

Presentation to:
Electoral Boundaries Commission

by:
District 9 PC Association

September 7, 2004
North Rustico, PEI

Speaker #1 (rural)

Chairman Justice McQuaid, Commissioners Mitchell and Hubley, ladies and gentlemen . . .

We thank you for this opportunity to present our views to you in the matter of the proposals for revision to the area, boundaries and names of the 27 electoral districts, as outlined in your interim report of June 30, 2004.

My name is Ron Coles, from Suffolk and my colleague is Bernie Gilbank from East Royalty .

We appear before you today as residents of District 9. Our district, like our representation here today, is a mix of urban and rural communities. I live in the rural area and Bernie resides within the City of Charlottetown.

Ironically, one of the intents/results of your commission's proposed revisions is to separate the rural areas of the province from the larger municipalities like Charlottetown, Summerside, Cornwall and Stratford. In fact, our arguments against the proposed changes are intended to convince you to maintain the rural/urban mix. We also want to leave with you the importance of considering not only numbers within this process, but also the role electoral boundaries play in Island life and the responsibility these boundaries should have in creating the best representation for the people of the Island in

the legislature.

We believe one of the key benefits of District 9, Stanhope-East Royalty, is that it does contain a healthy blend of urban and rural residents. This mix allows for many advantages.

Most importantly, Our MLA is required to be familiar with both urban and rural issues. As a result, he is able to make a more rounded representation of all issues in caucus, in cabinet, and during debates in the legislature.

The dense population of PEI creates a unique situation where the rural people are very interested in the issues within the urban areas and the urban people are interested in the rural farming and fishing practices. On page 18 of your interim report you seem to suggest otherwise. And I quote “The interest which citizens of this area (referring to rural areas) have in government policies relating to health care, education, transportation, agriculture, fisheries and the environment, is distinct from the interest of those electors or citizens living within the four municipalities.” To me this is a Calgary vs Northern Alberta approach, certainly not PEI. One only has to watch CBC Compass on a nightly basis to determine otherwise.

Fostering community involvement is one of the goals of government and helps maintain prospering communities - both rural and urban. This holds true for involvement in schools, churches, sports and community groups. The

majority of rural residents of the current District 9 and the people of East Royalty and Sherwood attend the same churches, belong to the same sports organizations and have formed many volunteer organizations. But these people rarely have similar community involvement with the people in Hampshire or North Milton (which would become part of the same district if these recommendations were adopted). In establishing a district, one must take into consideration how communities are linked to each other and how they flow into the urban areas.

Many Islanders have rural roots. Our families came from fishing or farming communities. Families may live in a municipality today, but they still visit relatives in the country. Prince Edward Island is one community - a community of farmers, lawyers, fishers, teachers, retailers, truck drivers, accountants, and civil service employees. Cohesion must be encouraged and supported; dividing into more urban districts and less rural districts could foster an “us/them mentality” between urban and rural residents. The suppliers to the bread basket vs the consumers. Prince Edward Island is too small to afford such a split. One only has to look at the federal political scene with it’s west vs east divisions as an example to strongly avoid.

It is vital to our island society that we support this feeling we share . . . that we belong to one larger Island community. It is vital that we don’t drive wedges between the urban and rural communities.

The changes proposed in the interim report would require a major overhaul of the entire political map in our province. With due respect, Commissioners, We question why such drastic changes are being suggested, when your mandate could be met by putting forth some more appropriate, less intrusive, adjustments.

- We understand the legislation states that the number of electors in each district shall not be more than 25% above nor more than 25% below the average number of electors in all 27 districts.
- Of 27 districts in the province, nine have a variance of more than 25%: four have a variance below the 25% mark and five have more than the acceptable number of electors. We understand that your goal is to address these inequities, but I maintain that you could achieve your mandate in a simpler manner.
- Simply follow an example of the current District 9 or of your proposed District 22 of Pownal. Where achievable, allow mixed districts to exist where they share common community interests between their rural and urban areas. Perhaps trying a mixture of 1/3 urban districts, 1/3 rural districts and 1/3 mixed districts would create a better legislature for all the Island people.

Although the rural and urban populations may vary in the number of electors

represented, the size of our province and the issues we face dictate that we should strive to elect more MLAs who can represent the combined views of all Islanders, rather than representation that is specifically urban or rural.

We can only hope the federal politicians don't start to think that equal representation is fair, or we may find ourselves losing two or three of our federal MPs to a more populated province like Alberta.

Your own interim report states: "The objective is to insure that each citizen is guaranteed the right to effective representation and the right to play a meaningful role in an electoral process which is established on the basis of electing one representative from each of the 27 electoral districts."

We strongly encourage you to consider a system of effective meaningful community representation for the good of all Islanders over a rural versus urban number system.

Thank You