

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING JUNE 12,
2004 AT MARRIOTT PINNACLE HOTEL

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.

Garry Nixon

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Explaining the Irish system - how it ensures minority representation.

KEY THEMES

I have written a book on BC politics. I live for five months each year in Ireland. I want to explain the Irish system because it answers a lot of the questions raised. We should not give the leader that much power.

An STV system with multiple member riding was imposed on the Irish by the British because Sinn Fein, the radical party, had all the seats with half the vote. For example, let's say there are nine members in a district. People would rank all the candidates. Then, you say it is impossible for nine people to get more than 1/10 of vote, so this is the quota. If someone got more than 10% of the vote, then the person is elected. Any votes extra (more than the quota) and their 2nd choices are redistributed. Then the counting process continues. You eliminate the least preferred candidate and redistribute its preferences. After all the ballots have been voted on, you have nine people elected. The Irish politicians don't like the system. They had a referendum, and twice it was presented, all the major political parties supported it and it was twice rejected by the people.

This system usually gives a slender majority government. No one party would sweep a large number of seats. To be fair, you could get minority parties if people are fed up with parties. This system is very fair because it ensures minority representation. Right now, if you were an NDPer living in Chilliwack, you might as well not vote because your candidate won't be elected. This system ensures that you'll get one of your members elected (out of 9). You can choose candidates across parties. It also gives each individual a lot of power, because they can also run as independents and get elected. This system is used in Australian senate elections, in Malta, and it was proposed in the Charlottetown accord. It is not to be confused with AV that we had in BC for 1952-53.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Single transferable vote. (STV).

"This system [STV] is very fair because it ensures minority representation."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q This is my 3rd public hearing, I have heard a lot of advocates for MMP, why is STV good?
- A It will ensure that people's votes will count. It will be fair, it will provide for minority representation. The system has worked in the countries where it is used.
- Comment In a book, the riding system is criticized when ridings are too small, this is problematic.
- A I think in the original Irish system, there was 8-9 member districts, but I leave it up to the Assembly.
- Q You seem to be suggesting that CA gives more voter choice?
- A Yes. In Ireland in the last 28 years, there are many choices, a large number of independent candidates. Local candidates, who campaign for local issues, there is a wide variety.
- Q Have you given any thought to the number of constituencies for BC and whether the number of seats varies?
- A In Lower mainland 9, in Victoria, 7, Burnaby and Coquitlam together, Delta and parts of Surrey are combined. Generally I favour larger constituencies. But not for up north, you could have 3 member ridings.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

- Q I am a great proponent of the Irish system, people when they are confronted to that, they say it is far too difficult.
- A I was teaching in Ireland, people in Ireland have done it well, the Malta government has as well.

SUBMISSION: NO