

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

LANGLEY PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 20 MAY 2004
AT THE HAMPTON 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.

Scott Thompson

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation recommending a system that incorporates elements both from the first past the post (FPTP) system and a proportional representation (PR) system.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Thompson discussed the advantages of the current FPTP system including the responsibility of MLAs to a given geographical area or constituency that often involves the representative having personal ties to the community and familiarity with local issues; and the existence of a local member which provides citizens with a constituency office to take their concerns to. Mr. Thompson stated that the critical democratic component of FPTP was that it provides individual citizens the opportunity to seek a seat in the legislature. The presenter also acknowledged that the current system has some shortcomings; in particular it tends to “manufacture” majority governments.

Mr. Thompson discussed the benefits of PR, including the fair translation of votes into seats enabling fewer voters to feel disenfranchised from the system. The presenter stated that a primary advantage of PR is that it provides political parties with the opportunity to put forth the “best and brightest” candidates, people that are well qualified but individuals that may not have the ability or interest to win nomination contests at the constituency level. Mr. Thompson also noted that PR has two main shortcomings: it does not operate on the basis of geographical representation, and hence accountability is compromised; and the system does not accommodate individuals who wish to run as independents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the adoption of an MMP system as it would combine the beneficial elements of both FPTP and PR. Under the system proposed, 50% of seats would remain as constituency seats (using FPTP) and the other 50% would be elected by a party list (using PR). Mr. Thompson also advocated the introduction of a 3% threshold for election to the legislature. The presenter strongly recommended against any form of majority system as a result of the time and cost a run-off ballot would require.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you favour a closed or open list for the

compensatory seats?

A I prefer a closed list, as it offers the greatest number of advantages. However, it is also probably the most subject to abuse.

Q In the system you propose we will be changing the number of ridings to forty; how do you see this impacting upon local representation? What does a local representative look like in Fort Nelson?

A As I see it, if you were to go to forty seats, I think it would roughly compare to the federal boundaries that we have right now. By following the federal boundaries, the province would not have to be so concerned about going through a redistribution process every 10 years.

Q Under your system you would have 39 top up seats for proportionality; what do you see the jobs of these people to be?

A I suppose this begs the question do you need 79 members in the province? Certainly these members could be involved in committee work. My guess is that in a coalition most parties would draw their cabinet members from the list.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Is this system used anywhere else in the world?

A It is similar to the system used in New Zealand.