

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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 BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

Sarah Hilbert-West

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

My thoughts on retaining sufficient and effective representation for northern/rural areas with different models of electoral reform. From past experience as political staffer/researcher and as an advocate for northern communities.

KEY THEMES

Sarah Hilbert-West spoke in support of an MMP electoral system for BC and emphasized the importance of protecting rural representation. She argued that electoral reform in BC should uphold two key principles: greater proportionality and local representation, and that an MMP electoral system fulfilled both of these criteria. Ms Hilbert-West also explained that it is vital for rural areas to have an MLA to advocate for the community when provincial resources are allocated, and to advocate for individuals within the constituency. She acknowledged that MMP would require larger ridings, but argued that this could be acceptable in rural ridings if extra funding were allocated to MLAs to open multiple offices in a large riding. In addition, parties could balance their lists to ensure a balance of candidates from urban and rural areas. For these reasons, the benefits of MMP to rural ridings outweigh the disadvantages. Ms Hilbert-West also spoke in favour of having more free votes in the legislature, and of the need to increase youth participation in the political system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sarah Hilbert-West recommended the adoption of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: "Electoral reform in BC should reflect two main principles: greater proportionality and local representation."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Do you think that people north of Hope are ready to trade off on the size of constituencies for more proportionality?
A	I do think they are if it's a MMP system, particularly if guidelines can be drawn up to ensure regional representatives on the party list. I also think there needs to be funding for MLAs to open more offices within riding.
Q	You mentioned the party lists, do you think people are willing to have the party pick their local MLA?

A	I think people in the North like to know their representatives. It depends on which model you select. I don't think people would like a system with no constituency candidate.
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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	With a mixed system, one possibility is to have a vote for a local member and second vote for the party. There is also a possibility of incorporating a transferable vote system similar to the Irish system and combining that as well. That could be a way for voters in the north to have more selection.
A	I think it's really key that whatever system we choose is as simple as possible. I think it's damaging if the ballot gets too complicated. I like a system where a person can say this is the party I like and this is the person that I like.
Q	I agree that we must retain regional representation. But I'm also in favour of the STV system. I think it's a great idea but if we apply it to the North we would be putting together all the ridings in the North. Then of course, all of those members would have to travel huge distances. So I can see STV being applied in urban areas but not in rural areas.
A	I agree, campaigning in the north is very difficult because of the huge distances. I also think that having more constituency offices is very important.

Comment: There we no further comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO