

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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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](http://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.

# William Lim

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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Mixed system, staggering elections and public financed elections.

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## KEY THEMES

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I will speak about electoral systems. I recommend 1) A mixed system, with a mixed member proportional (MMP) system for urban centres with multiple (i.e. Two or more) ridings; and majority (50% plus one vote) system for rural ridings. 2) Staggering elections: half of all urban MLAs and half of all rural MLAs are elected at half-term of every legislature for a full year term. 3) Public financed elections. In particular, media space and time slots are to be administered by the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, allocated equitably to all candidates, without discrimination to minor parties or independents seeking public office. Third party involvement, on the other hand, is to be restricted to organizing all-candidate meetings at their respective local communities.

An increasingly large number of Canadians are seeing some serious flaws in the entire process of our parliamentary democracy. Like many concerned and thoughtful citizens who have made presentations to the Assembly, I am aware that the political process has seriously turned off a large number of people from active participation. I want to tell young people that they can have confidence again that the electoral system can address their needs.

The present electoral system is first past the post (FPTP). One of the most disturbing aspects of FPTP is the general lack of a level playing field in elections for minor parties and independent candidates. In particular, the latter often have difficulty to get their ideas and problems across the electorate. This would frustrate the electorate while trying to gain a complete understanding of the whole list of ideas of all candidates in order to make an informed decision. The FPTP system tips the scale in favour of main party candidates over minor party candidates. As a result, the ballots casts for a candidate are often perceived as having little voice. Elected representatives routinely ignore the concerns of citizens.

The last aspect is that there is little contact with constituents between elections. The politicians are in it mainly for themselves, the party and their friends. In this context, I respectfully propose some reform to the electoral system.

1. A mixed system, with MMP, with urban centres with multiple ridings and a majority system for rural ridings.
2. Staggering elections: Half of all rural MLAs, and half of urban MLAs are to be elected for half a term. Thirdly: Public financed elections.

To conclude, I would like to draw to your attention that our parliamentary democratic system is in fact a form of a social contract between the elected law-makers and the citizens who elect them. In order for this system to work for all concerned, both parties to the same contract must be equally empowered, enabling each to hold the other side to keep its terms of the bargain. Sadly, this prerequisite condition somehow has not been in existence in our case for some time. Therefore, legitimately many citizens have felt they have been betrayed in the process, or at the very least, let down in the course of this contract. It is time indeed to restore the equilibrium of the power relationship between the two parties. I believe that my proposal is an attempt to re-empower the citizens in the political process as its initial step of electing the law-makers. In the words of Lord Acton who has made so perceptively an observation in these matters: "In the absence of equilibrium in a relationship power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." With these words in mind, I most certainly don't want our situation to deteriorate to the "absolute" level. For, in that scenario, it will definitely mean the end of our democratic system as we know it.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) A mixed system, with mixed member proportional (MMP) system for urban centres with multiple (ie. two or more) ridings; and majority (50% plus one vote) system for rural ridings.
- 2) Staggering election: half of all urban MLAs and half of all rural MLAs are elected at half-term of every legislature for a full year term.
- 3) Public financed elections.

*"A lot of young people say that politics does not matter, that it is not relevant, that there is no point even in voting. This is absolutely wrong. Voting matters because government matters." Former Prime Minister Jean Chretien. The Province, May 28, 2004.*

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#### **QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL**

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No time for questions.