

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.

Bob Simpson

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Any reform to the electoral process must make space for independents. There is a growing cynicism towards political parties and a trend towards independents gaining seats in government. Our future electoral system must be able to accommodate this trend.

KEY THEMES

Bob Simpson expressed concern about political cynicism and declining voter turnout among youth. He advised the assembly to consider three key issues when they consider an alternative electoral system for BC.

- 1) The party whip, the Premier's office and the Cabinet exercise extensive power under the current system, to the extent that our political system is best described as an oligarchy rather than a democracy.
- 2) The Assembly needs to be future-oriented in its deliberation, and consider the changing dynamics of the province and the potential effect of electoral system change on young people. In particular, the Assembly should address escalating disgust with political parties.
- 3) Any electoral system recommended by the Assembly should take into account the wide regional disparities in the province. For example, many areas in the province are still only equipped with party-line phone systems and do not have access to cell phones, cable television and high-speed internet access. All regions of the province need to be directly represented in the legislature.

Quote: "Only those of us who live "beyond Hope" can truly understand, and therefore represent, the interests of those of use who choose to live outside the Lower Mainland and the Island."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	I'd like to assure you that we are very concerned about the lack of youth voter turnout, and we are open to any suggestions to deal with this issue.
A	I would suggest holding a youth forum to give youth a chance to express their views to the Assembly. I also highly recommend watching the recent CBC documentary 'Screw the Vote.'

Q	Do you feel that changing the system will encourage more youth voters or do we need to do more in addition?
A	Obviously it has been a long time since I could have been classified as a youth, but from watching the documentary ‘Screw the Vote’ I understand that young people are concerned that a bunch of old white men are calling the shots, so putting more old white men in the legislature will not resolve that. Young people are also concerned about participating between elections, so looking into technology that can actually enable people to have some effect on decisions being made between elections would be great.

Comment from panel: I would also like to add that we do have a number of young members of the Citizens’ Assembly.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	Could you clarify what you mean by participatory democracy – aren’t issues too complex for things like referendums?
A	It’s a paradoxical situation because we don’t have the time to be informed. All I’m saying is that it needs to be more often than every four years.
Q	I think most youth don’t even know that there is a government, let alone that it’s dominated by old white men. How do you think we should introduce people to how democracy works?
A	I think it’s a question that ought to be explored. One of our teachers in town does a wonderful job to get students out and experiencing politics with model UNs and the like. I don’t think having a pamphlet in the classroom and a test on Friday will be sufficient. People need to experience the political world. It’s a question that needs discussion.

Comment: I believe that the way to start introducing young people to politics is at the local government level

SUBMISSION: NO