

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

KELOWNA PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 24 JUNE 2004
AT THE COAST CAPRI HOTEL

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.

Devra Rice

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I would like to encourage a change in our electoral system to a mixed member proportional system and discuss some benefits of proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Rice expressed her support for MMP in order to provide representation to the diversity of voices present in BC. The presenter argued that we have outgrown the current FPTP system which is dominated by two major parties and excludes the views of minor parties. In addition, Ms. Rice stated that the current system foster adversarial politics which leads to voter apathy and alienation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Rice recommended the introduction of a system of proportional representation, such as MMP. According to Ms. Rice proportionality is essential to give us better representation and to avoid the “winner-take-all” effect of our current system, and the perception of wasted votes. Under PR, Ms. Rice argued that the quality of debate in the legislature would be enhanced and the wild swings in policy characteristic of BC would be moderated as a result of the need for parties to cooperate in order to pass legislation. The presenter argued that MMP offers an excellent compromise as it allows citizens to vote for both their preferred local candidate and a party that represents their views. According to Ms. Rice, MMP provides the best of PR and FPTP while remaining straightforward enough to avoid confusion. In addition, the presenter argued that MMP still allows independents to run for local constituency seats. Ms. Rice supported the use of a closed party list for MLAs elected proportionally as long as the selection of such members was performed in a democratic manner. Finally, the presenter argued that the introduction of MMP would temper strategic voting and moderate adversarial politics.

Quote: Recent election results not only in BC but across Canada have demonstrated that the “first past the post” system is not giving us the results that we want, no matter where we are on the political spectrum.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Many citizens in countries where MMP has been recently introduced have expressed dislike for the idea that the party will determine who is on the list. Does that bother you?

A You know more than I do, as you have had a chance to study more of the details than I have. That is a concern, and I think I would refer that back to the Assembly. If there is a better way to deal with the party list then I would be happy to support that as long as it is not too complicated. I like the closed list as it appears to be straight forward and promotes the fielding of a balanced slate of candidates. I think if you have a party vote and then a ranking of candidates within that, it seems as if it would become quite chaotic. So if there was a way to compromise by keeping the system straight forward, but also making the people happier with the selection of the list, I would be open to that.

Q Do you have any suggestions as to how we would alter the ridings under your system of MMP?

A Perhaps two thirds geographic constituencies and one-third party list seats, if that works out mathematically in terms of how few list seats you can have and still attain proportionality. It seems to me that this split would make the ridings a little bigger but not so big that people would have to drive for three days to find their MLA.

Q Realistically, in order to attain proportionality, we would need to allocate 50% of the seats as PR list seats. This would necessitate doubling the size of constituencies; do you see this as problematic?

A The districts are not the only factor. It is important for people to have a local representative but at the same time that local representative may only be supported by 40% of the people. Even if you made the ridings very small you would only have 50% of people at most supporting the candidate. A local person does not necessarily give you the

representation you're looking for. The list MLAs are still people you can go to so perhaps there could be a requirement that list members locate their offices throughout the province to bring them closer to people who do not have a constituency representative close to them. The list members may have a different type of constituency, for example, a particular ethnic groups and citizens may feel more comfortable going to that representative regardless of their geographical locale. As long as the list members end up spread out through the province then I feel that the system would work.