

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

CRANBROOK PUBLIC HEARING DATED
21 JUNE 2004 AT THE PRESTIGE 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.

Dr. William Hills

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I deal with proportional representation. I will raise two serious questions.

KEY THEMES

William Hills argued that BC needs a new electoral system but that the most important issue to address is the need to regulate the processes of political parties. He explained that PR is not a panacea for the ills of the political system. He described political parties as far too powerful, particularly when party leaders are able to override the local constituency in the selection of party candidates, and expressed concern about the lack of regulation of candidate selection. Dr Hills argued that PR will transfer even more power to political parties by giving them the power to appoint non-elected MLAs. He also predicted that PR will further erode rural representation. Dr Hills argued that one man one vote works in the US but does not suit the geography of BC because representation by population means that rural voters must drive or fly hours to get to see their local representative. He advised that no more than 12 per cent of the current 79 seats should become proportionally elected compensatory seats, otherwise the Assembly would have trouble in the rural areas of BC. He suggested that the Assembly instead recommend an increase to the total number of seats in the legislature and justified this expansion by noting that that Alberta currently elects more MLAs per head of population than British Columbia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

William Hills recommended the introduction of regulation for political parties.

He also recommended that a mixed member proportional system should have no more than 12 per cent of seats in the legislature elected using proportional representation.

Quote: "I reluctantly conclude that pouring clean, clear water into a toilet bowl does not make it drinkable. Parties and their activities simply must be put under laws and government regulation; otherwise, proportional representation simply transfers more power over government to private parties."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

One member of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	How would you feel about larger ridings but with the same number of members elected from that geographical area?
A	That would just make it more difficult to see your MLA. Our federal riding is so large that it makes it impossible for there to be any dialogue during the election campaign.

	I also have a problem with fixed terms. They've had huge problems with that in the states and it just gives more power to the senior bureaucrats because it's almost a revolving door for representatives. There's just so much out there, party financing and other shenanigans. Maybe we need four years to fix this up.
Q	Where did you come up with the 12 per cent number?
A	I think if you turn any more over to the parties and people get wind of it then the proposal won't get past the referendum. We're not even electing the Canadian Senate now and you're suggesting more people not being elected?

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 advocating any particular political system?
A	I think we need to evaluate PR against the Alternative Vote. I'm not comfortable with proportional representation when there is no control over the way that parties select their candidates. I'm in favour of the single alternative ballot.
Q	I'm wondering if you're familiar with William Richter from the University of Rochester. He's done a lot of work on political manipulation and agenda control. I think that fits in with what you're talking about. I can't see how any system would work when there is that manipulation.
A	I tend to agree with you more than I disagree. I think other areas for concern are the commercialization of the media and that only two per cent of the population is involved with political parties.

Comment: "I think a system where you have a separate vote for a candidate and for a party won't be hard to sell in BC."

SUBMISSION: NO