

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.

Roy Grinshpan

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

My own personal views on the pros and cons of current system, changes I would like to see and approaches followed, and my impressions of the Citizens' Assembly process.

KEY THEMES

I was raised in Montreal, and have lived in various places. I worked as a polling clerk for referendums and elections. I was chosen for the Charlottetown accord. Now I am a groupie of the Citizens' Assembly. I would like to increase voter turnout. I want to honour our veterans. I feel that we really need to get going to increase representation, and we should use a guarded approach.

I do have a preference for mixed systems, I am not sure if MMP is better than MMM, but I do want a mixed system. We should have a threshold. I hope that we would get less polarized results, and we could get more consensus. The only drawback is that the number of seats in the house is fixed at 79.

I like many aspects of FPTP in increasing accountability. I am biased to empowering the electorate over the party list organizers. In terms of ballot structure, I want an open-list candidate list, I don't want zombie politicians, I want the ballot to have the location of the candidate, I want it to be simple for the voter. The Australians have a very complex ballot. Both the electoral model and the ballot empower the elector to turf out a member of the House that they don't want. My threshold is 7% to minimize the fringe and extremist parties. It is very important that there is substantive support for a party before they get into the House. I don't want to see regionalization, so an increased threshold is the best way to do this I think. I think that with a higher threshold it legitimizes the parties that made it into the House. In the north there is a tradition of consensus building, but it's not there in the rest of Canada. The Dutch example: it is very much in the tradition of Holland to have consensus building, but they have a very low threshold. But now they are looking at raising their threshold. We want guarded approach. There is a lot of pressure on government to acquiesce, and do it right and that is not true.

From my own perspective, I am excited but I don't want to see a change that is too radical, if we take a slow phased approach, of a third of PR at the time, that is a good idea. It is really important to recommend something that will pass in a referendum. We should do it in a cautionary way there will be another opportunity later on to adjust it.

How to measure success? I would like to know. We should determine that, what is it, voter turnout, government stability, degree of consensus confrontation, number of bills passed? Who will get to do the measuring? In the report, the Citizens' Assembly should

look ahead: Do we need to build a future sanity-check? Can we build in a failsafe ahead of time? No one will know how effective the system will be after a change. We should consider a proposal that will consider for how long we should keep the change before calling another referendum at that point. I am in awe of the whole process, and looking at the members and their dedication is very impressive. It is incredible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mixed system, either MMP or MMM.

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q What would be your top three ways of measuring success?
- A For me a very important thing is voter turnout. How do we measure voter turnout? But worry that the list is not complete, so is voter turnout measured according to the list or is it all BC residents? Beyond the voter turnout, I guess that there are experts on that.
- Q A candidate would only be able to run on one ballot, why?
- A In Quebec after bill 101, 178, I was very frustrated. One big debate was about having equal access to having bilingual signs. One person was elected from the equality party, then he switched to the Parti Quebecois. We need to be able to stop zombie politicians.

Comment from panel

I like the idea of a failsafe clause. It is worth discussing.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q I would like an explanation of open list. Would I prioritize 25 or 30 candidates?

A There is no preferential voting, just an X, because the system is complex enough, we need to make sure that the system passes. I am recommending 1/3 PR.

Q What will be on the referendum, will we have a choice of more than just one PR system? We should have a "sunset" clause.

A If we recommend a change, we would recommend one system

Q Is 7% too high? Also, this is not a cheap process. To have another CA would be ok, but expensive (sunset proposal).

A Normally I would see 16 years, so have 4 elections, and have a referendum at the 5th election. In Israel, it is a nightmare because there are too many parties. It is important to have high enough threshold, you can waste tax payers' money, and get crazy, issue-based parties.

Comment I would argue that you are taking a partisan stance against small parties. In Germany, the 5% threshold was to keep out Nazi like parties, but they still got in and the Greens were kept out.

A We have time, we have to do it gradually, I respectfully disagree but I appreciate your comments.