

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

REVELSTOKE PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 22 JUNE 2004
AT THE COAST HILLCREST HOTEL

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.

Debra Ducharme

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation that supports MMP electoral reform from the point of view of a politically active nurse and a concerned parent of three adult children who do not vote.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Ducharme discussed a number of problems inherent in the current FPTP system, in particular its tendency to foster wild swings in policy from government to government and its ability to produce highly disproportional results. The presenter discussed her frontline experience of the damaging, and financially costly, impact of pendulum policy swings in the healthcare industry. According to Ms. Ducharme, the current system provides no incentive for governments to work together in a collaborative way. In addition, Ms. Ducharme stated statistics that demonstrate that FPTP systems produce exaggerated majorities, the lowest levels of representation for women and minorities, and declining voter turnout. Particular concern was expressed by Ms. Ducharme regarding the issues of political alienation among youth and negative voting throughout the electorate. The presenter argued that the introduction of a system of MMP would not only allow for a much fairer representation of the political choice of voters but would also encourage ruling parties to work in a much more collaborative way with other parties. Under this system debate on critical issues would be more comprehensive and respectful in nature because parties would have to learn to work together more effectively. In addition, Ms. Ducharme argued that implementing MMP would restore voter confidence by making every vote count and allowing people to vote sincerely ‘for’ their preferred party or candidate. Furthermore, MMP may increase the representation of women and minorities and potentially increase voter turnout, particularly among younger voters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter made the following recommendations:

1. That the Citizens’ Assembly recommends a change to the current model of electing MLAs used in British Columbia and that the change be the usage of a mixed member proportional (MMP) system of proportional representation.
2. That the Citizens’ Assembly recommends a reasonable threshold of about 4 or 5% of the vote to secure representation, thereby discouraging the emergence of fringe parties.
3. That the Citizens’ Assembly recommends a fixed number of legislative seats.
4. That the Citizens’ Assembly engages the public in a review of possible MMP systems that could be used in British Columbia.

5. That the Citizens' Assembly recommend that 50% plus 1 (a simple majority) be the measure utilized in the question regarding electoral reform that is brought forward to British Columbians.

Quote: Electoral reform has the potential to change the fundamental core of British Columbia politics and revitalize the democratic process ... It is time for British Columbia to move to a system of voting that more accurately reflects the will of the people.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you have an idea how you would like your system of MMP to look?

A I think that BC is very attached to having their local representative, although I acknowledge that the constituencies would have to be larger. One of the fundamental issues is deciding where to draw the boundaries and perhaps the federal boundaries could be utilized. I support a system in which 60% of members would be elected through local ridings and 40% via PR lists. I think that FPTP could be retained for the election of local MLAs.

Q You mentioned the apathy among young people; do you think MMP will address this issue? Why did you choose MMP over other PR systems?

A I get the feeling talking to neighbours and friends that they like the idea of voting for local representatives so the mixed system would enable them to do this while also allowing a better reflection of the will of the electorate. In terms of the issue of apathy among youth I don't think that they will start voting straight away but if people feel that their vote counts then they will start to vote. I think a lot of it depends on the teacher they have in high school. If they know that the result is determined before they cast their ballot then they will immediately feel disenfranchised.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

- Q You talked about the lack of representation for the Green Party, but I think that there should be a threshold set or there would be a proliferation of extremist parties. What is your opinion on that?
- A I agree with that. I definitely think that there should be a threshold of between 4 and 6% to eliminate those extremist parties.