

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

MAPLE RIDGE PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 19 MAY 2004
AT THOMAS HANEY SCHOOL

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.

William Walsh

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The polarization of politics in British Columbia has hurt everyone. There is a huge economic cost and political cost when we vote against a particular vision. I am for a proportional representation (PR) system where parties which have reached a certain threshold of the popular vote (say 5%) must be represented, because they represent issues which are important to all of us.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Walsh read an excerpt from *Canada and its Provinces* (1914) to demonstrate the fact that Canada's electoral system is constantly evolving. The presenter discussed the weaknesses of the current FPTP system including low voter turnout and the lack of responsiveness of the political system to constituents. Mr. Walsh discussed the disappointing state of the provincial economy; specifically, the unfortunate factor of yo-yo policy making which induces negative voting against the incumbent government rather than voting in favour of a vision for British Columbia. Furthermore, wild swings in policy require extensive rolling back of programs already in place, coming at a tremendous cost to the province.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the introduction of a proportional system (with a 5% threshold) in order to temper the wild swings in policy making. Mr. Walsh expressed the view that minor parties may be able to raise a voice of reason in the legislature; a voice not only for four years down the road but a vision for the province for ten or twenty years down that road.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q How do you see us increasing the representation of smaller parties?

A I'm not an expert in terms of the five different electoral systems but thinking about the results from the last provincial election in which the Greens garnered around 12% of the vote, if they had secured some representation in the legislature they could have impacted upon some decisions made by the government such as the cutting of the budget of Water, Lands, and Parks. If MMP had been in place then they could have had around 8-10 seats in the legislature and that could have had an

impact in terms of policy making.

Q What do you think about local representation as opposed to trading that for a larger constituency under MMP?

A I do think that one of the weaknesses is the lack of responsiveness in the system. Even if the constituents elect their member it is as if the member can't respond to the need of the constituents because of party discipline.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q What would you change in the electoral system to stop the wild swings in policy?

A If there was some form of MMP then at the end of the day seats in the legislature will reflect the popular vote. If we had that today then I think that that would help the debate in the legislature.

Q Who decides who those minor parties pick to represent them?

A The party picks those members based on the standings in the polls. I think it is up to the party themselves.