

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

CHILLIWACK PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 18 MAY 2004
AT THE RHOMBUS HOTEL

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.

Brenda Black

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Possible reforms to improve the current electoral system.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Black expressed the belief that Canada does not constitute a liberal democracy as it does not run “free and fair elections”. The existence of disproportionality, that is, the unequal weighting of votes across Canada, precludes fairness in the electoral system. The presenter argued that the appropriate solution was to retain the current boundaries and change the electoral system. Ms. Black discussed a number of problems with the current FPTP system including wasted votes, the production of artificial and exaggerated majorities, and the exclusion of minor party representation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Black recommended the adoption of proportional representation, in order for seats gained in the legislature, reflect votes cast. Majority government may be replaced by a more consensual style of politics. The presenter proposed an open list system under which a representative of each party would be appointed to each constituency where there is no resident candidate for election, thereby allowing for direct contact between party and constituency as under the current system while improving the democratic foundations of the system.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- | | |
|---|--|
| Q | Do you feel that voting is unfair provincially as well as federally? And do you think we need to expand the electoral boundaries to enable vote equality? |
| A | Yes, I do think that voting is also unfair provincially. I don't think that equalizing the boundaries is a possibility in BC, but if it was then we could retain the current system. |

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q How would there be a local representative to represent the constituency under your system?

A If we do elect PR there won't be local candidates in ridings, so in order to keep contact between members of the public and MLA's then parties should locate a member in that riding to keep the contact.

Comment Given the volatile, polarized political history of BC, and the yo-yo policy making, I think it is very important to have that kind of representation (PR) across the board. I think it is better representation of the people.

Q I would like to go on record as being opposed to this system; the preferential ballot seems a lot simpler. I don't like PR as it accentuated the power of parties. Parties are more interested in self-preservation than in representing constituents. Suppose every MLA got 58% in his riding, under PR 40% of those seats would have to go to another party, how would you explain that to a constituency that cast a majority of votes for given candidate?

A Under PR you wouldn't be voting for certain people in a riding, you would be voting for a number of people on a list. And under an open list system you vote for candidates, under a closed list it would be a party vote, but the open list should address your concerns regarding the control of parties.