

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SMITHERS PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 7 JUNE 2004
AT THE HUDSON BAY LODGE

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.

Hilda Earl

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A short narrative of the shortcomings and effects of the present system; then a summary of the principles I would like to see incorporated into a new electoral system.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Earl discussed the discontinuity between parties' electoral promises and their performance in the legislature. The presenter discussed the problem of executive dominance and questioned the desirability of the nature of accountability existent under FPTP. Ms. Earl expressed the belief that citizens of BC have moved beyond frustration and anger with the current system, to indifference. According to Ms. Earl, the problem of voter apathy is particularly pronounced among the young. The presenter argued that we need a system that enables: the fair translation of votes into seats; more control over the government's agenda and spending; fixed election dates; and a mechanism for change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Earl recommended the adoption of a system of MMP. Under this system, local representation would be maintained with local MLAs being elected via a preferential ballot with the alternative vote. In addition, proportional seats are to be allocated on the basis of a party list so that the number of seats allocated to each party would be equal to the percentage of votes cast for that party. Ms. Earl stated that while such a system may result in minority governments, this constitutes a risk worth taking as the primary role of democracy should not be the greatest efficiency, it should be the careful consideration of what is best for the most people. According to Ms. Earl the stability of the current system is unhealthy as it enables executive dominance, however, the introduction of a system that produces governments that have to cooperate and reach consensus allows the emergence of a healthy stability in government. Ms. Earl argued that if the government cannot reach consensus, rather than a no-confidence vote, which would bring down the government, the question should be decided by referendum. Ms. Earl also recommended that parties be required to place their policies on the ballot in order to hold elected representatives accountable to their explicit promises. Under such a system, if the government requires more money it would be required to hold a referendum in order to gain the approval of the citizens.

Quote: I think of accountability [under FPTP] as retribution, punishment, and redress after the fact. What does our current brand of accountability accomplish for us?

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q You argue for fixed election dates; but how would that provide us with stability?

A It would ensure that a minority government can't be brought down by a non-confidence vote forcing us to vote each year.

Q You appear to be advocating a mixed member majority system?

A I think I'm advocating the combination of a system that ranks candidates with a PR system.

Q Do you favour a closed or an open list for your PR component?

A I have mixed feelings about closed lists. I would be in favour of citizens having more say about who gets on the ballot, but on the other hand, with our current level of apathy, having open lists may be too complicated and voters might not want to take the time to figure it out.