

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

DAWSON CREEK PUBLIC HEARING DATED
13 MAY 2004 AT NORTHERN LIGHTS
COLLEGE

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.

Michael Murphey

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Three proposals: local initiative and referendum on local issues, proportional representation in the Legislative Assembly, and legislative video conferencing.

KEY THEMES

Michael Murphey argued that the current FPP system results in wasted votes and gives citizens little chance to participate in political process between elections. He advocated a system of direct democracy for local issues. Mr Murphey argued in favour of a proportional representation electoral system for the Legislative Assembly, in order to achieve proportional electoral outcomes, a more diverse range of ideas in the legislature, and to promote legislative compromises by reducing the likelihood of single-party majority government. He acknowledged that a weakness of a PR system is the lack of local representation, and proposed a partial solution in the form of a mixed system in which the local candidate with the most votes would be elected in each constituency, and the rest of the votes would go into a pool of province-wide candidates ranked by their individual parties. Mr Murphey stressed that the ‘at large’ candidates would be selected from the runners-up in the constituency elections, not from lists drawn up by “party hacks”. Seats would be assigned on the basis of the percentage of the vote received by each party. He proposed that both the MLAs elected by FPP and the ‘at large’ MLAs would continue to reside in their local communities and hold caucus meetings via a publicly transmitted video link-up. In this way, citizens would have year round access to their local representatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Michael Murphey recommended the introduction of proportional representation in BC.

He also recommended the introduction of direct democracy at the local level, and a requirement for all MLAs to reside in their local communities and conduct political meetings and debate using video link-up.

Quote: “Citizens are effectively cut off from their elected representatives during the legislative sessions. A better system would be for representatives to continue to reside in their local communities.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Since we are not allowed to increase the number of MLAs in the legislature, what would you think of a system where we increased the size of the ridings?
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A	I think it's a step in the wrong direction because it would be centralizing rather than decentralizing power.
Q	Do you really think that MLAs would be able to effectively make decisions if they weren't in the same place
A	I think that local accountability and the local community have access to their MLA is more important than the efficiency of the process.
Q	Would the additional members only represent a local area or would they represent the entire province?
A	If I were given a choice between keeping the current system and combining ridings, I would combine the ridings.

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

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	When people give examples of PR, they tend to give examples from Europe. But my concern is that Canada and the European countries are very different. In particular, there is a lot more space here, whereas in Europe they are very densely concentrated. I think it would be much better to have a bicameral system that they do in the US.
A	I grew up in the US and I left because it was becoming a more dictatorial and unrepresentative place. So I don't think having bicameral system protects or improves anything. I think most people either vote on the basis of personality or they vote for a party platform and I think we need a voting system that mirrors that.
A	(Panel member) Well we haven't only looked at Europe. For example, we've also looked at New Zealand which is also a settler society.
Q	Do you not think an identifiable local representative who knows our concerns and knows our local area is important?
A	I think what's more important is voter apathy, and I think a PR system will encourage people to get involved and that's more

	important than local representation.
Q	But when I watch the news I know more about what's going on in North Van or Surrey than urban people do about what's going on up here. We really need to take into account the role of the media.
A	That's why we need a system where MLAs stay in the local area and don't go down to Victoria. So the people they have daily contact with are their local constituents and not with other people in the legislature.

Comment: “I agree that we must go to some form of PR. It is important for voters to be able to choose their governments. I don't agree that we need regional representation. We live in a technological age, so I think that proportionality is more important. I urge the Assembly to look at a MMP system.”

“I find it hard to believe that all the technology in the world can replace human contact.”

“In the old days it used to take a week and a half to get from Hudson Hope to Dawson Creek, now we can do it in a day in the car or in seconds by email. We are a global village.”

SUBMISSION: NO