

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

ABBOTSFORD PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 5 JUNE 2004
AT THE RAMADA INN AND CONFERENCE
CENTRE

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

Dorothy-Jean O'Donnell

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The Citizens' Assembly should make two recommendations (a) a specific more proportional voting system (b) that the Citizens' Assembly be a permanent body to make recommendations for democratic renewal to go to binding referendum at each subsequent election.

KEY THEMES

Ms. O'Donnell discussed the need to bring the issue of personal empowerment to the fore. The presenter argued the need for a change in political culture to transform the adversarial style of politics into a more consensual, respectful style of governing. Ms. O'Donnell discussed the fight of the Fraser Valley for clean air which unified the community toward a common goal. The presenter argued that this process reflects some of the ways that the Citizens' Assembly is able to overcome the ideological divide.

Ms. O'Donnell stated that the one feature of the Westminster system which ought to be preserved is responsible government, with a premier that sits within the house of assembly. The presenter argued that party government should not be above reflection by the Citizens' Assembly as it is possible to have a Westminster system without party rule. Ms. O'Donnell also noted that the recommendation of the Assembly should give due attention to the Constitution of Canada, in particular the issues of equality, and aboriginal and treaty rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. O'Donnell made three recommendations:

1. The Assembly should carefully consider the various proposals for more proportional representation, and recommend an alternative which captures the spirit of the people's demand for empowerment.
2. In its report, the Assembly should not confine itself to presenting a rationale for the model it adopts, but should elaborate on the richness and vitality of the submissions it receives, clarify some of the pressing questions relating to democratic renewal that it has considered, and discuss how the model it proposes will further work for democratic renewal.
3. The Assembly should recommend that the Citizens' Assembly be given a renewed mandate to continue work for democratic renewal and make further recommendations for change in the electoral process to empower the citizenry. Consideration should be given to drafting a second referendum question to that effect.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Would you like a government free of parties?

A I'd like a government in which people are sovereign and make decisions and live with those decisions. I would like to get rid of party government. We should look to the example of Nunavut and see what we can learn.

Q Do you favour any particular system?

A I am in favour of a more proportional system and I am aware of the controversies that exist between STV and MMP. I was a member of the Pro Rep campaign of 2002. Whatever you propose, your proposal should move the system out of the rut it is now in.

Q How much importance do you place on electoral reform?

A The key to democratic renewal takes place well before the ballots are cast and counted. The change that is needed is that parties shouldn't be nominating the candidates. The parties should just participate along with other groups in a forum but the power should remain in the hands of the citizens and not the parties.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q The problem with non-party government is that when you have a large population parties present a simplified set of ideas, what is your opinion on that?

A I agree with that 100%, I think that there is a crucial role for parties in articulating their vision, so on voting day you would have parties. The problem is how to involve the citizens in the electoral process. Because it is not good enough to wait until voting day.

75% of the youth have already told you that they are not engaged in the system, they want a better system.