

Submission to  
Electoral Boundaries Commission of P.E.I.

by

District 27 - Tignish DeBlois  
Liberal Association

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Our organization met on several occasions and held lengthy discussions on the proposed electoral boundary changes. District 27 Liberals are opposed to the proposed changes on many levels but in this brief we will address three main areas of concern: Traditional Political Leadership, Local Boundaries and Variance.

First and foremost, the reduction in the number of MLA's for West Prince from the current four to the proposed three is totally unacceptable.

When the current twenty-seven electoral districts were created, West Prince maintained its traditional number of seats; in fact, our political influence increased by having four seats of 27 as opposed to four seats of 32.

At a time when rural P.E.I. is in a crisis situation, due to a downturn in our major industries of fishing and farming; with job losses in our fish processing sector, we want to be assured that West Princes' strength in the legislature is not reduced beyond our current four seats. We feel that additional representation for the urban areas should not be

at the expense of rural P.E.I.

This commission can make recommendations but the electoral boundaries cannot be changed without a vote in the legislature. West Prince will be watching our elected MLA's with the expectation that their voices are loud and clear on retaining four electoral districts in West Prince.

We have come to the conclusion that rural P.E.I. and West Prince, in particular, will bear the brunt of these proposals from a Commission appointed to represent P.E.I., but with no representation from Prince County. We wonder why our elected MLA's from West Prince did not object to the make-up of this commission at the on-set. Also, why would the Government of P.E.I. appoint a Commission with such an unbalanced regional representation?

Recently Tourism Minister Philip Brown, in an effort to improve the dismal tourist season on P.E.I., publically stated that most Islanders from the East haven't traveled to Western P.E.I., and Westerners haven't been beyond Charlottetown. This confirms our position that we need

local regional representation in Government, and should have had it on this commission. Even our current Government admits that Islanders don't know their Island very well. How then, can we expect these rural regions to be represented from afar? Rural P.E.I. needs our local MLA's... people who live in, and know their area.

### Local Boundaries

The proposed boundary change for District 27, in our opinion, is splitting communities that are traditionally joined by common interests; i.e., industry, jobs, shopping/business centre, etc. For example, we suggest that Greenmount and Woodvale are tied more closely to Tignish on a day-to-day basis and should be included in District 27. Conversely, St. Lawrence and Roseville would not have similar ties to Tignish/Miminegash and would be more oriented toward Alberton; thereby more suitably to be included in District 26.

We also question the need to change the district numbers i.e. 27 to 1. This appears to be a change for the "sake of change" with no rhyme nor reason to it. We suggest this will cause confusion amongst the

electorate, especially with seniors. District 27 concurs with statements made by veteran MLA Wilbur MacDonald (The Guardian, August 14, 2004) on this topic. <sup>1</sup> “Every time we change the riding boundaries we lose volunteers and reduce enthusiasm to work for the parties. And it’s one reason voter turnout declines because people find it difficult to figure out which riding they belong to.”

<sup>2</sup> “But pulling out the stuffing of our rural ridings is not a welcomed move”

### Variance

Our members question the use of the current variance as a justification for the proposed boundary changes. We are suggesting that the rural MLA has a broader spectrum of issues to deal with for his/her constituents because rural life has issues common to urban centres i.e. municipal issues/infrastructure etc. as well as issues pertaining to the industry of rural P.E.I. Geographically it is more difficult for rural Islanders to travel to meet their MLA. These are just a few of the

reasons why we feel West Prince needs to retain four electoral districts.

We challenge the Legislature of P.E.I. to show leadership on this issue by focusing a debate on what variance is needed to reflect P.E.I. in terms of industry, culture, etc. and thereby we are suggesting that this whole procedure be re-visited; review the variance with the possibility of a wider variance between rural and urban centers i.e.: rural 30% urban 25%.

It seems we want to “have our cake and eat it too”, in the sense that we want representation in our provincial government to reflect an application of an equal district variance but would any member of this Commission or any member of our provincial government support this idea if applied to our Federal representation?

We think not... We’d use the argument that as a “have-not” province we must maintain our four Federal Members of Parliament. We suggest that a parallel argument applies to our provincial districts... within P.E.I. the rural districts are the “have-not” areas and we desperately need the voices of four MLA’s from West Prince to ensure

the future development and survival of our small communities.

We thank you for the opportunity to express our views on this matter.