

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.

David W. Wright, Q.C.

Green Party of Canada

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I favour proportional representation for many reasons, one of which is that all Parties, and all regions would benefit from it, and it would greatly strengthen the democratic process.

KEY THEMES

David Wright expressed concern over declining voter turnout and voter registration, the lack of checks on government power, the failure of governments to keep their campaign promises, growing cynicism and voter apathy. He suggested the introduction of legislation to hold the leader or the government accountable for any failure to fulfill campaign promises by end of the government's third year in office. He argued that this would be a practical remedy for breaches of trust by representatives. Mr Wright recognized that such legislation is beyond the mandate of the Assembly but proposed that the Assembly raise the issue in the final report and recommend the creation of a future assembly to address these issues. He supported a proportional representation electoral system in BC that could provide for both local and political affiliation representation. Mr Wright expressed confidence in the Assembly's capacity to choose the best electoral system to meet the needs of BC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

David Wright made four recommendations to the Assembly.

"1) I recommend the question on this matter to be posed to the public for their acceptance or rejection be subjected to public hearings before being cast in stone.

2) I recommend that in addition to a direct and simple question on the individual's support or non support of the concept of proportional representation (the result of which should be binding on the government based on 51 per cent of the votes cast), consideration should be given to allowing voters to advise the government on which form of proportional representation they favour (this might be advisory only).

3) I recommend that consideration be given to enunciating and enshrining the democratic principles which form the foundation of the Government of British Columbia's authority, to be set out and passed into law at the earliest possible date. I further recommend that this Assembly request the Canadian Government to give serious consideration to clearly defining an enshrining our democratic rights in amendments to the constitution or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

4) Lastly, I would like the Committee to recommend that a Party's symbol be allowed on the ballot paper."

Quote: "There is no doubt in my mind that proportional representation is needed and I support it. There must be elements of both local and political affiliation representation in it."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system?
A	It is difficult for a new party or minority party to start out because people are scared of wasting their vote, so it is difficult to build up a base of voters. That's one of the problems, the problem of the wasted vote, so new parties don't have a chance to have a voice in the legislature.
Q	Why do you think that people would prefer a choice of electoral systems, rather than a yes or no question on a referendum?
A	It would make it a more democratic process. Democracy needs to be seen to be done, so that would heighten that perception. I realize that that would add problems to any system of voter education.

Comment from panel: There were no further 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 it be realistic to have a list of ten items that are important in voters' minds, and ask each party what their position is on that issue, so that we knew where we stood on each issue?
A	I think a new electoral system wouldn't change that, but that instead there needs to be something in law. If you give your vote to a party because they had promised to do something there needs to be a requirement for that to be done and it also might mean that parties reduce their list of promises.
Q	You're proposing a proportional system. How do you get around the problem of party lists, which seems to put huge power in the hands of the person who draws up the list and gives too much power and discipline to the party leader.

A	It depends on the policy of the party – you need the grassroots of each party to demand a say in the process. If the leader refuses then you have a choice to vote for another party or to work to get rid of the leader.
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Comment: “I like your suggestion about making sure governments keep their promises, I think there needs to be a way to make sure that governments also don’t go beyond their mandate.”

SUBMISSION: NO