

W. Carlton

**Testimony of
Barbara Carlton, Executive Director
Peace River Valley Citrus Growers Association
Redistricting Hearing
Tuesday, September 20, 2001
Hardee Co. Civic Center**

I'm here to share a story with you of a culture, a way of life, of life in Hardee and DeSoto Counties and for that matter, rural Manatee and Sarasota Counties. Peace River Valley Citrus Growers Association represents commercial citrus growers in these four counties. Although the daily grind of an agriculture operation is much less than romantic, you can talk to any grower for a few minutes and quickly get an understanding of the love he feels for his job, his farming operation, and his community.

Note the four counties we represent are very different in nature. Two are coastal counties whose populations are ten fold that of the two interior counties. Yet, within the four counties exist communities and people who will exemplify the culture being explained today.

You are mandated to provide equal representation to all Floridians based on the 2000 U.S. Census. If you take the time to look at the statistics for DeSoto, Hardee, Manatee and Sarasota counties, you will note the population in Hardee and DeSoto Counties has increased more in the ten-year period between the 1990 census and the 2000 census than the more heavily populated coastal communities. As a matter of fact, the population in these two counties has grown more than the state average in the same period of time.

Why this trend? Urban citizens are falling in love with our rural communities. Who wouldn't want to live in a setting where you can quietly swing under a 200-year old oak tree while watching a variety of birds and other wild life moving throughout your property?

Growing up in Manatee County, I am privileged to say I was part of an agricultural community. Even back then, town was a busy and large place. However, the bulk of the community was agricultural in nature. Citrus, tomatoes, cattle and other row crops were the main stay of the community and the leaders of the community agriculturists. Sarasota was very much the same. In the '80's Interstate-75 split these counties. It brought development east providing food and lodging for tourists. Today you will find development from the west border to the east border of Manatee and Sarasota Counties on land previously used for agriculture.

An agricultural community in a rural setting can not be represented as a part of a larger urban district. Votes count and it is certainly understandable for an elected official to place a vote within the legislature that pleases the majority of his constituents. Urban constituents may not understand the uniqueness or importance of the rural agricultural community.

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has just completed a study stating the Florida citrus industry contributes a total economic impact of \$9.3 billion in industry output to Florida, \$4.18 billion in value added impact and supplies 89,700 jobs. This is one agricultural industry in 23 Florida counties. Locally, virtually all jobs are connected to

agriculture, most to the citrus industry. The on-tree crop value in our four represented counties is approximately \$225 million. These funds flow within our communities and are a vital part of its wellbeing. Representation requires an understanding of agriculture and rural communities.

Florida agriculture has been represented well in the past by a variety of individuals serving in the legislature. These individual jobs were made easier when districts took into account more than population. Please help rural agriculture communities preserve their culture by retaining their agricultural integrity when determining district boundaries. Officials elected to represent rural areas will be able to do a better job when areas are linked with similar economic dynamics.

GOOD MORNING. MY NAME IS BILL SORRELL, AND I AM A MEMBER OF COMMON CAUSE SARASOTA-MANATEE.

YOU HAVE HEARD TESTIMONY FROM COMMON CAUSE AND THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, ASKING YOU TO GO ABOUT REDISTRICTING THE STATE IN A FAIR AND IMPARTIAL MANNER...MAKING THE PROCESS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA, DRAWING COMPACT DISTRICTS COMPOSED OF CONTIGUOUS TERRITORY AND AS EQUAL IN POPULATION AS POSSIBLE...DISTRICTS THAT WILL NOT DILUTE THE VOTING STRENGTH OF ANY RACIAL, ETHNIC OR MINORITY GROUP...WILL NOT FAVOR ANY PERSON OR POLITICAL PARTY AND WILL BE SINGLE MEMBER DISTRICTS, INCLUDING 40 STATE SENATE DISTRICTS AND 120 STATE HOUSE DISTRICTS. AS YOU KNOW, COMMON CAUSE AND THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS ARE WORKING TO PLACE TWO CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS ON THE BALLOT FOR 2002. THEY WOULD CREATE AN INDEPENDENT, CITIZEN BASED COMMISSION RESPONSIBLE FOR RE-APPORTIONMENT AND SETTING STANDARDS THAT THE COMMISSION WOULD FOLLOW IN THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS. THIS WOULD ELIMINATE THE MOST SERIOUS FLAW IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM...THE OBVIOUS CONFLICT OF INTEREST THAT EXISTS WHEN THE LEGISLATURE DRAWS ITS OWN BOUNDARY LINES.

I AGREE WITH EVERYTHING IN THE PETITION THAT CALLS FOR THOSE AMENDMENTS...EXCEPT POSSIBLY THE TITLE...!"PEOPLE OVER POLITICS." I AM ONE OF A DWINDLING NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO DO NOT CONSIDER "POLITICS" A DIRTY WORD AND DO NOT CONSIDER "POLITICIAN" A DEROGATORY TERM. I THINK POLITICS CAN AND SHOULD BE A NOBLE PROFESSION. POLITICIANS ARE, AFTER ALL, THOSE WE CHOOSE TO REPRESENT US AND RUN OUR GOVERNMENT THE WAY WE WANT IT RUN... OR AT LEAST THAT'S THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO WORK. SO WHY DON'T WE ELEVATE POLITICIANS TO THE SAME LEVEL OF PERCEPTION AS... SAY...ATHLETES, OR MUSICIANS...OR ACTORS. COULD IT BE THAT SOMETIMES THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE REPRESENTING US AT ALL. BUT RATHER THEIR OWN AND OTHER SPECIAL INTERESTS. MAYBE THAT IS ONE REASON SO FEW OF US DON'T EVEN BOTHER TO VOTE ANYMORE. HOW OFTEN WE HEAR THE LAMENT, "MY VOTE DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING THE CANDIDATE WITH THE MOST MONEY ALMOST ALWAYS WINS...AND THEN THEY HAVE TO DANCE WITH THE ONES THAT BRUNG EM.

THE BEST ILLUSTRATION OF THIS IS AN OBSERVATION MADE BY A LONG TIME, WELL KNOWN SENATOR, WHO SAID, "WHEN I COME INTO MY OFFICE AND SEE A STACK OF TELEPHONE MESSAGES ON MY DESK, WHICH ONES DO YOU THINK I ANSWER?" WELL, MOST OF MY MESSAGES MUST HAVE BEEN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STACK, SINCE I SOMETIMES DO NOT EVEN GET AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF MY LETTERS AND CALLS. PERHAPS I WOULD HAVE HAD BETTER LUCK IF I HAD BEEN A BIG CONTRIBUTOR. I DON'T MEAN TO SOUND CYNICAL...JUST DISAPPOINTED AND WORRIED AS OUR BELOVED DEMOCRACY SEEMS TO BE SLIPPING AWAY FROM US. I DO NOT POINT A FINGER AT THE POLITICIAN OR THE CONTRIBUTOR. THEY ARE SIMPLY PLAYING ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF THE GAME. COMMON CAUSE IS TRYING TO CHANGE THE RULES. IN THE MEANTIME, HOW ARE WE GOING TO FEEL ABOUT YOUR CREDIBILITY WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED THIS REDISTRICTING PROCESS? WILL WE BE SAYING, "WELL DONE...AND THANK YOU FOR REPRESENTING US SO WELL... OR WILL WE SEE YOU LOOKING OUT FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTY FIRST, THE WAY IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN...EVERY TEN YEARS. AND WILL YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SIGH AND SAY, "IT WAS THE SAME OLD THING...POLITICS AS USUAL." IT'S UP TO YOU. WE'LL BE WATCHING AND LISTENING. THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK.

AND WISHING
YOU WELL