

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

COURTENAY/COMOX PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 26 MAY 2004 AT THE COAST
WESTERLEY 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.

Gwyn Frayne

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

We believe our present electoral system needs to incorporate some form of proportional representation. We support the idea of this initiative and the referendum. The past Chair of our Chapter, Barbara Berger (Comox Valley Chapter, Council of Canadians) will co-present with me.

KEY THEMES

Gwyn Frayne and Barbara Berger expressed concern over the loss of governmental power to transnational corporations, and the alienation of young people from the political system. They criticized the 'democratic deficit' produced by the current voting system, including the disproportionality of election results, the need for people to cast strategic rather than sincere votes, the distortion of power resulting from false or exaggerated government majorities, an ineffective opposition, the adversarial and polarized political system, excessive party discipline and declining voter turnout. Ms Frayne and Ms Berger supported the introduction of an MMP electoral system, arguing that such a system would increase the likelihood of coalition and minority governments and bring about more balanced legislation, without huge shifts in political direction every four years. They also argued that large corporate interests would not exert as much influence as they do under the current system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Comox Valley Chapter of the Council of Canadians made the following recommendations:

- 1) That the any referendum recommended by the Citizens' Assembly only require the support of 50 per cent plus one voters, rather than the current 60/60 requirement.
- 2) That the current system needs changing and that a referendum should take place.
- 3) That Enumerations be conducted before every election to educate voters about the importance of voting and assist in registering young adults, the poor, and ethnic minorities.
- 4) That the voting age be lowered to 16, and that high schools introduce education on the importance of voting, the electoral system and political issues in order to engage young people in the democratic process.
- 5) That legislation be introduced to impose a fine on registered voters who do not vote, the proceeds of which could be used to fund Enumeration costs.
- 6) That a system of proportional representation, preferable a Mixed System as used in Germany and New Zealand, be recommended by the Citizens' Assembly.

Quote: "There must be a system which allows both party politics and constituency representation where one does not cancel the other. Mixed systems allow for flexibility, balance and more accountability to work for the general good rather than the narrow interests of a single party."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were no questions from the panel, although three members of the panel made the following comments.

Comment from panel:

“I want to assure you that we will discuss the referendum issue at the assembly.”

“I agree that enumerations are important and think that it is a very good suggestion for increasing voter registration.”

“I am also curious about the 60 per cent requirement for the referendum and I strongly encourage you to keep asking those questions.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

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| Q | Do you see the arbitrary selection of 60 per cent as backtracking by premier? |
| A | Yes, I do. |
| Q | How will education for young people in schools work? |
| Q | If voting age were to be lowered to 16 people would still be in high school when they voted for the first time, and so could ask questions and be educated about the voting process. |

Comment: “In Europe and Quebec students take a citizenship course.”

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# TO FOLLOW