

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.

Dave Stevens

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Principles and a proposal for a proportional representation system.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Stevens stipulated two principles for electoral reform: that no vote should be wasted, and that party representation in the legislature should be commensurate with their support in the electorate. The presenter stated his support for proportional representation which would in his view temper the “tyranny of the majority”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Stevens recommended the introduction of a system of proportional representation that also retained local representation. The presenter advocated the retention of the current ridings and the current ballot. Under this system the vote would be divided into party and non-party votes. Non-party votes would be for independent riding candidates (using a preferential ballot) who would qualify for representation should they receive a majority of votes (50% + 1). The number of seats to be allocated to parties would be determined according to their overall share of the vote across the province. Under this scenario, parties are entitled to pick their most popular candidates until all party lists are full. According to Mr. Stevens, this system will produce a legislature that suitably reflects the overall vote by party and will also allow outstanding local candidates to be elected. Mr. Stevens argued that while this system is not perfect, it offers the advantages of a simple ballot; increased representation of minor parties; and the production of more minority governments.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you think the government could effectively run the country with that large number of independents?

A Yes I do. I have lived through minority governments at the federal level. I think that if a minority is given a chance to govern then they will have to govern well, they will have to undertake only actions that have broad support in the legislature even after they are elected. I am not keen on the tyranny of the majority. The possibility of a small number of people wielding

undue influence is a good talking point, but I don't agree. They wield their influence only in concert with other members of the legislature.

Q Are you proposing two votes per person?

A No, I'm advocating an unchanged ballot with a single vote that may be interpreted in one of two ways. If you vote with for a politically affiliated candidate then that is a vote for the party. If you vote for a person that is not a member of a party, then that person can only be elected if they have achieved an actual majority of votes in that riding.

Q How would you assign candidates to ridings?

A They will be assigned by riding associations. Some ridings will not have a representative in the legislature, and I think that is fine.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q How big do you see our legislature being if we are going to retain the current boundaries with PR; are you effectively doubling the number of members? And what do you do with the fact that in the North we are very overrepresented?

A I don't propose changing the number of seats. I think that increasing the size of a deliberative body reduces its effectiveness.

Q How do get proportionality out of your system?

A There will not always be occasions when an individual candidate will receive 50% + 1 of the vote, so FPTP in that case will be less likely and there will be pluralities. However, we still have the division between candidates who are affiliated with parties and those who are not. I think that there would be a rise in the number of independents in the legislature and small parties will get representation even if they cannot get a majority of the vote in the

ridings.

Is your 50% + 1 requirement for all candidates or only for independents?

Only independents. All other votes would be for a party vote. The parties will rank their candidates and if the party is entitled to 15 seats then they just pick from the top of the list.

You're saying that any candidate in a riding that gets 50%+1 and is unaffiliated gets elected; what happens if the person is affiliated and gets a majority of the vote?

Then they may or may not be elected. That is one of the deficiencies of the system and it is analogous to the case now where candidates are parachuted in.