

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

CRANBROOK PUBLIC HEARING DATED
21 JUNE 2004 AT THE PRESTIGE INN

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.

Wilf Hanni

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation in favour of preferential voting.

KEY THEMES

Wilf Hanni discussed some drawbacks of Proportional Representation (PR) and proposed a system of preferential balloting for BC, as is currently used in Australia. He acknowledged that PR would produce proportional electoral outcomes and therefore help smaller parties that are seldom elected to the legislature under the current system, but described a number of flaws with PR, including unstable coalition and minority governments, and the appointment of unelected MLAs to the legislature by political parties. He argued PR does nothing to address biggest single problem in BC, which is splitting the vote. Mr Hanni explained that under the current system, if the vote is split between two parties on one side of the political spectrum, then a majority government on the other side of the spectrum can be elected with a minority of the popular vote. This results in voters feeling compelled to vote strategically for the party with the best perceived chance of defeating the party on the other side of the spectrum rather than for the party with the best policies and candidates. Mr Hanni argued that preferential voting would eliminate this problem by allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference. A candidate would need to receive a majority of the votes cast to be elected, which could require counting second and later preferences. He explained that a preferential ballot would enable voters to cast their first vote for party they like the best and their second vote strategically for party that is higher in the polls and likely to defeat party they like the least. Mr Hanni told the hearing that this system has been used successfully in Australia for many years. He argued that counting the ballots need not be complicated or time consuming if computers are used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Wilf Hanni recommended the introduction of the Alternative Vote system in British Columbia.

Quote: "Preferential balloting allows voters to openly indicate their real preferences at the ballot box without fear of accidentally electing the wrong people in with only a minority of the votes cast."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	In 1996, the PDA, Liberal and Unity parties had more than a majority of the votes. Surely they would have been able to work together as a coalition?
A	In European countries there have been successful coalition governments, such as in Germany which has been very stable unlike Italy and Israel. As long as parties

	have values in common I think it is possible for them to work together.
Q	Do you think there would be more chance of people spoiling the ballot with this system?
A	When we used this in the Reform Party to elect party leaders, if people used an X instead of ranking the candidates numerically we counted that X as their first preference.
Q	Would you still end up with a majority government under this system?
A	I firmly believe that this system would have resulted in the election of a number of Reform MLAs and a greater diversity in the legislature. People could have voted Liberal as their second choice, and in 1996 we would have had a Liberal rather than an NDP government.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	Do you think that there is anything in common in European countries using PR, such as a President that doesn't have as much power as the legislature?
A	If you're suggesting that proportional representation is not often used by countries with a British style parliamentary system then yes, you're right.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO