

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.

Matthew Laird

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The positives and negatives of various proposed electoral systems, and how to go beyond electoral reform.

KEY THEMES

I am the co-founder of Recall BC, and leader of Moderate Democratic Movement. How do we ensure that communities across BC continue to have a voice representing their distinctive backgrounds, yet ensure every vote counts and all views are heard? I used to be a proponent of instant run-off voting, feeling that this would meet the balance, communities would still have a local representative yet they would also receive a representative that most closely mirrors their views. However, as some people point out, such a system effectively elects everyone's second choice. In itself this is not a bad thing, it forces moderation, less extreme ideologies, and elects someone a whole community can generally agree on if you will. However it does not address the problem of groups which might have support spread over a larger area - groups which might have five per cent of the popular vote across the province, yet not concentrated enough to elect candidates in any one constituency. Again, the balance has not been met.

Pure Pro-Rep has its own deficiencies. The majority of power is held with the parties and communities lose their voice. Even if the province were divided into regions, three large new problems are created

- The first being the area each MLA represents would be far larger, they would have trouble maintaining a connection with their community - you would no longer have a local MLA.
- The next problem is a lack of accountability, if seats are allocated to parties, the ability of a local representative to cross the floor in a case of extreme lack of confidence in their party is gone, some might even say the ability to have an independent voice for you community is gone.
- The third problem is that small groups would still have a larger hurdle to jump in order to be heard.

I believe that MMP reaches the best balance. In your final report, I urge you also to recommend a form of direct democracy, truly giving a voice back to the people. I believe your mandate in fact cripples the assembly from the start. Limitations such as being constrained to a 79-seat legislature automatically eliminate some forms of MMP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Direct democracy, MMP.

“In your final report, I urge you also to recommend a form of direct democracy, truly giving a voice back to the people.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q How do you prevent abuses of the system when you use direct democracy? I am concerned with indirect voting, the vote is not secret; you are coerced into voting one way.

A There are systems out there which do allow secret voting, there are open systems to ensure that there are no secret monitoring. There would be the same type of coercion as with regular voting, if you voted on a direct democracy at your MLA's office, no one would be looking over your shoulder.

Q What if population shifts, do boundaries shift as well? From that there are various models on electing candidates.

A Basically we recognize that local representation is important and that I believe there are constraints in the size of the districts across the province. When population shifts the districts will have to be redrawn. That is a requirement by the court. That is made according to the census.

Q To the Assembly: After June 24, when last public hearing, what happens? You have 2 meetings scheduled, what are they for? Can the public participate?

A We are meeting in Prince George to discuss what we heard in the public hearings and to prepare for the deliberation phase in the fall. A lot of members have speaking engagement in their communities. We have a small committee within the assembly who are evaluating presentations that will be made to the assembly as a whole in September. That meeting will be opened to the public as all our meetings are.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q I am not sure how you see the direct democracy working?

A Not for every bill, there are systems called liquid democracy, you can give you voice to your MLA, but every time you differ from your MLA, you go make your own vote.

Q What do you think about the recall system?

A The number of signatures is fine, but how it is done and the time frames need reform.

Q You will be narrowing down your views to present them to the public?

A That was in our preliminary statement. Our deliberation process in the fall, that's what we will be doing, narrowing down the possibilities

Q Between Dec and April, could there be more education to keep the people up to date so that they can make an informed decision?

A Everything we do between now and Dec 15 on our website, and our plenary discussions will be opened to the public. We are having discussions with the Attorney General office regarding an education phase.