

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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DUNCAN PUBLIC HEARING DATED  
8 JUNE 2004 AT THE TRAVELODGE  
SILVER BRIDGE

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](http://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.

# Carol Hartwig

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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The importance of the citizen assembly should not be underestimated. Our ability to participate in representative democracy and the province's ability to react quickly to world events depends on citizens who feel that government represents their interests.

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## KEY THEMES

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Carol Hartwig noted the extent of support for proportional representation but argued that two other principles are also important when considering electoral reform: maintaining a connection between an electoral district and those who represent that district in the legislative assembly, and maintaining parties that are capable of addressing government in a comprehensive manner. She expressed concern that proportional representation, including a mixed member proportional system, could exacerbate divisiveness and wide swings in policy in British Columbia. Her primary concern is that proportional representation could lead to splitting and fractioning of political parties as they try to appeal to sectional, religious or regional cleavages. Ms Hartwig acknowledged that PR brings with it some benefits, such as the potential to increase voter turnout and increasing the representativeness of the legislature, but argued there are trade-offs involved in the selection of any electoral system.

She argued that a mixed system could lead to a fractured, fighting and deadlocked legislative assembly with further concentration of power within the Premier's office, or the chaos of an Italian or Israeli legislature. Ms Hartwig expressed concern that small parties or single interest groups would use the legislature to champion one issue and proposed a twenty per cent electoral threshold in order to prevent the proliferation of small parties. She argued that the role of a political party should not be to represent one group or issue but to form a comprehensive government. She raised a number of problems with politics in BC including the dictatorship of the ruling party, the power of the Premier's office, extreme party discipline and policy swings. She argued that changing our electoral system may not address these issues, and proposed two alternative solutions for these problems. These are the introduction of formalized committee system where expert information can provide a sounder basis for decision making and which is open to the media, and providing checks and balances within the government by separating the legislative and executive function of the government as a check on the power of the Premier.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Carol Hartwig recommended the introduction of a formalized legislative committee system.

She also recommended that the executive and legislative functions of government be separated.

*Quote: "I am not convinced that proportional representation will assist in solving our problems because the solution of electoral reform does not fit the problems."*

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**QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL**

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

Q	Do you not believe that dramatically changing the electoral system will change the way that government does business or the way we are governed?
A	I don't believe that changing to PR would necessarily address the problems in our system, for example, the feeling that there is too much power in our majority government. My issue is that changing the electoral system may lead to bigger problems. I think people are more concerned about the problems of governing, particularly the swings back and forth. I'm not sure that PR would address that and I'm not sure that other electoral systems would address that problem.
Q	You've indicated here some form of governance by committee. Do you have some examples of that?
A	It's not governing by committee but using a formal committee structure within the legislature. I believe that there are some committees used at the moment but that it's not a formal structure. We should have standing committees with regular meetings that are open to the media and can filter opinions and issues.

**Comment from panel:** There were no comments from the panel.

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**QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

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There were no questions or comments from the audience.

**SUBMISSION: YES**

**SUBMISSION ID# TO FOLLOW**