

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.

Andrea Reimer

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I will speak to the need to make our public institutions less adversarial and more focused on public policy and how electoral reform is a vital part of this much needed shift.

KEY THEMES

Ms. Reimer discussed her experience as a politically engaged citizen and the obvious need for electoral reform in order to combat voter apathy. The presenter discussed the problem of low voter turnout and wasted votes at provincial and federal elections. Ms. Reimer argued that the current FPTP system is unrepresentative of the population of British Columbia. The presenter expressed her disappointment that while the means of election may be altered the method of governance, that is, the Westminster system, cannot. Ms. Reimer argued that the Westminster parliamentary system facilitates representative democracy as organized by political parties, making it difficult for individual citizens to be elected, and disadvantaging (in terms of status and resources) those parties unable to elect a sizeable number of members to the Assembly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Reimer advocated the adoption of a system MMP. The presenter argued that citizens affected by the enlargement of urban constituencies would be compensated by the fact that their votes would count. The geographical size of rural constituencies would remain the same. Ms. Reimer recommended that under this system of MMP, one third to one half of MLAs be elected via party lists in order to ensure proportionality. In addition, the presenter expressed support for open party lists and opening up the process of local candidate nomination. However, Ms. Reimer argued that these two processes must be consistent, that is, if the process of local candidate nomination is retained in its current form then closed party lists must also be supported as these two systems are essentially the same. To prevent abuses of the candidate selection process, Ms. Reimer recommended the addition of a clause to the Elections Act that states that nominations must be by a democratic process.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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| Comment | It is likely that if you used a one-third division under MMP that STV would be more proportional. |
| A | STV is incidentally often proportional but it is not inherent in the design of the system. |

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

- Comment The Supreme Court ruled that ridings can only vary by plus or minus twenty five percent; I heard another perspective up north that our resources are being drawn from an ever dwindling number of people because of the increase in technology, so I personally see that point of view very clearly and strongly.
- A If the point of having constituency seats is to represent a region then they should be as small or as large as they need to be to make people feel that their representative understands their region.
- Q You mentioned MMP, what is the difference between that and straight PR?
- A A pure PR system would see you only vote for a party. In an MMP system you would have half the seats as they are now and you would have half the seats as compensatory seats, you would have two votes, one for your local representative and one for your party. If 58% of people voted for the Liberal Party with their first vote but they didn't get 58% of the seats they would get topped up to 58% so that votes cast for parties would be reflected in seats won.
- Q What do you mean by the statement that your vote didn't count?
- A I actually don't believe that you do waste your vote when you vote for someone that doesn't win the seat. But if you believe that our votes translate into people who translate into our voice in the legislature who represent us in public policy debates, I have never had my vote contribute in that way.
- Q Isn't the point of the party system to enable new parties to prove themselves over a period of time, doesn't waiting a bit build character?
- A I think the effect of it is to exclude young people from the process, and that is never a good thing.