

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.

Marc Gregoire

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

On the relationship between democracy and good government and the parliamentary system.

KEY THEMES

Marc Gregoire told the hearing that he had come to urge caution. He discussed the failings of Proportional Representation and advocated the introduction of Alternative Vote system as used in Australia. He discussed the role of the legislature in the parliamentary system and explained that an electoral system must produce an effective government and opposition. Mr Gregoire acknowledged that a criticism of the current electoral system is that it has produced dramatic policy swings from government to government, but suggested that these swings have not been caused by the electoral system but by the changing political preferences of the province, which have been reflected in the legislature. He argued that domination of the legislature by the government is a strength rather than a weakness of the current system, as governments must be able to pass legislation and implement the policy platform that they committed to during the election campaign. Mr Gregoire predicted that electoral reform will not be able to reduce power of Cabinet with the government. He argued that the criticism of the current system as lacking proportionality as a chimera, because in a proportional system fringe parties may hold disproportional power within the legislature.

Mr Gregoire outlined a number of weaknesses of proportional representation including the selection of closed lists by political parties, the creation of two different types of MLAs in a mixed system, and the creation of new ideological or regional parties. He described coalition governments as being based on back-room negotiation rather than consensus and collaboration. Mr Gregoire argued that proportional representation could lead to a political system that lacked a strong government and strong opposition. He described the introduction of MMP in New Zealand as having mixed results, and told the hearing that it took two months to form a coalition government following New Zealand's first MMP election and that the government that was formed was an unexpected combination of political parties. Mr Gregoire argued that the Alternative Vote system has been used in Australia since 1918 and has served Australia well. He described the AV system as producing the same sort of election results as under the current system. He argued that the AV system encourages parties to be centrist because they need to appeal to a broad base within the electorate in order to win second preferences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marc Gregoire recommended the introduction of the Alternative Vote system in British Columbia.

Quote: "Proportional representation is cited as increasing the representation of women and minorities, but this is only true with closed lists, which are repugnant to democracy because they allow the party to decide who is elected."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were no questions or comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	Would you support compulsory voting that they have in Australia to support that electoral system?
A	I think that if people can't be bothered to inform themselves or vote seriously then they shouldn't be forced to vote.
Q	Could you please describe what you consider to be a fringe party?
A	I think if we introduced PR in BC then we would have four parties, probably without the development of any fringe parties, but then the European experience shows us that that is always a danger.
Q	I'm far more afraid of the Premier and the current government than the rise of fringe parties.
A	If we want to reduce the power of the Premier then we need to reform party processes rather than the electoral system.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# TO FOLLOW