

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VICTORIA PUBLIC HEARING DATED
10 JUNE 2004 AT THE WESTERN BALLROOM,
HARBOUR TOWERS

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.

Bruce Hallsor

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

My presentation will be on behalf of Fair Vote Canada, and will review the characteristics of voting systems used around the world comparing and contrasting the positive and negative attributes of each system as they might relate to British Columbia. Fair Vote Canada will be urging the assembly to examine all systems proposed to them by their ability to meet certain criteria that we believe are the hallmark of a good political system in the context of modern Canadian society. I practice electoral law and have studied various electoral systems. I am currently the national VP of Fair Vote Canada, information on which can be obtained at www.fairvotecanada.org

KEY THEMES

Bruce Hallsor explained that Fair Vote Canada has identified four important objectives in the choice of an electoral system: broad proportionality, extended voter choice, stable and responsive government, and maintaining a link between representatives and geographic constituencies. He argued that two families of electoral systems have the most potential to meet all four of these objectives: the Single Transferable Vote and the Mixed Member Proportional electoral systems. Mr Hallsor described the MMP system being effective for making votes count and delivering proportionality. He suggested that if MMP were to be introduced in British Columbia that the model adopted should use open lists to increase voter choice. Mr Hallsor acknowledged that the major difficulty facing the introduction of MMP in BC would be the requirement to maintain the current number of seats in the legislature resulting in significantly larger ridings, which pose particular difficulty for already large Northern and Interior ridings. He suggested that these ridings could be exempt from enlargement, although acknowledged that this may not comply with Canadian jurisprudence. He also suggested assigning some or all list MLAs to represent particular regions in order to compensate for larger rural ridings. Mr Hallsor advised the Assembly that if it should decide to recommend an MMP system in BC, it should also express a preference for increasing the size of the legislature in its final report. Fair Vote Canada favours a lower threshold in order to maximize the diversity of parties represented within the legislature.

Mr Hallsor argued that STV in British Columbia would provide extended voter choice and give the choice of candidates to the voters rather than to the parties. STV also permits independent candidates to be elected. Under STV, votes for smaller party candidates or independents who are not elected are not wasted because voters can also express additional preferences for other candidates. He noted that the STV system is criticized because it pits candidates against all other candidates, and has failed to help female candidates to be elected in the countries in which it is currently used, Ireland, Australia and Malta, but suggested that this may be indicative of the culture of those countries. He described STV as a way to combine fairly good proportionality with geographic representation and pointed out that STV had recently been recommended by the Berger Commission on Electoral Reform for the City of Vancouver.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bruce Hallsor recommended the introduction of either MMP or STV in British Columbia.

Quote: “It is important that the electoral system respect the need of people to have an MLA who is responsible to their geographic community, as well as to have representation that respects the overall communities of interest in the province. A well designed system can achieve one without compromising the other.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were three members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	Do you see a mixed model where plurality could be used in the regional areas and PR in the larger urban areas?
A	I think that you could look at a hybrid system but I think you risk running the perception that a system isn't fair because it treats different parts of the province in different ways.
Q	In terms of MMP, we've heard a range of recommendations on how large the proportion of compensatory seats should be. What's your recommendation?
A	I think that 10 per cent would not give you sufficient proportionality, on the other hand having 30 proportional seats would require significantly larger ridings. That's why we recommend a larger legislature. I think the Law Commission of Canada was right to recommend about one third. The other concern with having only 8 or 9 compensatory seats is that these would not be enough to deal with the large aberrations between votes and seats that we see in this province.
Q	In a mixed system you have two types of members: constituency and list members. Do you think that this creates two types of members and that this is problematic?
A	I don't see that as a huge obstacle. In countries that have this system they've managed to get around that. I think it depends on whether there is an open or closed list. If it is an open list, the MLA may be more representative of the non-geographic community that has voted for them.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

There were no questions from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

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