

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

NORTH VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 2 JUNE 2004
AT THE LONSDALE QUAY 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.

George Heyman

B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The presentation will consist of recommendations for electoral reform from the 60,000 member BC Government and Service Employees' Union.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Heyman discussed the BCGEU's conference which addressed problems such as voter apathy and declining voter turnout. The BCGEU identified the need for electoral reform, and particularly the need for the introduction of some form of proportionality. Mr. Heyman addressed numerous problems existing within the current FPTP system including the ability of governments to secure exaggerated majorities in the legislature, thereby compromising the accountability of MLAs to voters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the adoption of MMP as it introduces an element of proportionality while retaining local representation. Mr. Heyman stated that a shift to MMP would temper the dominance of governments in the legislature and strengthen accountability. In addition, introducing MMP would keep the ballot process simple and clear, and enable a more diverse and representative set of voices to be heard in the legislature. The presenter advocated the adoption of a threshold in order to prevent instability in the legislature and to discourage the emergence of disruptive or politically extremist parties. Mr. Heyman also discussed the need for legislation to be established to ensure that the creation of party lists constitutes a fair and transparent process. The presenter also expressed his disappointment that the Citizens' Assembly was precluded from recommending that the number of the seats in the legislature be increased.

Quote: The results of electoral reform are unpredictable. The experience of other countries suggests that it will take patience and a large investment in public education to make sure we get a system that works for BC.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you feel that MMP would be an improvement for your union as more views would be represented?

A That is a large part of it. This is simply our chance to speak to you about a system that we think would be more broadly representative and prevent this pendulum effect in policy making that so many people have mentioned.

Q How do you ensure that the best people to govern the province are placed on the party lists?

A I think that the creation of party lists under MMP provides an opportunity to ensure that there is a modicum of representation of the actual face of BC. If the legislature is unrepresentative of the cultures of BC, even with all the best intentions they may not be able to do a good job for British Columbians.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q How do you prevent strategic targeting of a riding, for example by a religious group?

A I don't know how you prevent it. Nothing we design will be perfect but MMP should drive up the levels of participation and I think that there should be a threshold for representation of around 5% as there has to be a reasonable support in the electorate to justify representation.