

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.

Robert Everton

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I would like to comment on the historical evolution of democracy and its distinction from most electoral systems. I call for the need for forms of participatory democracy to accompany other basic electoral reforms.

KEY THEMES

The task of the Citizens' Assembly is to determine reform to our existing electoral system. My concern is about democracy. I recently completed a doctoral dissertation on democracy. I would like to clarify what is meant by the term democracy. It is not the same as electoral politics. I hope that the reforms that you do recommend are conducive to a greater possibility of democracy.

The term democracy comes from the classical Greeks, it was about citizens who governed themselves, not the same as electing people to govern us. The two forms are quite different. Even Aristotle did not confuse democracy with electoral government. Greek democracy functioned by means of local, mass assemblies, where all citizens could and indeed were expected to participate in their own governance. Each citizen would receive a per diem for their presence in their assembly. The positions rotated among citizens, in a very open and public manner. This is the method by which Citizens' Assembly members were selected. Also, juries stood in as surrogate bodies for the assembly, their representative feature was a key element. Democracy was absolutely essential to Greek society.

Perhaps you could include a comment in your recommendation about citizen participation. Without actual participation, democracy is rhetoric. As then, citizen participation would require a process. Greek democracy remained democratic because they had numerous devices for accountability. Any official that did not work for the good of the citizens was held accountable. John Stuart Mill wrote that an electoral system without proportional representation was tyrannical. The dominant political parties have avoided introducing proportional representation (PR) for 150 years. We should of course finally adopt this basic yet long overdue change.

I advocate a mixed member proportional system (MMP), with 50% of the seats for PR, the remainder seats not simply determined by first-past-the-post (FPTP), but rather there should be some form of second choice, or the preferential option. Calculations can be weighted. The FPTP as currently constituted is archaic, it de-legitimizes the entire electoral process. The above suggestions meet your mandate. But surely this is an invaluable opportunity to comment on other suggestions. Recall and referendum are both democratic reforms.

Electronic voting could be considered (we would have to look at the abuses- like in US). Such a system would have to produce a written record, with software that is verifiable

and trusted. I work with youth and I find that they are turned off; often they feel that their vote does not count. I just wanted to say that a major factor with youth is that they are aware that free trade agreements are limiting what any government can decide.

As a final element, for there to be a citizenry to be able to participate, it needs to be informed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MMP, 50% PR, 50% preferential voting.

“As far as the mandate of the Citizens’ Assembly, proportional representation has already been widely advocated, here as elsewhere, as a necessary element, without which no electoral system can pretend to be remotely democratic.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q You advocate MMP, can you mention some of your reasons for choosing that system?

A I think in the end, there is no perfect system. Looked at submissions online, there seems to be lots of support for MMP. The real needs are for greater representation of diverse opinions that people not need to vote strategically, that MLAs represent the real views of their constituents. With a mixed system, PR and First past the post or preferential voting. I am not for political parties.

Q When you were talking about 50% PR, are you looking at open list or closed?

A Open list, what I really wanted to do here, is to bring my values. My values are democracy, choosing one of the other options, is only accommodating the notion of democracy

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q If not in favour of political parties, would you encourage a system about more independents?

A I would but outside mandate, neighborhoods should constitute local assemblies, and that their recommendations become binding, but not done anywhere in the world. For the Greeks, the elites always won, I would like to see people like the CA members actually being my government.