

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

MERRITT PUBLIC HEARING DATED
15 JUNE 2004 AT DAYS INN

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.

Ava Dean

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A proposal for a simple, mixed electoral system.

KEY THEMES

Ava Dean told the hearing that after 40 years of voting she had come to the conclusion that the political preferences of voters are not reflected in our legislature or our parliament. She criticized the current system for giving 100 per cent of the political power to one party when it may not even have the support of a majority of voters. She expressed concern that this can lead to ‘lame duck’ oppositions who have so few seats that they are unable to hold the government to account. Ms Dean supported the introduction of a mixed electoral system. She explained that this system would be simple for the voter, with each voter casting a separate vote for a local candidate and a political party of his or her choice. She proposed that half to two thirds of seats be allocated to local candidates, with the remaining seats allocated proportionally to parties. She acknowledged that ridings would need to be larger but argued that this was preferable to having more MLAs in the legislature. Ms Dean explained that she supported a mixed system because it allows people to support a candidate even if they did not like that candidate’s party, it makes voters feel that their votes count, and it enables people to cast positive votes for the candidate and party of their choice rather than voting to get rid of the party in power.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ava Dean recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: “Proportional representation of any kind would create a more effective and accountable government with greater responsiveness to the electorate.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were three members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	How important is it to have a local candidate and a constituency office? What do they do for you? Do you think that party discipline affects this?
A	I think that party discipline is inappropriately draconian. An MLA who votes their conscience or votes to represent their constituency is going to be disciplined in a way. The constituency office is very important. In the course of my work and the people I come in contact with, I often suggest that they go and talk with the folks at the constituency office both for advice on how to negotiate

	the government departments and for advocacy.
Q	Is your system based on MMP like in New Zealand?
A	Yes because I was looking for something simple
Q	For the vote for the local candidate do you prefer a majority or a plurality system?
A	I haven't thought about it but off the top of my head I'd prefer a plurality system. But actually now that I think about it, being able to express a first and second choice could be a good thing.
Q	I ask because it seems that people are interested in having more choice and that's what you get with that preferential ballot.
A	I agree. I'd prefer that if I couldn't have my first choice then that I could get my second choice.

Comment from panel: There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	Are you restrained by the concept of representation by population? I'm concerned that rural ridings already have a shrinking population and that if you redraw the boundaries to make districts bigger then that will affect that even more.
A	(Panel member) It is possible to use different electoral systems for different ridings, so you could have smaller rural ridings using one system and larger urban ridings using a more proportional system. (Facilitator) There is a judicial requirement to meet representation by population, plus or minus 25 per cent. The Supreme Court has made that decision.
Q	It comes back to advocacy – in an urban riding it's much easier for the MLA to get around, whereas in our riding it takes about 10 hours to drive around it. It makes the MLA's job so much harder. I suggest that you could

	weight the vote where rural votes count twice to balance out the influence of the urban centre, or you could have a double majority system where to pass legislation you need a majority in both the urban and rural ridings.
A	Those are both interesting suggestions.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO