

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.

Jane Sterk

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I want to discuss issues of gender balance, diversity, merit and resistance as it relates to who gets involved in the political process with particular reference to women.

KEY THEMES

Jane Sterk supported a shift to an MMP electoral system with two thirds of the legislature elected in constituencies, one third reserved as compensation seats, and a five per cent electoral threshold. Drawing on her current experience as a candidate in the federal election campaign, she told the hearing that she is convinced that the current electoral system is dysfunctional and cannot be made effective under any circumstance. She argued that the system perpetuates adversarial behaviour and four to five year cycles characterized by broken promises followed by spending sprees just prior to the next election. She criticized the prevalence of artificial election majorities, strategic voting, widespread disaffection, and the increasing power of special interests and multinational corporations under the current electoral system and argued that voting system reform is the first step to improve the political system.

Dr Sterk argued that the membership of the legislature should mirror the population at large, and comprise 50 per cent female MLAs, representatives of ethnic minorities in proportion to the population, and MLAs of a range of ages. She predicted that a gender balanced legislature would result in more civility and collaboration. She depicted the current electoral system as preventing equal representation of women by requiring candidates to behave adversarially, which makes a political career unattractive to women, and described the difficulties that female candidates face raising election funds and getting elected under the current system. She opposed any suggestion that MLAs in a mixed system should only be eligible for ministerial portfolios if they are elected in constituencies, as most women in PR systems are elected from party lists. Dr Sterk argued that while more women are elected under proportional electoral systems, they remain underrepresented in most legislatures. Therefore electoral reform is a vital first step on the path to change, but is not sufficient to change the problems with the current political system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Jane Sterk recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: “We must find a system that is more conducive to participation by increasing numbers of women.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	You mention women as being 50 per cent of the population when surely they are 52 per cent?
A	You're right, but 50 per cent would be a fantastic start!

Comment from panel:

"I just want to make it clear that despite the 50-50 split in the Assembly, we're not divided in our decision making process between men and women."

"You're right that our mandate is limited, but I think that there's a feeling that we may also make a couple of additional recommendations in our report. And I think down the road you'll also see other things being dealt with by citizens' assemblies."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	With MMP, it sounds like it would be two thirds FPP and one third elected by the party. It doesn't sound like much voter choice to me.
A	Bryan Schwartz proposed 10-15 per cent, and there seems to be a general antipathy in the province to a 50-50 split. I am sure that the committee will consider a balance that they consider to be reasonable.
Q	If you recommend one third of MLAs to be elected from party lists, then the ridings would need to be 50 per cent bigger. Do you think there's any problem with that?
A	Well I'm currently running in a federal riding which is huge, and the provincial ridings are a lot smaller. I'm currently pursuing ways to get more citizens involved in decision making within the riding, in a similar model to the Citizens' Assembly model, and that could get the grassroots involved in advising the MLA.
Q	One of the things that I like about the Citizens' Assembly is the gender balance. My question is how could you recommend that there be a gender balance in the legislature?

A	My understanding is that the Assembly can propose an electoral system but they cannot propose a method for introducing gender balance.
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Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# 0360