

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

DAWSON CREEK PUBLIC HEARING DATED
13 MAY 2004 AT NORTHERN LIGHTS
COLLEGE

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.

Fred Banham

Peace River Regional District

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Accountable and representative government.

KEY THEMES

Fred Banham spoke on behalf of the Peace River Regional District. He emphasized the importance of local representation. Mr Banham also requested that the Assembly consider the importance of “demographics” and not just population as a determination for constituency representation in the Legislative Assembly. He argued that voters in Northeast BC feel under-represented, and that representation based purely on population fails to recognize the considerable wealth generated for the government by the region. The voice of the agricultural minority is lost against the urban majority.

Mr Banham also stressed the importance of having an accountable local representative. He argued that an MLA should be able to express constituent concerns without the constraints of party discipline. Mr Banham also suggested that voters should be given more choice and should be able to rank candidates in a preferential system. He suggested that any electoral system change be accompanied by a system of voter education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Peace River Regional District recommended the introduction of a preferential electoral system in British Columbia.

Quote: “It is important to have representation that understands local concerns and issues that need to be addressed by government.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were three members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	From your talk, you seem to have said that there are two things that are fundamental. One is local representation, and one is the need to represent areas that don't have a lot of population. What do you think of the idea of an elected Senate to deal with this issue?
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A	I think the issue is to make sure that there's a system that recognizes the diversity of this region. If you look at an urban constituency, the same issues may be there but there are not the same huge distances.
Q	It sounds as though it's not only a difference of size and population, but an economic difference?
A	We produce so much of the revenue for this region but we don't see a lot of it back.
Q	So what you're saying is that what you'd like to see is the best of all worlds, the local representation and the rest and that may be a difficult challenge. The other issue you brought up is giving voters more choice with a preferential ballot. Do you really think that the voters of BC would be able to handle a more complicated system? Would people in BC trust it?
A	I don't think it would be a deal breaker. I think there's an opportunity to have a better system, but we also think it's important to have an education process that accompanies any new system.
Q	You mention moving to a system that might allow first, second and third choices. There are at least three families that have this component, does the region have a preference for which particular system is introduced?
A	Our primary concerns are local representation and accountability so whichever system would achieve those.

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	What about the Rocky Mountain regional district? We almost lost an MLA in the last review.
A	I'm only speaking on behalf of the Peace River Regional District. Richard Neufeldt's constituency includes a lot of the province beyond the Peace River, including the Northern Rockies.

Q	You mentioned that you're advocating boundaries based on demographics, what do you mean by that?
A	The plus or minus 25 per cent rule will mean that our constituencies will get larger and larger as our older population leaves for warmer climes, so eventually you could see one constituency covering both the north and south Peace. So we're suggesting that you set the boundaries in stone and don't change them on the basis of population changes.
Q	Do you think that having the cake and the icecream is not wanting too much but just wanting the system to be fair? You mentioned that you wanted to reduce the effects of party discipline, is that correct?
A	I think the man from Buick Creek is very wise!

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO