

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PENTICTON PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 23 JUNE 2004
AT PENTICTON 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.

Kevin Barry

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation in support of the official BC Nurses Union submission.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Barry expressed his support for the position of BC Nurses Union. The presenter stated his frustration with the current FPTP system as a result of its production of wrong winners and artificial and exaggerated majorities both federally and provincially. Mr. Barry argued that the operation of the current system has created problems of accountability. Furthermore, the presenter discussed the damaging effect that adversarial politics has on the political system in British Columbia in terms of weakening debate in the legislature and producing wild swings in government policy. Mr. Barry argued that the current “winner-take all” system leads to the under-representation of women and minorities. According to the presenter, for democracy to be effective it must be inclusive. In addition, to encourage the engagement of youth, and traditionally marginalized groups, the broad representation of society within the legislature is essential. Mr. Barry stated that the introduction of proportionality would produce a more inclusive legislature, allow a more diverse range of voices to be heard, and enhance the accountability of MLA’s to constituents between elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Barry recommended the introduction of proportional representation in order to increase voter turnout, enhance minority representation, and to produce balanced governments and consensus based legislating. The presenter advocated the introduction of a system of MMP modeled upon the New Zealand example as it provides for good local representation while allowing a vote for the party of choice and enabling the proportional translation of votes into seats. Mr. Barry offered his support for the following recommendations of the BC Nurses Union:

1. The Citizens’ Assembly rejects the current FPTP electoral system, and instead strive to be more inclusive and provide for a more consensual style of government.
2. The introduction of a form of proportional representation as the centre piece of electoral reform in British Columbia.
3. The Citizens’ Assembly thinks critically about the MMP model of representation for 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 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.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Does the Nurses Union support a certain type of list under MMP, open or closed?

A I think we fall into line with the report from the Law Commission of Canada which argues for as much flexibility in the list as possible. We don't claim to be experts about electoral systems and are happy to turn that over to people that know more than we do.

Q Do you think having seats set aside for indigenous groups is a good idea, as is done in New Zealand?

A I think that is a great idea, certainly for our Aboriginal people that is something that should be considered. They do make up a large portion of our electorate and they are not very involved in our electoral process at the current time so one would hope that if we had some seats set aside for them that they would become more interested in the electoral process.

Q Introducing MMP would necessitate increasing the size of ridings, particularly in the North. Do you have any opinions regarding how to deal with those geographically large ridings in the North?

A I'm sure there would be concerns over representation, it already exists under the current system, but the ridings are large enough right now that people from one end of the riding to the other don't feel that they are being represented. The urban areas in rural ridings tend to be the focus of the district and the rural areas don't seem to have much say in what direction the riding takes. It would be a larger riding but I think that you've got to give something to gain something and by going to MMP, under which you get two votes, I believe that you

would gain more than you lose.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q What are the advantages of an open as opposed to a closed list?

A I like the advantage of an open list system as it allows voters to arrange the candidates as they like. I think that allows for a much more democratic process. A closed list enables the party hierarchy to rank candidates as they see fit, and they are going to make sure that the people they want will be placed at the top of the list and get into the legislature. Open lists would make citizens get more involved to find out who party candidates are and what they stand for, and the more people that get interested the more likely we are to get representative government.