PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING JUNE 12, 2004 AT MARRIOTT PINNACLE HOTEL

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.

Arpal Dosanjh

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

In my presentation, I will advocate in favour of a preferential balloting system and against adopting a proportional representation (PR) system. By adopting preferential balloting, we can realize most of PR's benefits while avoiding PR's inherent accountability problem.

KEY THEMES

I am here to urge the Assembly to recommend change to a single member majoritarian alternative vote system. It offers many advantages over the current system. You have a lot to gain from a change, and little to lose. A majoritarian system is one where each candidate to be elected requires at least 50% to be elected. People rank candidates in order of preference. You remove the least preferred candidate and reassign its preferences until you have a candidate with a majority.

Some benefits of preferential voting are:
1) Enhanced legitimacy, because of a requirement for 50% of support.

2) No more vote splitting and strategic voting in that type of system, because if the candidate they support does not get elected, they have a second choice for another candidate.

With the current system, the candidate with the highest number of votes wins. With alternative voting, a candidate would be eliminated and preferences reassigned. One disadvantage is that the ballot is more complex. Over the long term, it will become second nature and on the short term the government could conduct a campaign to educate the public. There are a number of trade-offs. I want to point out the disadvantages of PR. You would lose that single identifiable candidate per constituency. With a move to PR or a mixed system, you lose something.

The point of my presentation is why should the Assembly recommend a change to only preferential voting?

1) There is little risk.

2) It is consistent with our electoral traditions, it isn't foreign to British Columbians; we had this system in place in 1952 and 1953.

3) It is non-contentious. A PR system is less likely to garner consensus. People could also raise constitutional objections. I have referenced a paper from Scientific American that points to the preferential system as one that provides the truest reflection of constituents' wishes. To conclude, I think we should recognize that each system has its merits and disadvantages. In my view, we could move to a majoritarian system without losing anything.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority system, Alternative Vote.

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q   In the system you are proposing, it does not do anything for small parties.

A   A consolation prize is that supporters could vote for one of the larger parties. Supporter of small parties can really put down who they favour. Smaller parties can get policy support from larger parties in exchange for second preference votes. A change to this system has benefits, without any drawbacks. I don't see why the population would vote against something like that

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q   Given the fact that our MLAs are 'trained seals' who tow the party line, I wonder to what extent people make the choice on behalf of their constituents or the party policies?

A   It may be the case currently, this would not be changed by this system.

Q   Does it not bother you that the result of 1952 election that Social Credit got into power with that?

A   I am not familiar with the history, but you need to give some time for a system to settle in.

SUBMISSION: NO