

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PORT MCNEILL PUBLIC HEARING DATED
25 MAY 2004 AT THE HAIDA WAY
MOTOR INN

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.

Catherine Bell

New Democratic Party

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I believe we should change the system.

KEY THEMES

Catherine Bell explained that the New Democratic Party of Canada is the only national party on the record in the House of Commons as supporting electoral reform, having introduced a motion in favour of proportional representation in September 2003. The NDP's non-negotiable condition for participation in a federal minority government is a referendum on electoral reform. Ms Bell criticised the false majorities created by the FPP electoral system in recent federal and provincial elections. She argued that without proportional representation, our votes are not reflected in either the federal or provincial governments. Ms Bell also attributed political cynicism, alienation and declining voter turnout to the FPP electoral system. She pointed to a number of federations that currently use PR electoral systems and argued that every industrialised democracy in the world has adopted a form of PR at some level of their political system except Canada and the United States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Catherine Bell recommended that a proportional representation electoral system be introduced in BC.

Quote: "Simply put PR would elect a Parliament that reflects Canadians' views and the choices they make at the ballot box."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Do you want to vote for a candidate, a party, or both? The reason I ask is for the purposes of ballot construction, where there can be separate votes for a candidate and a party.
A	The NDP advocates for a MMP system and personally, I would prefer to be able to vote for a candidate and a party.

Q	How important is it, do you think, to maintain local representation?
A	Absolutely vital. You hear from the people in the Interior the phrase that there's no hope beyond Hope. People also refer to the northern part of this island as 'no man's land' but obviously there are a lot of us up here and we need to have a voice.
Q	Do you think that we need to have some form of electoral threshold?
A	I think if we're looking percentage-wise, whether a party gets one per cent or five per cent, the people who have voted for them should have some representation for their views. I'm conscious that your mandate means that you cannot increase the number of seats in the legislature, and it's difficult to give a party who gets one per cent of the vote one per cent of 79 seats, so I am aware that you're constrained by that.
Q	The limitation in our mandate on increasing the number of seats means that if we have a mixed system we will potentially have to make some ridings larger. How do you feel about that?
A	I think they're already large, so my preference would be to increase the number of seats. I know you're restricted but you could make a recommendation in your report that there needs to be more seats.
Q	How do you feel about coalition governments?
A	I think we've seen around the world that some coalitions work very effectively and some don't. I think if the will of the people is to make it work then it can work.
Q	As a politician, do you represent me as a voter or do you represent your party?
A	Once I'm elected I represent all of the voters in my constituency, as well as the people of Canada.

Comment from panel: There were no further comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	The system that you mentioned with two votes, were you referring to the system that we had in the 1950s?
A	(Answered by facilitator) No, that was a preferential system where you could rank the candidates first, second and third, not a proportional system with a separate vote for the party and the candidate.
Q	If you're in favour of complete proportionality, where a party gets one per cent of the votes gets one per cent of the seats, surely that sort of system would be unworkable?
A	There are so many models of proportional representation. I know that the people of BC are looking for better representation and need to hear their voices heard, especially young people in the province. I'm not advocating one form of proportional representation over another.

Comment: There were no further comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO