

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.

Rick Smith

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A truly democratic system should reflect both regional communities and communities of interest. The only way this can be achieved is through some form of mixed proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Rick Smith spoke in favour of mixed member proportional representation as the electoral system that could give a political voice to the greatest number of British Columbians and thus be most democratic. He expressed concern with party discipline and the current electoral system's failure to represent the changing culture of provincial communities. Mr Smith argued that party discipline prevents politicians from truly representing their constituencies because candidates follow the party platform even when this is not supported by the majority of constituents in the MLA's riding. He also criticized the current system for only recognizing regional communities rather than non-geographic communities of interest. Mr Smith argued that the notion of regional representation may have been appropriate for homogeneous communities but that communities in BC have become more diverse, for example as the economies of rural communities have become more service-based than goods-based. Instead, Mr Smith proposed that MLAs should represent communities of interest, which are not limited by geographic boundaries but created by common values and concerns. He argued that MMP allows a more diverse range of interests to be represented in the legislature, so that voters' interests may be represented even if they did not personally vote for the MLA representing their riding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rick Smith recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: "The culture and composition of our communities is changing and our electoral system should reflect those changes."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	How would you distribute the seats in a mixed system?
A	At this time we still need to respect the need for some degree of regional representation without increasing the size of the legislature. So it might be too extreme to double the size of the ridings with 50 per cent of MLAs being elected proportionally. But if we see an increasing trend for regional communities becoming less important

	we could eventually adapt our system in that direction.
Q	Do you feel that there is more need for representation in rural areas rather than in urban areas?
A	It's a challenge because in our country we've always been a bit non-democratic and given rural areas more votes per person than other areas. But I think it's becoming less important to overcompensate in this way. I expect you'll still need to weight the vote in favour of rural districts but I don't think it should be as much as it has been.

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

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO