

Bill Longstaff

15 September 2009

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Suite 100, 11510 Kingsway Avenue
Edmonton AB T5G 2Y5

Re: Electoral Boundaries Review 2009

Democracy means political equality. Citizens may be unequal in many ways, but at the ballot box each man and each woman is the equal of every other, i.e. one citizen, one vote. Ensuring this equality should, therefore, be the first objective of an electoral boundaries commission.

Unfortunately, Alberta has entrenched a system of inequality. The Commission is directed by the *Electoral Boundaries Commission Act* to ensure that the population in each electoral division is within 25 per cent of the provincial average with special considerations allowing up to 50 per cent below the average. This is far from equality.

A citizen in a constituency at 25 per cent below the average would enjoy a vote 1.7 times that of a citizen in a constituency at 25 per cent over the average. A citizen in a constituency 50 per cent below the average would enjoy a vote 2.5 times that of a citizen in a constituency at 25 per cent over the average. This is a gross diminishing of the democracy of those citizens in constituencies over the average. It is unjustified and unnecessary.

Historically, this inequality has been justified on the basis of distance and sparsity of population and has therefore made rural citizens a superior breed to urban citizens. Presumably the reason was the greater difficulty for representatives to communicate with constituents under such conditions. That may have been true when communication was slow but hardly applies today with communication easy and instantaneous. It is an outdated concept. The most challenging constituencies today are those in the inner city neighbourhoods of our larger cities with their great contrasts in income levels, variety of ethnic backgrounds, high immigrant populations, etc. But regardless of the difficulties in representing various types of constituencies the answer should not be to selectively diminish the democracy of some citizens, i.e. to make some citizens less equal than others.

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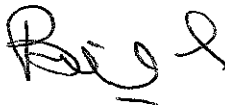
chief electoral office

Nor need it be. Saskatchewan requires that, except for two vast northern ridings, constituency populations be within five per cent of the provincial average. I believe Albertans are capable of achieving as high a standard as our neighbours.

All constituencies have their special challenges. If a challenge is serious enough it can be dealt with in other ways than sacrificing democracy. MLAs need only be provided with appropriate assistance in dealing with that challenge. If, for example a constituency has an exceptionally high number of citizens whose first language is not English, the MLA could be provided with translation assistance.

I respectfully request, therefore, that you respond to your mandate by recommending electoral boundaries that adhere closely to the fundamental democratic principle of one citizen, one vote, allowing a variance of no greater than five per cent from the average constituency population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Fife". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.