

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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QUESNEL PUBLIC HEARING DATED  
11 MAY 2004 AT THE SANDMAN 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](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.

# Peter Ewart

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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A fundamental issue in our society is: who has sovereign power, from whom does all power flow? In a truly democratic society, all power flows from the people and the electoral processes must reflect this concept in every way. This should be an important, indeed crucial, guiding principal in any decision we make as electors regarding which electoral reforms are most appropriate.

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## KEY THEMES

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Peter Ewart argued that the state apparatus is controlled by the most powerful political and economic forces in society, leading to the alienation of an increasingly disenfranchised population. He argued that sovereign power should reside in the people, rather than in the institutions of government. Mr Ewart commended the establishment of the Citizens' Assembly as mechanism for popular participation in the political process, despite the limits imposed by the Assembly's mandate. He argued that choosing an appropriate electoral system for BC is only the first step in the process to give citizens ongoing mechanisms for participation. Mr Ewart suggested that a permanent Citizens' Assembly be established to address a range of issues including the constitution, election finance and candidate selection. He also advised that the Assembly needs to monitor any new electoral system to assess whether adjustments are needed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Peter Ewart recommended that the selection of the most appropriate electoral model for BC reflect the principle that political power derives from the citizenry

He also recommended that the Assembly's final report include a recommendation that the Assembly or a similar body be permanently convened in province.

*Quote: "There must be recognition by the government that the people are the source of all power and authority in the province."*

*"Now the genie is out of the bottle, let us as citizens ensure that it stays out."*

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## QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Are you suggesting that there should be a parallel system with both a legislature and a parallel citizens' assembly?
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A	Yes, so there be a mechanism for ordinary citizens to investigate and review the political process. This mechanism should be ongoing. Otherwise, if you want to change the political system then you're whistling in the wind. We need a mechanism for ordinary people to hold the politicians and state officials accountable. It's about balancing out the power.
Q	Unfortunately our scope is very limited. I'm wondering if we could achieve some of those objectives through a change in the electoral system. If we had more diverse representation within the legislature would this help to address these issues?
A	I think the jury is already in on the electoral system, that we need to get rid of the current system. But I don't think that PR will solve all of our current problems, so we need to have a mechanism to make sure this is an ongoing process.
Q	You mentioned education of voters. How would this work?
A	In terms of educating voters, we need a mechanism where issues like this could be raised. Having a citizens' assembly that addresses that issue would ensure that we could go further with it. In terms of the specifics, I think that's something we need to discuss as a citizenry so it's not a decision made by someone down in Victoria.

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

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**QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

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

Q	It almost sounds like you're proposing a Senate of the people, is that a fair description?
A	I would hesitate to classify it as a Senate because it would be something new. At the moment, citizen control is too weak. This mechanism is designed to harness the creative energy of people. I think a Senate has some different features to this mechanism - it focuses on regionality for example. Whereas this assembly would be looking at the whole political process and proposing reforms.
Q	I think your suggestion of a standing citizens' assembly is intriguing. What sort of decision making process would your assembly follow?

A	It would be possible to use referendums like the current assembly. It would need further thought. The assembly itself would be able to take up that issue and put it to the electorate as a whole for voting, along with the composition and structure of the assembly.
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*Comment:* There were no further comments from the audience.

**SUBMISSION: NO**