

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VALEMOUNT PUBLIC HEARING DATED
7 MAY 2004 AT THE HOLIDAY INN,
VALEMOUNT

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.

Roger Beck

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The Assembly should consider a ‘none of the above’ option for the ballot paper or a system of approval voting. Problems with the political system in BC extend beyond the electoral system and include the domination of the legislature by the government, the need for more free voting, and the need for people to be more informed when they cast their votes.

KEY THEMES

Roger Beck spoke in support of the ‘none of the above’ option. He argued that this option could increase the number of people who go to the polls, by providing a voting option for people who do not want to vote in favour of any of the candidates on the ballot.

Mr Beck also discussed problems with parliamentary democracy in BC, particularly the domination of the legislature by the government which restricts effective representation of minority views. He proposed that MLAs be free to vote as they wish on any issue.

Mr Beck asked whether the Assembly had considered the possibility of approval voting where people vote for all the candidates on the ballot of whom they approve. He argued that this voting system would ensure that the candidate with the most votes would be likely to have the support of more than 50 per cent of voters.

He also raised the issue of voter information and argued that we do not know enough when we vote. Mr Beck explained that voters have little economic incentive to research their voting decision when the cost of acquiring additional information may be high in comparison with the tiny influence that each voter has over the electoral outcome. He argued that the Assembly should not only consider the issue of voter turnout but how to ensure that people can cast a more informed vote.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr Beck recommended that the Assembly consider a ‘none of the above’ option on the ballot paper and an approval voting system.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Do you think people are not voting because they are too ignorant of the issues?
A	When the chance of influencing the outcome of the vote is so tiny, then people won’t make the effort. The economic value of going to the voting booth is very low because the effort of voting is

	higher than the chance of influencing the vote. I think people don't necessarily make that equation though, a lot of people vote out of a sense of duty.
Q	Do you think if you could vote for an individual that shares your values and issues, rather than someone who is local, would that be a better system?
A	I think it's really important to have somebody local who represents you.
Q	What would you think of a system where you could cast a separate vote for candidate and party?
A	I think that would be an improvement.

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	In California, the League of Women Voters publicises the voting record of all candidates every time there is an election. They have a lot of referendums there so a voting record is important. Do you think that if there was a publication listing the past voting record of candidates in BC, would this solve part of the problem?
A	It certainly would.
Q	I would prefer MLAs to regroup for each problem which came up, rather than always voting with the party. So the alignment of MLAs could change with every issue.
A	Response from the facilitator: Many members of the public are very concerned with party discipline, so I thought I should let you know that the Robson Valley is not alone.
Q	Is there a way to find a system where we don't have to vote for parties and we can just vote for candidates?
A	I'm sympathetic to your feeling that we're slaves to the party system. However, a big plus of the party system is that it reduces our

	information costs. We can say, this candidate stands for this party so we know where they stand on each issue. However, if the candidate does not have a party affiliation we have to find out where they stand on each issue.
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Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO