

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.

Neil Sutherland

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Criteria for choosing an electoral system.

KEY THEMES

My background: After my MA thesis, I looked to see which references I cited the most and they are all at the UC Irvine, the Freight train of electoral studies, so I went there.

I was put into the position where I thought that I had some things to say to the Citizens' Assembly (CA). So I wrote a manuscript addressing all the issues that I thought the CA should look at. We should try to make the system more democratic. But this can't be addressed by the electoral system. Maybe we could have more free votes, or use the internet more. An electoral system is not a cure-all, it can't solve all the problems in our democracy. The presenters don't want to talk about how an electoral system chooses a government. The parliamentary system chooses the government. We have to have a majority government, whether it's a coalition or not, and we need party discipline, so that the government maintains the confidence of the house.

When we choose the government, it has consequences. We need to consider all these things. If there will be some kind of proportional system, I agree that our system has to be more proportional. I will argue today against the current system and against extreme PR (national list, pure PR). With first-past-the-post, the 1996 election was an anomaly, the Liberals got more votes and lost, that doesn't seem right. Also you don't really get an effective opposition. Gerrymandering and wasted votes are also important issues. We did see examples of what kind of government we would have with a more proportional system. With two seats, you would still get a majority government, but with a bigger opposition. You would not have results like in 2000 and in 1996. With magnitude two, there is no wasted vote and gerrymandering. There is no reason to go beyond magnitude two, except if people want more proportionality. When you get to about six seat ridings you get to about perfect proportionality. There is no point to go beyond 5-6 seats ridings. There are still vagaries of extreme PR. There is no reason to go with a province-wide list.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Electoral system change to include more proportionality, with an increase of district magnitude to 2.

"There is no reason to go beyond a magnitude of 2, except if people want more proportionality."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q I was also looking at the impact of proportionality and the district magnitude (DM). Which formula did you use?

A In my original study, I used the droop formula. My friend did it with a different formula, there was some variations between the three. But ultimately, they all ended up with perfect proportionality with 6 seats ridings.

Q Clarification, in our preliminary statement, we did not make a decision to move toward PR. Have you considered at all how increasing the DM works in a very large province?

A If you used a mixed system, you would merge two northern constituencies the size of France and Germany, it makes no sense. So I would argue that you are not talking about going to 5-6 DM, but smaller ones. If you retain one seat ridings, outside the Lower mainland, you would have proportional ridings in the Lower mainland and Victoria.