

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PORT ALBERNI PUBLIC HEARING DATED
9 JUNE 2004 AT HANSEN HALL

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.

Nelson Allen

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A former Alderman for the City of Nanaimo, former Regional Board Director and current School Trustee in Nanaimo. MA in Political Science, Public Policy and Comparative Government.

KEY THEMES

Nelson Allen discussed the political history of British Columbia and demonstrated that if the province had used a purely proportional electoral system to allocate seats in the legislature, British Columbia would have only had three majority governments since Confederation. He argued that proportional representation would lead BC into a whole set of new problems that have been faced by European democracies for quite some time, including the proliferation of political parties and subsequent difficulty in forming majority governments. Mr Allen expressed concern that BC would become a consociational democracy where decisions are made in secret by elite leaders, and where coalition governments are formed that are based on party and personal agendas rather than the broader public interest. He discussed the difficulties of coalition formation and governance, as well as the rise of extremist political parties under PR. Mr Allen criticised the attitude that ‘we’re for democracy except when we don’t like the winner’ which he described as creating resentment and undermining the political system. He also argued that proportional representation reduces the capacity of governments to cope with prolonged crises because moderate parties become dependent on extremist parties in order to form governments. In contrast, Mr Allen provided the example of the United States with two moderate centrist parties and suggested that having two major political parties also suited the political culture of British Columbia. He proposed modifying the current electoral system to ensure a more distribution of seats based on population.

Quote: “We often hear comments from citizens on their perception that we are too polarized in our politics in BC and therefore something should be done to fix this problem ... I would suggest that having two main political parties in BC clearly represents our political culture.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	You have outlined the history of the province, and I think some people would criticize the success of the system at the present time.
A	I’m not advocating that we maintain the current system as it is now. I think the Assembly should come up with a system of proportional representation that improves representation. I suggest that you consider making rural

	ridings smaller, and making the urban ridings larger. In that way you would be able to have a split mixed system like the one suggested by the previous presenter.
Q	If you had your choice in which place you wanted to live would you prefer to live in the amalgamated riding with proportional representation or in the smaller rural riding without proportional representation?
A	I think if I lived in a rural riding I would prefer to directly elect a local member, but if I lived in an urban riding I wouldn't be so concerned about that.
Q	You suggest that having two main political parties in BC clearly represents our political culture. What sort of PR system would you suggest to maintain that?
A	We currently have a two party system because the division on the right between the Liberals and Conservatives has collapsed, so the Liberals today represent the coalition of those parties. Then you have the NDP on the left, and also the Greens with 12.4 per cent at the last election and I think they should be represented in the legislature.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# TO FOLLOW