

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.

Norman Jaques

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation expressing concerns about our current system and promoting MMP as a new system for BC.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Jaques argued that electoral reform is long overdue as our current FPTP system is outdated and unfair. The presenter stated that while a perfect electoral system probably does not exist, the current FPTP system is at the root of the growing problem of misrepresentation as a result of strategic voting and low voter turnout. Mr. Jaques argued that increasing numbers of citizens are not voting as a result of the perception that their votes don't count. According to Mr. Jaques, Canadians desire four fundamental values in their electoral system:

1. Fairness. The current FPTP system is appropriate for two-party contests but does not accommodate BC's multi-party environment or the diversity of points of view that exist. FPTP results in the production of skewed situations as a result of the creation of artificial and exaggerated majorities. In addition, Mr. Jaques noted that FPTP over-rewards minor parties with regional strongholds.
2. Representation. The presenter argued that the composition of the legislature should reflect the wishes, ideas, and composition of the province. While electoral boundaries help to ensure regional representation, they do not provide for the inclusion of ideas and interests within the broader citizenry. Mr. Jaques noted that FPTP systems tend to contain low proportions of women in the legislature when compared to countries using proportional representation.
3. Equality. Mr. Jaques argued that BC needs an electoral system that enables people to vote their conscience as every vote will count toward the election of candidates. The presenter argued against the introduction of preferential voting on the grounds of the argument that this system prevents wasted votes as it does not solve the problem of disproportional electoral results.
4. Accountability. Mr. Jaques stated that local representation is a myth, and MLAs need only be accountable to campaign donors and their party. In addition, incumbents are often easily reelected as the result of votes being split between multiple opposition candidates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the introduction of MMP akin to the system proposed by the Proportional Representation Initiative of 2002 and that favoured by the Law Commission of Canada and Fair Vote Canada for the federal context. Mr. Jaques

offered support for a system of MMP under which as many as half of the legislative seats are filled via closed party lists that are published before election along with the rationale for the selection of these candidates.

Quote: Perhaps British Columbia can lead the way to less polarized and adversarial politics. We want our policies developed with some degree of consensus reached through cooperation and compromise.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q Would you entertain open lists?
- A I would entertain open lists, but I believe the advantage of closed lists is that it holds the party accountable to make sure that their list has people on it that will have the favour of the voting public.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

- Q Many might view PR as a problem as those parties that would not get a seat under FPTP may do so under proportional representation. What is your view on that?
- A I don't fear it. I don't think it's a problem. At the federal level the Liberals have a terrible time electing people in Western Canada as most the people's votes there are wasted. With proportional representation everyone's vote will count and we would have representation in parliament that is closer to how people voted across the province or across the nation.
- Q The introduction of PR will almost certainly result in the continuous production of minority governments. How do you make sure governments don't continually fall?
- A I don't think that we should worry about minority governments. Some of the most progressive legislation has been introduced under minority

governments federally including the Canada Pension Plan and the Canada Healthcare Act.

Q Would you advocate the retention of FPTP for constituency seats or would you support the introduction of preferential voting that would ensure that the candidate had the support of a majority of the electorate?

A Personally I like the idea of a preferential vote for the election of the local candidate.

Q There is a concern that closed lists give parties too much control over the individual representatives; are you concerned by that?

A I don't find that scary as I would like to think that the parties would try to put people on their lists who otherwise would not be elected, women, aboriginals, and minority representatives for example.