

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.

Henry Teichrob

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Making a proposal about how to organize the electoral system in BC.

KEY THEMES

The presenter discussed the need to address the problem of “wasted votes” under the current FPTP system. Mr. Teichrob also stated the need to temper the power of the executive over the legislature, in order to avoid the current situation of “dictatorial rule”. The presenter argued that there exist too many small parties and too many false promises on the part of the major parties. According to Mr. Teichrob, FPTP contains multiple deficiencies including its ability to produce artificial and exaggerated majorities; weak opposition; polarized politics with accompanying wild swings in policy; voter alienation and apathy resulting in low voter turnout; and the holding of too many elections leading to disillusionment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Teichrob advocated the introduction of MMP. Under this system, two-thirds of the legislature would be elected from single member plurality districts in order to protect local representation, particularly in rural areas. The remaining one-third of MLAs would be elected on the basis of the proportion of the overall vote that their party gained in the election. Parties would determine which candidates, from the number of losing riding candidates, would be elected to the legislature. Mr. Teichrob expressed the opinion that to be elected candidates should have worked to earn their place and not be political appointees who have never had to go door-to-door canvassing votes. The proportional MLA’s would be allocated to regional areas. The presenter recommended the introduction of: a 5% threshold; the retention of fixed terms; and a requirement that a party contest a minimum of 20 ridings with a membership of at least 50 members in each riding to qualify for inclusion on the ballot.

Mr. Teichrob concluded with a list of the advantages of his proposed electoral system including: the prevention of wasted votes, the production of a more balanced legislature with more effective opposition, the exclusion of nuisance parties via the use of the 5% threshold, its simplicity for voters, and the emergence of a tone of moderation in politics.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Have you thought about how big the districts would be?

A You should let the parties decide. As depending on how many regional MLA's that party has elected determines how they will divide up the province and where they will position their regional representatives.

Q How do you propose to reconcile an "x" ballot with a PR system?

A Using a single ballot prevents voter confusion. The percentage of the vote is very easy to calculate. The legislation would say that one-third of the MLA's would be elected among the top-losing candidates in order to introduce an element of proportionality.

Q There exist some systems in which the 5% threshold is negated if the party wins a constituency seat; would you support this system?

A I would suggest that a party that doesn't work hard enough to get 5% of the vote across the province doesn't deserve recognition. It takes a lot of hard work to emerge on the provincial scene and these parties should work through their way up through the local municipalities to get themselves established.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Are the "at large" members selected on the basis of the province-wide vote, and will the candidates selected be those that lost by a whisker?

A Yes that's right, but all candidates will have to have gained 5% of the vote. That is my threshold.

