

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.

Keith Olson

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation in support of STV and mandatory voting.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Olson discussed the need for all candidates to produce a statement detailing their policy platform that is compiled in a single document and sent to every household in BC. The presenter argued that to qualify to vote, after registering at the polling station citizens should be required to correctly answer 8 of 10 questions on the political system. Therefore, under this system, uninformed citizens are precluded from voting. Mr. Olson also supported the introduction of STV in order to enable the representation of the broader will of the community. The presenter argued that people do not think digitally, but rather in terms of range which is better suited to the process of ranking candidates than selecting a single contestant. While Mr. Olson acknowledged that this may lead to a greater number of spoiled ballots, he did not view this as problematic as those citizens who were incapable of figuring out how to order the ballot perhaps should not be voting. Mr. Olson acknowledged that this system may not be feasible in a society where voting is voluntary. Therefore, he offered his support for the introduction of mandatory voting. Under this system, non-voters would face a punishment of 100 hours of community service. This community service could be retracted, however, if the offending individual passes a quiz on the political system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Olson advocated the adoption of voter eligibility tests, STV, and mandatory voting. The presenter recommended that voting power in the legislature be weighted according to the popular support received by candidates in the electorate, potentially enabling the opposition to have more voting power than the majority party in the house. Mr. Olson also expressed support for the introduction of sub-MLAs for large ridings.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q I believe that everybody has the right to vote once they are of legal age and there may be a number of reasons why people have not had a chance to get up to date with the issues including work commitments; what are your views on that?

A There will always be exceptions. If you come out of a coma on the day of the election you won't know

what's going on. If you have been working away for 6 months you might not know what's going on but you could spend an hour going over the document that have been compiled on where the candidates stand. This way everybody has the same source and you have something which you can hold your MLA up to.

Q Would you support raising taxes to allow the introduction of sub-MLAs?

A That is a loaded question as it begs the question: what is the alternative? This system would negate the need for multiple staffs in different parts of the riding by having someone float around to take care of their concerns.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q I think the idea of an informed vote is very good and the Assembly should look at finding a way of making voters responsible for their vote and not let it be a tossing of the dice. How would you see sub-MLAs functioning?

A One way I can see this is that they float around the region going to places where they have been summoned to talk about what the MLA is doing. Or if they are looking to garner public opinion they can travel to communities.