

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.

Ron Wagner

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Support for either PR-STV or a German mixed system with open lists.

KEY THEMES

Ron Wagner argued that electoral system change is necessary to ensure that there is an effective opposition and to minimize radical swings in policy. However, he expressed a concern that a more proportional system would involve closed party lists, where parties based in Vancouver will select candidates for the list. He strongly supported open party lists to give the voters the capacity to choose that they want to represent them. Mr Wagner also argued that many people would like to vote for an individual and not be required to vote for a party. He recommended either a PR-STV system or an MMP electoral system with a five per cent electoral threshold and open party lists. He acknowledged concern over any increase to the current size of the ridings, but argued that it was better to have larger ridings and a system that actually worked than the current system. MLAs could also receive additional funding to employ extra staff in larger ridings. Mr Banham also spoke against compulsory voting and suggested that the size of the legislature could be increased in future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ron Wagner recommended the introduction of either PR-STV, or MMP with a five per cent threshold and open party lists.

Quote: "I strongly feel that we need an open list, so that we can choose the person we want to represent us."

"I'd rather see the challenge of a larger riding and a system that is actually working rather than what we've got now."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	In Australia it's mandatory to vote, and I believe it works quite well.
A	I scrutineered our local election and what really shocked me is the number of ballots where people had just started at the top and filled in the boxes. I'd rather that the person went to vote because he actually believed in something, rather than someone who is forced to vote.

Q	We've had presentations from people suggesting none of the above, what do you think about that?
A	That strikes me as a product of cynicism, and I think it would be better to have an electoral system that actually works.

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

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation two members of the audience had questions.

Q	In terms of getting more people out, do you think it would be good if we made it income tax deductible?
A	I think we need an educational campaign about participatory democracy to change the culture and encourage people to vote.
Q	You state that it's a democratic right not to vote if you don't want to. Should you then be allowed to criticize and complain about it?
A	It certainly seems to be the case. The people who are the most critical seem to be the ones that don't vote. But I think voter cynicism is because there really doesn't seem to be any point in voting.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO