

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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QUEEN CHARLOTTE CITY PUBLIC HEARING  
DATED 12 JUNE 2004  
AT THE SKIDEGATE COMMUNITY 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](http://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.

# Gerald Johnson

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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A presentation discussing reform to the current political system in order to combat voter apathy and mistrust.

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## KEY THEMES

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Mr. Johnson discussed his experience in local municipal politics which provides the grounding for his views regarding the necessary reforms for the federal and provincial political systems. According to Mr. Johnson, the current multiparty, partisan political system fails to meet the needs of a free, socially dynamic, educated, and multicultural society. The presenter stated the opinion that the current system is outdated and the fact that it is failing society is reflected in declining levels of political trust. Mr. Johnson discussed a number of perceived shortcomings with the current FPTP system including:

1. The tendency of the system to consolidate and interpret the electorate's intentions through the winning political party and to a lesser extent the official opposition, and further, through the caucus and the leader.
2. Its promotion of party discipline at the expense of local representation.
3. The need it generates for large sums of money to fund a successful campaign often requiring the active solicitation of corporations and groups with vested interests who expect to be favoured when public policy decisions are made.
4. The ability of large vested interests to pay employees and lobbyists to develop individual contacts within the ministries that may enable them to influence political decisions in their favour.
5. The consolidation of power into the hands of fewer and fewer representatives makes it easier to affect differing degrees of control over the policy-makers by a few economically powerful organizations.
6. The existence of an increasing disparity between the large urban areas and outlying smaller communities. The premise of one-person one-vote promotes and maintains a colonial political system, favouring the large population centres in many cases to the detriment of the more remote communities.
7. The paramount objective of political parties is to win elections rather than represent a multicultural constituency which promotes the marginalization of women and non-white racial groups from the political decision-making process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Johnson recommended that:

1. The federal and provincial governments supply the funds for all campaigns. Donations from private and/or public corporations or individuals to a campaign fund will be illegal.
2. Municipal councils and regional district boards nominate one individual each to run for election to represent their particular regional district in the legislative assembly. Region wide campaigns and subsequent election will determine the representative.
3. The elected MLA or MP for each regional district will not be affiliated with a particular political party. In fact, political parties will not be needed.
4. The newly formed legislative assembly will elect from within its members a cabinet and chairperson (premier/prime minister). Competency to hold a particular cabinet position will be the prime criteria used when electing these members.
5. Cabinet members will report directly to the legislative assembly and they will serve at its pleasure. Their performance will be formally monitored quarterly. Their success will be based on the overall non-partisan performance of their duties as related to the policies and requirements of the legislative assembly.
6. All lobbying of cabinet positions will be recorded and be made available to the members of the legislative assembly as soon as practical.
7. All votes of the legislative assembly will be recorded showing each members vote.
8. Constituency offices will be funded and situated to allow for constituent face-to-face contact with an MLA or MP's representative within a maximum of one-hour travel for a constituent.
9. Elected representatives should serve five year terms.
10. At the federal level the Senate would not be required.

*Quote: Increasing electoral apathy is due to a system that disenfranchises the individual by consolidating the decision-making powers of the many into the self-serving hands of the few ...the maintenance of the status quo will only ensure that this apathy and lack of respect for our political system will continue.*

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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Q Do you see a limit to the size of government, given that you are advocating an MLA with a number of different offices?

A Your MLA or MP should be within one hour of travel to all constituents. I have just proposed a framework for consideration. I will leave the nuts and bolts up to the Assembly. I certainly don't want thousands of members.

Q How would the system function with municipalities making nominations rather than parties, isn't this likely to lead to people trying to control municipalities?

A To attempt to control all the different individuals in a municipality would be tough to do. In the present party system the leader and the caucus has control and the leader often dictates the way the member votes regardless of the views of the constituents. Backbenchers with few resources are at the mercy of the leader's wishes.

Q This system may produce many candidates for election and it may be the case that minority groups may be able to mobilize and control who gets the nomination. How is this system going to make it less likely for people to be able to get together and control the agenda?

A The nitty-gritty of the election is for you to figure out. You are never going to stop individuals getting together, both inside and outside the legislature, and that's fine as long as it is done on a one-by-one basis rather than being controlled by parties.

Q Who is going to monitor the performance of the cabinet ministers?

A The legislative assembly. Right now they don't have to report to anybody as long as they keep the prime minister or the premier happy. Under this system they would be beholden to the legislative assembly.

Q How representative do you think your MLA would be if they have to cover a large district here that contains such diverse industries?

A Somewhere along the line you have to consolidate the representative from the municipal regions and only one of them is going to get elected, and sometimes Haida Gwaii is not going to get a representative that agrees with our issues, but sometimes we will. There are also other ways of affecting political change besides the election of MP's or MLA's.

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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Q I am concerned that eliminating political parties wouldn't let people get their voices heard. How can a group of people who are in the minority get representation under a system that is not proportional?

A I'm not against proportionality, but I am against corrupting the system of representation. This system provides an opportunity to get all those views out as people need not be "Green" on every issue or "NDP" on every issue. Without political parties you are able to stand in front of the constituents for what you believe in on every topic.

Q It sounds to me that each region or district would only nominate one candidate but that doesn't give the voters much choice. What is your opinion on that?

A The way I envisage it, once you are elected to a municipal council then you are able to put your hat in the ring and be considered for election. It is a filter as you have already been elected on the basis of who you are and what you stand for. I wouldn't restrict it to just one person from each regional district. The reason I like the regional districts is that they are drawn along the lines of economic and cultural homogeneity.

Q How do you deal with the disproportionality between regions that this would create?

A If you do it by regional district then this region would end up with a little more power than someone voting in the lower mainland. How you deal with that is beyond me. You could do it proportionally but then you get Vancouver running the province.

Q If in theory political parties come together on the grounds of common values and issues, how long do you think it would take before you have a series of political parties emerging in the legislature?

A It depends on the issues. Party members often disagree over issues. I don't think they have to worry about that if they represent their constituencies and if they find other members who share their views then that's great.