

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.

Roy Howard

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A New Zealand style MMP system would combine the benefits of proportional representation with the ability to elect a local representative.

KEY THEMES

Roy Howard argued that the current electoral system is not truly democratic because a large proportion of BC citizens are not represented by the government. He provided the example of the last two provincial elections where twenty per cent of voters in 1996 and 2001 voted for parties that were not represented in the legislature. Mr Howard argued that these wasted votes increase voter apathy, leading to declining voter turnout.

Mr Howard also perceived the disproportionality of the current system as a major flaw, and pointed to the 1996 election when the government won more seats with fewer votes than the opposition.

He proposed the adoption of a New Zealand style MMP electoral system in British Columbia as a solution to the problems of wasted votes and disproportionality under the current system.

Mr Howard is also concerned that strong party discipline prevents MLAs from representing local interests and suggested increasing the number of free votes in the legislature as well as strengthening the province's recall initiative.

Mr Howard recommended against adopting a Single Transferable Vote system, on the grounds that STV is less proportional than MMP, and that its complexity could contribute to voter apathy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr Howard recommended adopting an MMP system with one half to two thirds of seats directly elected by First Past the Post and the remaining one third to one half of seats being elected by a second vote on the ballot for a party of the voter's choice.

Mr Howard recommended against adopting STV which, although an improvement to the current system, would not be sufficiently proportional and would be too complex.

Quote: "Although I am seldom in agreement with the current government, I wish to thank and congratulate them for initiating and supporting this extremely progressive and important process, which hopefully will invigorate democracy in our province."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Some members of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	Why did you recommend against STV?
A	Because it may not necessarily be proportional, and it would not be as proportional as MMP.
Q	Do you prefer open or closed list?
A	Closed lists, because otherwise I think it gets too complicated on the ballot. I think parties need to be held accountable, the list needs to be open and transparent. Creating the list needs to be a democratic process, so that people who want to influence the list can get involved and participate in the party selection and help to select candidates in that way.
Q	What if we had an open list, but restricted to smaller local areas so there wouldn't be so many names?
A	I think it is important for the ballot to be simple.
Q	What if you restricted each list to within six or seven geographical areas in the province?
A	But how many parties contested the last election? Even if it was a rural riding and there were only 8 parties running in the riding, with 6 or 12 names for each party then that's a lot of people on the ballot. I like the idea that you're trying to tie it to the regions. But I still believe that a closed list would be less complicated.
Q	Have you thought about what the ballot would look like?
A	There would be two parts – who would be your local representative? And then who would be your party? And there could be up to 20 or so parties listed to choose from.
Q	You mentioned freedom and that you don't like mandatory voting, but what about an incentive to vote, maybe getting a refund on your party membership if you vote?
A	Well I wouldn't be averse to getting \$10 back if I voted! I think the incentive is already there though. And besides if you donate to a party then you get a proportion back through the tax system.

Comment from panel: There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation a member of the audience had a question.

Q	Why do you believe that voting should not be compulsory?
A	There are countries with mandatory voting, but personally I don't think voting should be mandatory because I believe in freedom.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO