

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.

Bjorn and Ruth Meyer

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A discussion of proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Meyer discussed the numerous problems with the current system including voter apathy; low voter turnout; the cynicism of voters as reflected in the sentiment that their votes don't count; disproportional electoral results; and the tendency of the current system to encourage extreme swings in policy. The presenter argued that four requirements exist for a good electoral system: proportionality; the encouragement of participation; the stimulation of belief in the system; and simplicity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended:

1. The division of the province into regions along the lines of geography and communities of interest. The presenter proposed seven regions: Vancouver; Fraser Valley; Okanagan; Cariboo and North; North Coast; Kootenays; and Vancouver Island. According to Mr. Meyer, regional characteristics would then be reflected in electoral results.
2. Legislative seats are to be assigned to each region on the basis of the population in each region.
3. Each party would nominate a list of candidates for election equal to the number of seats up for election in each region. This system may give lower candidates on the list the chance to gain political experience before they are likely to get elected.
4. Voters cast a ballot for the party of their choice on election-day.
5. Seats in the legislature are to be distributed on the basis of the proportion of votes each party has received in each region.
6. The smaller parties benefit as a result of the regionalization of the province as parties that are popular in a particular region, but not province wide, are able to gain representation.

According to Mr. Meyer, this system would result in: a fairer distribution of seats; the representation of more political parties in the legislature; minority government, or coalition government may result forcing the parties to cooperate and perhaps moderate proposed legislation; the production of policies closer to the center of the

political spectrum; representation in the legislature that reflects the voting results thereby tempering cynicism and engendering more respect for the system; and the creation of a system simple enough for people to understand and appreciate.

Quote: I believe this system will have a high likelihood of giving us a much more satisfactory political system and governments we can all feel a part of.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Comment	I come from Fort Nelson and I see that you have included the North with the Cariboo, I would like the North to be a district too!
A	This is just a proposal and by dividing the province into regions with multiple members it allows the small parties an opportunity to get elected.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q	How do you decide how to draw the regions?
A	Thankfully I don't have to make that decision. I tried to suggest that the Okanagan would be a fairly logical region on the grounds of geography and resources, the things that cause one area to be distinct from another. Regardless of how many factors you try to consider you are never going to get a perfect system but you need to get areas that share a commonality of interests.
Q	If you can only vote for a party, what about those people who don't agree with any of the party platforms?
A	Possibly you could make room for private individuals to run, but obviously financing that may

be a problem for a single individual.

Q By breaking the province into regions, do you worry that the small parties (with fewer resources) may concentrate on their stronghold and not run candidates elsewhere thus curtailing voter choice?

A That's a good point but I think that you are always going to have that. At least under this system minor parties have a chance of getting at least one representative.