

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

ABBOTSFORD PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 5 JUNE 2004
AT THE RAMADA INN AND CONFERENCE
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.

Timothy Jones

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A short presentation detailing the observed shortcomings of the present system based on 35 years of voting in BC. I will be speaking in support of a mixed member proportional (MMP) voting system.

KEY THEMES

The presenter discussed the shortcoming of the current FPTP system as reflected in declining voter turnout and rising voter apathy, alienation, and disillusionment. Mr. Jones argued that FPTP creates enormous human waste as a result of wild swings in policy that stem from BC's polarized system of politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Jones recommended the adoption of a system of MMP that would re-engage the non-voting citizenry as every vote would count. The presenter argued that MMP would moderate policy swings and admit more voices into the legislature. Effectively, this system would produce a more consensual legislature and legislation more in-line with the public will.

In particular, Mr. Jones advocated a system of MMP with two-thirds of members elected via local constituencies and the remaining one-third being elected from a party list. This system would have a 5% threshold. Political parties should have an open, transparent, and public method of selecting their list candidates. According to Mr. Jones, an option should exist on the ballot for the voter to either endorse the party list, or rank candidates if they prefer. The presenter stated that the concerns of rural voters regarding the loss of local representation should be alleviated by the knowledge that they will have two votes and their influence in politics will be regained. Mr. Jones argued against the inclusion of a NOTA option on the ballot as this constitutes a negative action and voters should be encouraged to make positive and informed decisions at the polls. On the same grounds, the presenter stated his disapproval of mandatory voting.

Regarding the potential referendum question, Mr. Jones recommended that a single question be drafted in simple and clear language, free of double negatives, and backed up by a campaign of public education.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q You stated that MMP would increase voter turnout, on what do you base this contention?

A On the experience of other jurisdictions where MMP has been introduced.

Q On what do base your assertion that people are giving up on the democratic process?

A I have two sons and a daughter, and my daughter is making me aware of the tremendous amount of poverty in Langley. These people have no political interest and no feeling of connection. And these people are often living in dire circumstances and they are apathetic. It is often hard to see these people when you work and drive a car.

Q Are you in favour of an open or a closed list?

A I feel that the party lists should be open to scrutiny so that the public and the press can examine the proposed candidates. I feel that the parties should select the candidates for their list via an open and transparent process. When the list is compiled, ranked according to party preference, the voter is able to either accept the party ranking or rank the candidates according to their preferences. It is likely that most people will check the party list, but there is always the chance that people will order the ballot themselves and upset the party order.

Q How would your constituency seats be elected?

A Via the current plurality system.