

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.

Rae Stonehouse

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Personal observations regarding BC politics and a reiteration of the recommendations forwarded by the BCNU.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Stonehouse expressed his concern with the state of democracy in British Columbia. The presenter discussed the problems of low voter turnout, and strategic and negative voting under FPTP. In addition Mr. Stonehouse argued that FPTP has led to the exclusion of women, aboriginal, minorities, and the poor in politics. The presenter expressed the opinion that citizens are fed up with confrontational politics which result in policies and laws that do not represent a broad consensus of opinion. Mr. Stonehouse stated that FPTP fosters wild swings in policy as a result of the “winner take all” nature of the system which enables ideologically driven political agendas to be implemented with little accountability between elections. The presenter argued that this may not be the case if reform enabled the election of effective and representative oppositions. According to Mr. Stonehouse, the diversification of the legislature under proportional representation would mean that governments would be held to account between elections and debate on critical issues would be comprehensive and respectful as parties and legislators would have to learn to work together more effectively. In addition, the absence of “false majorities” would allow well constructed dialogue and timely implementation of policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Stonehouse supported the recommendation included in the formal submission to the Citizens’ Assembly by the BC Nurses Union:

1. That the Citizens’ Assembly rejects the current model of electing Members of the Legislative Assembly used in British Columbia.
2. That the Citizens’ Assembly brings forward the concept of proportional representation as the center piece of proposed electoral reform in British Columbia.
3. That in depth consideration be given to the usage of a mixed member proportional system of PR that could be used in the province of British Columbia.
4. That the Citizens’ Assembly engages the public in a review of possible MMP systems that could be used in British Columbia.

5. That the Citizens' Assembly recommends the adoption of a reasonable threshold of about 4 or 5% of the vote to secure representation.
6. That the Citizens' Assembly recommends a fixed number of MLA seats.
7. That the Citizens' Assembly recommends a 50% plus 1, or a simple majority, be the measure utilized in the question regarding electoral reform that is brought forward to British Columbians.

Quote: The current "first past the post" system of voting contributes to the under-representation of women and minorities amongst democratic countries. The lack of balance in perspective and experience in our elections and legislatures inevitably contributes to policies and initiatives that do not truly reflect the full diversity of our society.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Could you clarify what you mean by "engage the public" in recommendation four?

A Prior to this afternoon, I would put myself in the category of those people who really didn't know a heck of a lot about the political system in BC. As I outlined in my presentation, I was very frustrated. I went to your website and I educated myself as best as possible and agreed to make a presentation on behalf of the BCNU. But I wasn't going to take a presentation that I didn't agree with. Once I studied it, I agreed with it. What they are recommending from the BCNU standpoint is that the Assembly continues with an expanded mandate to elaborate what its "made in BC" system would include.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q What is the "reasonable threshold" recommended by the BCNU?

A It seems to be 5%. I have seen thresholds ranging from 4 to 7%, but 5% does seem to be the standard

number. My understanding is that, while it doesn't seem like a large number, when you are putting together a political party it is quite a task to get 5% of the voters to follow your beliefs. So 5% is what we are supporting.