

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VERNON PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 21 JUNE 2004
AT THE PRESTIGE INN VERNON SALON

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.

David Hart

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I will present the points outlined in my earlier submission to the Citizens' Assembly.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Hart argued that the role of government is in need of clarification. The presenter stated that while the role of government should be “to guide the wishes of the electorate through the mechanism of the legislature”, it has evolved into “the subversion of the electorate’s vote into permission for an elected elite to impose their will onto an unsuspecting populace for at least a full electoral term. Mr. Hart argued that this reality is reflected in the numerous examples of governments carrying out policies which are detrimental to the financial and ideological well-being of the constituents. The presenter also stated that the current system tends to produce governments that erroneously believe that their party platform carries the approval of the populace, when often their victory arises from citizens voting *against* the incumbent party. Mr. Hart discussed his experience growing up in Australia and argued that the use of the preferential ballot in that country (with split terms for the Senate, and mandatory voting) has produced an electoral system far superior to Canada’s or BC’s. The presenter stated that there are a number of advantages to the preferential system including the choice it provides citizens to vote for an individual or a party, and the ability to rank succeeding choices to indicate how the platforms of other candidates or parties compare. In addition, Mr. Hart argued that the introduction of split terms would provide for much more stable government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the introduction of split terms, under which half the legislative seats would be contested at an election held every two years. According to Mr. Hart, this would allow the constituency a mid-term vote of approval or disapproval of a government and its actions. Mr. Hart also advocated: the introduction of MMP in order to make seats won in the legislature accord more closely to votes cast in the electorate; fixed electoral terms; the increased use of referenda on controversial issues; and the establishment of an independent bureau to adjudicate on cases where ministerial action leads to losses for the province.

Quote: Our current system of FPTP is the worst form of democracy, and only marginally better than a dictatorship. The only difference between our federal and provincial voting systems and a dictatorship is that we get the chance to change the dictator without bloodshed every term.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q How would you decide which MLA would have to face election at the first date?

A I don't know. This has been operating in the Australian Senate since Federation in 1900 and has been operating very effectively. It is a dampener on runaway, federal governments. It holds governments more accountable as exemplified by the Gough Whitlam affair in Australia which ended in the dismissal of a rogue government.

Q What does "preferential plus" mean?

A There is a presentation on your website on this topic. There are 19 pages written about it by a graduate in political science at UBC. After reading that I felt that I would support that system. I am an advocate of the preferential system as used in Australia.