

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SALT SPRING ISLAND PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 19 JUNE 2004 AT LIONS' HALL

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.

Sara MacIntyre

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

To recommend the Citizens' Assembly consider an electoral system that enhances government accountability.

KEY THEMES

Sara MacIntyre argued that the objective of electoral system reform should be to enhance government accountability, by increasing voter choice, local representation, and the capacity for the legislature to act as a check on government. She suggested that it is important that any alternative system adopted in the province should be a 'made in BC' system to address BC's unique problems. Ms MacIntyre described a number of reforms necessary to improve accountability including less party discipline; a parliamentary check on the Premier and Cabinet; a legislative role for MLAs; a closer link between MLAs and their voters; public policy driven by long-term public interest, rather than short-term partisan interests; and fewer wasted votes. She argued that the structure of the FPP system encourages and rewards party monopolies, leading to excessive party discipline, concentration of power in the Premier's Office and weakened local representation, and indicated these issues have contributed to lower voter turnout and increasing voter apathy.

Ms MacIntyre stated that the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation is recommending a mixed system combining multi-member STV districts in urban areas and single-member Alternative Vote districts in rural ridings. She explained that this system does not require any increase to the size of legislature or significant redrawing of the electoral boundaries. In this system, voters vote for candidates rather than parties. Voters can select between candidates from the same party, effectively turning the election into a primary process and removing the problems experienced with candidate election process in BC. Ms MacIntyre argued that MLAs would have greater incentive to be responsive to their constituents because they will be competing against other candidates in the same party at the next election. She predicted that a mixed AV-STV system will reduce wasted votes and increase voter choice. Ms MacIntyre cautioned that electoral reform alone will not address all the problems within political system but that this system will increase the independence of MLAs and open up the possibility for further reforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sara MacIntyre recommended the introduction of a mixed STV-AV system in British Columbia.

Quote: "Under severe party discipline strong local representation is non-existent. When it comes to checking government, MLAs have the clout of a wet noodle."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	How many members does the Federation have in BC?
A	We have approximately 9,000 members in BC, and we've been active in BC since 1992.
Q	Did the members vote on this electoral system – how did you choose it?
A	Nick Loenen is on the board of the Federation so he has played an instrumental role. One of our tenets is more accountability in government and one of the ways to achieve that is voting for candidates rather than parties. Our members didn't directly contribute to this process but they do indicate the values that they consider to be important in our annual surveys.
Q	The rural ridings would use the Alternative Vote?
A	Yes, so the MLA in the rural riding would need to win 50 per cent plus one of the vote.

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	So there could be multiple candidates on the ballot all having the same party logo?
A	I think that's one of the real benefits of the system because it opens up the competition within the parties as well as between the parties. If there's a party you like but you don't like their particular candidate then you would have a choice of other people to vote for.
Q	There would be multi-member districts in urban areas, so they would be much larger?
A	Yes, although you could still use the current electoral boundaries and combine three areas.
Q	But if you take three and make one aren't you changing the boundaries?

A	Yes, but if you combined three ridings into one you would still have three MLAs not just one MLA representing that large riding.
Q	Did you say that nowhere else in the world has used this system?
A	Yes, that's right – it is made in BC for the unique demographics and geography of BC. But the components of the system have been used elsewhere – both Alternative Vote and Single Transferable Vote are used in other democracies.
Q	I'm concerned that people could claim to represent a party when they haven't been approved by the party. Also I'm concerned that it would still be very difficult for independents to be elected.
A	The political parties would still exist as they do now, so they would approve 3 or 4 candidates for each riding. As for independent candidates, it depends on the constituency. There may be a local council alderman who has the support within the constituency.
Q	What do you mean by a transferable ballot?
A	You would rank the candidates 1, 2, 3 4 and if no-one was elected on the first count then you would go down and count people's second preferences.

Comment: “So this is really moving the candidate nomination and selection process from the party to the public.”

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# 0397