

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.

Alan Webster

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The Westminster system of governance depends on the basic right of qualified voters to make their selection of the best candidate in their riding, be they party nominated or individuals. I do not support any "PR" system.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Webster expressed the view that the adoption of preferential voting would be a vast improvement over the currently employed FPTP system. The presenter argued for the adoption of a simple, straightforward system that fits within the Westminster framework of government. Mr. Webster argued that the retention of single-member ridings is essential to maintain the connection between local representatives and voters. The presenter argued that there should be no change to the current system of riding distribution of voters as it currently allows the best compromise of voter participation and geographical representation that has been devised to date. Ridings allow the active participation of our very diverse population of voters in local constituency politics. Mr. Webster argued that too many people have overlooked the great diversity of the citizenry of BC, which is not comparable to relatively homogeneous societies such as New Zealand. The presenter stated that MMP may constitute a dangerous and potentially backwards step for BC as it represents a drastic change for the Westminster form of responsible, majority government. MMP encourages the development of diffuse party coalitions where the political power resides not in the "majority party" but is acquired by the minority parties through "backroom deal making". New Zealand now has six parties under MMP, and voter turnout started to decline after a slight rise in the two elections following the introduction of the electoral change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Webster recommended the adoption of the alternative vote (AV) as it requires that candidates secure a majority of the vote, and enables voters to rank their preferences. The presenter made three further recommendations for if and when the voters of BC are asked to consider changing the electoral system:

1. That they receive all the exact details of your final recommendation well in advance of the referendum vote.
2. That they receive clear and transparent information on the probable ramifications of this recommendation on both the voting system and government, and;
3. That they receive your considered (consensus) opinion that the recommended change will be beneficial to all BC voters and residents, in the long run – not just for an election or two!

Quote: The record of “minority coalitions” here in Canada – at the national level – clearly paints a picture of a disastrous and disruptive process that has produced serious political instability.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q In the last election in BC the Liberal party got around 97% of the seats with 58% of the vote; by adopting a majority system, what is your understanding as to the correction to that disproportionality?

A We are trying to compare a unicameral system with a bicameral system in Australia, the lower house is elected using preferential voting and the Senate is elected using PR. I don't know if it is something that the Assembly can recommend but I would support a proportionally elected Senate.

Q We are trying to deal with issues such as low voter turnout and the wasted vote; how does the alternative vote deal with these problems?

A If we are relying on moving to a more complicated voting system to get more people to come out and vote we are kidding ourselves. Young people just don't know what is going on as they simply don't learn it in school. The alternative vote does allow minor party representation as all preferences are counted.

SUBMISSION: YES SUBMISSION ID# 393