

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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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](http://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.

# Chad Bester

## BC Democratic Futures Party

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### DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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Proposal for Regional Representation. Warning of potential problems with Proportional Representation.

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### KEY THEMES

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Chad Bester stated that his greatest concern regarding electoral reform is the potential for the urban majority to opt for a pure form of Proportional Representation that removes local representation for the rural regions of the province. He argued that PR could exacerbate ethnic divisions in BC and result in political extremism. Mr Bester recommended that the Assembly consider how any electoral system reform will affect the urban-rural divide in BC.

Recognising that the Assembly's mandate does not include the creation of an upper house or a Senate in BC, Mr Bester proposed a new system for structuring the legislature that would effectively create a Senate within the single legislature. 55 MLAs would be elected using the Alternative Vote system in single member ridings. 12 Senatorial MLAs would be elected from six economic regions (Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland, Okanogan, Kootenays, Thompson-Cariboo, and the North) using a preferential ballot and would have the power to veto legislation until after the next election if it is opposed by two thirds of the Senatorial MLAs. The final 12 MLAs would be elected proportionally according to the total vote of each party across the province. In this way, up to 24 MLAs could be independents or represent small parties, forcing government to consider a broader range of concerns. Each ballot paper would require the voter to cast three votes: a preferential vote for the local MLA, a preferential vote for the regional candidate, and one vote for the proportionally elected provincial candidate.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr Bester recommended that BC adopt an electoral system providing for local, regional and provincial representation, as outlined in his submission.

Mr Bester also recommended the adoption of a Voter's Bill of Rights, covering issues such as electoral finance laws and recorded his opposition to any form of electronic voting.

*Quote: "The greatest political disconnect in society today is the urban-regional divide."*

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**QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL**

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

Q	Could you elaborate a little on the electronic voting you are opposed to?
A	Electronically, there are back door ways to change the vote. If you need to recount, how can you guarantee that the votes being recounted are the original votes? There have been considerable problems with electronic voting in the US. Paper ballots are more verifiable.
Q	How can you guarantee that the Senate MLAs have no party affiliation?
A	I think it would be hard to make sure that they don't have party affiliations, but because they are a separate type of representative I think there would be too much overlap if the party ran too many candidates in each riding. So the party would stand candidates for the local MLAs and you could have more prominent people in the area standing as the regional representatives.
Q	Who would make the selection of the proportionally elected MLAs?
A	I wouldn't have a list. Any party can only hold a maximum of four proportional seats so you could have more prominent individuals running a provincial wide campaign. There would be smaller party representatives and prominent independents elected proportionally who would campaign across the province.
Q	How important is local representation to you? How many constituencies would you have here in your system?
A	It's very important, perhaps the most important thing. There are 55 local constituencies but there are also regional representatives. I think regional representation is particularly important when Vancouver is growing at such a pace, to ensure that all out resources are not diverted to areas with the largest population base.

**Comment from panel:** There were no comments from the panel.

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**QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

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Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	In the voter's bill of rights, would there be any specification of who draws up electoral boundaries?
A	Yes, you could include that. I'm more concerned with issues such as paper ballots. I think that this would be the perfect time to enact a voter's bill of rights at the same time as we're considering electoral reform.
Q	What are the advantages of a transferable ballot?
A	Bill Bennett first came to power with a transferable ballot. This helps the middle ground party because it tends to be everyone's second choice so it means that politics is less polarised.
Q	Why have four seats for each party elected using proportional representation?
A	I personally don't support it because I think it promotes extremism, but I recognise that a lot of groups out there support PR so I put it in as a sort of compromise.
Q	This ballot looks like it could be a bit confusing. Could you have separate elections at different times for each of the three types of MLAs?
A	No, I think it would be too expensive, so you need to elect them all at the same time for cost reasons. So people would have to know their candidates and know their politics to vote.
Q	Some Canadian provinces once had Senates but they have been dissolved, do you know why that was?
A	I don't know why that happened – it could have been the urban majority trying to get rid of regional representation.

**Comment:** There were no comments from the audience.

**SUBMISSION: YES**

**SUBMISSION ID# 0028 AND 0213**