



Power Shift: From Party Elites to Informed Citizens

Vaughan Lyon

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Canadian Vaughan Lyon is courageous. In his new book, *Power Shift*, he makes the case for diffusing political party control. Lyon acknowledges, “Since the proposed model will involve the transfer of power from the elites to citizens, some of those who are politically advantaged by and comfortable with the present system will vigorously oppose it.” Anyone writing this sort of proposal will come under fire from the well-established political class, but Lyon may be the person to cut through the opposition.

Sometimes the right message has to also come from the right messenger. As an educated and accomplished political scientist, Lyon is that courier. More importantly, he is pro-government and offers his ideas to strengthen the role of government and give it real legitimacy by connecting it more directly to the governed. He writes with the authority of a scholar, offering clearly researched conclusions and complete documentation. At the same time, Lyon’s language is clear and concise with modern examples.

Power Shift does not call for the abolition of political parties. Rather, it presents the idea of constituency parliaments, bodies of representatives comprising one elected official for every one-thousand voters. In the case of Canada, these local, close-to-the-voter parliaments would then be the source of advice and information for the 308 members of the Canadian House of Commons. It’s an idea that could easily be transferred to any representative government and could have been proposed as 435 constituency parliaments for each of the congressional districts in the United States. Though based on Canadian politics, nearly every conclusion and observation in the book can be applied to the US governmental system.

Lyon has organized his presentation so that his solution is presented first, followed by his longer case for change. This structure puts the primary idea into the reader’s mind and then shows how it will work to solve many of the current problems our governments face. It is not difficult for modern political watchers to accept the notion that party politics have become more important in government than public policy, but Lyon shows how his constituency parliaments would better connect citizens to their political leaders.

The book addresses significant problems with the current system, things like voter apathy, special interest groups, and an uninformed electorate. Lyon writes, “Interest groups of whatever kind will no longer be able to claim they speak for us, because we will have the means to speak for ourselves.” He also addresses the current political climate of constant crisis: “A crisis, real or contrived, is valuable to politicians as a means of mobilizing support and diverting attention from the policy failures that have led to the need to act.” Lyon then goes on to show how more direct representation would get the governed interested and involved.

Power Shift is offered to save and promote government. Conservatives will likely find flaws in Lyon's proposed implementation of constituency parliaments, but many will also appreciate the good sense and reason in his thinking. This book should be required reading for anyone who sees that our current political structure is at a crossroads. The only people who may find *Power Shift* a bit unsettling are those in the governing class who keep their power through party politics and an uninvolved electorate.

THOMAS KACHADURIAN (April 16, 2013)

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