

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

TERRACE PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 8 JUNE 2004
AT THE COAST INN OF THE WEST

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.

Val George

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

No electoral system is perfect, but our current one is one of the worst possible options. Proportional representation with guaranteed local representation is what we should move towards.

KEY THEMES

Mr. George discussed his surprise at the public discontent with their system of government when he first arrived in Canada as expressed by jeers and taunts directed at John Diefenbaker during a speech given when he was Prime Minister. The presenter stated the view that these feelings stem from the inadequacies of the current FPTP electoral system. Mr. George argued that FPTP constitutes one of the worst electoral systems available as it provides artificial majorities to parties who then feel that they have a mandate to act on behalf of all citizens, although they only secured a minority of the vote. According to Mr. George FPTP only works within states with two-party systems *and* when the party leader is a great statesman capable of rising above party maneuverings. The presenter argued that great statesman are no longer attracted to run for political office in Canada as they do not wish to get involved in a system that is so manifestly ineffective. Mr. George expressed the view that this perception has led to a lack of popular confidence in our elected members and to declining voter participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. George advocated the adoption of a system of MMP. Under this system, 50% of members would be elected from local ridings and the remaining 50% from party lists. Local candidates would be required to garner a majority of the vote to be elected, and to enable this Mr. George supported the use of a preferential ballot with the alternative vote. The party list seats would be determined according to the total provincial vote with a 5% threshold. Mr. George argued against increasing the size of the legislature, instead supporting the doubling of the current constituency size. According to Mr. George, this system of MMP would allow for a measure of local representation and the inclusion of minority voices within the legislature. The presenter also argued against simplifying the act of voting, or introducing internet voting, on behalf of those who can't be bothered to take the time to come out and vote. Mr. George stated that simplifying the ballot would only serve to increase the number of uninformed voters that participate.

Mr. George argued that the introduction of MMP would lead to the emergence of better people to stand for public office. The presenter argued that while no electoral system is perfect, focusing on the faults of other systems does not negate the existence of greater faults in the current system it simply becomes an argument for the status quo. Mr. George stated that the best doesn't have to be

the enemy of the fairly good, as fairly good will be a lot better than what we have.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you prefer a closed or open list?

A A closed list in which parties pick the candidates and I know that's objectionable to many people. No system is perfect, but what we have to find is the most workable system.

Q What are your views on the representation of minority parties?

A I think that is one of the major faults of our current system and I think that we are one of the few democracies in the world that still uses this system that gives minority voices no representation. They have a right to be represented in government and a right to be heard. I don't think you should have a ridiculous threshold of 1%, but as long as it is a significant minority then it works well and that minority has a right to be there.

Q Would you be required to cast one or two votes under this system?

A Minority representation should come from a total provincial count of the vote and parties should be given representation according to that vote. So you only vote once. But I don't have a real problem with a two vote system.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Do you think that minority representation would make people start voting according to their own self interest, for example, voting for a seniors' party, or a youth party?

A I'm not talking about that kind of minority representation, I'm talking about the kind that you have in most other democratic countries in the

world. But if seniors can get together and form a party and get 5% of the vote then I think they should be represented.

Q Do you think there should be room on the ballot for disaffected voters to express their opinion?

A Good idea. If you do want to that properly then perhaps we should give everyone a test before they vote to ascertain whether they are capable of making an informed decision (that is a facetious comment).