

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

NELSON PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 11 MAY 2004
AT THE PRESTIGE LAKESIDE RESORT

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.

Colleen McCrory

Nelson/Creston Green Party

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation on mixed member proportional (MMP) representation and relevant reforms.

KEY THEMES

Ms. McCrory discussed the flaws of the current FPTP electoral system including declining voter turnout and registration, and increasing voter apathy and alienation particularly among youth. The presenter went on to note the tendency of the current system to produce exaggerated majorities and to deny the representation of minor parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. McCrory recommended the adoption of MMP in order to produce a more balanced legislature, to encourage policy debate, to temper the dominance of the executive, to increase the likelihood of minority governments, and to reinvigorate participation in the political process. Under this proposal two-thirds of seats would remain constituency seats, and one-third would be allocated to party lists. Citizens would have two votes, one for the local riding representative and one for the party list. Political parties would be required by law to construct their party lists in a manner that gives every party member a voice in the selection process that must be filed with Elections BC prior to the election. This should enable the representation of traditionally marginalized groups in the legislature.

Quote: There is a feeling in rural BC that we are not being represented. We need to revamp the political system to give representation to all the people of the province.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q Two often stated concerns regarding MMP are the election of list members and the prospect of slow moving minority/coalition government; do you see these as significant problems?
- A Right now I think that we could use a little slow down in decision making. In terms of the party list, the parties would have to be accountable for the

construction of their lists. In New Zealand your lists reflect the issues that the parties feel are important, so each party will probably have a different set of priorities but you do see more minorities and women represented. We have a very male dominated system here and MMP appears a fair system to encourage change.

Q What makes those twenty six list MLAs accountable to anyone?

A They are accountable to the public. They are MLAs just as your riding MLAs are MLAs. They are there to represent you just like anyone else.

Q In countries that do use PR systems the young people have not really returned to voting, what do you think about that?

A As a person involved in politics one of the most important factors, at least in the Green Party, would be to get youth issues represented through party lists so I think that you would see the youth coming into the process that way.

Q How do you see MMP improving the problem of divisive party politics, party discipline?

A If you have three or four parties in the house (assuming that they reached the 5% threshold) you would have more opposition, and with more representation, governments would be forced to have a lot more discussion in the legislature. It would encourage consensus politics.

Q Do you have arguments against STV that would make it an unacceptable choice for BC?

A I didn't like that system as I thought it was very complicated. It's a nightmare to sort out the counting process.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

- Q Would it be worthwhile enlarging the ridings and detracting from the contact of MLA's with constituents, wouldn't it be better to add twenty-six members?
- A The public are so turned off of increasing the money spent on government that expanding parliament is not really an option. MLAs may have to travel more but they could stay connected with their constituents.