



CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY
ON ELECTORAL REFORM

Record of Proceedings of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform October 23-24, 2004

In attendance: J. Blaney, Chair
154 Assembly members
10 staff
11 facilitators
10 notetakers
30 observers
5-6 media

On leave: G. Mackinnon
S. Williams

Absent: C. Fader
V. Gowing
E. Morrison

Recording secretary: L. Perra

Saturday, October 23, 2004

Plenary AM Session

Rev. R. Hall, accompanied by M. Jarbek, W. Wong, B. Carter, S. de Luna, and A. Hsu led the members of the Citizens' Assembly (the "Assembly") in the singing of the national anthem.

The Chair noted that he had received a resignation from P. Barakat who had to leave the Assembly owing to personal reasons.

The Chair recognized:

- Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections BC
- Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Elections BC
- Janet Erasmus, Senior Legislative Counsel, Ministry of Attorney General
- Neil Reimer, Senior Evaluation Advisor, Ministry of Attorney General
- André Blais, University of Montreal
- Patrick Fournier, University of Montreal
- Gordon Gibson, author of the Gibson Report that led to the creation of the Assembly
- Leslie Seidle, Senior Research Officer, Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montreal
- Norman Ruff, University of Victoria

The Chair made the following comments about the members:

- That they were extraordinary citizens who make up the Citizens' Assembly.
- That they were selected through a random selection process and then by invitation -- the members self selected themselves to become involved.
- That the government gave the members an important task; gave them independence; and gave them the power to recommend directly to the people of British Columbia.
- That they have demonstrated that if one gives a group of citizens an important task with empowerment, these individuals will rise to the occasion.

The Chair went on to express that if the Assembly recommended a change, how could the Assembly ensure public support? He believed that the variable is in the Assembly's hands; that people would support the Assembly's decision based on their unanimity and their commitment to the process. He commented on the matter of complexity. That it was important that the Assembly described their alternatives from the perspective of the voter going into the booth. The current system is simple – one goes into the booth and marks an “X”. The Assembly's alternatives could be expressed in similar terms, that is:

- If STV—vote 1,2,3...
- If MMP—2 votes: candidate, party

The Chair also noted that British Columbians are as intelligent as other people throughout the world who have been using these systems and would be able to accept the Assembly's recommendation should a change be recommended.

Approval of the Agenda

The Chair advised the Assembly to be flexible with the agenda throughout the weekend. The morning session will be changed in that following the presentation by K. Carty, the Assembly will move into discussion groups for the balance of the morning. After lunch the Assembly will return and stay in plenary until they reach a decision, or need to return to discussion groups.

Presentation: MMP system for British Columbia - K. Carty

Constituency – list split 60/40
Candidates can opt to run in either or both seats
Voters would have two choices: candidate, party
Constituency seats elected by alternate vote
Provincial vote allocation
Regional open lists for seat assignment
Threshold is 3%
Seat vacancies by alternate vote

There was general agreement that these were the key features of the MMP alternative.

Presentation: Alternative Electoral Systems for BC. K. Carty.

Following questions and comments from members, the Assembly broke into small discussion groups. The details of these questions and answers are included in the attached transcript of the weekend session.

Saturday Afternoon Plenary

The afternoon was given to a thorough discussion of the two alternatives designed by the Assembly. The details of the discussions are included in the transcript. Following the discussions, the Chair determined the Assembly was prepared to vote on the best alternative for British Columbia. The Chair asked Brooke Banister, John Stinson, Ilene Zurowski and Jackie Tait if they would serve as scrutineers for the secret ballot vote. They accepted. The Assembly was asked to mark their ballots and to select either MMP or STV as the best alternative. The Assembly was informed that the order of the alternatives varied: on some ballots, MMP would be first and on others STV would be first.

Results of the vote:

MMP - 31
STV - 123

The Chair declared that STV was selected as the best alternative for British Columbia.

The Chair commended the members for the manner in which they had conducted their deliberations. The session adjourned for the day.

Sunday, October 24, 2004

Plenary AM Session

The Chair recognized K. McKinnon, Commissioner from the Yukon, and D. Hitching of the University of Alaska.

The Chair asked J. McConaghy, W. Wong, L. Hill and K. Cavelletto to serve as scrutineers for the votes. They accepted.

Presentation: Making a Recommendation: Stay with FPTP or Switch to a new System? K. Carty

Following questions and comments from members, the Assembly broke into small discussion groups. The details of these questions and answers are included in the transcript of the weekend session.

The Chair called the question to be voted on: Does the Citizens' Assembly recommend that the current electoral system (FPTP) be retained? Yes or No

Results of the vote:

Yes - 11
No - 142

The Chair declared that the Citizens' Assembly did not recommend that we retain the current system FPTP.

The Chair called the question to be voted on: Does the Citizens' Assembly recommend that the best alternative system - STV be proposed to the people of British Columbia in a referendum? Yes or No.

Results of the vote:

Yes - 146
No - 7

The Chair declared that the Citizens' Assembly recommends STV be proposed to the people of British Columbia in a referendum.

The Chair closed the session noting that the Assembly had:

- carried out its discussions eloquently and with respect for each other;
- learned about electoral systems;
- learned how to work together;
- continued to learn with each passing weekend.

The Assembly was adjourned at 11:45 am. Members were asked to complete evaluation forms.