

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

NANAIMO PUBLIC HEARING DATED
27 MAY 2004 AT COAST BASTION HOTEL

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.

Robert Baker

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A very simple to implement, yet powerful change in our electoral system could radically change the nature of politics in BC and Canada. Each voter is given one choice vote and one reject vote.

KEY THEMES

Robert Baker criticized the current electoral system as lacking the capacity for voters to say no to a particular candidate or party. He suggested that, even though proportional representation seems popular, FPP may not be all that bad and may just be in need of some modification. He proposed a First Past the Post system where voters are given the capacity to cast both one 'yes' vote in support of a candidate, and one 'no' vote in opposition to a candidate. Mr Baker argued that this system would provide more incentive to MLAs to be accountable to their constituencies in order to avoid a substantial number of 'no' votes at the next election. He predicted that an MLA elected by FPP in an MMP constituency would have no incentive to behave any differently than he or she would under the current system. Mr Baker argued that voter turnout would improve under his modified system because voters who only wanted to vote against a particular candidate rather than supporting another party would still be able to vote. He explained that accountability and responsiveness to the electorate would improve because candidates would be less likely to vote according to the party line if they thought that would displease their constituents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Robert Baker recommended modifying the current First Past the Post system to enable voters to cast a vote against a candidate as well as a vote in favour of a candidate.

Quote: "Although proportional representation certainly appears popular, I would like to suggest that First Past the Post may not be all that bad and is simply in need of some modification."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	I have a question about the logistics in counting. Would you take all the yes votes and then minus all the no votes?
A	Yes, that is correct.

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.

Q	Have you thought it through one further step and considered giving people one yes vote and two no votes?
A	I haven't thought about that.
Q	The whole spirit of debate in the legislature would change. We haven't really talked about that this evening, but what you're getting at is the end result of the whole exercise. People would have to cooperate with each other, rather than having an adversarial atmosphere. What we need is people working together for the benefit of everyone.
A	I believe that the system I have proposed would do the same thing, because of the necessity for candidates to become more responsive to the people. So there would be less of a divide between party platforms.
Q	How could you reject the party leader but accept the local candidate?
A	I haven't addressed that issue, but I would hope that if the party leader was that offensive, then the voters in his or her constituency would use their no votes.
Q	Does this plan really get to the issue of extreme party discipline? A candidate would have to be very independent to walk always from party funding the election campaign.
A	I think the no vote tends to diminish value of the big dollar in an election campaign. It is much easier to buy yes votes than to buy off no votes.
Q	I think you could combine an MMP system with a no vote, because I think that would make it more accountable.
A	I have no quarrel with that.
Q	I can see a lot appeal in the no vote, and the spiteful side of me would be rubbing my hands with glee. What about people with unproven track records, surely you can only use your votes for people with a track record?
A	You would only get one vote yes and one vote no, so you don't have to express an assessment of every candidate. There was an example given earlier this evening of a Green

	party voter feeling the need to vote strategically, but with my system you could cast a no vote against the major party and yes vote for the Green candidate.
--	---

Comment: There were no further comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES