

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SPARWOOD PUBLIC HEARING DATED
23 JUNE 2004 AT THE COMMUNITY HALL

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.

Michael Clark

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Minimal change will work best for an evolving parliamentary system, PR can be incremental.

KEY THEMES

Michael Clark cautioned against jumping to a new system, and proposed more cautious incremental changes to reform the political process. He recommended making one small change at a time, then assessing the impact of this change before moving forward to introduce more small changes. Mr Clark explained that, rather than introducing a proportional representation electoral system, the allocation of party status and resources within the legislature should be based on a party's proportion of the popular vote, rather than the number of seats won. Mr Clark made proposed eight changes.

1. That Official Party status is granted, within the Legislative Assembly, to each registered political party obtaining five per cent or greater of the vote by electors in a general election.
2. That each Official Party has the representation of at least two members in the Legislative Assembly.
3. That where an Official Party fails to elect two members to the Legislative Assembly, the candidates of the party having the greatest percentage of votes in their own riding are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor to represent that party in the legislature.
4. That the allocation of time and questions during Question Period is directly based upon the popular vote obtained by the Official Parties.
5. That budget, office space, and staffing within the Legislative Assembly buildings is allocated according to the popular vote obtained by the Official Parties.
6. That an All Party Special Committee of the Legislative Assembly is created, where all motions are debated and voted upon based on the percentage of the popular vote obtained by each Official Party and passed only with a vote greater than fifty per cent.
7. That all appointments to positions of a duration beyond the mandatory call for the next provincial election become the responsibility of the All Party Special Committee, including government appointments, recommendations for the Senate of Canada, the Lieutenant-Governor of BC and BC Supreme Court judges.
8. That the Citizens' Assembly be reconstituted and reconvened every 15 years.

Mr Clark argued that these changes could have a positive effect on voter turnout, parliamentary member turnover, electoral disenfranchisement, government inexperience, lack of government accountability, and the concentration of power in the Premier's Office and political party bureaucracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Michael Clark recommended supplementing the existing electoral system with a provision that any party that wins 5 per cent of the vote but does not win any ridings in the province should have two MLAs appointed to the legislature.

He also recommended a number of reforms for the legislature.

Quote: "Little steps are more likely to get you where you want to go. I'm proposing training wheels for an evolving democratic process."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	I'm trying to wrap my head around people being appointed rather than elected. Can you elaborate a little bit?
A	If you take the vote and you take the percentage of voters for each party, then each political party should have at least two people in the Legislative Assembly. If they don't get voted in, then you go to the tally of the votes for the candidates from that party, and the two people with the highest percentage of the vote in their ridings would be appointed to the legislature.
Q	Do you think any government is going to give us a second crack at this?
A	If you're going in small steps then you need some guarantee that it's going to be readdressed. Otherwise you're going to go for a big step which might not be something that the government wants.
Q	So the little step, is that we maintain the status quo but tinker behind the scenes?
A	Yes, although you would potentially be putting extra people into the legislature.
Q	I'm curious about financing the parties?
A	I'm talking about financing the parties within the legislature. So there's a Legislative Assembly Management Committee which allocates money to the various MLAs and I'm saying that instead of allocating it on a member basis, you should allocate it on party PR basis. So that

	would give the Green Party offices in the legislature, for example. It would also give them more staff so they could do more research and be more knowledgeable.
Q	Would this not cost more?
A	No, it would cost exactly the same as now. In fact, in the current legislature, you'd be taking money away from the government and giving it to the other parties.
Q	So we would stay with 79 seats, but with every party that wins 5 per cent and doesn't get any seats, then you would add two extra seats. Why did you pick 5 per cent?
A	I read the Jenkins Commission Report, and there seemed to be some consensus that 5 per cent was an appropriate threshold. In comparison, Israel has a threshold of 1.75 per cent and that has resulted in the election of some small splinter parties.

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

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	I would be concerned that your system could increase the staff and support for a party but they would still only have two people in the legislature.
A	More educated and better staff would help those people to question the government. It also puts them on a more equal footing with the other parties and removes patronage.
Q	If we have 79 seats now, and you're talking about having additional members, who is going to pay for that?
A	You're right, that would cost more but I think it's worth it. As a percentage of the provincial budget it's not that much. In terms of bang for the buck, you're getting voices heard that weren't heard before. In the Italian Parliament, the people changed less than the members of the BC legislature because the party leaders always stayed at the top of the list. So I'm trying to balance giving parties a voice, versus cost to the legislature. Maybe we reduce their salary by the

	percentage necessary!
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Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES SUBMISSION ID# 0732