

REPORT OF THE 2013 ELECTION REVIEW PANEL

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November 2013

Introduction

The May 2013 provincial election results are a source of frustration and profound disappointment for everyone connected to the BC New Democratic Party. For party members, activists and supporters it represented a lost opportunity, the opportunity to finally put BC back on the right track after 12 years of reckless BC Liberal rule. For NDP MLAs the results offset the strong showing over the last four years as they held the government to account for their numerous failures and scandals. For BC NDP campaign staff and volunteers the results undid the months of hard work and organizing that took place not just during the 28 days of the campaign, but also in the months leading up to that campaign. Despite those deeply felt reactions, the BC NDP must not let those frustrations and disappointment define our efforts over the next four years to build both a strong political organization capable of winning in 2017 and an effective Opposition in the Legislature to hold the new government accountable over the next four years.

Our Party has a laudable record as government in BC. We spearheaded major changes to BC's labour laws, reformed land use planning and established a successful system of public auto insurance under the Barrett government in the 1970s. In the 1990s, during two consecutive terms as government, NDP governments improved access to post-secondary education, placed limits on class size in K-12 education and established a world class system of protected areas across the province.

Across Canada, New Democrats have shown similar leadership, forming government in four other provinces and the Yukon. In Manitoba, the provincial NDP has held government for almost fifteen years. At the federal level, under the leadership of the late Jack Layton, the federal New Democrats are now the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. That legacy of electoral success serves as a reminder to Party members here in BC that it is through our shared values as New Democrats that we will be able to gain the confidence and support we need to win in 2017.

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It's with that perspective in mind that the Provincial Executive of the BC NDP tasked the Review Panel to evaluate the Party's 2013 campaign and assess the changes needed to ensure electoral success in four years. The review Panel's Terms of Reference included:

- Evaluating the 2013 campaign with a view to determining the reasons for the loss including a review and assessment of the strategies and tactics of the BC NDP 2013 campaign.
- Identifying the successes that should be built upon.
- Recommending steps to make improvements and prepare a winning strategy in 2017.
- Ensuring that the review assessed constituency preparation, technical and logistical preparations, communications, fundraising, central campaign decision making, selection of campaign leadership, advertising and media relations, ethnic outreach, voter contact, candidate selection, relationship between the central and local campaigns, platform and policy development, role of the leader, stakeholder relations including with community leaders, business, social movement, ethnic communities, environmental movement, affiliated unions, and labour movement.
- Reviewing and assessing the BC NDP's broader relationship with the voters of British Columbia including an examination the BC NDP's base of support compared to the changing demographics of the population and the impact of vote splitting with other parties.

The Review Panel was appointed by the Provincial Executive in late July, but began its formal process of review in late August. The members include

Cindy Oliver, President of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators and chair; Andy Ross, former President of the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union, Local 378; Eugene Kostyra, former Manitoba cabinet minister and senior advisor to Premier Gary Doer; and Pam Sihota, a law student in Terrace, BC. The Panel members volunteered their time to undertake this review. Budget constraints limited the means by which the Panel was able to gather input, however, that did not prevent thousands of activists and members from completing online surveys and drafting written submissions. The Panel also received survey information from candidates who ran in the 2013 election; over 25% of those who ran for the BC NDP in the election provided us with information from their online survey. As well, several candidates also provided the Panel with written submissions that addressed their concerns about the 2013 campaign. The labour movement was also a major contributor to the Review Panel's work, providing written submissions as well as participating in a direct interview with Panel members. While the Provincial Office and Staff were extremely supportive through all of our work, a number of documents, including the campaign strategy, were not available and others, such as polling and focus group reports arrived late and could not be reviewed. Having access to those documents in a timely fashion would have provided the Panel with additional background data on various aspects of the campaign as well as information used in the development of both the Party's platform and the campaign's key strategic decisions.

The input gathered from Party members and activists came primarily from an online survey. Over 3,000 party members completed the survey, providing the Panel with a strong starting point for the drafting of this report. The written submissions from candidates, campaign managers,

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Constituency Associations, Party Committees and MLAs also contributed invaluable to the drafting exercise. As well, through a series of interviews with the Leader, key staff, the Provincial Office and the Campaign Team, the Panel was able to develop further insights into the details of the campaign. We have summarized, as much as possible, all of the input into this report. Our summary has been divided into a number of key themes that emerged over the course of our review. Those themes reflect not only the important chronological narrative of the campaign and its lead-up, but also some of the important strategic questions that everyone from the Party Leader to the campaign volunteers struggled with during the campaign itself. In the final section of this report we outline the major recommendations from our review. We recognized early on in our process that some aspects of our review would require follow-on work by all levels of the Party. Where appropriate, the recommendations flag those areas where this follow-up work is needed.

BC's Shifting Political Landscape, 2010-2013

It would be a mistake to simply look at the results of the May election as being the culmination of 28 days on the campaign trail. In the months and years leading up to the start of the campaign, key events, especially those affecting the BC Liberals, had a major impact on the strategies implemented during the 28-day campaign.

Within the first sixty days of winning the 2009 election, the BC Liberals unveiled one of the most cynical flip-flops in the history of the province: their decision to implement the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). The announcement made by then-Premier Gordon Campbell and his Finance Minister Colin Hansen unleashed a firestorm within the public at large as well as within the ranks of their party and their supporters, a firestorm that would eventually

lead to the resignation of Mr. Campbell and the potential demise of the province's right-wing coalition.

When it was announced, Mr. Campbell hoped, no doubt, that whatever controversy it spawned would be short-lived. He was wrong. It created enormous tensions within his Cabinet and within sectors of the province's business community. There was a widespread public backlash as well, one that undercut BC Liberal support across wide sections of their traditional voter base. More significantly for the BC NDP, it created the opportunity to brand the BC Liberals as untrustworthy and dishonest. It took until the Fall of 2010 for the full impact of the HST fiasco to finally force Mr. Campbell to resign.

The ensuing leadership contest for the BC Liberals did little to repair the damage done by the HST. Although Christy Clark won the leadership, she faced a divided Caucus. The prospect that a province-wide referendum on the HST could well force her government to withdraw it loomed large. As well, her initial plan to call a snap election in mid-2011 faced stiff opposition within her Caucus and Cabinet. Unable to push through on that plan, Clark was forced to launch a legislative session in the fall of 2011, a session in which she had no substantial agenda to advance.

During this period the BC NDP MLAs succeeded in framing the new Premier and her government as lacking both the mandate and an agenda that had any measure of support among BC voters. As Clark lurched from one legislative gaffe to another, it became increasingly obvious that she lacked the policy depth needed to run the province. That pattern continued through to the end of the legislative session in March 2013 during which time Clark's approval ratings plummeted, divisions within her party became more public and the sense

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that her government had simply “run out of ideas” and was headed for electoral defeat became more widespread in the minds of voters.

During this period as well, BC Liberal support trended steadily downward. The shift in public opinion, while good news for the BC NDP, became something of a two-edged sword. As Clark’s policy and political failings became more evident and her prospects in May 2013 looked increasingly grim, the BC NDP was seen as a “government in waiting”. That label tended to shift the focus away from further scrutiny of the Clark government’s prospects and, instead, intensify the scrutiny of the BC NDP’s prospects as a new government.

It’s important to note that during the Spring 2013 legislative session, the Official Opposition landed one of their most stunning blows on the BC Liberals when it tabled material that revealed a broadly-based government-side partisan plan, coordinated by government staff, all designed to secure “quick wins”—and therefore BC Liberal support—within key ethnic communities around the province. The revelations led to the dismissal of senior staff in the Premier’s Office, ridicule by provincial media, open hostility within the BC Liberal Caucus directed at Clark, but most of all, a humiliating acknowledgement by Clark that the plan was a flagrant misuse of public resources. Moreover, the scandal was seen as a calculated and cynical attempt by her party to win support among ethnic voters.

The quick win scandal, which came at the end of the legislative session, was further evidence that Clark’s government had lost the moral authority to govern. However, as many have commented during this review, the fact that the scandal was largely ignored through most of the run-up to the election and throughout all but the final weeks of

the campaign was another example of a missed opportunity on the part of the BC NDP campaign to define Clark and her track record as Premier.

‘Memo to File’ and Attack Ads

Having won the NDP leadership race Adrian Dix faced a very specific challenge: addressing the “memo to file” issue. Certainly the legislative press gallery was well versed on the issue and was quick to question him on it after he won the leadership in April 2011. His response at the time was direct, thoughtful and appeared to satisfy many who thought that the issue was behind him.

However, for BC Liberal supporters, the memo issue became the centerpiece of a well-funded series of attack ads designed to undermine the public’s perception of Dix. Those ads began to roll out in early 2013 at a time when BC Liberal support had fallen dramatically. Adrian’s public response, both in the early days of his leadership bid and during the height of these attack ads, stressed that he was committed to staying positive and not engaging in personal attacks. In the early part of 2013, during which these ads were pervasive, public support for the NDP continued to remain strong. That outcome convinced many that “staying positive” had merit as a strategic approach to the 2013 campaign.

In talking to communication specialists, it’s clear that focus group response to the notion of staying positive can have a certain amount of attraction. However, as one observer put it, “focus groups always like the positive, but the reality is, negative ads stick”. Complicating the strategy of staying positive was the confusion around what that constituted. In fact, as the Party moved closer and closer to the election, the bar on what staying positive meant kept moving up. How that happened is still difficult to discern precisely, but certainly the provincial media found the “staying positive” proposition a point to which they could

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return again and again to assess the Party's commitment to this principle. In effect, by making the declaration of staying positive a key part of the campaign strategy (both pre-writ and during the 28 day campaign), the Party found itself faced with a media that was constantly testing the bounds of what constituted "positive". Many commented that by the time the writ was dropped in April, the notion of positive was foreclosing many of the traditional ways in which the NDP has worked to define and frame the governing party during an election.

Preparing for the Campaign

As early as 2010, the BC NDP had developed and approved a strategic plan that detailed key elements that would guide the Party's efforts to win government in 2013. Those elements included building a stronger connection between all levels of the Party, making a greater effort to improve fundraising, and creating a concerted effort to diminish the BC Liberals' support base given the self-inflicted damage that the BC Liberals had launched with the HST. The plan also included a renewed emphasis on activating our base within BC's growing ethnic communities.

While that strategic plan remained in place throughout the 2010-2013 period, its interpretation and implementation varied. Certainly on the fundraising front, the Party adopted a more aggressive approach, one that produced significant increases, especially in the 12 months prior to the May election.

The same 12 month period also saw a concerted effort at platform development. In fact, many have commented that the 2013 platform was the most comprehensive and detailed platform document that the party has ever produced. NDP MLAs have stressed that the platform development effort was also a unity building exercise, an outcome that

ensured strong support for the platform elements as well as strong buy-in on what would be advanced during the campaign.

If there were drawbacks to the platform development process, they were in areas of communication. Many of the submissions and interviews noted that the platform was difficult to summarize into a succinct message that average voters and party supporters could easily understand and enthusiastically support. Compared to other election campaign platforms, it seemed to reflect the image of a party seeking re-election rather than an Opposition seeking to replace an incumbent government.

From presentations made to the Review Panel it's apparent that while there was a formal Election Planning Committee structure that included representatives from all levels of the Party, that Committee was not actively involved in the development of that campaign strategy or its eventual roll-out. This disconnect reflects the prevailing view that the priority during the months leading up to the election campaign and the release of the platform was more focused on managing expectations rather than taking on the BC Liberal track record.

Complicating matters was the fact that the final release of the platform was subject to numerous delays and amendments, changes brought on by tax changes made by the BC Liberals in 2013 and an overarching commitment to table a fully-costed platform. Both the delay and the eventual roll out of the platform in the first week of the campaign only served to further emphasize the view that our bid to win government lacked a clear, concise and appealing message to our universe of potential voters.

All of these complications speak to the strategic decision to craft a platform document that was more heavily weighted to the views of "a

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government in waiting” rather than a platform that spoke to the aspirations and priorities of voters. By comparison, the BC Liberals gave little weight to their election platform; it was released before the writ was dropped, spoke about their commitment to jobs and the economy and was largely ignored through most of the campaign. Their focus during the campaign was to have their leader appear at workplaces, talk endlessly about the promise of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and have allies and Cabinet Ministers attack the NDP. While their promises were paper-thin and their track record as government was deplorable, their strategic approach in the campaign was to downplay all of those weaknesses and emphasize a message that played well with voters. In the end, it worked. There is an important campaign lesson in all of that, one that our side failed to recognize.

Party Infrastructure

The financial strains of maintaining a strong and effective Provincial Office are a problem that has a long history in BC. In between elections the Provincial Office has had to devote much of its time and limited resources to either paying down debts from the previous election or building up resources needed for the next election. However, for much of the last decade it has struggled with both simultaneously; that was certainly the situation that the Provincial Office faced after the 2009 election as it contended with a \$2 million debt while trying to anticipate and prepare for an early election call once the BC Liberals emerged from their leadership convention. The financial strains were compounded by the demands of the federal party as it mobilized for a federal election in 2011. In addition, much of the NDP’s traditional donor base in BC was also being tapped by fundraising efforts at the municipal level, where the three year election cycle competed for fundraising support at a time when the Provincial Office was working

hard to reduce outstanding debts and build capacity for either an early election call or the fixed date in May 2013.

The financial strains of the Provincial Office affected two critical areas: the long overdue changes to the Party’s voter contact and database system and election readiness. Part of that readiness included the development of opposition research. However, that research appeared to be a difficult area for the Party because of its limited resources. As a result, the bulk of that research work was done by campaign staff. While that effort did produce a core of useful material, effectively deploying that information was encumbered by the confusion over how the use of this research would square with the overarching commitment to “stay positive”. “Failing to prosecute the BC Liberals” took many forms and certainly effective opposition research was another example of the collateral impacts that the staying positive directive had on what should have been a basic part of the Party’s infrastructure.

The problems and inadequacies of the Provincial Office’s voter contact data base—NDP Vote—have been a source of frustration for many years. To its credit, the Provincial Office recognized this and took steps to develop a new system starting in 2010. The proposed new system was initiated by the federal Party and was designed to incorporate new methods of voter identification that merged federal and provincial data and provided capacity for ‘real time updates’ that would help Constituency Associations refine voter support both before the campaign began and over the course of the 28 day campaign. Delays in the development of this new system forced the Provincial Office to default to the existing system, NDP Vote, and work on improvements to that system rather than incorporate a whole new system.

Developing a more robust system of voter contact information is a major priority for the Provincial

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Office. Although the shared approach to the development of this new system will help make the transition more affordable, it's important to recognize that if the NDP expects to be a viable political force provincially, it has to have the modern infrastructure needed to be that force.

In an earlier section we described how fundraising efforts improved significantly in the 2011-13 period. A major factor behind those increases was the commitment by all levels of the Party to set meaningful and aggressive fundraising targets for fundraising. The result, by 2013, was that most Constituency Associations were fully funded for the 2013 campaign and that funding carried over to local surpluses following the campaign. There's no question that the success of those efforts was also tied to the perception that we would form government after May 14. Had we formed government, the prospect of election finance reform would have changed the fundraising efforts for all parties. However, with the loss in May comes the reality that the Party will have to rely on broadening its fundraising base, a change that makes the overhaul of the Provincial Office's member and voter identification all the more urgent. With a more sophisticated system in place, the Provincial Office would have the capacity to target fundraising in ways that avoid the blanket outreach efforts that some members find either irritating or redundant. One last point on voter contact information systems: those familiar with them stress that whatever changes are made, data quality and training are critical to the effectiveness of any upgrade.

It is also important to recognize that simply having the software capability to track supporters and improve voter contact information does not completely address the technical issues associated with this kind of data. The experience in other jurisdictions where more robust voter contact

information has been developed indicates that data quality is just as important as software. That means having the capacity to continuously sift through data sources and find ways to cross-check information to ensure accuracy and reliability. Putting that capacity in place is an on-going investment that needs to be made along with any improvements in voter contact systems.

Polling

One of the most bedeviling, distracting and in many ways de-mobilizing factors in the May 2013 provincial election was polling. The sizeable leads that the NDP enjoyed in the year prior to the election contributed to the growing sense within the legislative press gallery, media pundits and certainly Party activists that support among BC voters for the BC Liberals was in an irreversible downward spiral that would lead to their certain defeat on May 14. However, on election night those provincial polling results proved to be very wrong, so wrong in fact that many have grave doubts about the reliability of polling methods and accuracy. A working group was formed by the panel to look specifically at the issue of communications and polling. Their observations and conclusions have been incorporated into the recommendations section of our report, but for the purpose of this report, we think it is important to emphasize a few key factors about polling and the role those polls played in the election outcome.

In the post-election analysis done by a number of the prominent pollsters it is now obvious that sampling methods and voting intentions of those sampled in any of the polls done during the campaign played a critical role in misrepresenting real voter support. The polling that was done in the domain polls over-weighted the views of those 35 years and younger, a group that has a low voter participation rate. In effect, the pollsters gathered the views of people who were unlikely to cast

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a ballot. The polls also underrepresented non-English speaking households in their surveys. In a province where ethnic diversity is on the rise and ethnic voters represent substantial voting blocks in many ridings, not having their views reflected in a poll (or only partially reflected because of underweighting) will grossly distort the true level of support recorded in the poll results.

While the constant refrain heard in the run-up to the election campaign and during the campaign period was that the polls would tighten up the closer one got to May 14, there didn't appear to be any substantial effort, either by MLAs prior to the election or within the campaign team as it prepared for the election, to more carefully analyze the public domain polling results. Instead, what seemed to develop is a belief that somehow the BC Liberal vote would either not recover its traditional base of support or would not turn out to vote on May 14. Both assumptions proved wrong.

The favourable polling numbers also engendered a strong sense that the NDP was a government in waiting. The impact of that perception was felt in many ways throughout the twelve months prior to May 2013. It fed the view that if the NDP was a government in waiting, it had to sound and behave as though it was government. That, in turn, shifted thinking from what would appeal to voters to what needed to be done to manage expectations. The net effect of that effort was that the Party's base of support found itself with fewer and fewer platform options that could generate the excitement or inspiration needed to mobilize in their respective communities. The strong polling numbers also fed a sense of complacency among Party supporters—the BC Liberals are imploding and our job is to stand aside and let them fall.

Both impacts shifted the ground in ways that would prove very problematic. As BC Liberal support declined, voters saw the May 14 election

as a vote about the NDP, not about the incumbent government's track record over the last twelve years. And given the overarching directive that the NDP campaign would stay positive, the combination of staying positive and having the focus on "us" instead of "them" proved lethal. Christy Clark was able, either through surrogates or through her own campaign, to attack the NDP and raise doubts in the minds of voters. The NDP, on the other hand, limited itself to talking about the details in its platform and not taking head on—at least not until the last week of the campaign—the BC Liberal track record or the more fundamental ballot question of whether the BC Liberals deserved another term as government.

In terms of Party-generated polling, the major mistake made in this election was that absence of polling in the target ridings which the Party had to win if it hoped to form government. Although a comprehensive, large sample size poll was done in February-March 2013, target riding specific polling was not done in the period between then and May 14th. Difficulties in getting sufficient response rates at the riding level were cited as major problems in this regard. In the next section on the campaign we will talk in more detail about the target riding strategy, but it is important to note that one of the reality checks that should have guided the Party's overall strategy, both in the pre-campaign and campaign periods, should have been a careful assessment of voter sentiments, priorities and voting intentions in these target ridings. In the absence of consistent polling in these targets, the Party and the campaign had no specific sense of just how volatile voter intentions were, who was being affected by what arguments in the campaign and whether key elements of the platform and campaign message were resonating with voters in those ridings.

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Communications

From our review of submissions and documents, the following communications issues appear to have had a major impact on the success of the campaign:

- The campaign allowed the media and the BC NDP's opponents to define negative in the broadest possible way, and to extend the prohibition on negative to the NDP's natural supporters. Moreover, it provided no real room for the campaign to provide contrast based arguments against Christy Clark and her record and character at any point in the campaign. For the NDP to do so would have reinforced the negatives the Liberals were attaching to the NDP leader on trust and consistency.
- The campaign allowed the BC Liberals to define the NDP and Adrian Dix rather than prosecute the BC Liberals' track record as government. The BC Liberals succeeded in defining the NDP as a tax-and-spend party. Not surprisingly, mainstream media portrayed the platform commitments as "spending", not memorable, practical changes for people's lives. As a consequence, undecided voters were susceptible to the BC Liberal assertion that the NDP was going to increase spending and taxes. Moreover, those voters were unable to identify how that spending would benefit them.
- The apparent ballot question developed by the campaign was cautious and uninspiring, in part a product of being constrained from providing a sufficient negative contrast to the BC Liberals and their leader.
- The central campaign appeared to lack strong internal communication when important issues emerged during the campaign

or when key shifts were made in policy. In several instances, the central campaign had little or no briefing material for local campaigns when significant events or policy changes were in play. That gap left local campaigns to fend for themselves in putting together speaking notes or background information.

- The campaign did not have an effective ethnic media strategy, leaving the campaign vulnerable to aggressive and hostile attack ads in various non-English speaking media.
- The campaign was not competitive in coverage in print, radio and television in languages other than English.
- The campaign failed to conduct sufficient research to determine support for its messages and policy decisions amongst first and second generation British Columbians from Asian and South Asian backgrounds.
- The central campaign did not have readily available spokespeople and translation capacity in languages other than English.

It is also important to emphasize the role that paid advertising plays in any campaign. How large a budget the Party has for that advertising is always subject to the pressures of fundraising. Just as important is the question of placement and target audience for that advertising. Overall though, the advertising needs to reinforce the campaign's central message. In that regard, the problems cited earlier with the campaign lacking a clear succinct message that could inspire voter support also had an impact on the 2013 paid advertising.

Online Survey Input

The Review Panel used a web-based approach to gather input from Party members and activists. The Panel had a website through which we were able to provide regular updates to Party members. With technical help from Provincial Office, we

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also drafted an online survey that allowed members the opportunity to reply directly to the Panel on issues that they believed were critical to our review. Although there were over 3,000 responses to the online survey, the useable data from that survey was closer to 2,500 (duplications and incomplete surveys accounted for the bulk of the netting down of the survey results). A summary of some of the key findings from the survey included the following:

- The surveys were submitted from all regions of the province. Approximately one-quarter of those completing the survey were from Interior and North Coast ridings. Another one-third came from Vancouver Island ridings. The remaining 42% were from ridings located in the greater Lower Mainland area.
- The level of involvement in the campaign spanned a broad cross-section of activity. The majority of those completing the survey were involved in their local riding campaign in some form of voluntary activity that included canvassing or local campaign support.
- In terms of key issues that the respondents thought needed to be emphasized in the campaign and the platform, the economy, the environment, jobs, education and health care were the dominant issues cited in the survey.
- A slight majority—about 54%—also said that they felt their issues were not reflected in the Party’s platform document.
- A larger majority—close to three-quarters of respondents on this question—said that the campaign’s advertising did not reflect the issues that they wanted the Party to address in the campaign.

- When it came to the strategy of the campaign, over two-thirds of respondents did not feel that the strategy was well explained to them.

- A similar pattern of response was evident when asked about support for local campaigns; two thirds said that their local campaign did not have what it needed from the central campaign. Many cited problems with outdated list information as a problem in their local campaign.

- Respondents also felt the Party’s ethnic outreach efforts were not effective; over 70% of respondents were not convinced that the ethnic outreach effort was in any way sufficient.

As well, the Panel received input from many local Candidates. Their feedback included the following:

- They expressed a need to have more flexibility to include local issues in their local campaigns.

- All found the support and talent of their local Campaign Managers an enormous asset.

- Most Candidates expressed concern that the attack ads were “sticking” with local voters.

- Several Candidates expressed frustration about disconnects between their campaign and the planning of the central campaign.

The Panel also heard from Campaign Managers. A separate survey was drafted and sent to those managers. Seventy-one surveys were completed and returned for our review. Their comments were very useful and some of the key points raised by those managers included the following:

- The majority of managers were unsure of the value of micro-targeting.

- 40% said they were successful in pulling their marks.

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- Close to 70% of the managers were satisfied or very satisfied with the support of the provincial office.
- A reoccurring theme for many managers was the need for a new database, more training and preparation and more two way communication with the central campaign.

The Campaign

At the risk of overstating the obvious, campaigns matter. An election is, in many respects, the culmination of four years of effort, both inside and outside the Legislature, for a political party to present itself, its leader and its platform to voters. During the course of 28 days a party works to capture the interest and ultimately the support of voters. At a granular level, the campaign is how a political party penetrates beyond its base of committed voters to convince undecided and “leaners” to support their candidates.

Winning support beyond a party’s base of committed voters is no easy task. Modern campaigns have many moving parts that must be synchronized enough that key objectives are met, often on a daily basis. Modern campaigns also need to be strategically flexible and have the ability to understand quickly what’s working and what isn’t. In this regard it seems that the testing of our campaign messages and vulnerabilities was either ignored or discounted by key decision-makers within the campaign team. Whether that was done because domain polling showed such a large lead for the NDP is still unclear, but the take-away for our Panel is that constant testing and re-testing of our core message needs to be central to the design of all future campaigns.

At a technical level, many parts of the NDP campaign infrastructure were very strong and well-resourced. The central office staffing was in place well before the campaign began. The campaign’s

social media presence was effective; however, it’s not clear that the benefit was proportional to the resources and time allocated to that effort. The rapid response efforts and the daily “reality check” pieces were deemed a success. While there were a few examples of gaps in pulling together and equipping the central campaign office as well as supporting local campaigns, those gaps did not appear to be overly problematic. The campaign tour arrangements were also well-resourced from a technical perspective. Tour logistics were thoroughly mapped out and had the capacity to make changes where and when necessary.

Those operational strengths, however, masked a number of critical internal problems. As mentioned earlier, the campaign did not have a succinct, clearly articulated core message that resonated strongly with voters. That deficiency was further compounded by the constraints of staying positive, constraints that effectively barred both the provincial and local campaigns from using Christy Clark’s name in campaign literature. That particular constraint added one more barrier to convincing undecided voters and leaners that the ballot question was about her track record as Premier and whether the BC Liberals deserved another term as government.

The campaign also suffered because of internal tensions over whether or when to make shifts in the campaign. While those kinds of tensions are not new to campaigns, they can have an adverse impact, and they certainly did in the 2013 campaign. While opposing views within the campaign team have become more apparent in the post-election period, it is critical, in terms of campaign discipline, that the Campaign Manager must take greater responsibility for not only resolving these counterproductive tensions, but also recognizing the vulnerabilities of the overall campaign and have the capacity to direct needed

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changes in strategy when and where needed. From reports we received it appears that confusion over the role that the Campaign Manager needed to play in terms of resolving internal tensions had an adverse impact on the overall campaign.

From comments, interviews and submissions made to the Panel, it was also clear that the “failure to prosecute the BC Liberals” was a major source of frustration for many local constituencies. These comments go to the heart of a long standing debate about how much latitude local constituencies have during the campaign period. As Panel members, we understand the importance of running a disciplined campaign, but because of the staying positive directive and the stifling effect it had on attacking the BC Liberal track record, party activists, especially at the local level, felt stymied by this directive.

It is important to remember that one of the traditional strengths of the NDP in this province has been our capacity to run strong local campaigns. The fact that many local campaigns expressed a frustration with their inability to highlight their issues within their campaign speaks to the need for the Party to consider ways to provide latitude to local campaigns and candidates that re-build a strength that has long been key to NDP electoral success.

Similar frustrations were expressed about the way in which the Party’s platform was rolled out. The decision to have an extended roll-out designed to twin elements of the platform with various BC Liberal Cabinet Minister’s ridings seemed confusing to many. It did not have the desired impact of focusing the campaign on the BC Liberal track record. Instead, it seemed to shift the spotlight onto the details of our platform, leaving the BC Liberals the opportunity to portray our platform as “all about spending”. Add to that the fact that our platform was not easily summarized into a core

message that either the media or undecided voters could grasp and it became obvious that the longer we spent rolling out the platform, the more we were making the first week of the campaign about the NDP as a “government in waiting” than about the BC Liberals’ twelve year record of government in BC.

Many presenters acknowledge that the BC NDP will always be framed as a party that advocates for better public services and programs. No one suggested that we should change that fundamental approach. However, many commented that in a campaign to capture the attention and support of undecided voters, talking up what the incumbent has done wrong is a more persuasive force in a campaign than allowing the incumbent to shift the debate onto what you would do differently.

Invariably, the major challenge for the BC NDP is to provide a strong narrative to voters that addresses their concerns about jobs and the economy. For all her faults as Premier—and there are many—Christy Clark the campaigner followed a tightly scripted plan in which her core message and daily visuals were all about those issues. In contrast, our campaign did not follow a similar path. Daily visuals of the Leader did not show the same connections, a fact that is at odds with the NDP’s long history of support within the labour movement and for working families. The notion of a tightly scripted message within each campaign event was also a major failing. It remains unclear to our Panel as to how that failure was allowed to persist, but certainly competing views within the campaign team about how that scripting should work contributed to this problem.

The campaign’s target riding strategy had its own set of problems. While the initial view of the strategy was pragmatic and guided by a coherent analysis of polling results from previous elections and an on-the-ground assessment of where NDP

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candidates could realistically defeat BC Liberal incumbents, several problems emerged. Inevitably, those ridings not on the target list were quick to advance their objection. As well, during the course of the campaign there was a push to expand the list even though the resources needed to support that expansion were not in place. To what extent that push was a reflection of an over-confident assessment of voter support is unclear; however, in hindsight it appears that deviating from the original target strategy was a campaign misstep. Add to that the failure to do polling and focus group testing linked to the target ridings and the possibility for error in how the overall campaign worked increased considerably.

Re-Engaging with BC Voters

Our Party has a proud history of defending communities across BC. Whether it was the major changes to labour laws, land use planning, the successful launch of public auto insurance done by the Barrett government in the 1970s or the improvements to education at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels during two successive terms during the 1990s, the BC NDP has had an enormously positive impact on our province. Over the next four years we need to position ourselves to advance those efforts in 2017. Part of that shift will mean improving the inclusiveness within our Party.

The BC NDP has made great advances in supporting a nomination process that gives women candidates the opportunity to run for office. In 2013, over 40 percent of the BC NDP candidates were female. That represents a significant change in how our Party reflects and respects the communities in which it works to build voter support.

For a province like ours, where ethnic diversity continues to gain momentum, the challenge for 2017 will be to ensure that our candidate selection process reflects that changing diversity.

The experience in 2013 was that we have some major gaps that need to be closed. Our ability to effectively communicate in languages other than English needs to be improved. Part of that effort needs to focus on the distinct media landscape that has developed in BC to serve the diverse ethnic communities in the province. Having the necessary language capacity will make the outreach effort with those media that much more effective.

Candidate selection also means candidate support and candidate vetting. From the information received by the Panel, it appears that both areas need improvement. To what extent those changes will require amendments to the Party constitution and practices is an open question at this point; however, if the Party hopes to field a strong list of candidates in 2017, work needs to begin today to both identify strong potential candidates from BC's diverse ethnic communities and to support those candidates as we move closer to the next election.

The Party's connection to the BC labour movement is also critical to any successful rebuilding effort; BC's labour movement is a founding partner of the NDP. That historic connection reflects a commitment of shared values. The fight for social and economic justice that is so central to the principles of the BC NDP is also a key priority for the labour movement. When unions organize and bring voice, respect and better conditions to the lives of the thousands of men and women, they are also mobilizing a community to ensure those workplace rights are matched with progressive legislative change, a change that is central to all New Democrats who want progressive alternatives from their government. Those shared perspectives are also critical to how effective the Party is when organizing an election campaign. Union activists and union members help mobilize voter support at both the local and provincial level. Unions also

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provide on-going financial support to the Party as well as contribute to maintain the Party's capacity to connect with voters on key issues of economic and social justice.

The partnership between the labour movement and the NDP is a two-way partnership, one that requires both to work collaboratively on a progressive and shared agenda. For the labour movement it means moving support for the NDP beyond the leadership ranks. Too often a disconnect between union leaders and union members undermines labour's ability to mobilize support for NDP candidates or build public support for progressive change. Similarly, the Party needs to advance policies that connect with working people in ways that strengthen the principles that brought labour and the NDP together.

Observations and Conclusions

The lessons learned from the 2013 provincial election are many. We know that not framing the incumbent government and focusing public attention, media scrutiny and ultimately voter choice on how their term as government has failed to meet the needs of voters can have a disastrous impact on a campaign and an election outcome. Going into the May 2013 campaign the BC NDP had the capacity to make a compelling pitch to voters that the BC Liberals did not deserve another term. Scandal, incompetent public policy decisions, cold-hearted cuts to much needed public services and programs—the list of BC Liberal failures is a long one—but by failing to give these issues proper weight in our campaign, we effectively ceded an advantage to the BC Liberals that they opportunistically used to win a fourth term.

We also know that our campaign machinery, although much improved over previous election campaigns, needs a significant overhaul. Having the technical capacity to not just identify potential voter support, but also correlate that support to

policies, issues and the priorities of those voters is the new standard that drives modern campaigns. Unfortunately, right-wing political organizations have seized this approach and are using it to great success; witness what the Harper Conservatives have been able to achieve in their campaigns. Our party has to develop capacities in these areas if we hope to win in 2017.

Our Party also has to do a much better job of connecting with BC's increasingly diverse voter population. Our outreach efforts within some of those communities have a strong history, but we cannot afford to assume that those connections will transition from one generation to the next. BC will be a far more diverse province in 2017 and if the BC NDP does not have an effective and coherent ethnic outreach strategy in place by then, we are at risk of losing again in 2017.

One final observation and that is the extent to which election campaigns are about the Leader. The reality of modern campaigning is that a political party has to operate a sophisticated campaign at many levels simultaneously. It has to appeal to a party's base for support, fundraising and volunteers. It has to deal with a media that is looking for critical gaps in whatever position the party is advancing. But most of all, the campaign has to reach that group of voters who don't pay attention to the details of an election until well into a campaign. In that respect, a party's Leader is a party's brand. We have to be mindful of how we present that brand and never make assumptions about how voters, especially the undecided, will ultimately make up their minds and cast their votes. In that context, party Leaders have to be accessible to voters, have to be willing to engage and have to accept that in creating the sense of brand, the Leader's openness to advice, input and direction from a campaign team is critical. Similarly, the campaign team has to work from the assumption that they are always fighting

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an uphill battle in which public support for the brand is never a foregone conclusion. Having all those elements firmly in place is the only way to ensure electoral success in the future.

Recommendations

Provincial Office, Provincial Executive and MLAs

- The Party needs to build strong and effective connections between all levels of the organization including the Table Officers, the provincial Executive, the Provincial Council and MLAs. Having that in place will ensure that future campaigns enjoy the full support of the Party's key decision-making bodies.
- The Party needs to have a well-defined structure for the Election Planning Committee. The EPC must include representation from all levels of the Party and ensure strong and effective connections are in place throughout the campaign.
- The 2017 campaign must be guided by a strategic plan which reflects the input and priorities of not just MLAs and the Party Leader, but also the Party's Executive, Table Officers and Provincial Council. The development of that plan is critical to our success in 2017.
- The development of that plan should begin with a thorough de-brief of the 2013 election results as well as campaign strengths and weaknesses and utilize an ongoing strategic planning process.
- The Provincial Office must invest in a new system of voter and member contact information that has the capacity to merge key data bases and provide real-time updates to that information. This investment must also ensure that the data entry is accurate and up to date. As well, the system change must include training for local Constituency Associations.

- The Party also needs to turn its attention to effective member engagement between elections, not just during the 28 day campaign. This emphasis will require better training of Local Constituency Associations, more effective deployment of organizers and ensuring Table Officers and Executive the building of a strong organizing infrastructure within the Party beyond the 28-day election campaign cycle.
- The incoming Executive of the Party need to undertake regular semi-annual reviews of the implementation of these recommendations to ensure the intended goals are achieved.

Candidate Selection & Support

- While the Party has recorded great success in increasing access for women to represent our Party as candidates, similar efforts must also be directed at BC's increasingly diverse ethnic communities. The Provincial Executive should consider changes that would ensure that our slate of 2017 candidates fully reflects the ethnic diversity of the province.
- As part of any plan to improve the Party's candidate selection process, the Provincial Office also needs to strengthen its vetting procedures to anticipate problems before they arise during the 28 day campaign.
- The Party should be prepared to make the necessary constitutional changes to support the goals of stronger diversity and better support for local candidates.
- Establish a plan for non-incumbent candidates nominated well in advance of the writ period, to allow them to make the most of their time and resources.

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- The Party needs to develop a robust system of candidate support that includes extensive training, briefing on platform elements and support for their local issues and campaigns

Fundraising

- The Provincial Council should set meaningful and measurable fundraising targets for all levels of the Party and ensure those targets are met.
- Although there were some complaints about the aggressive new approach that the Party took to fundraising over the last two years, the reality is that neither the Provincial Office nor a 2017 election campaign effort can be effective if it isn't well-resourced. Fundraising is key to meeting both objectives. For that effort to succeed, all levels of the Party need to set meaningful targets for fundraising and review how best to achieve those targets.

Polling and Communications

- In 2017, the Party needs to have a more disciplined approach to targeted ridings, one that includes tracking polling in these ridings as well as a very deliberate connection between the platform and local priorities for those ridings.
- Comprehensive focus group testing must assess campaign messages, campaign documents and all paid advertising.
- To ensure that the target strategy has the right level of support, the 2017 campaign should have a target committee that works with the target constituencies to ensure they have quality candidates, resources, training, volunteers and local advertising.
- The 2017 campaign must start with a strong, clear message about why the BC Liberals don't deserve another term

as government. Not answering that basic question will leave voters wondering why a change in the status quo is needed.

- The 2017 campaign needs to include a capacity for local campaigns to highlight either the failures of incumbent government candidates to address important local issues or specific platform commitments designed to build voter support in key ridings.
- While the platform and the campaign should not inhibit the capacity to govern in the case of a victory, the election strategy should be, first and foremost, centered on the first task of winning the election.
- Campaigns should be inspiring and provide a positive vision for voters to grasp, but they should also draw appropriate contrasts based on differences in policy, record and character.
- Campaigns should center on the NDP's perceived strengths and the opponents' perceived weaknesses.
- Research must be conducted well in advance of the election to understand priorities of voters from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.
- Ethnic media should be integral to the campaign strategy and rollout. Particular effort should be given to ensuring these media receive fair and equal attention from the Leader and the campaign.
- The central campaign should have readily available spokespeople in each of BC's major language groups, who are fully integrated in the central campaign. These spokespeople should not necessarily be candidates.
- The Leader and the Leader's communications team should receive media

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training for each audience language, and be expected to engage regularly in advance of and during the election with ethnic media.

- The polling strategy should conform to generally accepted principals of campaign polling and should be sufficiently resourced so as to be effective and meaningful.
- The 2017 campaign's paid advertising must be properly resourced and support the campaign's core messages while being flexible enough to adapt to emerging issues.

Platform

- While the standard for tabling a fully-costed and comprehensive platform document was advanced in 2013, greater emphasis needs to be placed on how the 2017 platform document is communicated to voters.
- As well, careful consideration should be given to how and when the 2017 platform document is released.
- The 2017 platform must inspire both the Party's traditional base and potential swing voters. The input from all levels of the Party needs to reflect those priorities and provide clear evidence that the BC NDP has earned the support of voters.
- The 2017 platform also needs to be thoroughly tested using polling and focus groups to ensure that our priorities are well understood and easily communicated. Ultimately the platform is the Party's pitch to voters, especially undecided voters who need to be convinced to vote NDP.

The Campaign

- The Party should strive to have its 2017 campaign team in place at least a year ahead of the election.

- In selecting a Campaign Manager for the 2017 campaign, experience, skill and a thorough understanding of the BC political scene and the Party's capacity to mobilize at the constituency level are essential attributes for this position. Strong team leadership skills are an essential part of the manager's skill set.

- The 2017 campaign should have the flexibility to better support local campaigns and integrate feedback provided to the central campaign by local constituencies.

- It is the responsibility of the Campaign Manager to keep the team focused and effective. It's also the job of the Campaign Manager to ensure that the Leader is following the plan developed by the campaign team. Where disagreements arise between the Campaign Manager and the Leader over details in the plan, it's the Leader's job to be the candidate and the manager's job to run the campaign. Any confusion on those roles and responsibilities undermines the entire campaign effort. The 2017 campaign needs to have those roles clearly defined and agreed to long before the writ is dropped.

- While the Leader's Tour was well-resourced, it failed to connect effectively with voters, a gap that reflected problems with the core campaign message. The 2017 campaign needs to close this gap.

- The 2017 campaign needs to resource and implement an effective ethnic media strategy that includes more targeted ad buys as well as more dedicated Party spokespeople capable of handling interviews in languages other than English.

- The campaign needs to provide local campaigns with a capacity to talk about local issues. The 2017 campaign needs to address

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the concerns raised by local campaigns that their efforts to build voter support were held back by a tightly controlled central campaign.

- The 2017 campaign needs to address the issue of the economy. While the 2013 Campaign provided a detailed platform with well-researched proposals for meaningful change, those proposals were not distilled into a succinct message on the economy that captured the support of voters. The Party cannot afford to overlook that issue in 2017.
- A fully supported campaign strategy document needs to be in place at least a year before the 2017 campaign begins. The document needs to detail all strategic aspects of the campaign as well as tactics and implementation approaches and resources. In addition, the plan should be updated and adjusted to changing conditions that emerge prior to the launch of the formal campaign.
- When there are major policy shifts during the course of the campaign, the rationale for those changes must be clearly understood and communicated to all levels of the Party prior to the announced policy change.

Connecting with the Labour Movement

- Union activists play a key role in both the provincial and local campaigns. The Party needs to ensure that its connection to the labour movement remains strong. Part of that connection can be facilitated by ensuring that training and election preparedness efforts are coordinated between the Party and its union support base. The 2017 campaign needs to reflect that coordination and work to ensure it remains a vital part of the overall strategy.
- The labour movement provides an important level of support for the Party both before the writ period and during the 28 days

of the campaign. The Party and its labour partners need to find ways to strengthen the effectiveness of labour liaison support during both periods.

Re-engaging with BC Voters

- In the terms of reference for the Review Panel, there is priority given to ensuring that the review process engages in broader outreach efforts with members and Constituency Associations. Winning in 2017 will take an enormous commitment from Party members who need to be re-engaged with the BC NDP. Those members need to be mobilized now, not months before the next provincial election. Table Officers, Party Executive and the Provincial Council all have a role to play in that outreach effort and the November Convention provides an important launch point for that work.
- The BC NDP has to fully reflect the diversity of our province in all of its efforts to re-engage with members and activists. The Party's long-standing relationship with aboriginal communities needs to be strengthened. The same is true for the Party's connection with new Canadians who have long seen our Party as an inclusive and progressive voice for their issues. Incorporating their voices and their priorities in the re-building effort is critical to our success in 2017. These engagement efforts are a multi-year commitment that must be supported and implemented continuously by MLAs and local Constituency Associations.
- A strong and effective strategic plan for re-building the Party's capacity to win in 2017 needs to be developed by representatives from all levels of the Party. The plan must also engage Party members in a continuous

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campaign of mobilization, one that highlights the BC Liberal track record and inspires our base to re-commit to our Party.

Respectfully submitted,

CINDY OLIVER, CHAIR

EUGENE KOSTYRA

ANDY ROSS

PAM SIHOTA

PHILLIP LEGG, PANEL SECRETARY