



BRITISH COLUMBIA
REAL ESTATE
ASSOCIATION



For immediate release

BC's First-Ever, Province-Wide Election Focus Group Goes Beyond the Polls

Vancouver, BC – May 9, 2005. Despite facing dramatically different issues across the province, British Columbians in all regions rated their quality of life between seven and nine on a scale of one to ten, with ten meaning “couldn’t be better.”

That’s what the REALTORS® who participated in BC’s first-ever, province-wide election focus group were surprised to learn after consulting with more than 70 people from every region of the province. The focus group was designed to capture what British Columbians are thinking and talking about in the lead up to the provincial election.

“The issues people are talking about, like the economy, education and health, really relate to their quality of life,” says Gretchen Gebhard, a Kelowna REALTOR® who participated in the focus group. “This project provides insight into the feelings behind the polling data. Talking with people in my community, I didn’t expect them to be so positive about their quality of life. When we got together for the focus group, I was even more surprised to see that my colleagues heard similar things in their communities.”

The focus group was conducted by the British Columbia Real Estate Association (BCREA), in partnership with research firm the Mustel Group. In late April, a group of 11 REALTORS® in regions throughout BC consulted with members of their communities about issues being debated during the provincial election campaign, including the economy, environment, education, health, transportation, safety and housing. On May 5, 2005, the REALTORS® met in Vancouver with a Mustel Group moderator to participate in the focus group and report what they heard from people in their communities.

“British Columbians are concerned about crime, health care and education,” says focus group moderator Tom Jopling of the Mustel Group. “But there seems to be guarded optimism that things are on the right track.”

REALTORS® conducted interviews with a diverse range of British Columbians, including teachers, police officers, environmentalists, students, airport workers, doctors, nurses, mayors, parents, business owners, scientists, retirees, bank managers and engineers. They spoke with people in every corner of the province, in towns and cities such as Powell River, Fort Nelson, West Vancouver, Chetwynd, Nelson, Parksville, Prince Rupert, Victoria, Kelowna and others.

“As REALTORS®, we’re very involved in our communities,” says Gebhard. “We talk to a wide variety of people every day and we care about the issues that affect the quality of life in our neighbourhoods.”

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Highlights of the focus group include:

- When asked to suggest ways in which politicians could bring about a positive improvement to the quality of life for people in their region, residents tend to focus on improvements to the politicians' own personal characteristics, such as honesty and integrity.
- Residents responded with guarded optimism about the next one to three years, noting that the improving economy must be balanced to ensure long-term sustainability and growth.
- A positive quality of life was attributed to a good economy with good local job prospects, good personal health, a strong sense of community, healthy relationships and good educational opportunities.
- Factors contributing negatively to quality of life include the current and future condition of the health care system, personal financial security, education concerns, lack of time to spend with family and community issues related to crime, drugs and homelessness.
- When asked about the most positive things happening in their regions, residents talked about the economy, improvements in health care and education-related infrastructure and the 2010 Olympics, among others.
- When asked about the most negative things happening in their regions, crime, drugs, homelessness, degradation of health care infrastructure, lack of qualified tradespeople, environmental issues and lack of jobs were mentioned.
- Almost without exception, the residents interviewed by REALTORS® expressed their intention to vote in the upcoming provincial election.

“Although the people I spoke with felt BC was the place to be, we haven't even seen our potential yet,” reported Kathy Bowes, who consulted with people in her Powell River community. “Our beauty, our resources, our economy, our social services, we have greatness ahead of us and we should be looking for a longer-term plan, rather than a short-term plan.”

“I have a fairly long list of negatives from my respondents, although none of them were in consensus with the exception of two who answered the economic recovery or economic development in smaller communities lags behind major centres,” said Ted Shepard, a Prince Rupert REALTOR® who consulted with a variety of people in Northern BC communities.

“Our profession also sees this focus group as an opportunity to encourage people to take action in their communities and to exercise their democratic rights by voting,” says Gebhard, who is member of BCREA's Board of Directors. “Our Association is non-partisan, but we're encouraging our member boards and REALTORS® to demonstrate their concern for their communities by getting involved in the political process.”

A summary of the focus group findings, interview questions and more information about the focus group participants is available at: http://www.bcrea.bc.ca/news_room/focus_group.htm.

BCREA represents 12 member real estate boards and their approximately 14,000 REALTORS® on all provincial issues, providing an extensive communications network, standard forms, government relations, required post-licensing courses and continuing education. To demonstrate the profession's commitment to improving Quality of Life in BC communities, BCREA supports growth that encourages economic vitality, provides housing opportunities and builds communities with good schools and safe neighbourhoods.

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