

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

RICHMOND PUBLIC HEARING DATED
4 MAY 2004 AT THE VANCOUVER AIRPORT
MARRIOTT HOTEL, RICHMOND

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.

David Reay

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I will be endorsing PR, but will be indicating that the committee also should acknowledge that financial rules and nomination systems also need attention.

KEY THEMES

David Reay argued that we need to first identify the values we want in our electoral system and then choose a system that represents these values. He proposed that the following values need to be reflected in the electoral system.

1. We need representatives who are connected to their communities. The representatives do not have to represent geographical communities, instead candidates could be representative of ethnic or professional communities. We need a system that encourages interaction between MLAs and voters.
2. We need opportunities to elect non-traditional candidates. The current system promotes candidates with similar backgrounds and discourages women and minorities, and people from non-traditional careers.
3. We need more debate and a diverse range of views represented. The current system homogenizes voting and leads to a two party system. People are forced to vote strategically rather than supporting a third party. Political debate is not public, but occurs before a policy comes out. We need a system that encourages public debate.
4. We need a system that works. We need to be careful that small parties do not cause unnecessary delays or prevent effective government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

David Reay recommends the adoption of an MMP electoral system in BC with a 50 per cent split between list and constituency candidate, regional lists, and a five per cent electoral threshold.

Quote: "I don't think there is a person in BC who has been here for the last week who can say the current system is working."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	What part of MMP forces candidates to interact with their communities?
A	Interaction is essential to be elected. In our current single member districts candidates can ride on the party's coattails. We need more women and ethnic candidates. We can do this through party lists where people choose parties on the basis of the number of women and ethnic candidates on their lists.
Q	Why did you choose a closed list?
A	Closed lists allow parties to balance their lists to ensure expertise in the legislature. Parties will be judged on the basis of their lists.
Q	How do you see First Nations people getting elected?
A	Parties can balance their lists but I think the first step is to see how the list works without affirmative action to see whether native people are elected on the list.
Q	How do you feel about coalition government?
A	We currently have coalition governments – a coalition on the left called the NDP and a coalition on the right called the Liberals. I understand from Europe that coalition governments may take longer to be formed but may be more stable.

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	You were saying an MLA doesn't have to represent a riding but might represent ethnic or professional groups?
A	Yes, there would be some MLAs elected in a constituency and some elected from a party list representing more demographic groups.
Q	Do you think this would cause polarization?

A	I'm not saying all lawyers would vote for one representative, just that this would enable more non-traditional candidates to be elected.
Q	MMP systems with closed lists have recently been adopted in NZ, Scotland and Wales. In every case, citizens have expressed dissatisfaction with a closed list model. Given that situation, would you still recommend closed lists?
A	I understand that this works quite satisfactorily in the jurisdictions that have them. Your examples are all jurisdictions that have recently changed systems. I think you need some time to settle in.
Q	If there is a party that I like, with candidates on their list that I don't like, what would I do then?
A	Your first option is to get involved with the party and to influence the party list selection process. Also, this would make parties unpopular, which would encourage them to change their lists.
Q	Why four regions and not just one provincial list?
A	I picked this as an example to stop the tendency of parties picking their whole slate from one region. This would encourage candidates from more regions.
Q	What about a primary for party list selection?
A	I didn't look into that because it's not within the mandate of the assembly. The most undemocratic process right now is the nomination system for our candidates. We need to find a new way of nominating both types of candidate.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO