PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PRINCE GEORGE PUBLIC HEARING DATED 10 MAY 2004 AT THE PRINCE GEORGE CIVIC CENTRE

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.

Lara Beckett

To support Mixed Member Proportional Representation as the most fair and democratic method of turning votes into seats and allowing the voters' choice to be recognized.

KEY THEMES

Lara Beckett spoke in support of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system. Her presentation focused on two benefits of the system for BC: increasing diversity of representation facilitated by the party list, and the system's capacity to make every vote count. Ms Beckett explained that a closed party list will ensure a balance of candidates from a range of regions and ethnic groups, as well as more women candidates. Representation for rural communities would increase under MMP through the party list. She argued that the legislature needs to reflect the diversity of society in BC. Ms Beckett also argued that citizens need to feel that their votes count for the system to be democratic. More people will participate under MMP because they will be able to see how their vote affects the make-up of the legislature.

She suggested that an MMP electoral system would increase the likelihood of minority government, and that as a consequence MLAs will need to collaborate to produce legislation with broad support. Minority federal governments have created broadly popular policies such as Canada Medicare, unemployment insurance and the Canadian Pension Plan. When MLAs need to work together to pass legislation, politics becomes less adversarial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lara Beckett recommended the introduction of an MMP electoral system in BC.

> *Quote: British Columbia has a diverse society and out legislature must reflect that diversity.*

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Do you feel that there are times when your vote is wasted?
A	Oh yes, if you don't vote for the winning candidate that your vote doesn't count.

Q	Are there other systems you're aware of that could address your concerns?
A	In my research I've read about a lot of other electoral system but none of them are as effective as MMP because it's specifically designed to translate votes into seats.
Q	With an MMP system, if the leader of a party does not win their riding, they can still be elected on the party list. Is this a concern for you?
A	This doesn't concern me because while the leader may not be locally popular, they may have broader support throughout the province, and that support needs to be represented.
Q	Have you considered the number of MLAs to be elected in the constituencies and the number to come from the party lists.
A	No, I want to recommend MMP but to leave the precise numbers involved in the system up to the Assembly.

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	Would this lead to a redesigning of the number of ridings in the province and the number of seats in the legislature?
A	My understanding is that the Assembly needs to stick to the number of MLAs that we have now. Ideally, I would like to see a 50/50 split between the two types of MLA.
Q	With a closed list, the candidates will be dictated to us by the political parties. Would you consider an open list as an alternative?
A	Personally, I support a closed list because I'm concerned about the balance of the list, in terms of gender, ethnicity and regions. I believe that if party lists are not balanced then they will lose support and people will not vote for the party. If you have an open list, then we will lose that balance on the list.

Q	Could you explain how MMP works?
A	In a mixed system you have two sorts of MLAs, some who are elected just the same way as they are now. The mixed part refers to the addition of a party list. Parties win the number of seats according to the proportion of votes they win across the province, and these MLAs come from the party list.
Q	Is this system in use anywhere else and if so do they like it there?
A	Yes, it is widely in use. Two examples are New Zealand and Germany, but it is quite widely used in a number of democracies. It's working well in Germany. In New Zealand they've had three elections under MMP. After the first election it was a bit chaotic, but after the next elections people seem to be getting used to the system and it's working quite well.
Q	Have you considered a party list that's widely published before the election?
A	Yes, absolutely. People need to know who they are voting for!
Q	BC currently has recall legislation – how do you see this working with party list MPs?
A	Well, recall legislation has its place, but it's currently very difficult to use. There are a number of issues that need to be considered beyond the assembly's mandate and I think our recall legislation is one of them. Ideally, with a political system that works better we wouldn't need to have recall at all.
Q	How can you be sure that the party lists will have regional representation or women's representation when the parties are the ones who determine the lists?
A	One way would be to enact laws dictating to parties how they compose their lists. Another way is that with published lists parties will be very unpopular if their lists are not balanced, so if they want people to vote for them they will have an incentive to make balance their lists.

Comments: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: **NO**