

Electoral Boundaries Commission
O'Leary Lions Club Hall

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Presentation by:

District 26 PC Association
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Electoral Boundaries Presentation

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to interim report of the PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission certainly had a challenging task before it and while we appreciate the effort made by the members of Commission, we cannot support its recommendations.

It is our feeling that the Commission did not properly take into account the interests of **rural** Prince Edward Island.

We feel that the Commission did not grant enough weight to the representative needs of rural Islanders, or the contribution our rural communities make to the Island way of life.

For example, rural based industries such as fishing, tourism, forestry, and farming serve as the primary economic engines of the province and as such, we feel that these significant interests deserve fair representation.

Today we compete in a global economy and now — more than ever before in the history of agricultural development on Prince Edward Island — we need to aggressively ensure these industries which sustain our livelihood, continue to be cultivated and developed.

Plainly speaking, we need to ensure that there are enough Islanders willing to choose a rural-based livelihood, and who believe that their best interests are as well represented as Islanders living in larger centres.

If we wish to remain competitive in our region,

across the country, and outside our borders, we believe that it is essential that a sufficient number elected representatives work on our behalf.

The recent report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, does not, in our opinion, give sufficient weight to the interests and needs of rural Islanders.

Thousands and thousands of Islanders work in these industries and it is imperative that they have a strong voice to balance the trend towards urban based economic development.

How important are these industries to the economy of Prince Edward Island? In 2003, fishing, farming, tourism, and forestry had the following positive impact on the Prince Edward Island economy:

Tourism:

- Tourism is worth an estimated \$353 million to our provincial economy annually
- Approximately 20,000 Islanders work in the Tourism sector each year.
- While Atlantic Canada has less than 10 per cent of the national population we have almost 20 per cent of the tourism-related jobs

Forestry:

- Value of wood industry shipments reach 50.6 million.
- Primary forest product shipments rose by 2.5 % and industrial wood production rose by 1.7 %.

Fishing:

- Fishing contributes over 350 million to our economy.
- Total value of landings in 2003 was \$165 million.
- Fish exports are the second largest export from the province, accounting for 30% of exports from the province, and valued at \$197 million.
- The harvesting and processing of fisheries products provides employment for more than 9,000 people across the province

Farming:

- Agriculture is Prince Edward Island's number one industry and has a direct impact on the economic, social well-being of Prince Edward

Island.

- One in four Islanders are employed by the agricultural industry, but not only on farms. These jobs range from research scientists to agricultural lenders.
- 646,137 acres of land area devoted to farming - represents 46% of land mass.
- Total farm cash receipts reached \$354.3 million.
- PEI's food processing industry employs 4,000 people

Our rural-based industries are the lifeblood of our economy, something clearly understood by the current government which has consistently indicated its support for responsible use of our natural resources.

We lead the rest of the country in implementing policies which protect our environment. For example: PEI is the only province that has buffer zone legislation, as well as crop rotation legislation. Additionally, we lead the country in environmental farm plans, enforcing sustainable resource policies.

Apart from the economic impact, these industries contribute significantly to the unique and distinct rural character of Prince Edward Island.

Although trends tend to indicate that rural population is in minor decline, **we do not believe this justifies such sweeping changes to our electoral map.**

In fact, we argue that the negative consequences of redesigning the electoral map to eliminate a rural district

does not equal the positive impact such a move would have on the urban areas of our province.

For example, urban Prince Edward Island has an extra level of political representation not available to rural Prince Edward Island. The cities and towns of Prince Edward Island have councillors and mayors to speak on their behalf and to lobby for their best interests - the local MLA is often the most effective and accessible representative available to rural Islanders.

We certainly acknowledge the contributions of federal Members of Parliament. They work hard to offer assistance to rural Prince Edward Island, but the reality is that all too often they cannot spend the time, or devote the resources to ensuring that rural specific concerns receive

proper attention.

Geography plays a key role. Rural communities are generally situated farther away from government services and they depend upon the local MLA to act as their spokesperson and person best suited to navigating the ins and outs of government bureaucracy.

The geographical realities of rural life reflect the important role the rural MLA fulfills in simplifying the processes involved in accessing government services and in understanding government policies.

We agree that a keen respect for “communities of interest” is an essential component of effective representation.

It is imperative, especially at the provincial level of

government, that citizens feel bound by a degree of common interest.

School districts, fire districts, sister communities, and ties to community hospitals are central influences in electoral districts, and no doubt foster political involvement and interest, not to mention a sense of belonging and connectedness.

We are very fortunate in Prince Edward Island to have a politically astute electorate and we think it would be fool-hardy to jeopardize that by creating fissures and unnatural divides among communities which have had close ties for decades, perhaps even before Prince Edward Island attained official status as a province.

Additionally, it is our belief that it would be short-

sighted and also disrespectful to disregard these relationships between communities in order to achieve such small variances when the Electoral Boundaries Act clearly states that a 25 percent variance is well within acceptable limits.

Are we being unreasonable in requesting that the Commission tolerate greater variances in order to accommodate rural communities and ensure that they receive effective representation?

The answer is no! Our request isn't even original — nor are we asking to set a precedent.

For example, Manitoba, which also has a rich agrarian and rural tradition, similar to that of Prince Edward Island, has incorporated special provisions within

its body of legislation dealing with electoral boundary issues as they relate to the rural areas of the province:

Manitoba's "Electoral Divisions Act" sets forth the rules and regulations ,and as shown in section 11, subsection (3) criteria other than population numbers factor into the division of electoral districts.

(For a complete description, see Appendix A.)

Although, as cited in your report, Prince Edward Island is the most densely populated province in Canada, and is not comparable to Manitoba in every sense, it is equitable in the sense that as a politically organized unit, it must represent widely varying interests as they relate to its urban and rural regions.

I believe that the *Carter* case, also referred to in your

report, provides the legal basis for tolerating greater variances. **This would result in the preservation of the current number of districts** which we believe provides effective and fair representation for the rural areas of Prince Edward Island.

A summary of the decision (*see Appendix B*) argues that it is justifiable to allow factors such as geography and communities of interest to be taken into account in order to provide **fair and representative** government.

Although we respect the hard work, and of course the expert legal opinions of the members of the Commission, we disagree with your interpretation and application of the legal principles as they relate to the division of electoral boundaries on Prince Edward Island.

We believe that insufficient weight has been given to the elements of *community of interest* and also *historical associations*. Granted, there are no significant geographical features which divide or separate Island communities, there are, however, meaningful and tangible ties which connect Island communities.

They may not be visible on the map, but they exist, and are quite pronounced and perfectly justifiable to those Islanders which experience and respect them.

For example, Islanders in the community of West Point and surrounding areas have traditionally accessed the services offered in the municipality of O'Leary. They shop at the Co-op and bank at the Credit Union in O'Leary, they also rely on the fire services, the health

services, and they use the recreation facilities.

Under the proposed changes, they will be electorally cut-off from their traditional service and support base – their communities of interest.

Defining community of interest, of course, is not always that simple. The people in the communities just mentioned, have a connection, and it goes beyond grocery stores, credit unions, and hospitals. It would be wrong to divide such a strong and positive force in their communities.

The goal of any democracy is effective representation. It is our sincere belief that if the number of rural districts is reduced on Prince Edward Island, this goal will not be achieved.

Strict and unbending adherence to variances will not serve the voting public or the goal of effective representation.

Are the voters in Toronto-Danforth and Toronto-Centre poorly represented because their ridings have 73,844, and 79,742 voters respectively, compared to the voters in Egmont and Cardigan who live in ridings with 27,891 and 26,836 voters?

If this kind of variance can be tolerated to ensure effective representation, why can we not grant the voters of rural Prince Edward Island the effective representation they deserve.

Perhaps the new map was drawn in anticipation of a challenge based on a violation of the Charter of Rights

and Freedoms, but as it stands presently, it appears that this map interferes with the right of rural Islanders to effective representation.

The variance situations as it stands presently:

District 27 -21%

District 26 -15.5

District 25 -28%

District 24 -17%

District 23 -15%

Only minor adjustments may be required in order to fall within the acceptable variance range. Our recommendations to ensure we receive effective representation are as follows:

1. We recommend that District 24 become an Acadian

district with about 2500 Acadian voters. This is allowable under a recent court decision.

2. A 2% adjustment between District 27 and District 26 that will allow District 27 a -19% variance and District 26 a -17% variance.

This amounts to 72 voters which can come from District 27 taking over the entire community of St. Louis and reaching down the shore road in Kildare to the O'Rourke Road (Raynor Road).

3. District 23 would pick up the voters from District 24 in the amount of 450-500. District 25 would then pick up a percentage of voters from district 23 so that both districts would be approximately at a variance of -20%.

4. If district names are to be changed then we submit that in this district the name “Alberton” makes better sense.

It is our position that the system only needs minor adjustments so that the variances can be met and the rural integrity maintained.

Past legal decisions allow for a measure of judicial leeway when the mitigating factors of *community of interest* and *historical associations* are present.

In the case of rural Prince Edward Island, its interests are quite distinct from that of the urban areas of the province and the electoral map should reflect and respect those differences.

Thank you.

Appendix A:

The Electoral Divisions Act, province of Manitoba,
section 11, subsection (3) states that:

11(3) Where the commission is of the opinion that a population variation is desirable for any reason set out in subsection (2), it may vary the population of any electoral division but no such variation shall,

(a) where the electoral division is situated wholly south of the 53rd parallel, be greater than 10% more or 10% less than the quotient obtained under section 9; and

(b) where the electoral division is situated wholly or partially north of the 53rd parallel, be greater than 25% more or 25% less than the quotient obtained under section 9.

Appendix B:

“Carter Decision” excerpt:

Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation. Deviations from absolute voter parity, however, may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation. Factors like geography, community history, community interests

and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic. Beyond this, dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced.