

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, Good Evening;

I am Blois Dingwell from Midgell and I thank you for the opportunity to make some comments on your interim report on the proposed electoral boundary changes.

It is evident from reading your report several times, that a lot of time and effort was put into developing the conclusions and recommendations and this is to be appreciated but it seems to me that too much emphasis was put on the number of voters in each district. Although important, the result of this exercise gives rise to other undesirable situations that I feel should be considered.

The original court decision by Justice DesRoche supported by the majority of the appeal division in the City of Charlottetown versus the Government of Prince Edward Island (1998), recognized the validity of the 25% variance. I feel that the continued use of a larger variance should be used to better represent the true nature of PEI.

I don't think the Province should be divided into urban ridings and rural ridings. It is the combination of the two working together that makes the province what it is and this would only be strengthened by MLA's having to represent, understand and answer to both interests rather than setting up a system that will evolve into an urban versus rural type of government.

For the most part, I think, it is fair to say that the majority of service industries are located in urban areas and most of the real wealth generating industries such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism are located in the rural areas.

It is true that you recognize that currently 56% of the population is rural and 44% urban but you also recognize and provide for growth patterns that are changing. This, once started and a precedent is set, won't change. I think we should recognize that the population change is not by choice but instead is driven by efficiencies that are forced upon our primary industries by a cheap food policy and by diminishing resources. While the industries are no less important to the province there are less people are involved with them.

As the population continues to change as you indicate will happen, laws and regulations affecting rural PEI, the wealth generating region, are made by urban MLAs. With this, our rural industries will find it harder to be treated fairly and to survive.

If you would like an example, look at how unfairly our fisherman appear to be treated

when the rules and regulations are made and enforced by departments where they have little real influence. Do we really want to create a situation that will lead to more of this type of thing in our own province, when we could perhaps avoid it by using a larger variance to better recognize the economic reality in PEI.

You suggest in your report that voter apathy can result from people feeling their vote doesn't count or doesn't have the same weight as another because of the variance in numbers. This could lead to a decrease in voter participation. I would suggest that in a larger part, voter participation is affected by the organizations that the political parties have developed over the years and the rivalries between them as they try to get support for their candidates. The proposed changes will destroy many of these organizations that are used to working together as a unit and the current level of disinterest with the political process will make it hard to develop new organizations as people will feel displaced by new district names and numbers and probably just say 'why bother at all'.

The size of some of the proposed districts will also cause some difficulties in people having equal representation. The district that I will be in for instance, is very large in size compared to many. Can you imagine a voter trying to bring his or her concerns to an MLA in a district, such as proposed District #26, where because of its' size probably would take 45 minutes to drive from end to end as compared to an urban riding of several square blocks. If for some reason your own MLA wasn't available, in a rural riding you would have to go to the next riding's MLA, whose interests could be different while in an urban riding if your MLA was unavailable you could go a couple of blocks to the next one or you probably go the same church as 3 or 4 MLA's. Does this seem like equal representations to you? I don't think so!!

Mr. Chairman, I hope I have demonstrated that numbers alone do not ensure equal representation. Some areas require more services from an MLA than others do. This is evident by such things as EI rates and EDA program usage or simply by distances from government offices or services.

I hope your final report will be fair to all voters and MLA's but more importantly, I hope it will be good for PEI..

Thank You