

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PORT ALBERNI PUBLIC HEARING DATED
9 JUNE 2004 AT HANSEN HALL

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.

Scott Fraser

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I will speak in favour of the provincial Citizens' Assembly process and why such a process should be adopted nationally.

KEY THEMES

Scott Fraser introduced himself as a candidate running in the federal election. He argued in favour of changing the current provincial electoral system to a form of proportional representation (PR). He explained that the First Past the Post (FPP) system is only appropriate for a two party system but that BC now has a number of parties with support in the electorate. Mr Fraser argued that the disproportionality of election outcomes under FPP has led to declining voter turnout because people have a sense that their votes do not count. He suggested that PR would better deal with issues in rural communities because at the moment rural people feel that their voices are not heard. Mr Fraser predicted that PR may increase the likelihood of minority governments with a more collaborative approach to politics that aim to reach consensus. Although decisions may take longer, he argued that they will be better and reflect the views of a wider range of people. Mr Fraser emphasized that voter turnout is declining and that British Columbia need a system that will engage and encourage citizens. He also suggested that we need to consider our commitment to First Nations and proposed the introduction of reserved seats for First Nations representatives, however he felt it was important that any proposal regarding aboriginal representation come from the First Nations themselves. Mr Fraser argued that women and minority groups feel disenfranchised under the current electoral system. He told the hearing that most democracies in the world already use PR systems and that PR can be adapted to suit the political culture, for example by retaining local representation, or including a preferential ballot to allow voters to cross party lines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scott Fraser recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

He also recommended that there be direct negotiation between the province and First Nations to determine role of First Nations in a proportional system.

Quote: "It is critical to our future that we find a system where everyone can have a say."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were two members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	When you talk about MMP, how much proportionality are you looking for, 30 per cent, 25 per cent?
A	I look for direction from the Assembly on that.

Q	To go to a proportional system this would require enlarging the constituencies in order to achieve that, what do you think about that?
A	I like the idea of MMP, but as I travel my riding I'm aware of how daunting the distances are and how difficult it is for candidates to get their message out. Other than that I don't have a problem of expanding the boundaries.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	My question is to the panel. I would like to see a stop to changing the electoral boundaries for political advantage. How would you ensure that with PR every riding would be represented?
A	I understand your concern, but I understand that boundaries are currently determined on the basis of population. (Facilitator) Boundary drawing is not a concern of the Citizens' Assembly. You should know that since the 1980s the boundaries have been drawn by an Electoral Commission.
Q	Have you encountered any disadvantages to PR?
A	I'm not aware of any, but I do see that there are some disadvantages for the larger parties who may see their majorities reduced!
Q	If everyone knows about proportional representation, then why are we wasting so many tax payer dollars to find out about electoral systems?
A	I'm certainly no expert on the different types of proportional representation. In our system there is a natural resistance to any sort of change, because the system we have now is comfortable and we're used to it.

Q	My question is for the panel. You mentioned you were considering making the ridings bigger, and how much more difficult would it make it for the MLA to represent the riding?
A	(Panel member) When you go to a proportional system you need to have some way to make sure that the seats are distributed in a proportional way. We're not allowed to increase the number of seats, so the only way you could achieve that is to bring together constituencies in order to create those extra seats to top up and make it proportional.

Comment: “One of the benefits of proportional representation seems to be that you have more women elected.”

“Somebody asked about the disadvantages of proportional representation, and I think the real disadvantage is that we don't know who will be representing us because the parties decide on who gets to be elected.”

“My understanding is that in some forms of proportional representation you can also have local representation, so you would still elect someone in a local constituency.”

SUBMISSION: NO