

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.

Hilary Crowley

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

We definitely need to change our voting system to prevent the polar swings characteristic of this Province. Too many of the electorate feel disenfranchised so we need more proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Hilary Crowley began her presentation by assuring the audience that an MMP still includes local representation, in order to counter earlier suggestions by other presenters that MMP increases urban representation. She argued that rural voters would instead be better represented under MMP, because party lists could facilitate the election of more rural candidates. Ms Crowley argued that the present electoral system is seriously flawed. Voters are usually voting the incumbent party out rather than voting in the MLA of choice. She stated that there are an increasing number of people not voting, and predicted that this will continue if we stay with the present electoral system.

Ms Crowley proposed the adoption of a PR system where every vote counts, and which enables people to vote for candidate or party who they really support. She argued that BC should pioneer electoral reform in Canada in order to facilitate reform of the federal electoral system. Ms Crowley proposed a modest increase in the number of seats in the legislature and a necessary reduction in the number of constituencies. She advised the inclusion of a five per cent electoral threshold in order to maintain stable government. She also suggested that safeguards be introduced to ensure that Northern and rural voters are fairly represented on party lists. Ms Crowley predicted that there would be more coalition governments under MMP in BC, and that this would require consensual decision making. She opposed the introduction of an STV system as being too unwieldy, insufficiently representative of a broad cross-section of the community, and complicated to administer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hilary Crowley recommended the adoption of an MMP electoral system in BC.

She also recommended a ban or restriction on corporate donations.

Quote: "It we stay with the status quo, less and less people will bother to vote and lack of participation can lead to anarchy."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

A member of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	Could you elaborate on why you don't think STV would meet the needs of the province?
A	In my reading, I found it difficult to understand and this would make it a difficult sell to the electorate.

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	Are there changes you would like to see to increase voting among young people and the disenfranchised?
A	That's why I'm advocating MMP. If people felt they could vote for smaller parties without it being a wasted vote then they would actually go out to vote.
Q	Why can't we have a preferential ballot in a mixed system? Why not have the constituency representatives selected by a preferential ballot?
A	There's no reason why you couldn't combine the two. If people feel that having two systems that are not anything like the current system can be presented at the same time, they you could do it. Otherwise I would really support the MMP system.
Q	How can you enforce regional representation within the party list? Wouldn't the majority of people on the list be from the lower mainland, unless you let people choose within the list?
A	I think that's the importance of having a closed list. That means the party can pick members for their list from where it feels there is most need. If the party feels there is more need to have a rural candidate then they would go to the top of the list.
Q	You mentioned there should be a ban on corporate donations to campaigns, what about union funding?
A	I would include union funding in the ban as well.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.