PRESENTATION SUMMARY

NORTH VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 2 JUNE 2004
AT THE LONSDALE QUAY 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.

Rockridge Secondary School students

Grade 11 and 12 Rockridge students present their recommendations from the school's Model Citizens' Assembly.

Grade 11 and 12 student of Rockridge discussed the process of learning about electoral systems while undertaking a mock "citizens' assembly".

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenters recommended the adoption of MMP. Under the proposed system 50% of seats would be elected via a PR list and the remaining 50% would be elected on the basis of single member districts using the alternative vote. A threshold of 5% would be required for parties to qualify for representation in the legislature. According to the students, such a system would allow for the entrance of new parties while precluding the representation of radical parties.

The students argued that dividing the government between proportionally elected MLAs and local members provided a number of advantages including: the provision of effective opposition within the legislature and the avoidance of exaggerated majorities; and the protection of local representation while introducing a number of members who may focus on the concerns of the entire province.

The current FPTP system was rejected as a suitable model by the students as they felt that the system poorly reflected the popular vote and did not give smaller parties an opportunity to be represented. Similarly, they decided against a full PR list as used in Israel as a result of the lack of geographical representation that it provides. MMP was viewed as providing the perfect balance between proportionality and local representation. The students also discussed the possibility of introducing mandatory voting. This was largely opposed, however, as not voting was argued to constitute a legitimate form of democratic protest.

The students discussed the problem of youth voter turnout, and devised several solutions including the introduction of:
1. MMP in order to help solve the perceived problem of wasted votes;
2. A more substantial effort in secondary schools regarding voting, including education on party platforms and policies;
3. Election fairs, in which parties can present their candidates, explain their policies, and discuss their platforms;
4. The active pursuit of youth on the part of political parties by targeting youth

oriented issues such as the subsidy of university fees, in order to engage youth in the political process.

Q   Were you talking about open or closed lists?

A   We felt that regional representation was important, and we thought that a list system may also be important as it would enable the greater representation of small parties within the legislature.

Q   How do you see MMP encouraging voters, not only first time voters, but in terms of keeping voters engaged?

A   There is no guarantee that youth are going to become involved just because the system changes. There is simply not enough education in schools.

Q   Why did you choose the majority preferential system for the constituencies?

A   We chose that mainly because we liked the idea of people ranking their preferences more than just putting an 'X' beside someone's name. Especially in a tight election, a preferential vote may be fairer. We felt that an important issue for youth was to see that their votes counted toward the election of a candidate. This is more likely to happen when you can rank your choices rather than simply choosing one person.

Q   How many additional people do you think you would need to enable the system to have both local representation and proportionality?

A   Some governments may double the seats. We never discussed the point of how many MLAs we would

need. We may combine similar ridings and then introduce the PR members so that the split between local and list members would be 50-50 without having to increase the number of seats in the legislature.

Q   We know that many youth aren't even registered in the demographic you are talking about, but in your experience what would changing the electoral system actually do?

A   I think an important factor would be the amount of education that is given to students about the different systems. We are trying to show youth that their vote will actually count rather than being overruled by a larger party. So the only way that electoral change may alter youth behavior is by being paired with a system of education.