

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SURREY PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 31 MAY 2004
AT THE SHERATON GUILDFORD 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.

Wayne Taylor

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A general presentation on the current electoral system including a few recommendations for change.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Taylor stated that in this process of electoral reform we are undertaking an evaluation of the quality of democracy that we have. According to the presenter, we have lulled ourselves into a false sense of superiority with regard to the kind of democracy that we live in. Mr. Taylor argued that two factors lie at the heart of our democratic malaise:

1. Our first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, which:
 - a) When applied to elections with more than two alternatives, distorts the results and the enables one party to win government with a minority of the votes. Mr. Taylor discussed the problem of artificial and exaggerated majorities.
 - b) Fails to provide recognition or representation for the large proportion of people who vote for losing candidates.
 - c) Is exclusively reserved for the Canadian public. There is not one political party across the entire political spectrum that uses FPTP to elect their respective leaders and constituency representatives.
2. Electing members via single member districts, which:
 - a) Depends on arbitrary factors such as the configuration of constituency boundaries and the geographic distribution of electoral support for particular parties and candidates.
 - b) Place unrealistic expectations upon individual representatives to be able to articulate the many cross-cutting interests of increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan riding populations, particularly in Vancouver, Victoria and the major regional centres.
 - c) Facilitate the corruption of our political system through the disproportionate allocation of public funds to ridings held by members of the governing party, particularly those held by members of the Cabinet, and to ridings targeted by the government as potentially “winnable” in future elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Taylor recommended the introduction of a system that: provides proportionality of results; assigns equal value to votes cast; enables meaningful voter choice (by encouraging sincere rather than strategic voting); and that allows an opportunity for independent candidates to run for office and to be elected. Mr. Taylor also supported the introduction of a system based on multi-member ridings in order to increase competition among members within a district; to prevent the distortion of electoral support that occurs with single member constituencies; and to deny parties the ability to target particular ridings.

Quote: Through a combination of apathy, political intransigence and may I suggest an appalling lack of knowledge of alternative electoral systems, brought about by a failure to include the subject in our educational curricula, democracy in BC and in Canada has been surreptitiously distorted by a voting system that enables a minority to achieve electoral majorities and absolute power.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q You are obviously against the current FPTP system and are looking toward a more open system in which we can elect candidates as well as parties; have you given any thought to how we would redistribute the ridings in order to accommodate more than one representative?
- A Personally, I haven't. I am aware of Nick Loenen's proposal and I've seen his breakdown and know that you have received his submission. I do believe in multi-member ridings. I live in Coquitlam and sometimes the representative is of my political persuasion and sometimes their not, and when they are not, I'm not sure that individual represents my interests. However, if it was a multi-member riding, bigger and broader, I could go to a representative of my political persuasion that I would feel comfortable approaching.

Q Other than STV, is there another system you recommend?

A You may have caught me out there, I didn't want to go as far as recommending STV but it probably is my preferred system. There probably isn't another system that equates to what I have discussed here.

Q Do you have a history of interest in electoral reform?

A I am involved with a group called Fair Vote Canada, it is based on the federal level but it addresses the principles we are talking to here.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q If MMP used a ranked ballot for each riding would you find that more acceptable?

A I would find that more acceptable, I am from Australia and the lower house there is elected by preferential voting, so if half the house was elected by a preferential system and this was backed up by proportionality I think it would be more acceptable. However, this still relies on a single member system and I have some real problems with that.

Q With your proposal, if the result is instability and the destruction of investor confidence in our province that leads to a disastrous economic performance, you would say that that's fine because you would feel slightly more empowered, is that true?

A Everybody brings up the examples of Israel and Italy, I will point out that Ireland has STV and Ireland has one of the most preferred economies in the world to be investing in. I don't think it is the electoral system I think that it is the people that make up the country that is doing it. I don't think I even buy into your argument about Italy being unstable, I know lots of people who would love to live in Italy. The argument for PR is that you will get cooperation and compromise within the parliament to work together otherwise we'll throw

them out and put another group in. You have to reflect what the people want in the parliament and at the moment we're not getting that. We are getting a minority of people who are consistently electing our governments and we are on the outside looking in.