

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

KAMLOOPS PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 17 JUNE 2004
AT THE COAST CANADIAN INN

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.

Darren Blois

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Argument in favour of MLAs representing ridings and against proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Darren Blois argued that proportional representation is not an appropriate system for British Columbia because it tends to under-represent the rural, peripheral hinterland and create unstable government. He proposed that a better system to address under-representation is the preferential ballot. He explained that in a proportional representation system ridings would be abolished, voters would only be able to vote for a party, and MLAs would be chosen from ranked lists prepared by political parties. Mr Blois argued that in a proportional representation system people would not be able to vote for an individual, MLAs would be chosen by party bosses rather than by voters, and MLAs would have no connection to any particular area in the province. Mr Blois also predicted that a PR system would tend to create minority governments in BC. He pointed to the experience of proportional representation in several European countries and argued that it creates unstable governments, and promotes fringe parties. Mr Blois acknowledged that there are flaws in the current system, particularly the situation where a minority view can become a majority government. He proposed adopting a preferential ballot where voters may still vote for a MLA from their own riding and rank their choices in order of preference. If no candidate wins an outright majority, voters' second and third preferences are distributed until one candidate has won majority of support within the riding. He concluded that a preferential ballot would preserve the connections between a community and its elected representative, a connection that will be destroyed if BC moves to proportional representation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Darren Blois recommended the introduction of the Alternative Vote system in British Columbia.

Quote: With a preferential ballot voters are not just asked "who do you prefer?" They are also asked, "who can you live with as a consensus?"

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Have you given any thought to the issue of rural representation being lost to the big cities?
A	In our current system we actually over-represent rural areas. I think the current system is by its nature fair. In a PR system all 79 MLAs could come from Vancouver.

Q	You've been talking about a closed list system. What do you think about an open list?
A	Even with an open list, there's still one big riding.

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 and comments.

Q	What about a mixed system?
A	I think it would cause inherent inequality in the legislature when you have two different types of MLAs.

Comment: “You’ve only discussed one form of PR. I think it’s important to acknowledge that there are other forms of PR that have been very successful.”

“I take it you weren’t around when W.A.C. Bennett was around, and the system you’re proposing lasted for one round and then out it went. I notice that you never mentioned New Zealand in your presentation, where PR is working just fine.”

“One of the finest governments we’ve had was under Lester Pearson with a minority government. That brought us some of our best policies and people in the polls in this election want a minority government.”

SUBMISSION: YES NO X SUBMISSION ID# IDNUMBER