

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SIDNEY PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 15 MAY 2004
AT THE HOLIDAY INN VICTORIA

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.

Joan Russow

Equal Voice

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

As the former federal leader of the Green Party of Canada, I am participating in a Charter challenge to the First Past the Post system. I will be addressing the application of the Charter to electoral reform.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Russow discussed how the current FPTP system violates Section 15 of the Canadian Charter on Rights and Freedoms and discriminates against women and First Nations. The presenter also detailed a number of international and provincial declarations that Canada has committed to in order to redress gender inequality in political life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Russow stated the need for a system that ensured parties struck a balance between male and female candidates; that enabled the community to assess the merits of candidates and to convey their views to the parties prior to election; that did not marginalize women by placing them in unwinnable seats; that provided equal support, including financial support, for both male and female candidates; and the adoption of affirmative action measures on a strictly interim basis.

The presenter went on to recommend that the participation of a proportion of women in government should be established as one of the rules of democracy. Further, a parliamentary committee should be established with specific terms of reference addressing issues related to the status of women, and an education campaign should be conducted within parliament to increase awareness of the need to ensure an equitable proportional distribution of political posts.

Ms. Russow advocated the introduction of a proportional electoral system, possibly MMP. More specifically the presenter stated that FPTP should not be considered an option should a referendum on electoral reform be held.

Quote: It is not a question of whether or not to change the first past the post system but what kind of system will replace the current system.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q Is it the electoral process, or the individual political parties, that discriminate against women?
- A Even if the leader of a political party wanted to address the inequity it would be very difficult to do so under the current system. What has been shown internationally is that wherever there is some form of PR parties will put forward more women in order to produce a more equitable outcome. Certainly with some parties it is reflective of a lack of political will, but with other parties it is the restraints imposed by the system.
- Q I presume the Charter challenge has yet to be resolved?
- A We launched it in June 2002, and I presume it is still progressing through the courts.
- Q I have trouble seeing how FPTP discriminates against women. It seems like a correlation you've observed. Correlation does not imply causation; that is a concern I have. What is your view on that?
- A I think that there have been so many studies on this issue that I don't think that there is any doubt that there is a causal relationship. I think that the most we've ever achieved in Canada is the representation of 24% women.
- Q Are you suggesting that moving to PR would culturally encourage gender parity, or are you advocating a legislative requirement for equality?
- A In some countries it is legislated. I doubt in Canada that we would be willing to move toward that. I don't think we are at the stage of advocating parity but a first step would be the introduction of MMP to enable

greater representation of women.

Comment

This assembly is made up of half men and half women and we hope this assures you that your concerns will be addressed.