

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.

Donald Scott

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

It will centre on pre-elections activities and the nomination of candidates. I will also discuss proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Donald Scott told the hearing that FPP has been blamed as responsible for everything from declining voter participation to the lopsided legislatures. He suggested that the voting practice of British Columbians to vote against rather than for a government results in a misleading perception of the mandate for a government, which can be abused. Mr Scott focused his presentation on political party candidate selection processes. He described nominations and leadership contests as a “lawless world”. Mr Scott discussed a number of flaws with the party nomination process including, the lack of oversight of the nomination process, the capacity to stack party branches for candidate selection processes, and the tendency for candidates and their promoters to give away memberships in order to flood the membership and effectively buy the nomination. He described a number of examples of these practices in various ridings in the British Columbia and at the federal level, in a number of different political parties.

Mr Scott argued that every electoral system is founded upon the selection of candidates, and that the introduction of a new electoral system will not change the way politics is practiced unless the Citizens’ Assembly addresses the fraud and corruption permitted by the lack of electoral laws governing candidate nominations and leaderships. He argued that the absence of these laws will doom the Assembly’s efforts to build legitimacy, credibility and respect for democracy. Mr Scott also discussed proportional representation as risking the formation of perpetual coalitions, with tiny parties controlling the agenda. He described PR countries as becoming more party-centric and argued that in PR systems party bosses have even more control over who gets on the party slate or list.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Donald Scott recommended that the Citizens’ Assembly address the need for regulation of the selection of candidates by political parties.

Quote: “The absence of electoral laws governing candidate nomination and leadership selection will doom the Citizens’ Assembly’s efforts to build legitimacy, credibility and leaderships.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

One member of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	Determining how political parties choose their candidates is beyond our scope, but would a system where you could choose between multiple candidates from the same party
---	--

	within that riding help with that problem?
A	My only concern would be that you would need to make those ridings much bigger in order to have multiple candidates, which would make it even more difficult for candidates to represent the riding. I'd prefer multi-member districts to PR ridings.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation a member of the audience had a question.

Q	Have you looked at the Free Your Vote society's suggestion that MMP be accompanied by laws about party selection processes?
A	We need legally enforceable legislation as is currently used for general elections, which are usually pretty clean in Canada. It doesn't matter which system you're using if the people have gotten there through corrupt means. My fear about PR is that party bosses will have even more power than they do now. I have real misgivings about going to PR because if we go that route in a country like Canada with a huge potential for division then there will be a real scattering of parties that we haven't even dreamed of yet.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO