

Your Opinion

Northern Insights: concerns over senate

by Larry Sanders

This is the third in a series of columns leading up to the October 26 national referendum. This week, I want to talk about one reason I have for contemplating a "no" vote: the reforms in the Charlottetown Consensus to the Senate and House of Commons.

In the Senate, it's worth noting that the *Charlottetown Consensus* will theoretically REDUCE the size of a Chamber that many Canadians think should be abolished outright. The current appointed Senate has 104 "regular" seats, not counting the nine seats added by Mulroney using an obscure clause in the constitution to stack the Senate with enough Conservatives to ensure the passage of the GST.

Under the present system,

Ontario and Quebec each have 24 senate seats; Nova Scotia and New Brunswick 10 each; Newfoundland, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba six each; PEI four and the Territories one each.

In the new Senate, each province gets an equal number of Senators—six. Territories will get one each, meaning that when the present Northwest Territories split in two as anticipated, there will be three Senators from the far north. There will also be aboriginal Senators, elected by native people using a system that has yet to be worked out. There likely won't be any more than six aboriginal Senators, but that's only Ovide Mercredi's guess. Thus in total, the new Senate is not expected to have more than 69

members—a net saving of about 35 Senators, each with an office, staff, travel allowances, lifetime pension, etc.

The push for Senate reform has come from the west. I spent some time recently in Saskatchewan. The westerners I met were not happy with the *Charlottetown Consensus* not because each province might get an equal number of Senators, or because the Senators would be elected (two of the "E"s in Triple E). The westerners' problem is with the last "E": effective.

Central Canada was willing to allow the creation of an elected and equal Senate, but Ontario and Quebec would not allow the new Senate to be completely effective—in other words, just as strong as the House of Commons. The new

Senators cannot be appointed to the cabinet and cannot initiate legislation that involve taxes or spending money. The new Senate can only hold up House of Commons revenue and expenditure bills for 30 days. The new Senate will only have clear authority to veto legislation "materially affecting French language or French culture" and "bills involving fundamental tax policy changes directly related to natural resources." The *Charlottetown Consensus* admits that the latter category is vague and it's "precise definition . . . remains to be determined." The idea is to allow the new Senate to be able to veto programs considered an anathema in the west like the National Energy Program, which castrated the western economy for nearly a decade.

Whether the new Senate will in fact be able to do that "remains to be determined," and that's what has westerners worried and thinking about voting "no."

As a Northern Ontarian, that part doesn't bother me too much. What does disturb me is the lack of real regional representation within the new Senate for northern areas within the new Senate and men are likely to get an equal number of Senate seats in Ontario, Saskatchewan and B.C. because the NDP governments there are committed to the notion of "gender parity."

But what about regional parity within each province? If all six Senators elected province-wide on two ballots (one male, the other female), Northern Ontario will lose any political

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Some changes in ownership, such as gifts between certain family members, are tax-free with legal proof.

Starting April 1, 1993, if you want to sell your vehicle privately, you will have to buy a vehicle transfer package and give it to the buyer before the sale is completed. The package will be available at all Driver and Vehicle Licence Issuing Offices and from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Consumers will benefit from information

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