

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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RICHMOND PUBLIC HEARING DATED  
4 MAY 2004 AT THE VANCOUVER AIRPORT  
MARRIOTT HOTEL, RICHMOND

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.

# Neil Smith

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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The assembly, in the spirit of open mindedness, has been far too generous towards our current FPTP system. I would like to point out how some of the perceived advantages of FPTP are specious, and the need to change is urgent.

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## KEY THEMES

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Neil Smith argued that First Past the Post (FPTP) has failed us miserably and will continue to fail us without electoral system reform.

He challenged the strengths of FPTP identified by members of the Assembly in their preliminary report, and argued that these strengths are in fact weaknesses. Mr Smith then demonstrated how each of the following perceived strengths of the current system has had a negative rather than a positive effect on the province.

1. The system has not “served us well” especially in the last two elections. There have been sharp swings in public policy. The party with the most votes has become the opposition.
2. FPTP is not “representative” because it lacks proportionality. Geographical representation is only superficial because party allegiance overrides local concerns. The system is never politically representative, as can be seen in the last two elections.
3. The current system is not “accountable”. Politicians are only held accountable on election day once every four years. Other systems would not be less accountable than FPTP.
4. Strong majority government should not be perceived as a strength of the FPTP system. Mr Smith asked what is wrong with consensus, compromise and negotiation?
5. Mr Smith asked why the Assembly considered it a strength of the current system that it “limits the place of minor parties and marginal interests” and argued that we should welcome diversity.
6. While the current system is simple, voters will be able to understand a more complex ballot just as they understand their tax forms. An education programme in schools would also enable people to adapt to a more complex electoral system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Neil Smith recommends the adoption of MMP in BC.

*Quote: "Why is strong majority government considered to be a good thing? What is wrong with consensus, compromise and negotiation?"*

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

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Some members of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	What sort of system would increase accountability?
A	I prefer the MMP system although I would consider an alternative. I prefer MMP because it is both proportional and representative
Q	Is local representation important to you?
A	Local representation is not a big issue for me. The legislature should be most concerned with issues that concern BC as a whole. We have municipal government to solve local issues.
Q	Why then go with MMP and not PR-list?
A	I would consider an alternative system, but my priority is to get rid of the current system. If we choose to change now, we can fine tune a new system. We may never get this chance again.
Q	So do you support PR-list? Under a PR-list system there would be more party allegiance?
A	If you're not hung up on the idea of local representation then party allegiance is fine. Parties represent a set of political ideas that people can align themselves with. In another system we could get a wider selection of political parties.
Q	How would accountability increase under a PR-list system?
A	A party list can be held accountable. I'm just saying that the current system is not accountable.
Q	Under an MMP system, we would have a greater range of parties in the legislature. Do you think this will mean that parties have endless arguments and prevent the legislature working competently?
A	More parties would improve debate. At the moment debate boils down to heavy handedness and personalities.

**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 a member of the audience asked the following question.

Q	A local MLA can help people with issues that cannot be solved by city hall. So what would we do without local representatives?
A	It's very good that the MLA can assist you but there are other elements of the bureaucracy available to help people. The MLA should focus on issues concerning all of British Columbia.

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

**SUBMISSION: NO**