related to gambling addiction and the havoc these addictions were creating within their families, workplaces and sometimes the community at large. There were stories about people in small Alberta communities such as Rocky Mountain House, Sylvan Lake, and Wood buffalo who were holding plebiscites advocating the removal of VLT's from their communities. Also, a statement by Alberta's populist Premier Ralph Klein that if people didn't want VLT's in their community, they could vote to have them removed.

In the fall of 1997 a Calgary geologist and successful natural gas explorer, became interested in the gambling debate as a result of hearing a number of very disturbing stories about people who had become addicted to gambling and the impact those addictions had upon their families and work places. He also heard about the plebiscites that had been held in some of Alberta's towns and here in British Columbia in 1995. His name is Jim Gray.

Jim is one of those people who wants the best for his community and he began to ask why no one was doing anything to curtail or even eliminate what seemed to him to be an obvious public cancer – what many people have referred to as the crack cocaine of gambling - the spread of Video lottery terminals in the city of Calgary. In December of 1997 Jim convened a group of people together, and they prepared a presentation for the Calgary City council requesting that the City hold a plebiscite. Council listened to the group but decided there wasn't clear evidence that a sizeable enough group was interested in the VLT issue. They therefore declined the request to hold a plebiscite unless the City received a petition requiring them to do so.

The rules related to mounting a successful petition in an Alberta municipality are an excellent example of how government discourages, even eliminates citizen initiated plebiscites in anything but the smallest villages or towns. Here is what it takes:

1. First, the Municipal Government Act in Alberta requires that a successful petition to force a plebiscite must be signed by enough electors aged 18+ to equal at least 10% of the total population;
2. second, all signatures must be gathered within a 60 day period;
3. third, each signature must be witnessed;
4. fourth, each witness must swear to a Commissioner of Oaths that the signatures they witness are authentic;
5. fifth, each signature must be authenticated by the city's returning officer before the petition is declared valid.

These rules mean that a valid petition to force a plebiscite in Calgary requires the petitioners to collect, witness and authenticate signatures from in excess of 100,000 people – or about the same number or more than the total number of people that vote in Calgary's municipal elections.

Jim Gray is also one of those people who find that when the cards are stacked against him he decides to do something about it. He asked advice on the feasibility of undertaking such a petition and what the chances of success were. He was told that no petition requiring this many signatures, collected in such a short period of time, and under such a strict set of rules had ever been successful. His response was, "OK, then lets be first to do it".

In order to undertake this petition an organization needed to be created and a great deal of planning had to be undertaken. Thus the completely voluntary and ad hoc organization that became known as Calgarians for Democratic Choice was created.

The name Calgarians for Democratic choice was chosen because it was decided that the purpose of the exercise was not to only sign up all those opposed to gambling, but to also appeal to those who believed voters should have the right to express an opinion on whether or not they wanted VLT's in their community.

To be successful CDC had to engage hundreds of people from almost every Christian faith, from the Muslim community, the Jewish community, and almost every other religious community, plus non-profits such as the YMCA, Science Alberta, Calgary's Women's Emergency Shelter Association, and the list goes on. Once organized a specific 60 day period had to be established (April 6 to June 4, 1998).

The decision to create an organization to undertake a petition drive and the subsequent media coverage of the event was contagious, not only in Calgary but throughout the province. Citizens in Calgary's sister city Edmonton took up the challenge when their City council refused to voluntarily hold a plebiscite, and by the time the campaigns were over and the results known 33 other cities, towns, and even county districts decided to hold plebiscites in the fall of 1998.

The actual petition campaigns in both cities involved circulating petitions at church meetings, in malls, and at public gatherings of every sort. But this was not enough. Another successful aspect of the campaign was a door to door canvassing to all parts of the city. As Jim Gray had predicted, with nothing more than a belief that citizens would rise to the challenge, more people signed this petition (124,000) than voted in the 1995 municipal election. Edmonton's petition was similarly successful as 105,000 voters in that city signed a petition requesting a vote on VLTs.

There is not time to go into any greater detail related to this unique direct democracy endeavor tonight. For those of you that want to read a detailed account of this case study please go to the Canada West Foundation website, www.cwf.ca, click on their publications, choose their gambling project publications, and go to the 1998 publication entitled Rolling the Dice: Alberta's Experience with Direct Democracy and Video Lottery Terminals.

For those of us who do not think VLTs should be in corner bars, restaurants, and hotels the results of the plebiscite votes in Calgary's municipalities in the fall of 1998 were not what we had hoped for. A majority of those voting in the October plebiscite voted to retain VLTs in Calgary as 58% voted to keep the VLTs. In Edmonton the vote was much closer as 50.1% voted to keep VLTs and 49.9 voted to remove them. Overall, in the 36 communities that held plebiscites 28 communities

voted to keep VLTs, 7 communities voted to remove VLTs, and one community in which there weren't any VLTs voted to keep them out.

On the surface one might conclude from this case study that all the planning, the time, the energy and the emotional commitment of Jim Gray and the hundreds of people that worked on these plebiscites went for naught. To conclude that the Citizens for Democratic Choice was a failure because of the outcome of the plebiscite is to misunderstand the purpose of citizen engagement. That an individual was willing and able to encourage hundreds of citizens to join with him in actively seeking to force a plebiscite on an issue they thought important to their community is far more important than how the vote actually turned out.

Democracy does not guarantee citizens that when they engage in a cause, no matter how worthwhile the cause may be, they will get their way. A cornerstone of democracy and citizen engagement is that people can have a say in what takes place in their communities, and that their concerns will be carefully considered in the decision making process.

Electing Senators

The second example of citizen engagement has to do with Senate reform and the ongoing efforts to create a Triple E Senate in Canada – a Canadian Senate where Senators are **elected** not appointed, a Canadian Senate wherein each province has an **equal** number of Senators not as at present where Ontario has 24 Senators to British Columbia's 6 senators, and a Canadian Senate that is **effective** in that it can promote national government programs and policies that represent the needs and wishes of Canadians residing in all provinces.

Changing the way in which people are selected to serve in the Senate, the way provinces are represented in the Senate, and the power and influence of the Senate in Ottawa is a subject that has been debated in this country for over 140 years.

In 1874, M.P. David Mills introduced a proposal for provincial appointment of Senators in the House of Commons.

In 1906, the House of Commons debated a proposal to limit Senators' terms to the life of three Parliaments.

In 1909, the Senate debated and rejected a proposal changing the selection of Senators to a combination of election and appointment. Under this proposal, two-thirds of Senators would be elected and serve seven-year terms.

In 1927, Senate reform proposals were discussed at the Dominion Provincial conference.

Senate reform is clearly not a new Issue. It is one of those political issues that almost everyone can agree needs to take place, but the institution and the practices related thereto seem impervious to change – that is impervious until now.

Given Prime Minister Steven Harper's commitment to only appoint Senators that have first been elected by the people of their province, it may well be that the time to reform the Senate is now upon us. However, students of Canadian Government are well aware that the road to Senate reform is full of false starts and promises never fulfilled.

If indeed our new Prime Minister does undertake meaningful Senate reform in the coming months and years it will be, I submit, in no small part due to the work of an irrigation farmer that lives just outside Calgary. His name is Bert Brown. What follows is the real story behind the Senate reform movement.

Bert Brown began advocating for Senate reform at a provincial constituency meeting of the Three Hills Progressive Conservative Party in 1983. There were 8 people in attendance at this meeting and as is sometimes the case, rather than simply talking about "what ought to get done" these 8 stalwart Albertans decided they would create a Committee and Reform the Senate of Canada. The name of their committee became the Alberta Committee for an Elected, Equal, and Effective Senate and they appointed one of the attendees at the meeting the Committee Chairman – Bert Brown.

The Triple E Committee as it is now known, still exists today and is still under the chairmanship of Bert Brown. It boasts nearly 5000 members coast to coast, including Mel Smith and a majority of the people that have given the Mel Smith lectures over the past eight years. Most of these people were personally sold their \$5 membership by Bert Brown and given a stylish lapel pin to wear – one of which I am wearing in my lapel tonight.

Bert takes his job as Committee Chairman very seriously and at every opportunity champions the cause of Senate reform. During the first year of his chairmanship he

not only attended almost every public and group meeting in the province that would listen to him, but he also personally contacted almost every MLA in the province with the view to obtaining their support for a creation of an elected, equal, and effective Senate, and of course selling them a \$5 membership and encouraging them to wear the now familiar lapel pin. By March 1984 when he presented a resolution to the Alberta PC party convention on behalf of his Constituency Association he had the support of nearly everyone in the room.

Shortly after Bert was successful in obtaining support for the idea at the PC party convention the Alberta Government struck a Special Select Committee on Upper House Reform and toured the province asking for public input regarding Senate reform. As is the case with many such committees deliberations only a handful of people turned out to any one of the numerous meetings held across the province. Those who did turn out to these meetings were, in large part due to Bert's extensive campaigning, advocates of what is now known as the Triple E Senate reform. It was thus with some satisfaction that Bert was told privately by an MLA, even before the Committee report was released to the public, that the Special Committee of the Alberta Legislature would recommend that the Alberta Government actively support the creation of a Triple E Senate.

With the moral support of the Alberta Government Bert began what has become a 20 year plus campaign for Senate reform. It is a campaign that has seen some encouraging developments, and many discouraging outcomes.

Senate Reform received a big boost when the newly formed Reform Party of Canada and its leader Preston Manning came out in favor of a Triple E Senate. Another boost occurred when Prime Minister Mulroney and the ten Premiers signed a constitutional accord that became known as the Meech Lake Accord. The Accord stated that future appointments to the Senate would be made from a list provided by the government of the province in which the vacancy occurred. This agreement was a far cry from the creation of a Triple E Senate and was very disappointing for Bert Brown. However, it did represent the first concrete set of proposals agreed to by Canada's political leaders for Senate reform in over 120 years.

Following unrelenting pressure by the Triple E Committee, which often consisted of Bert Brown speaking euphemistically on behalf of his 5000 members and the majority of Albertans and Canadians that favor the idea of Senate reform but don't do much to see it happen, the Province of Alberta passed legislation providing for the election of a Senate Nominee.

In October 1989 Alberta held the first ever election of a senate nominee, arguing that Prime Minister Mulroney would appoint whomever Albertans elected to the Senate. The fly in the ointment, however, was that Prime Minister Mulroney publicly stated he was disinclined to make such an appointment. Supporters of Senate reform nevertheless argued that if Alberta elected a Senate nominee, Prime Minister Mulroney would be required to appoint the elected nominee to the Senate under the terms of the yet to be ratified Meech Lake Accord. This was evidence that the election of Senate nominees was an acceptable way for provinces to nominate new senate appointments. An elected Senate would set a precedent for the election of Senate nominees in other provinces and thus begin a Senate reform movement that would eventually generate a complete overhaul of the Senate.

In the Senate election of 1989 Bert Brown was a candidate for the ruling Progressive Conservative party of Alberta. Bert wanted to run for the newly formed Reform Party, of which he, like many Albertans, were also a member. However, Bert had tacitly agreed to run for the PC's prior to learning that the Reform Party would run a candidate and so he honored this commitment, realizing that he could be defeated by the Reform candidate in the election because of that Party's surging popularity among Alberta voters. He was right; the Reform Party candidate Stan Waters won the election, Bert came in second. This was to be the first of three Senate nominee elections that Bert has been a candidate.

When Prime Minister Mulroney delayed appointing Stan Waters to the Senate in the fall of 1989 the Alberta Government decided seven months following the election to threaten to withdraw its support for the Meech Lake Accord, as the province, like many other provinces, had yet to have the legislature ratify the accord. It thus wasn't until nearly nine months after the election and just before the June 30 deadline for ratification of the Meech Lake Accord that Stan Waters was finally appointed to the Senate.

Given that the Provinces of Manitoba and Newfoundland decided not to ratify the Meech Lake Accord, it can be argued that the only good thing to come of the Accord was that for the first time in over 120 years the Senate of Canada had at least one person elected, even if indirectly, by the citizens of the province which he represented. Unfortunately Stan Waters died 11 months after his appointment to the Senate and was replaced by someone that did not run in the Alberta Senate nominee election.

Because Senate reform was part of the Meech Lake Accord, the defeat of this initiative also represented a major set back for Senate reform. As things turned out

it was only a temporary setback as Senate reform became one of the key elements in the Charlottetown Accord. This new set of proposals for constitutional reform provided for a complete overhaul of the Senate. The Charlottetown Accord not only provided for the election of Senators, but it also provided for equal representation of the provinces in the Senate. The provision fell a long way short of the Triple E ideal in its description of the powers of the Senate.

Mel Smith, one of Bert's trusted advisors during the Charlottetown negotiations, phoned Bert early in the referendum campaign when Bert was thinking about supporting the Charlottetown Accord and in frustration commented "Bert, your trying to pick fly shit out of black pepper with boxing gloves on to prove this deal represents meaningful Senate reform."

Bert's own conclusion, after having tirelessly campaigned for Senate reform for over a decade, was that because the proposal provided that only the House of Commons could propose money bills and easily override decisions taken in the proposed Senate the Charlottetown Accord "would create the world's most expensive debating society".

The defeat of the Charlottetown Accord in the 1992 national referendum was bitter sweet for Senate reformers – they were pleased that a Senate reform package that would weaken the powers of the Senate was defeated, at the same time that they realized this was clearly the best chance to reform the Senate since confederation.

For Bert Brown the constitutional debates that took place from 1987 through 1992 was probably one of the busiest times of his life. He spent untold hours in meetings, on airplanes, and either being sought out by the press or seeking press coverage for Senate Reform, at the same time he was putting in crops, fixing irrigation systems, and harvesting crops.

Perhaps his most famous activity involved carving 5 huge 500 feet high – two mile long messages in his neighbor's field with a huge farm cultivator. The field lay directly under the flight path of the Calgary International Airport and could be easily seen from any airplane flying east to Toronto.

The first message went in the field in 1987 when the Meech Lake Accord was being debated and read **EEE SENATE OR ELSE!**

The second message went in the field in 1991 and read **EEE SENATE NOW JOE!**

The third message went in the field in 1992 at the time of the Charlottetown Referendum and read **VOTE WITHOUT FEAR!**

The Fourth message dealt with the 1995 Quebec Referendum and read **C'EST MIEUX ENSEMBLE**. It had a 1000 ft fleur de lis on one end of the message and a 1000 ft maple leaf on the other.

For politicians, media, political scientists and others involved in the constitutional debates Bert Brown is known as a tireless advocate for Senate reform. His energy seems boundless, his commitment to his objectives unquestionably sincere, and his influence far in excess of what one might expect.

Fortunately for Canada Bert's commitment to Senate reform was not extinguished with the defeat of the Charlottetown Accord. Over the past 14 years Bert has continued to advocate for Senate reform. Indeed, since 1992 Alberta has held two other Senate nominee elections, one in 1998, and another in 2004. Here again, Bert Brown's continual lobbying of the Alberta government was unquestionably the biggest reason these elections were held. Unlike the first Senate Nominee election, Bert ran as the Reform Party candidate in 1998 and won the election with 332,000 votes. He obtained more votes, by orders of magnitude, than for other candidate seeking either provincial or national public office in Canadian history. In 2004 Bert ran again, this time as a Progressive Conservative candidate as the reform party no longer existed. He won this election with 312,000 votes even though his campaign was limited primarily to plowing the fifth sign into the field – **EEE=THE RIGHT TO VOTE!**

In the past month Bert has been very active once again advocating for Senate Reform. On behalf of his committee he has written letters to the Prime Minister and every Premier in Canada talking about the unparalleled opportunity for Senate reform now that Canada has, for the first time, a Prime Minister committed to Senate reform and who has promised not to make any permanent appointments to the Senate unless they have first been elected.

So what can we learn from this brief overview of Senate reform and the on going campaign of Bert Brown and his Triple E Committee to reform the Senate?

First, although the Canadian political system is not structured to facilitate ongoing citizen engagement on issues such as Senate reform, it does not openly discriminate against citizen involvement.

Second, if anyone wants to impact something as entrenched as Senate reform they should know that these issues are very rarely changed in a short period of time. It often takes years, even decades, and there is no guarantee of success.

Third, fundamental change almost always requires the active engagement of dozens, often hundreds, and sometimes thousands of other people. One must be prepared to work with many people and all of the problems related thereto if they want to play a meaningful role in public policy change.

Fourth, and most important, the impact of a single citizen can have on public policy cannot be underestimated. Bert Brown's incredible impact on the Senate reform debate in this country is a result of his single minded purpose, creativity, his dogged persistence, his willingness to dedicate hours, days, months and years to promoting the cause he believes in, and his willingness to use his own personal limited resources to permit him to undertake the necessary travel. It also helps, of course, to be your own boss and be able to get down off the pivot irrigation system or off your tractor and go to a meeting or take the umpteenth call from a radio station in Brandon, Manitoba or Victoria, or wherever.

Fifth, anyone that takes on a cause like Senate reform needs to have a partner that is just as committed to the cause. Alice Brown is just such a person. She has been both supportive and engaged in every aspect of her husband's activities. She not only fills in for Bert when necessary, but often initiates projects of her own in support of Senate reform.

Government Encouragement of Citizen Engagement

Having given you two extraordinary examples of the impact an engaged citizen can have on public policy, I'd now like to focus on one of the hallmarks of a functional democracy - the manner in which governments permit, encourage, and facilitate individual and group participation in decision making.

Over the past two decades Canadian governments and government agencies have dramatically increased the scope and depth of public consultation. It is rare that major, and often relatively minor policy changes in Canada do not provide for public consultations. Whether or not consultations are meaningful is of course another matter altogether.

Nearly a decade ago (1997) Canada West Foundation published a report entitled Meaningful Consultation. This report is available on the web at cwf.ca When

writing this report my colleagues and I identified eight criteria that were essential to effective consultation. The eight criteria are:

1. Representation – which means that the consultation must involve a cross section of the people impacted by the decision;
2. Agenda setting – which means that the consultation should be limited to a single or at least a small number of related topics;
3. Access to Information – for consultations to be meaningful people have to have access to the facts and to experts that represent all aspects of the policy in question;
4. Discussion and deliberation – this criteria is based upon the belief that citizens must be able to be heard, must hear what others are saying, and must not be isolated from searching for alternatives;
5. Creating Options – a consultation process which allows participants to introduce new options and consideration is superior to one which is limited to a number of predetermined alternatives;
6. Individual participation – for consultation to be meaningful and creative people must have the freedom to discuss options;
7. Cost and Logistics – consideration needs to be given to the timing, location and costs of consultations;
8. Achieving Closure – consultations that are structured to arrive at solutions are generally more useful than those where it isn't clear what will happen as a result of the consultation.

Based upon these eight criteria we took a look at eleven different types of consultations that are used by governments to consult with their citizenry – all the way from elections, public opinion polls, and referendums to Royal Commissions, legislative hearings, policy roundtables and deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy is the process used by the British Columbia in dealing with electoral reform – they called it a citizens assembly, and it is an excellent example of citizen engagement that I'll return to in a few minutes.

Figure 1 provides an overview of our assessment of the 11 methods of consultation as compared to the eight criteria I've just described. Each method of consultation is rated as poor (1 point), fair (2 points), good (3 points) or excellent (4 points) on each of the eight criteria. As you can see from Figure 2 elections and opinion polls ranked as the least effect methods of consulting with citizens, while policy roundtables and procedures such as the BC Citizens Assembly ranked the highest.

Given the ranking system just described the conclusions that Dr. Ken Carty came to in assessing the BC Citizens Assembly last year in delivering this lecture come as no

surprise. The Citizens Assembly was chosen, structured and operated in much the same way as a number of earlier experiments in deliberative democracy such as the Assembly 96 project, sponsored by a number of research institutes in 1996. The results from the Citizen Assembly and these earlier projects are most interesting.

First, these experiments in deliberative democracy clearly indicate citizens chosen at random can work constructively one with another.

Second, citizens are just as capable as legislators or any other groups of basing their conclusions upon principle.

Third, ordinary citizens when given the opportunity to learn about the intricacies of political issues such as electoral systems can develop as good an understanding of the options and tradeoffs as any other group.

Fourth, the results of their deliberations will be carefully reasoned.

Fifth, citizens when given the right circumstances will come up with reasonable and often insightful recommendations to improve their society.

Figure 2: Effective Public Consultation

Effective Public Consultation



Each mode of consultation was assessed according to the 8 criteria for effectiveness listed below. For each criterion, a score out of four was given (represented above by the size of the coloured boxes). The total score was divided by the total possible (i.e., 32) to generate a percentage indicating overall performance.

Representative Sample	Agenda Setting	Access to Information	Discussing Issues
Creating Options	Individual Participation	Cost & Logistics	Closure

Philanthropy and Citizen Engagement

One of the more interesting aspects of citizen engagement which is generally seldom talked about in most conversations about citizens and public policy is the role private Foundations play in encouraging citizen engagement. In Canada there are approximately 1300 active Foundations, many of whom make gifts to Canadian charities related to encouraging citizen engagement. Some of those Foundations actually provide much of the funds required to operate a think tank. Other foundations, such as the ones I'm associated with, provide grants on a project by project basis to a wide range of charities and public policy institutes such as the C.D. Howe Institute, Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, Canada West Foundation, and the Fraser Institute just to mention a few.

Using the resources of Private Foundations to encourage citizen engagement is now the centerpiece of my day to day activities as the CEO of two private Foundations, and the Director of a third Foundation. These foundations allocate millions of dollars each year to a wide range of projects that encourage citizen engagement.

The Max Bell Foundation, for example, was created 35 years ago by one of western Canada's most successful businessmen. Upon his untimely death at 59 years of age in 1971, Max Bell endowed this Foundation with \$17 million dollars. Since 1973 the Foundation, through judicious investing, has been able to provide over \$65 million in grants to charities and currently makes gifts of \$2 to \$3 million each year. Most of this money is provided to charities that are involved in finding ways to improve public policy.

The Max Bell Foundation makes grants to organizations committed to improving public policies and practices by bringing new and better ideas to bear on problems facing Canada. For example, in 2004 the Foundation made a grant to the Alberta Bone and Joint Institute to evaluate a new method to reduce waiting times for hip and knee operations. Over the past five years the Foundation has made numerous grants to the Kelowna based Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE). SAEE has undertaken studies on a wide range of issues such as studying the impact of charter schools, home schooling, success in aboriginal education, sponsored roundtables made up of teachers and parents to set the agenda for education reform, and selecting and studying high performing schools to identify the factors that make them successful.

One of the more interesting aspects of SAEE is that it was created by a former school teacher/ librarian, Helen Raham, who is the driving force behind this organization's commitment to improve the public school system throughout Canada. Helen is yet another example of an individual that is making a major contribution to our society.

A third example of the impact philanthropy is having on citizen engagement is a grant given to the University of Lethbridge to create two websites, one is called mapleleafweb.ca, and the other policy.ca. Please take a look at these websites the next time your on the internet. The mapleleafweb.ca website provides in depth backgrounds on major public policy issues such as First Nations, health care, federal-provincial relations, democracy, the Canadian military, etc. The second website, policy.ca provides an overview of insightful articles written by academics or published by think tanks on a wide range of topics. These websites are intended to provide citizens with the key building blocks of meaningful participation - easy access to insightful information and analysis, and a balanced perspective of expert opinion.

A fourth, and highly relevant example of philanthropy contributing to citizen engagement to my presentation tonight is the gift the Arthur J.E. Child Foundation has made in support of the Laurentian Leadership Centre in Ottawa – an extension site of Trinity Western University. The decision to invest in this educational experience for Trinity West University students is based upon the Foundation's belief that the internship program at the Laurentian Leadership Centre will not only better prepare students to become effectively engage in a wide range of public policy issues, but that it will also provide them with an incentive to explore new ways to contribute to Canadian society.

Conclusion

My grandfather D.H. Elton was a lawyer, a municipal politician, and a poet. As a child I often listened to his poetry, and even memorized some of his poems. He wrote one poem in particular about people getting involved in civic action that impressed me greatly. He didn't mention political participation or citizen engagement directly, but rather simply took it for granted that citizens ought to be engaged in solving community problems. The poem is entitled *Ambulances and Fences*.

Ambulances and Fences

D. H. Elton

It was a dangerous cliff they all freely confessed,
Yet the path to its crest was so pleasant.
But over this dangerous cliff there had slipped
A duke, and full many a peasant.
Then the people all said, "Something has to be done."
Though their projects did not at all tally.
Some said, "Build a Fence 'round the edge of the cliff."
Some, "Put an Ambulance down in the valley."

Well the Cry for the Ambulance won the day.
For it spread to a neighboring city.
"A Fence may be useful or not," they agreed,
But soon each heart was brim full of pity
For those who had slipped on that terrible cliff.
And so people on Highway and Valley
Gave pound and gave pence, not for building a Fence,
But for an Ambulance down in the valley.

"For the cliff is quite safe if your careful," they said,
"And when people are slipping and dropping
It isn't the fall that hurts them so much
It's the terrible shock when their stopping".
And so day after day as these mishaps occurred
Quick forth did the rescuers rally
To pick up the ones that fell over the cliff
With an ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked, "It is a wonder to me
Why people pay more attention to repairing results
Than to stopping the cause.
They should really aim more at prevention.
"Lets stop all this mischief," said he
"Come neighbors and friends, let us rally.
If we just built a fence we could almost dispense
With the Ambulance down in the valley".

Over the past four decades plus I have had the privilege of spending most of my working life studying and participating in what the academic world of political science often refers to as political behavior and public policy. It is a career that has from time to time brought me frustrations and disappointments. It has also been a career that has brought me into contact with Jim Gray, Bert Brown, Helen Raham, Mel Smith, Preston Manning and many others equally committed to improving our society. Equally as important I have had the opportunity to work with hundreds of students who in their own way are working to improve our society.

I have thus come to understand that our society's greatest resource are citizens who give freely of their time to building fences, and even when necessary placing ambulances down in the valley.

As Ghandi once said, **“Be the change you wish to see.”**

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you tonight.

References

The material on gambling was obtained from a variety of Canada West Foundation's reports that are readily available at www.cwf.ca

The information on the Calgarians for Democratic Choice are personal reflections as I was an active member of the CDC strategic planning team.

The Senate reform material is based upon personal reflections and numerous conversations with Bert Brown. For an overview of Senate reform see www.mapleleafweb.ca

The Meaningful Consultation material is based upon research done by Canada West Foundation and available at www.cwf.ca.

The Philanthropy material is based upon my experiences with the Max Bell Foundation, Norlien Foundation, Arthur J.E. Child Foundation, and Philanthropic Foundations Canada. For more information please see www.mbf.org and www.pfc.org