

Fraser Health Authority voters vital to NDP's rise to government

The July 2017 elevation of John Horgan's New Democratic Party to government in the aftermath of B.C.'s 41st general election was due almost entirely to a sharp upward surge in NDP votes in the Fraser Health Authority region.

That surge resulted in the election of 17 NDP MLAs in the Fraser Health region, up dramatically from the nine New Democrats returned four years earlier in the 2013 general election.

Not only did the eight new NDP pickups in Fraser Health offset the loss of seats elsewhere in the province – the New Democrats lost one riding in each of the Northern, Interior and Vancouver Island health authorities, and added two in Vancouver Coastal – they also cut deeply into the electoral

majorities won by the BCLiberals over the previous four general elections

New Democratic Party challengers upset BC Liberal incumbents in seven Fraser Health ridings – Burnaby North, Delta North, Maple Ridge-Mission, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, Port Moody-Coquitlam, Surrey-Fleetwood and Surrey-Guildford – and the party also added Surrey-Panorama, abandoned by Marvin Hunt who instead ran (and won election) in Surrey-Cloverdale.

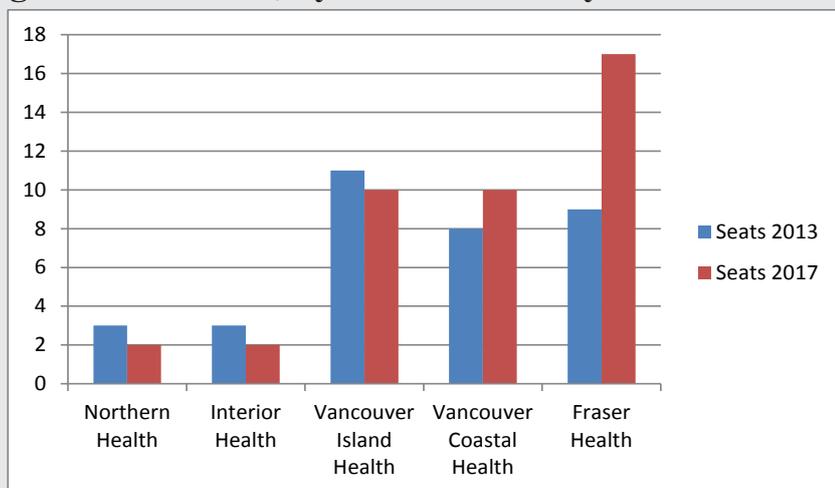
It became evident, once the May 9 general-election ballots were counted, that the BC Liberals' legislative majority had disappeared, as the long-governing party fell from 49 seats – out of a total of 85 – in 2013, to just 43 in a newly-expanded, 87-member House.

Buoyed by their gains in Fraser Health, Horgan's New Democratic Party took a total of 41 seats – up from 34 in 2013 – while Andrew Weaver's BC Green Party captured three ridings on Vancouver Island.

No party had been able to win a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly. Then, on June 29, after Horgan and Weaver signed an historic compact between their respective parties, the 16-year reign of the BC Liberals was ended on a legislative vote of confidence.

On July 18, Horgan's New Democrats were sworn into government. Seven NDP MLAs representing Fraser Health ridings – Harry Bains, Lisa Beare, Judy Darcy, Mike Farnworth, Bruce Ralston, Selena Robinson and Jinny Sims – were named to the Executive Council as full-fledged ministers, while Katrina Chen was appointed as a Minister of State.

New Democratic Party seats won in 2013 and 2017 general elections, by health authority



SOURCE - Elections BC

In B.C.'s 38th general election, in 2005, the New Democrats garnered a total of just over 231,000 ballots in the Fraser Health Authority region, more than 38,000 fewer than the number taken by the BC Liberals.

The vote totals for both the governing Liberals and opposition New Democrats declined in the FHA in the 39th general-election, in 2009, to about 256,000 and 226,000 ballots respectively. The difference between the two major parties shrunk to a still-commanding 30,000 votes in favour of the government.

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In 2013, in the province's 40th general election, the BC Liberals were led by Christy Clark, who succeeded Gordon Campbell after he had served for a decade as Premier. Few expected the Clark Liberals to be returned to government, but an historic upset – the NDP had been leading in voter surveys by as much as 20 percentage points – handed the New Democrats a fourth consecutive defeat.

The BC Liberals' vote-count in Fraser Health soared to 281,000 – 46,000 ballots ahead of the NDP's total.

Over the course of those three general elections, the BC Liberals had won 15, 17 and 19 seats in the Fraser Health region, far ahead of the New Democrats' seat-counts of 10, 11 and nine.

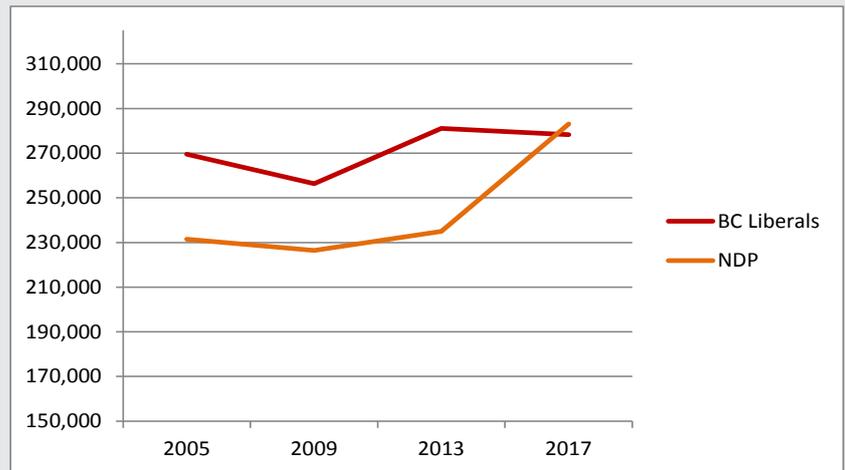
Viewed in this light the NDP's success in 2017 must be seen as remarkable.

Horgan's New Democrats racked up an historic-high of 283,000 ballots, an increase of more than 38,000 over the total from four years earlier.

The BC Liberals, meanwhile, lost about 3,000 votes compared to their total in 2013 – and with just 278,000 the governing party finished slightly behind the NDP.

When all the ballots were counted, the New Democrats had prevailed in 17 Fraser Health electoral districts, while the BC Liberals collapsed to only 11.

NDP closed gap with BC Liberals in Fraser Health with surge in votes across region



SOURCE - Elections BC

It was far from a dominant victory in terms of vote-share, however, notwithstanding the NDP's dominance in the seat-count. The New Democrats won just 42.4 per cent of all valid votes, slightly ahead of the BC Liberals' 41.7 per cent.

Clearly, voters in the Fraser Health Authority region made a vital contribution to the electoral success of John Horgan's New Democratic Party in May 2017. It remains to be seen whether the NDP – after more than four years in power – will be able to replicate their success in the fall of 2021, when B.C.'s 42nd general election is scheduled to take place.

In terms of population, Fraser Health is both the largest and the fastest-growing of B.C.'s five health regions.

One might expect that Fraser Health had a proportionate number of physicians and financial resources, but that is far from the case.

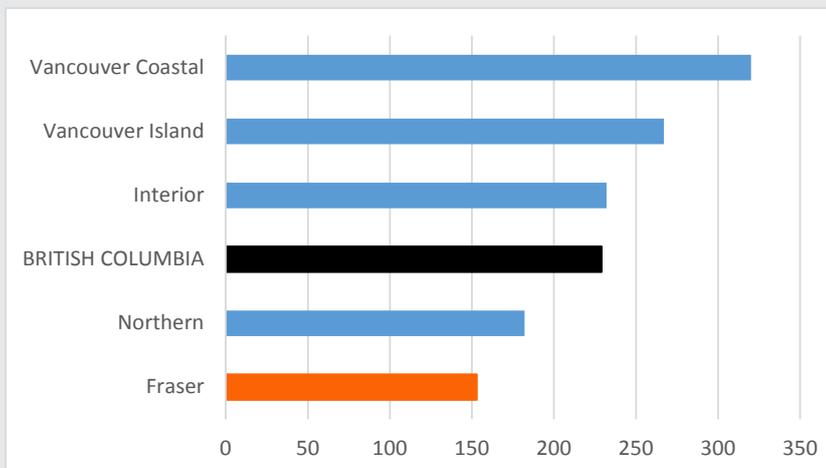
In 2015/16, for example, the neighbouring Vancouver Coastal region had almost 3,700 medical practitioners – both family doctors and specialist physicians – while the more-populous Fraser Health region had fewer than 2,700. Measured on a 'per 100,000 population' basis, Vancouver Coastal had 320 medical practitioners, yet Fraser Health had just 153.

Similarly, Fraser Health had far fewer GPs – general practitioners – than elsewhere in B.C. While the provincial average was 123 per 100,000 population (and in the Vancouver Island region, 159), the comparable number in Fraser Health was only 89.

The same was true for specialist physicians. So, while Vancouver Coastal had 16.3 anesthesiologists per 100,000 population in 2015/16, Fraser Health had a mere 6.7.

It would not be surprising, then, if the Horgan government was to recognize the political advantages of investing significant resources into the Fraser Health Authority region, before the 2021 general election. 

Fraser Health has far fewer medical professionals than other health regions (per 100,000 population)



SOURCE - MSP Information Resource Manual 2015/16, and BC Stats