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Victoria pressured to approve resort

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A former B.C. agriculture ministry official hired as a lobbyist for a Kamloops resort says the provincial government is under pressure to allow the development to proceed on farmland for political reasons.

"Kamloops has been the ultimate bellwether riding in the province," said Mike **Geoghegan**, a political lobbyist based in Victoria.

"For almost a century now, Kamloops has voted the way the province voted. They always manage to pick the winner."

Geoghegan served four years as ministerial assistant with the B.C. government until the defeat of Bill Barlee, former agriculture minister, in the riding of Okanagan-Boundary in May 1996.

Geoghegan was hired to push Pagebrook Inc.'s \$180-million golf course and resort at Six Mile Ranch between the fall of 1996 and summer of 1997.

Although the agricultural land commission rejected Pagebrook's bid to exclude about 135 hectares from the land reserve in July 1997, **Geoghegan** believes his efforts contributed to the government's decision last week to declare Six Mile Ranch of provincial interest.

The declaration means that cabinet -- not the land commission -- will ultimately decide the fate of the Six Mile Ranch development, located on Kamloops Lake about 20 kilometres west of Kamloops.

The province has appointed inquiry commissioner David Perry to conduct public hearings in Kamloops and Vancouver, and provide cabinet with a recommendation by Feb. 23.

Perry will investigate not just the agricultural merits of the Six Mile Ranch proposal, but the environmental, economic, social, cultural and heritage implications as well.

Six Mile Ranch is located within the Kamloops riding of Environment Minister Cathy McGregor, who supports the development. "This is me, acting as MLA in the best interests of me and my community."