

# 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.

# Mike McDonald

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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Realistic proposals for electoral reform.

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## KEY THEMES

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Mike McDonald told the hearing that he wanted to share some of the insights into the BC political system that he had gained after 20 years in politics working for a political party, a caucus and for the legislature. He discussed a number of the disadvantages of proportional representation in BC, including weakened representation for rural BC if the size of ridings increased, the loss of the link between the voter and their representative if a proportion of MLAs were elected via party lists, a division between two classes of MLAs resulting in more work for constituency MLAs, more control for political parties if list MLAs are dependent on the party for their place on the party list, and minority governments resorting to backroom deals to secure support for legislation. Mr McDonald supported the reintroduction of the Alternative Vote electoral system, where voters cast a preferential vote in single-member districts, and an MLA requires a majority of the vote to be elected. He argued that a preferential ballot increases voter choice and enables people to vote for a smaller party without wasting their vote because they can also express their second and third preferences in case the minor party candidate is not elected. Mr McDonald suggested a modification to the system so that a political party that reached a specified threshold of the province-wide vote but did not succeed in winning a constituency seat could be granted a non-voting seat on the legislature. Non-voting MLAs would still have speaking rights, thus ensuring that minor parties had a greater voice in the political system and were accepted as legitimate political actors. He cited precedents for this proposal in the US Congress, where the Congressman from Puerto Rico has a non-voting seat and in Maine where two First Nations tribes have non-voting status in the legislature.

Mr McDonald argued that rural representation is the greatest challenge facing the assembly, and that this problem will increase while the rural population continues to decline. He suggested introducing a system of weighted votes, currently used in regional districts, where rural ridings would be drawn based on a smaller population and rural MLAs would have one vote each in the legislature while urban ridings would be twice the population size of rural ridings and the urban MLA representing this double riding would have two votes. People in the province would be equally represented in terms of votes in the legislature, but rural populations would be over-represented in terms of the number of MLAs in the legislature. Mr McDonald argued that this model would preserve the principle of representation by population while giving rural MLAs a greater voice within the legislature.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Mike McDonald recommended the reintroduction of the Alternative Vote electoral system in British Columbia.

He also recommended the introduction of non-voting seats in the legislature for small parties which have failed to win a constituency seat, and the introduction of weighted voting to improve rural representation.

*Quote: “Increasing the fairness of representation through a preferential ballot, preserving local representation as the basic form of representation, providing smaller parties with a voice in the Legislature, and looking ‘outside the box’ at ideas to preserve rural representation may help strengthen our electoral system.*

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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	How would you see that implemented? I understand the Alternative Vote system, but with the weighted votes how would you avoid a charter challenge?
A	I don't think there would be a charter challenge because people still have equal number of votes in legislature. I only think this should be implemented if it has the support of rural people. This is a solution that has to be supported in the rural areas. They may not like the idea that Surrey has more votes, but it would mean that their voices were still heard despite the declining rural population.
Q	I was in Smithers at the last hearing and those people really feel under-represented.
A	Well that riding is currently 36 per cent under the target but even then it's a huge a riding. I personally think that Judge Wood was right to make that decision.
Q	I think that your suggestion could be popular in rural areas.
A	Rural MLAs could have a greater chance of getting into cabinet and with the committee system so would feel more represented even though there's still that element of representation by population.

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

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

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There were no questions from the audience.

**SUBMISSION: NO**