

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 29 MAY 2004
AT VANCOUVER CONVENTION CENTRE

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.

John Dennison

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I propose to offer two themes, both based on experience in Australia: the first regarding mandatory voting legislation and the second dealing with the transferable vote.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Dennison discussed the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory and preferential voting, and proportional representation based on his experience in the Australian context. According to Mr. Dennison compulsory voting ensures high voter turnout without engendering resentment on the part of citizens as they simply accept the requirement as the “way it is”. Furthermore, under this system voters are still permitted to spoil their ballot if they do not like any of the candidates. Regarding preferential voting, Mr. Dennison stated that while it is likely to result in a higher level of informal votes (as voters must rank all candidates on the ballot) it will prevent individuals feeling that their votes are wasted as the winning candidate is the “most preferred” or “least disliked” by all voters. The presenter also stated that preferential voting would temper the need for strategic voting. Mr. Dennison noted that while counting preferential ballots is complicated, the system tends to promote a strong two party system which provides a stable parliamentary process. The presenter discussed the method of election for the Australian Senate which uses proportional representation with the single transferable vote (PR-STV). Mr. Dennison argued that this system has enabled fringe candidates to hold the balance of power in the Senate, allowing them to pressure the major parties to conform on crucial votes. As a result of this, Mr. Dennison stated that PR tends to produce instability in government while preferential voting tends to ensure stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Dennison recommended the introduction of compulsory voting to encourage voter interest and to produce a more representative reflection of political preferences while not abusing the individual’s right to abstain. The presenter also advocated the introduction of preferential voting in order to prevent wasted votes and to encourage a stable two-party system.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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| Q | When was mandatory voting put into place in Australia and was there a negative reaction against it? |
| A | It started in Queensland in 1924 and was adopted throughout Australia in 1925. How it was accepted is lost in the mists of time but now people just |

accept it.

Q Am I required to rank all candidates on the ballot, or if I only like three out of the five candidates can I stop numbering my ballot at three?

A You must rank all the candidates by ranking your least liked candidate 5, your next least liked 4 and so on.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q How is the preferential ballot not allowing you to vote twice?

A In effect you do, but the result is that if you can't get your most liked candidate, you avoid getting the most disliked. And the party will provide you with a sheet informing you how to vote if you want to follow the party ticket.

Comment Those advocating PR often cite the European example and those countries often fit nicely into Vancouver Island. In BC we need geographical representation.

Q To what extent does the Australian experience require the existence of two houses?

A In this province proportional representation would definitely give the opportunity to small parties to win a few seats, but the problem with this is that they wield power in excess of their support and force decisions on certain issues. Furthermore, minor party candidates are elected by political parties and their first allegiance is to the party, so the hope that they would turn their back on the party is a wonderful but very pious hope.