

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.

Patty Weston

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

My perceptions of the drawbacks of the current system and my reasons for wanting change.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Weston argued that the outdated nature of our current FPTP electoral system is responsible for much voter disenchantment. According to Ms. Weston, FPTP does not promote the election of MLAs that represent the people of BC, nor does it enable the reflection of BC's pluralist society. The presenter stated that the current electoral system does not utilize the intelligence, ideas, and ideals of many British Columbian. Instead, FPTP leads to strategic voting, a practice which does not reflect the will of the people. Ms. Weston argued that the current electoral system promotes reactive voting which destabilizes the province and leads to wasted tax dollars and inefficient governments as a result of wild swings in policy. The presenter noted that FPTP limits diversity in representation and consequently the depth and breadth of discussion in the legislature. In addition, the system forces voters to choose between excellent local candidates and viable parties. Finally, Ms. Weston stated that FPTP compromises accountability as a result of the production of exaggerated majorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Weston advocated the introduction of MMP in order to create a system that is fairer, more inclusive, and cooperative. According to Ms. Weston, MMP will remedy many of the problems present under FPTP. Ms. Weston stated numerous advantages of MMP including: the proportional translation of votes cast in the electorate into seats won in the legislature; the promotion of sincere rather than strategic voting; and the opportunity it provides to vote for both the most desirable local candidate and the party that best expresses their values. The presenter argued that the introduction of MMP would help minor and emerging parties to gain representation, in turn creating a more representative and diverse legislative assembly. According to Ms. Weston, the creation of a diverse legislature would enhance the quality of governmental decisions. In addition, MMP would facilitate a move away from adversarial politics and promote a more cooperative, collaborative, and harmonious environment. The presenter contended that this would attract more women to politics. Ms. Weston stated that MMP would provide greater stability and reduce the cost of government as the swings in policy from election to election would be moderated. Finally, Ms. Weston argued that MMP will revitalize the civil service which will improve the deliver of services to British Columbians.

Quote: The “first past the post” system leads to strategic voting which is inherently depressing, negative and fear based. It does not reflect the popular vote.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q In New Zealand many citizens split their votes between a major party at the local level and a minor party at the party list level thereby maximizing the seats gained by both. Do you consider that to be strategic voting?

A I would consider that positive strategic voting rather than the negative strategic voting that we practice in this province. It is a whole different thing to be able to vote for an excellent person to represent my riding as well as a party that represents my values.

Q You argue that MMP produces a move away from adversarial politics, but there is a concern that under MMP much of the debate moves behind closed doors. Is that something that you see that we could control, or does that concern you?

A I think the back-room deal factor is an old male paradigm that has had its time. I believe that if there are more women involved then the system will become more collaborative and in these systems around the world there are more women involved. We need to recognize that a good idea is a good idea and it doesn't matter where it comes from. We need to be more collaborative and hold that as a value.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Would you consider an open list?

A I understand that closed lists are more efficient as long as parties are required to choose the party list

candidates in an open, fair, and democratic manner.

Q The argument against PR is that it doesn't lead to good results, but you have argued that it does lead to good results, what do you mean by "good results"?

A I believe that if a party gets 42% of the vote then they should receive approximately 42% of the seats. The last election produced a grossly exaggerated majority which is not very democratic. Good results to me means that people are positive and that they are engaged in the democratic process. All of us in Canada need to be more involved in the democratic process.

SUBMISSION: YES SUBMISSION ID# 0236