

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

FORT ST JOHN PUBLIC HEARING DATED
12 MAY 2004 AT THE QUALITY INN
NORTHERN GRAND

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.

Arthur Hadland

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Suggest a canton-style electoral system as in Switzerland.

KEY THEMES

Arthur Hadland argued that the agricultural community in BC has little voice under the current electoral system. He criticized the current party system for polarizing political will between two parties. He expressed opposition to strong party discipline, which silences MLAs, and to the concentration of political power among party leaders and bureaucrats rather than with the people. Mr. Hadland argued that there needs to be more power at the local level. For this reason, he advised the Assembly to consider the Swiss canton system. Each canton elects a body of seven community representatives for seven years, from which one person is chosen to represent the community in the legislature. This provides a structure for feedback between the community and the representative, and enables the representative to be recalled at any time. Mr. Hadland also noted that the Assembly's decision on the electoral system will affect future policies on funding for rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arthur Hadland recommended the introduction of a Swiss-style canton system in BC.

Quote: "We need more power at the local level so that individuals in each constituency can have more say."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	How valuable is your local MLA?
A	To respond to that I'd like to talk about this particular constituency. Our MLA has no power to bring back the resources that are generated in this community. The political system needs to be reworked to make sure those resources are directed back into the community.
Q	We are very concerned about the lack of representation of minorities, and it seems to me that a real minority in danger of

	disappearing is the rural remote minority.
A	I would challenge you to see if there's some way to counterbalance that in your choice of electoral system.
Q	In your opinion, when you exercise the right to vote, do you put the person ahead of the political party?
A	I think it's more important to have a good person who is sincere about representing constituencies. There's no point in voting for a party because they're just directed by people I've never met before. That's why I'm proposing the canton system.
Q	Do you know anything about the Irish system, where you can select candidates from within a kind of list, and there aren't any back room deals?
A	No, but I think it's important that any system we adopt is modified to suit the needs of the Interior and North of the province. I think we need to have a stronger voice within the legislature.

Comment from panel:

“Thank you for bringing up the canton system, we are very concerned with how to make MLAs more accountable to local community.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	I've done a little bit of looking around on political systems, and I like your idea of the Swiss system. Whenever we elect anyone, we always hear that they've been swallowed up by the political system. They leave here with the best of intentions, and then the party swallows them up. In Switzerland, do you know how they deal with the opposite problem? How does a system with no political parties organize it so that anything gets done?
A	I think a way to do that is for the leader of the assembly to be elected by the members on the floor. I imagine in Switzerland you have your factions and they deal and negotiate to get things done.

Comment from panel:

“We should point out again, that we can only deal with this issue within the boundaries of the Westminster parliamentary system.”

SUBMISSION: NO