

Mr. Chairman and commissioners, Good evening. My name is Blois Dingwell and as president of District #2 Morell- Fortune Bay, Progressive Conservative Association . I would like to thank-you for the opportunity to present our associations views on the electoral boundaries review.

Your commission has been empowered under its mandate to review the area, boundaries and names of the 27 electoral districts. Included in the list of things you are to consider are:

- the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- communities of interest
- and other relevant factors

It is these three items that our remarks are most closely associated with as we try to demonstrate to you that equal representation for each voter cannot be ensured by looking at voter numbers alone and any change to our present district structure should be very minimal if any change is even deemed to be necessary.

The major economic engines of our economy are generally considered to be Agriculture, Fisheries and Tourism and for the most part these engines, that normally produce a large portion of the wealth, that allows the government to provide the people of PEI with the goods and services they require, operate mostly in rural PEI. For the benefit of all Islanders, there must be sufficient representation in government to ensure that policy's made by government will allow these industries to prosper.

Rightly or wrongly over time, particularly in agriculture, production has been consolidated in larger units involving fewer people. This has happened because of economic necessity rather than personal choice but the result is that while the contribution to the provincial economy remains large, the impact those producers have on government policy has been diminished. This trend is likely to continue and does not bode well for the long term survival of our primary industries. It would be very easy and most likely for an urban dominated government to put well intentioned regulations or laws in place that would make rural PEI a very nice place to visit in the summer or on the weekend but a more difficult place for our primary industries to operate in. The result of a situation like this if it were allowed to happen would have a long term negative effect on the ability of PEI to provide the services its people require and deserve.

If we look for a minute at the Federal government and equalization in particular, we can clearly see what happens when power is determined by numbers alone. The Constitution Act of the Federal government indicates that each Canadian should be treated equally and have the same services available at similar tax rates to them wherever they may live. In reality, the Federal government is controlled in a large part by the province of Ontario because of the # of MP's it has based on population. This causes decisions, particularly those concerning equalization programs, to be made that make it virtually impossible for a province like ours to make equal services at an equal tax base available to its citizens. We would suggest that if the decision-making power is consolidated to urban PEI by voter #'s alone, these same types of decisions could adversely affect rural PEI and will be made here.

We would also like to point out that most urban residents are represented by other levels of government that allow them an additional type of representation of their views and concerns to the Provincial government that is unavailable to many rural residents. This means that rural voters depend more on their local MLA for assistance or service than urban voters do so if they both represent similar #'s of voters it is easy to see the inequities that this creates.

The shift in population from rural to urban on a permanent basis is more likely to continue than to reverse itself so the challenges you face in making your recommendations will have a very long term impact, particularly if you recommend a reduction in the allowable variance.

No law or interpretation of a law is necessarily guaranteed to be correct or proper forever.

Perhaps in order to ensure equality or parity in voter representation the commission could recommend to government, that given the shift in population and the importance of rural PEI to the overall well being of the province, that government and indeed the province would be better served by reviewing the relevant laws and their interpretations with the option of increasing the variance allowable rather than reducing them to ensure all parts of the province can be equally represented in the provincial legislature.

In closing, to illustrate the importance of the arguments we make, I would like to read a quote attributed to the late Hon. J. Angus MacLean that I saw in a newspaper column recently. He wrote in his memoirs entitled, 'Making it Home', "I believed then as I do now, that the devaluation and devastation of rural society is the greatest single misfortune that our country and our civilization has suffered in the past few decades."

We would hope that any recommendation that your commission would make would not further

impact negatively on the ability of rural PEI to continue to contribute positively to the well-being of PEI as a whole.