

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

DUNCAN PUBLIC HEARING DATED
8 JUNE 2004 AT THE TRAVELODGE
SILVER BRIDGE

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.

Matthew Price

Conservation Voters of BC

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Why environmental NGO's in BC support electoral reform.

KEY THEMES

Matthew Price explained that the mandate of Conservation Voters of BC is to recruit environmentally minded candidates into all parties and help get them elected, and that this role has made the organization aware of the shortcomings of the current electoral system. He argued that a major flaw in the current system is that it has artificially reinforced the left-right axis of political debate, entrenching a two-party system and excluding environmental issues from the political agenda. Conservation Voters of BC supports a mixed member proportional system because it combines the community accountability of geographic representation with proportionality to ensure that a more diverse range of ideas represented in the legislature. The organization also favoured the introduction of an electoral threshold to ensure that seats are not held by parties who only represent the narrow interests of a small proportion of voters.

Mr Price advised the Citizens' Assembly to consider the potential for any electoral system that they recommend to be manipulated by big money interests. He argued that electoral system reform needs to be accompanied by changes to the BC campaign finance laws to limit campaign donations to political parties. He explained that donation limits have already been introduced in Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario and at the federal level, but that there are currently no limits on union and corporate contributions to BC political parties. Mr Price feared that the introduction of MMP could increase the influence of big money by facilitating the election of smaller parties and enabling big money interests to buy seats for representatives who narrowly mirror their interests. He suggested that the Assembly's mandate should not limit it from recommending campaign finance reforms to accompany any new electoral system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Matthew Price recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

He also recommended reforming the BC campaign finance laws to introduce limits on donations to political parties.

Quote: "Electoral systems of any kind do not operate in a vacuum, and in our opinion a major determinant in how an electoral system functions in the real world is the presence or absence of big money interests manipulating the system for their self-interest."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	I think this is outside our mandate?
A	It depends on how you read it!
Q	So which system would you prefer?
A	The Quebec law on government finance would be a fantastic complement to proportional representation.

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	I've heard a considerable number of presentations and you are the first to address big money. Do you have any suggestions about how to improve that?
A	There are donation limits in other provinces and at the federal level. While the assembly's mandate is limited to translation of votes into seats, it cannot look at impact of new electoral system without examining the role of big money and how that will distort any new system. These electoral systems don't work in a vacuum.
Q	I make a similar suggestion in my presentation to examine the parties' internal selection processes and I think that is very concordant with party finance. I wonder if you have given any thought to that issue?
A	I'm not sure if I could give an informed answer to that. I do think it's germane to the Assembly's task when they are asked to examine how this system would work and that both those issues are relevant to that.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# TO FOLLOW