

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

FORT ST JOHN PUBLIC HEARING DATED
12 MAY 2004 AT THE QUALITY INN
NORTHERN GRAND

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

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: “The MLA representation in the Northeast is few and the geographic area of responsibility is huge.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	The size of ridings is constrained by the Supreme Court, so your suggestions are wonderful but we certainly can't do anything about that.
A	It certainly is a concern, because it makes the job very difficult for the local MLA.

Q	Voter apathy among youth - is that a problem in this area and is it being addressed in any way?
A	Yes, it's a huge concern in elections at all levels. In a recent referendum here we had 42 per cent voter turnout, because there was an incentive attached, you could vote at the local swimming pool! The sucker attached to the ballot really helped out.

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	It's also my understanding that the overall distribution of the ridings could be redistributed. Is that possible?
A	(Response from panel member) We are able to redraw boundaries to comply with a new electoral system.
Q	Can you address the comment that one vote in Vancouver should be worth one vote up here? The interests of people in a smaller geographical area can be represented by just one person but in a larger area, there will be a variety of concerns. It doesn't make sense to me not to enlarge the boundaries in the south of the province and minimise the size of the boundaries up here. A phone call is not the same as a face to face meeting.
A	I agree, that's what we're talking about. Local accountability is very important. Another concern we have here is that as the population gets older more people want to escape the winter and move further south so our population is declining.
Q	Would you consider the comment that in the larger urban areas, people can use modern technology but in rural areas some people don't have access to those technologies?
A	There are indeed dead areas in our riding, where people have no radio and no phone access. So there are really remote areas around in our province.
Q	Up here in the north, we have an increased work force, so maybe that could affect our riding size.

A	Yes, we have a phenomenally large transient workforce. So there are a lot of people who make their living in the Peace Country, but they vote elsewhere.
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Comment: “You’re not the first person to talk about the size of ridings. Everywhere in the province people are concerned with this. I’m concerned with the suggestion that a person’s vote in Vancouver should count less than someone’s vote here. In the days of modern technology, you can use fax or email or telephone to contact your MLA.”

SUBMISSION: NO