

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 29 MAY 2004
AT VANCOUVER CONVENTION CENTRE

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.

Karin Litzcke

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A proposal for politics without political parties.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Litzcke expressed the view that parties now constrain good people in seeking public office, and further constrain good decision making in government. The presenter stated that parties have exhausted their potential and currently serve to protect their own privileged position within the political system. Ms. Litzcke argued the need to break the dominance of parties and to ensure that individuals without party affiliations can make meaningful runs for office. According to the presenter political parties attract not the best candidates, but those that are good at playing party politics and attracting donations. Furthermore, as a result of the ability of parties to fund-raise they have driven the cost of running for public office beyond the reach of non-affiliated citizens. Ms. Litzcke stated that the existence of parties have inhibited effective and cooperative debate within the legislature. Finally, the presenter argued that the existence of party labels increases ignorance in the electorate and reduces politics to an expensive marketing exercise encouraging voters to cast their ballots for certain “brands”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Litzcke recommended the introduction of a system that enables 79 local representatives to be elected either with or without party affiliations. According to Ms. Litzcke, these members would then elect a leader and ministers from among their number without regard to party. The presenter argued that this approach would enable a higher quality of debate and the design and implementation of more effective policy as members would no longer be fighting over party platforms that were designed several years earlier by non-elected officials. Furthermore, Ms. Litzcke stated that this system would enhance the accountability of members as each individual would be responsible for the outcomes of their work. Specifically, Ms. Litzcke advocated a system in which candidates who have run once or twice under a party label should be required to run as an independent rather than drifting into a long-term co-dependent relationship with their party. The presenter argued that this would radically alter the nature of political parties as organizations, perhaps transforming them into private campaign management companies. Ms. Litzcke advocated changing the method employed for electing the premier, either to enable the members to select the premier or to allow voters to cast a direct vote. In addition, the presenter suggested banning political polling during and between election periods in order to encourage voters to think for themselves and potentially stimulate voter turnout. Finally Ms. Litzcke advocated the introduction of a preferential ballot.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q Our mandate is limited to how you translate votes into seats; you mentioned that you liked a preferential ballot more than FPTP are there any other elements you feel merit attention?
- A I view proportional representation with some alarm as I feel that it not only gives the parties more clout, you actually magnify their role as under MMP you double the impact of the party having both party constituency members and list members.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

- Q You didn't mention the role of representatives outside of Victoria; how would cabinet be formed or people be selected to head the civil service?
- A I think it is really important that we not delude ourselves about what we have now. We have ministers with no experience. Our current Minister of Labour is a former grocer, not that I have anything against grocers but I believe that all grocers could be trained to do that job. We have ministers at the moment that haven't got a clue. All of us have a certain level of experience and I think that we have just as much right to have the chance to head up those organizations. Regarding the election of the cabinet, we would elect them as they do in the North-West Territories.
- Q How do we achieve public awareness on the part of voters?
- A It is interesting in the current federal campaign the media falls into a routine and politics is spoon-fed to them and if this wasn't so I think you would see a lot more interest in journalism around elections. In terms of voter education, at minimum each voter should receive a certain amount of information about each candidate.

