PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VERNON PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 21 JUNE 2004
AT THE PRESTIGE INN VERNON SALON

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.

Len Bawtree

A proposal to modify the present electoral system to allow some proportional representation. Also some recommendations to reduce the alienation of "North of Hope" electors often felt due to the preponderance of seats in southwest BC.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Bawtree argued that the current FPTP electoral system does not serve the citizens of British Columbia particularly well. The presenter stated that the current system fosters adversarial politics and wild policy swings which discourage investment as a result of uncertainty. Mr. Bawtree expressed the opinion that electoral reform may enhance the role of MLAs who often appear to have little to do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter advocated the adoption of MMP in order to encourage greater citizen participation and to moderate the extreme swings in policy characteristic of BC in recent years. Under this system, approximately 44 MLAs would be elected via the current FPTP system in single member districts and the remaining 35 members would be elected via a PR list. Mr. Bawtree argued that an advantage of MMP lies in the fact that having some seats filled from a party's list would remove the need for party leaders to bump local candidates in favour of someone of their choice. The presenter stated that this system would potentially enable the list members to address issues of concern to the entire province, leaving the bulk of the constituency work to the local members. Mr. Bawtree acknowledged that this system would result in a reduction in the current number of ridings, particularly in rural areas. To alleviate this concern, the presenter advocated the creation of an "Interior" or a "Northern" caucus composed of urban and rural members. This body could produce the additional benefit of educating the urban members about rural BC. In order to prevent the proliferation of splinter or radical parties, Mr. Bawtree recommended the introduction of an electoral threshold of 4 or 5% to gain representation via the party list. Finally, Mr. Bawtree offered his support for fixed election dates which enable an extended discussion of issues of importance in the province.

> *Quote: I recommend a mixed member proportional system, which is easy to understand, and retains a portion of the system voters are familiar with.*

Q   Do you support open or closed party lists?

A   I would like to have a closed list, but it appears very difficult to do unless you have a run-off election. I can see that people who are very important to the party may be required not to run in a constituency where they may not be elected but just run on the list.

Q   You propose to lower the representation of rural areas; how do you think regions like the north will respond to that?

A   I don't think they will be particularly happy unless you, as a member of the Citizens' Assembly, recommend the adoption of a northern caucus which must have some teeth.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q   What happens to independent candidates under this system?

A   Independents can run for any constituency seat, but of course they would not be on anybody's list.

Q   What would this "northern caucus" do?

A   Is would be a caucus with sufficient resources to look in depth at the concerns of the north. They would have to have the resources and the ability to present the problems of the north, as in my view that is where the first dollars are made for the whole of BC.