

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

COURTENAY/COMOX PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 26 MAY 2004 AT THE COAST
WESTERLEY 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.

Bill Peters

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

How political party solidarity has nullified original idea of representative member acting as an independent voice.

KEY THEMES

Bill Peters argued that back-benchers have become ciphers in current political system, unquestioningly following the dictum that the ‘government proposes and the opposition opposes.’ He contrasted this situation with eighteenth century Britain, where local areas elected leaders from the community to the House of Commons to vote according to their conscience. Mr Peters outlined the development of the party system in the United Kingdom, and described the evolution of the political system in British Columbia. He described BC politics as being increasingly adversarial, with no real public debate. Mr Peters argued that the growth of the power of the political parties and the dominance of government by the Premier prevented effective debate within the Legislative Assembly. He advocated the introduction of a form of proportional representation electoral system so that a broader range of opinion could be represented in the legislature. This would restore effective debate because there would be a diverse range of views, rather than being limited to the current two party viewpoints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bill Peters recommended the introduction of a form of proportional representation in British Columbia, preferably the MMP system.

*Quote: “Currently we have a four year autocracy renewable at our choice.”
“We need Proportional Representation to restore true debate to the legislature.”*

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were two members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	You didn’t specify a particular PR system, do you have a preference?
A	I researched this area many years ago, and I opt as well for the MMP system because I think it’s necessary to have the list function to ensure a broad range of people in the

	legislature.
Q	How would an MMP system satisfy the need for less political party control, because by its very nature MMP requires a vote for both a candidate and a vote specifically for party?
A	The problem is the adversarial system, the division between 'us and them'. With PR we will have a broader range of opinion, and there will be less party discipline because parties will no longer be divided into the government party and the opposition party.

Comment from panel: There were no further comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation a few member of the audience had a question.

Q	I don't see how PR will change party power, why not eliminate political parties altogether?
A	If you could tell me how to do that I'd be willing to consider it. As I see it, the cost of contesting elections requires organizations that are something like political parties because individuals cannot necessarily afford to compete. Given those circumstances I think it's better to have an electoral system that facilitates more parties, to dilute that power between a wider range of people.

Comment: There were no further comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# 0169