

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

POWELL RIVER PUBLIC HEARING DATED
15 MAY 2004 AT THE CEDAR ROOM, POWELL
RIVER RECREATION CENTRE

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.

Patrick Brabazon

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Electoral reform is required if we are to avoid the severe political and ideological swings of past elections.

KEY THEMES

Patrick Brabazon argued that the two key issues to be addressed by a new electoral system are disproportionality, as demonstrated by the distorted electoral outcomes that have occurred under FPP over the past 100 years, and the disparity of the value of the vote due to the wide range of population in BC's various electoral districts. He proposed the use of a Single Transferable Vote system, using a preferential ballot and multi-member constituencies. He explained that the number of MLAs per constituency would vary in order to approximate as closely as possible the value of votes having equal weight. Mr Brabazon argued that an STV system would allow voters to vote for candidates across different parties, improve the representation of minor parties, and result in the election of candidates who more closely reflect the political preferences of the riding. He advised the Assembly against the introduction of a closed list PR system because it would reduce the direct influence of the voter by restricting the voter's choice to a slate selected by a party's power bloc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Patrick Brabazon made the following recommendations.

- “Scrap the first-past-the-post ballot.
- Replace the current 79 single-member constituencies with a smaller range of multi-member constituencies.
- The geographic size of each constituency would vary in order to accommodate the geographic reality of our difficult terrain and wide disparities in population density.
- The number of MLAs per constituency would vary in order to approximate as closely as possible the value of votes having equal weight, i.e the ratio of voters to MLA is similar throughout the province.
- Within each constituency elect the MLAs by a single transferable vote method of balloting.”

Quote: “I believe that a combination of multi-member constituencies and MLAs chosen by a transferable vote would go far to correct the inadequacies of our present system.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

One member of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	We're interested in understanding how people in rural
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	districts would feel about larger ridings.
A	People in rural districts feel a bit lost at the best of times, and this is not that big a riding. With multimember districts there would be incentives to spread candidates around the riding. In larger ridings we would also need to increase the number of staff in the riding and utilize modern technology for communication around the riding.

Comment from panel “Our mandate does not permit us to increase the number of seats.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	How many constituencies should there be under this system and how many members per constituency?
A	You could vary the size and number of members per constituency to suit the various regions of the province.
Q	My understanding is that you need at least 5 or 6 members in each constituency to give minor parties a chance of being elected.
A	Even with smaller numbers you would have some element of proportionality.
Q	Doesn't the transfer of that vote disconnect the voter from the vote?
A	I strongly recommend that you look at the website in South Australia. I mark my ballot in order of precedence, but if my number one choice was not elected then you go and look at my second or third choice. Say I really wanted the Communist candidate and he wasn't elected, then maybe I'd end up with a socialist candidate or at least a left candidate, with whom I'd feel more comfortable. Presumably I'd be voting in same political range.

Comment: There were no further comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO