



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 28, 2017

Day 57

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
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Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Motions

Electoral Boundaries Commission Final Report

34. Mr. Bilous moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta: Final Report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, October 2017, which was tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly as an intersessional deposit on October 19, 2017, Sessional Paper 456/2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to speak to the motion? The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to all gathered here in the Assembly and the millions and millions and millions watching around the world. It is a pleasure to rise and speak to such an important topic as Government Motion 34, the Electoral Boundaries Commission motion.

Mr. Speaker, you'll know that there are tens and tens of people who are very, very interested in exactly what is about to take place here with respect to what really is a very important report. All too often in this place and around the province some of the really, really important things that take place are also not that interesting. From time to time the electoral boundaries and where those lines are drawn on the great map of Alberta don't engage the people of Alberta, but it is very, very, very important. In particular, this report that we have before us is very important.

I'd like to just begin by thanking those Albertans who served on the commission over a 12-month period. I know that they gave a lot of their time, talents, and energies to that report and to that work, and for that we should all be thankful.

Having said that, there are a lot of challenges in that report, and I would like to spend a few minutes speaking about some of those challenges and why I would recommend that all members of the Assembly not accept the report that was presented. I've heard that the Government House Leader has proposed this particular motion, and I hope that they'll consider making some adjustments and reconsider that because I really firmly believe that the commission, unfortunately, didn't get the report right for our entire province. Certainly, there were some significant winners and losers in this report. I believe that the legislation that is provided gives the commission the ability to have winners all across the province, and unfortunately that wasn't where they arrived.

Many of my remarks today will focus around some of the remarks that were made in the final report by Commissioner Gwen Day. I would just like to say a very special thank you to Commissioner Day. I know that she worked very diligently and hard on her report and in many respects in isolation as well. I know that that can take a lot of time and energy. I think we all owe each of the commissioners a debt of gratitude but in particular

Commissioner Gwen Day because of the important work that she did and how that affects all of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I think of our province as a family table, if you will, and each person and each constituency around that family table has a very important voice. One voice shouldn't be greater than the other based solely on one factor, and I think that's what Commissioner Day spent a significant amount of time trying to identify. I want to highlight a number of things from her report that should bring us all to pause and consider whether or not the report is what's best for Albertans.

Commissioner Day speaks about some of the challenges that the commission faced right at the beginning of the work, and she refers to:

The Majority began the work with the priority of population carrying the most weight, which of course led to the desire to have a minimal deviation from the average number of 46,803 people per constituency.

Her view at that time and in the final report

began with the premise that effective representation is comprised of many factors of which population is but one . . . [that should be considered but that there is] discretion to use variances by the Supreme Court and the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

This is where Commissioner Day began her work, but there was a divergence between her and the majority. As such, not an ideal outcome was achieved.

I'll quote briefly from the report here.

The Majority began its work by using population to justify a new riding in both Calgary and Edmonton. I do not believe that this was necessary given the discretion allowed for variances and additional considerations besides population in the Act.

I might just add and I'll point out in my remarks this evening that it's not just in the act. Certainly, there have been a number of Supreme Court rulings that allow for those variances and discretion.

I think it's important that Commissioner Day took the time to review some of the historical Canadian foundations around the variances in the size of electoral boundaries and constituencies. She said:

We need to honor our Canadian historical standard of "representational democracy," which has served us well, all across Canada for 150 years. In the Dixon decision, Justice McLachlin wrote that "the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Charter must be defined against the wider historical and philosophic tradition of Canadian Society."

Commissioner Day points out that from the beginning of our Canadian history our forefathers made a conscious effort to balance these two things, effective representation as well as proportional representation or the representation of populations, as factors to create constituencies and that this has taken place both at the federal level as well as the provincial level. In fact, it has taken place since nearly the beginning of Canada.

In 1872 Sir John A. Macdonald commented on readjustments of constituency boundaries [at the time], "While it will be found that the principle of population was considered to a very great extent, other considerations were also held to have weight; so that different interests, classes and localities should be fairly represented."

I think it's important to know that not just at, essentially, Confederation but all throughout Canadian history we see this very important piece of effective representation being taken into consideration. In fact, I'll quote briefly from section 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The reference is the provincial electoral boundaries Saskatchewan 1991 ruling, where it says:

Historically, the drawing of electoral boundaries has been governed by the attempt to achieve voter equality with liberal

allowances for deviations based on the kinds of considerations enumerated in s. 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

This is an example of a court ruling that provides these very important variances.

From the outset we've seen Commissioner Day state that the majority was focused solely on population. I think if you go back, Mr. Speaker, and review the first press conference, you would have seen Justice Bielby speak specifically and, in fact, I would suggest possibly even brag about how close they got to voter parity with respect to population.

We see time and time again, since the dawning of Canadian Confederation, this importance of representation. I'd like to quote a couple of situations which are supported by the Charter as well as case law around this important preference for effective and equal representation.

7:40

I will quote from the 1991 ruling again.

"The broader philosophy underlying the historical development of the right to vote must be sought and practical considerations, such as social and physical geography must be borne in mind" and "The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s.3 of the Charter is not equality of voting power per se but the right to 'effective representation.'" The right to vote therefore comprises many factors of which equality is but one. The section does not guarantee equality of voter power.

It goes on in page 33 of that ruling to talk about some of the examples to be considered.

These are but examples of considerations which may justify departure from absolute voter parity in the pursuit of more effective representation . . .

It emerges therefore that deviations from absolute voter parity may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, that these considerations are given fair weight, and Commissioner Day goes on to say:

In fact, the concept of "one person, one vote" is not a Canadian construct.

The concept of one person, one vote: not only is it not a Canadian construct, but it is not mentioned anywhere in the Charter. So we've seen the commission act essentially focusing on one key priority, which I will admit is valid, but the act provides a number of opportunities for variances.

Let's just speak briefly about that act, the mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. Section 14 asks the commission to consider the following factors:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in it's priority placed in (a),
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Metis settlements,
- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (e) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries.

There are a number of other factors, but for the sake of time I will proceed.

So it is very clear that the commission had, one would say, a duty to consider multiple factors, yet we see the justice that is chairing in this case on numerous occasions, including in the draft report and at the first press conference, speaking about how this commission had done the best job, better than the last commission, because they had gotten closer to parity. In fact, equal representation or effective representation is just as important. We see a number of folks and the commission saw a number of people coming to the commission

trying to highlight – desperately trying to highlight – this to the commission.

In fact, AAMD and C clearly communicated their presentation to the commission that:

the process or means through [which effective] representation is achieved [is] by balancing population and demographics, community interest and characteristics, existing municipal and natural boundaries, and other relevant criteria. Over-reliance on absolute voter parity may not achieve the desired outcome and may inhibit the ability of Albertans to be effectively represented – effectively weakening Alberta's democratic institutions.

That is a quote from the submission of AAMD and C that Commissioner Day also included in her minority report.

I think it's a very important fact to consider, that AAMD and C, who I know this government and the Minister of Municipal Affairs are huge fans of and really, really respect the great work that they do there, are calling out and saying that, effectively, not paying attention to the difference between effective representation and equal representation essentially is weakening Alberta's democratic institutions.

In fact, just two weeks ago we saw at the AAMD and C's fall conference that they voted to support a motion to maintain the rural ridings. I think it's important that because of the commission's zeroing in on the major urbans and their desire to achieve this elusive goal of absolute parity, the cost will come to rural Alberta.

It's important that we truly understand the variances that are allowed in the legislation. The critical provision in the act around variances is to ensure that effective representation is granted to all Albertans through the use of variances. So we shouldn't be afraid of variances. In fact, we should embrace variances.

The Act states:

15(1) The population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25% above . . . [or] 25% below the average population of the proposed electoral divisions.

I'll quote again briefly from the minority report that Commissioner Day provided.

To this point on variances, in the Charlottetown (City) vs. Prince Edward Island (1998) case, the majority of the Court concluded that the variances were well within the tolerances accepted by McLachlin. In the Saskatchewan Reference "there is considerable acceptance in Canada for a variance of +/-25%," which is exactly what we have in our legislation, which should not be feared, Mr. Speaker, but embraced.

This is the quote from Commissioner Day:

In spite of the provision for up to +/-25% variances, a priority by the Majority . . .

She's referring to the majority of the commissioners.

. . . was set to achieve the lowest variances possible, particularly in Edmonton and to some extent in Calgary, thereby justifying an additional riding in both cities. The average variance in Calgary and Edmonton for the proposed electoral divisions is +/-5%. This is a full 20% below that [amount] allowed by the Act.

As I've already highlighted, it was very clear from the beginning of the commission that the majority were primarily focused on this goal of voter parity, which, in fact, is an unachievable goal because the census isn't perfect. The census on which they base their data is a head count of all folks in the constituency; it does not provide an absolute number. So it's a myth, at best, that we can achieve voter parity.

Commissioner Day references a very, very smart man – no relation – whose name is Mr. Cooper. In his submission EBC-2016-17-2-610

Mr. Cooper gives the following example which illustrates that the percentage that the eligible voters is of the total populations is not consistent from one riding to the next: "the entire population of any riding is not the electorate. The electoral list (Elections

Alberta web site) tells us that Lesser Slave Lake has 19303 registered voters (67% of the population) while Calgary-South East has 46555 (51% of the population)."

This is one example of how achieving voter parity is actually not possible because it is not the same in every constituency. We're chasing after a number that is not possible and at the same time not providing the variances that the act allows, and as such, there is a significant challenge for rural Alberta in the continued diminishing of that voice around the family table, that family table, the table that I spoke about at the beginning, of equally important voices both in urban and rural Alberta.

This continues to have an impact on our province. As we see, cities continue to grow at a greater rate than the population in the rest of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. There is this perceived notion that we need to achieve voter parity when, in fact, the results are going to be the ongoing erosion of rural ridings. Alberta won't be sustainable if all Albertans are to be effectively represented. If Alberta continues to grow at such a rate in the areas of the city, we run the risk of losing significant history and culture, and other economic drivers could potentially be lost in rural Alberta because of the lack of effective representation.

7:50

It's not to say that a city MLA is less or more busy than a rural MLA but that their roles are sometimes very different. We see in the city the interchangeability of MLAs at certain functions whereas in rural Alberta, for example, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills there are over a hundred elected local officials. There are 14 municipalities, and there are nine high schools, all that require a certain level of attendance by the local MLA, but we see fewer and fewer of them able to impact their local communities because of this erosion of the number of MLAs in rural Alberta, and we run a significant risk that we put rural Alberta at risk.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was really enjoying that speech from my colleague. Just on a little bit of a more personal note, I'd like to talk about the boundary commission's report and the submissions that we were allowed to do over the summer. It was quite frustrating. You know, I listened to a lot of them. There were a lot of MLAs from both sides at a lot of these commission functions, a lot of municipal government people, reeves and mayors. They all had the same message, and by the look of things from the final report that came out, it fell on deaf ears. It was basically a waste of all our time going to these things.

One of the most concerning was when I was at the session in Vermilion after the interim report. I was given a five-minute opportunity to do a submission. After that submission the commission questioned me for about 20, 25 minutes. In the very first question out of the chair's mouth – and I believe she is a Provincial Court judge – she asked me to explain why there was a relationship between the Saddle Lake reserve and the town of St. Paul. Now, the gasps from all the other people that were there were deafening, and I know that some of the members opposite were there as well and were quite shocked to hear that this person, who is in charge of these significant changes to the boundaries in the province of Alberta, had that little touch and that little connection with what goes on in rural Alberta. Saint Paul de Métis was established in 1909. Those two communities have been interacting within 30 miles of each other for over a hundred years. That's the connection. In the first version, the interim report, they were

separated into two different constituencies after all this time. These are the kinds of things that we were looking at. These are the kinds of arguments we made.

Now, they argued that it was going to be based on population and on the fact that every vote in Alberta should have the same power. Well, I agree with that. For every voter that comes out to vote, you know, we should be electing members with the same amount of power.

But I'd like to also point out – and I did point it out to the commission – that if you look at the Elections Alberta report from the 2015 election, the average voter turnout in Edmonton or Calgary varies anywhere from 25 per cent to 50 per cent maximum. Out in rural Alberta it's 60 per cent plus. So you tell me whose vote is more powerful: that person living in Edmonton, where there's only a 25 per cent voter turnout, when they're selecting a member for this Legislature or the people out in rural Alberta, where they're actually getting out and travelling sometimes 20, 30, or 50 miles to a voting station – but they're getting out there to vote – and have a 60 per cent voter turnout and get to select one MLA? There's a lot more to equal representation and equal power to a vote than just numbers on a sheet.

Let's talk about rural versus urban. My colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills touched on it. In my constituency I have 23 communities. Some are smaller; some are bigger. You know, they vary in size. I deal with 10 municipal governments – 10 municipal governments – that all want you there at this function or that function. Especially after this municipal election I was invited to the swearing-in ceremonies. I mean, you have to turn some of these guys down.

I represent over 20 schools in my area. I attended nine graduation ceremonies. This is all stuff that we do when we're not in the Legislature at the end of May and into June. There's a big difference when we talk about representation and how easy it is for an MLA to get around their constituency.

I've got five hospitals in my area. There are some of the MLAs that live in Edmonton and Calgary that may not have one high school in their area or one hospital in their area. How is this equal representation? All of these things need to be considered, not just numbers on a census. There's a lot more to representation and effective representation than a bunch of numbers on a piece of paper.

Along with the 20 schools, 10 municipalities, and 23 communities, unnumberable nonprofits, ag societies, women's shelters, seniors' groups, and 4-H clubs all want a piece of their MLA. It's very difficult to spread yourself around. There are times on a Saturday where I have five functions to go to between Lac La Biche and Elk Point, St. Paul, Two Hills. There are days when I put 400 kilometres on on a Saturday just trying to get around to represent all of these people.

Mr. Gill: Take a bus.

Mr. Hanson: I should take a bus, I guess, or hire a driver. Wasn't that what we were told, to hire a driver?

Mr. Gill: Make better choices.

Mr. Hanson: Make better choices.

These are the things. It's very upsetting when you go and present two submissions and at each one of those there were probably 20 people doing submissions. They all had the same message, Mr. Speaker – all of them – yet here we are. We've got this slam dunk, with no changes, the loss of three rural ridings, the loss of three rural voices. The northeast part of our province and indeed the entire province outside of the urban centres are the economic

drivers of the province, all of the oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, tourism – well, other than West Edmonton Mall, which is a big tourist attraction.

All I'm saying is that in these areas we may have a population of 35,000 people, but on a weekend, on a long weekend, some of these communities can double in size overnight. Bonnyville during an oil boom can have a shadow population of 25,000 to 30,000 people that show up in a two-week period. With all of that infrastructure, all the things that go with that – the hospital access, the school access – people not only come and work there, but they bring their families down, and they rent properties. It snowballs, right?

We want to talk about fairness to Albertans. Every Albertan not only should have the same power in voting; they should have the same access to their MLA. Is it fair that an Albertan, just a regular voting Albertan, that lives in Edmonton can jump on public transit or on his bicycle and ride down and be at his MLA's office in 10 minutes while another Albertan with the same vote has to drive 200 miles on sometimes sketchy roads in the wintertime or that a senior is trying to get from place to place to go and deal with the MLA to get some help with some paperwork? Is that fair? How is that fair? How is that fair and equal representation?

Now, I know that there are a lot of MLAs across the way that agree with some of this stuff. This is an opportunity for you to show Albertans that you actually stand up for them. I know that there are rural MLAs. You know that this is what you're hearing from your folks. Let's stand up. There was really no reason. The only recommendation or requirement by law was that a commission had to be set up to look at the boundaries. The boundaries as they were could have been easily redistributed.

There are constituencies in Edmonton and Calgary that are, you know, close to matching or maybe plus five that will never ever – ever – see the potential growth to bring them over the limit. There's no possible way unless you're going to change the whole system and build high-rises in residential areas. There's no possible way. They're already maxed out. You can throw a few infills into some of the old areas in Edmonton and Calgary where they have big lots, and you can split one house into two, but there's no way that you're going to increase the population by 10,000 people in the next 10 years. Impossible. Yet our rural areas are being sacrificed for this. We could have easily juggled some numbers in Edmonton and Calgary and equalized the numbers in Edmonton and Calgary and left the rural alone.

8:00

We still have that possibility, that option. All we need is for the people in this House to see the reality of it, see the fairness of it for Albertans, vote against this motion, and vote against this report by the commission. Unfortunately, I think it was a waste of time.

That's about all I've got to say. I really hope that some of the folks across the aisle that I know agree with this, because I heard their submissions at the interim report submissions – I know that they agree with it. I know that their constituents do, so I hope that they stand up for their constituents.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm very disappointed with these proposed electoral division areas, boundaries, and names for Alberta. It makes me feel like my constituency is now the doormat of Alberta. Literally, the decisions that were made that revolve around my constituency of Bonnyville-

Cold Lake are quite upsetting, upsetting to the point where I believe that someday, should these boundaries be challenged in court, they will actually use the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake for that constitutional challenge. This is how bad it is when it comes to Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Now, I put a little bit of time into writing an article for my local constituents to know, and I want to read parts of it because it's important that they understand how poorly this government, if they consider this report to be a reflection of Alberta's ability to have effective representation – it's so false. It's so false. We need to vote this down. This is a terrible report. I have to say that it's disappointing to see that they even put this together in northeastern Alberta.

Now, the article that I wrote I put on my Facebook page. It's called *Erosion of the Rural Voice in Alberta*. I put a lot of effort into this, a lot of thought.

Electoral Boundaries Commission final report came out last Thursday and it does not provide adequate provincial representation for a wide swath of Albertans. To be clear, it's disappointing that such a large focus was placed solely on population when there are so many other factors outlined in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act that should go into developing riding boundaries.

Rural Alberta has been overlooked and is grouped together in piecemeal ways that don't reflect our communities. It appears that the Commission only focused on population and ignored many of the requirements that they should have taken into consideration when making the new boundaries for Alberta that lay within the mandate given to the commission.

This is important because we've got a commission that focused only on population. This is upsetting. This is upsetting because we are using Stats Canada numbers during a decline in my constituency. We were hit, one of the worst in all of Alberta, up in northeastern Alberta, up in my constituency with mass vacancies in all of my housing, mass layoffs, and that's when they did the figures for population. This is shameful. This is truly shameful.

Now, we've got this section 14. I don't want to go too far into it, because I could read that word for word, but there are a lot of things in section 14 that determine the fact that what we've got here is a lack of following what, I would argue, was clearly set out as a mandate for the commission.

Now I'm going to read a little further here.

On July 24, 2017, I stood before the Electoral Boundaries Commission and presented that our constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake had very unique struggles that apply mainly to northern Alberta. My presentation was broken into four... points. I have four points I'd like to address. These are covered more thoroughly in the report to the commission that I've... handed you, but I will attempt to highlight them quickly in my presentation today.

This is a presentation that I gave to the commission. This is something that I sat and took the time to prepare for the commission to understand my constituency and the struggles within my constituency. I do know that there were several – that is, mayors and reeves – that also went out and took that same time.

The first point is about the communities served in Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The interim map shows that they are looking to add an additional 25 communities, which can be visibly seen on the map, along with two reserves.

Now, this was at the time of the interim report. We were looking at already increasing my constituency by a large number. The interim report doesn't look exactly like the final report because, I'll tell you, they did a big increase in the actual amount of population within my constituency.

I will read on. This is more about the interim report, but it is still reflective of the final report.

This [means] a total of 40 separate communities, two settlements, and five reserves within my constituency. Considering that each area is . . . comprised of a mayor, council, chief, reeves, and community leaders and elders, this would mean almost tripling the number of communities within my riding. Increasing the size of [my] constituency will make it extremely hard for an elected representative such as myself to properly represent the people within the constituency.

It comes down to size. It comes down to size. It's a large constituency with a lot of people packed into it.

I will say that the commission actually went on to say that it's a small rural constituency so it's okay to grow this to the size it is now. That's ludicrous, just truly ludicrous.

The second point surrounds shadow population.

My colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills touched on this.

In the report entitled Shadow Populations in Northern Alberta, which was prepared by the Northern Alberta Development Council . . .

This is a council that is dealing with just northern Alberta. We actually have our Deputy Speaker sitting on this council.

. . . the author looks at the prevalence of shadow populations and highlights how current federal census data does not accurately reflect the true population of the region. According to the report the percentage of the population for Cold Lake region is approximately 29.5 per cent higher.

Twenty-nine point five per cent higher: that's crazy. That's shadow population. That's population that Stats Canada is not capturing.

While I recognize that [this] committee is making a decision on the federal data, I would not be doing my region a huge service by failing to state that the shadow population is a real problem. It is a substantial part of my community. I believe that this [is a dramatic] increase [that] will result in people having an MLA who is serving a significantly larger population than purported.

This is important. Shadow population needs to be considered when we're doing this.

The third point is about the population being represented by the community. On page 36 of the interim report it [says] that the majority believes that the variance above 7 per cent of the population "can be supported as . . . an area where future population growth is likely to fall well below the provincial average." This is an issue that I would like to address. In the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake there are several major projects that are currently in the process of being started. I would specifically like to mention a few of the companies for these announced projects: [we've got] Cenovus, Husky energy, Imperial Oil, Osum, and CNRL.

All of these companies have large projects that are in the process or along in the process of starting.

Mr. S. Anderson: So the economy is picking up.

Mr. Cyr: No.

The government is all happy saying that it looks like it's starting up. No. These projects are actually put on hold till – you wouldn't believe it – 2019. Is that a time frame where you hear, like, maybe an election, a change of government maybe?

An Hon. Member: A coincidence?

8:10

Mr. Cyr: I think there's a huge coincidence there, that we've got all these projects put on hold. I do hope that these projects move forward. I have stated that to the Energy minister, that these projects are important to my constituency.

But what's important here to recognize is that these projects contributed a huge shadow population and a population within my

constituency. When we did the StatsCan population count for my constituency, we did it at the lowest possible time for my constituency, when there were no projects going or almost no projects going. Then suddenly this commission unilaterally, with no backup, says that my area is declining, and that is why it is okay for them to shove a whole lot of population into Bonnyville-Cold Lake. That's shameful, just shameful.

The commission's own statistics show that the region has not been declining [but], in fact, has been increasing. This is echoed by the completed report by Stantec for a regional waterline.

I will state that that is something that I take pride in. I was able to work with the Minister of Transportation to help get a waterline from Cold Lake to Bonnyville. This is a huge thing that adds to it.

Mr. Mason: You're welcome.

Mr. Cyr: He's as ecstatic as I am, which is good.

But what's important here is that that very report that he used to base his decision on in deciding whether that waterline was needed showed big population growth within my constituency. Big population growth. We've got a boundary commission that unilaterally made a decision – unilaterally made a decision – to say that my constituency is decreasing and therefore it's okay.

The fourth surrounds common community interests.

I'll say that I won't go too far into this because my honoured colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills did a great job explaining that the St. Paul region is its own little region. Putting this region into my constituency was really something that shouldn't have ever happened. This is a wonderful community, there's no doubt. I am fortunate if they are added to my boundary, but I will tell you that, in the end, this is its own area, its own region.

What we've got here is a commission that unilaterally decided, with no proof that I could see, that my area was declining. They couldn't come up with any reasonable boundary lines. They decided to almost double the size of my constituency. They made my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake the largest over the constituency average of all of the constituencies. The largest. We're 15 per cent over. After this interim report, after I presented to them telling them that 7 per cent was too much, they added 8 per cent more. Eight per cent more. I have to say that it's very disappointing to see that, in the end, you see that a rural boundary – a rural boundary – has the largest constituency for population over the average. That's unbelievable, truly unbelievable.

When I started off, I said that if there is a reason to challenge this in the courts, if we challenged because of the boundaries, it is going to be Bonnyville-Cold Lake that they're going to use because, in the end, this whole commission made an error when they made some facts that were, in my opinion, misleading. In the end, what we've got here is a constituency that is vibrant. We're growing. We are an incredibly strong constituency. Yes, we had a hard time. We had low oil prices. There's no disputing that. You know what? When we change government, I will tell you that my constituency will end up with 70,000 or 80,000 people. That is significantly larger than what this boundary report is saying, and that is tragic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see you here this evening at this hour. I will say, through you, good night, Austin and Chyanne Nixon, and I will go ahead and move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies for the page.

I'll just wait for the amendments to make it to the table.

The Speaker: They're just handing it out. In the interest of time . . .

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I kept a copy with me, which should help me do this briefly.

This amendment changes the names of some constituencies that are in the current report. Each of the constituencies proposed to be changed in this amendment had lost towns that are in their current names right now under the current boundary districts that were then removed during the first draft, but then those communities ended up back inside these constituencies. This amendment simply returns those original names back to those constituencies. I think I speak as a rural Albertan about how important it is for these towns to be still within their constituency with their names, how proud they are to be part of that.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that it actually shows the full jurisdictions and, I think, just corrects a minor error that will help these constituencies out. I would ask all members to support this amendment.

The Speaker: With respect to the amendment that the House is dealing with, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly support these amendments. I think they are sensible, and they reflect the communities. I think that's the right approach for the naming of constituencies, to focus on the communities and the municipalities, the jurisdictions that may fall within the electoral boundaries of that unit. All of these reflect that. I have no difficulty in recommending to government members that we should support this amendment.

The Speaker: Any other members under 29(2)(a) to the Government House Leader?

Any other members that would like to speak to the amendment, which we will call A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: I believe we are now on the motion as amended. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to speak out on this vitally important topic. I'm not going to restate a lot of the points that were made by my colleagues from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills or from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. These comments were reiterated many, many, many times over during the course of the public hearings, and I know they were also repeated during the course of many of the written submissions.

I will say that as a representative of a largely rural riding I am very disappointed with the Electoral Boundaries Commission in what I would describe as their tone-deafness to the concerns of rural Albertans. The recommendations that they list in the final report both on pages 61 through 63 and also on pages 26 and 27 under what are called rural concerns, or broadly lumped into rural concerns, are extremely disappointing because they reflect a total lack of understanding of the challenges of representation of a geographically large rural riding. It's not like they weren't told. Many of the members of this Legislature presented to the commission, and they detailed the kinds of challenges that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills talked about. We know what those are: representing, for example, nine or 10 or 12 or more municipalities, each with its own municipal council; representing four or five school boards; representing 13 or 15 or 20 ag societies, as I do in my constituency.

8:20

The thing of it is that each one of these bodies has a board, has a president that expects to have some face time with their MLA, and

when the MLA simply cannot provide that face time, then it's equated to poor representation. That simply is unacceptable. But effective representation is a two-way street. It's not just the ability of constituents to get to the MLA, but it's also the ability of MLAs to get to their constituents and get to their constituents where they live. In large, geographically diverse constituencies that becomes a real challenge.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that over the five and a half years that I've represented the people of Vermilion-Lloydminster, I've been fortunate to attend dozens and dozens of summer festivals, high school graduations, university convocations, and a number of other events, but one thing I have noted that I find interesting is that when you attend, your attendance is appreciated. When you fail to attend, it is noted and remembered. It's a dichotomy there, but it is a reality of representation that there is an expectation.

I was personally shocked to read in the final report on page 26 where the majority of the commission felt that rural Albertans are going to have to accept a cultural shift. You know, to me, that's just an insulting thing, that they have to accept

that a cultural shift toward making an appointment to see an MLA or making contact by telephone or e-mail is a more balanced means of addressing voter access than a reduction in the geographic size and population of the constituency.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that my constituents expect to see the whites of my eyes, and they want to know that they can see my reaction, not do the communication via e-mail, not do the communication via Skype. They expect that representation, and when they suggest, "Well, open satellite offices," I've already got two satellite offices in Vermilion-Lloydminster, and I know of other members who have three and four constituency offices. While that is helpful, it doesn't lessen the workload. It, in fact, makes it greater.

Mr. Speaker, the report by the commission indeed is an extremely disappointing document, and I certainly concur with the conclusions of the minority report by Commissioner Day. Commissioner Day brings to the commission considerable experience as a representative. You know, I will tell you that I was certainly very, very disappointed with the report, and I would encourage members to vote against it as well, but in anticipation that that may or may not happen, there is one specific request that I would make. I would like at this time to move an amendment, and I'll hand the requisite number of copies over to the pages.

Mr. Speaker, I'll wait to have that read into the record, but it's very much following along the lines of what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre – that's with regard to the naming of a constituency. In my case it's a little bit of a different situation in that the interim report called for the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster to be expanded to the west to include the town of Vegreville but to not include the name of the town of Vegreville. As anyone who's familiar with Vegreville – and I know the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is very knowledgeable of this – Vegreville has had a tough year. Their name was dropped from their federal constituency. They, of course, are still advocating for the retention of the case processing centre, and their name was now to be dropped from the provincial constituency, so I suggested that it should be added.

Now, there was a shift between the interim and the final report to orient the constituency on a north-south axis to add the community of Wainwright. That's fine. That makes sense. But where I do have a problem is that the new name of the constituency was going to be Vermilion-Wainwright and that the city of Lloydminster, by far the largest city in the constituency, the city whose population is nearly half the total population of the constituency, was to be dropped from

the constituency name. I can tell you that I heard a great deal from the residents of Lloydminster, from the mayor and council of Lloydminster.

All I'm asking in this amendment – and I will read it into the record. I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after “Sessional Paper 456/2017”:

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Vermilion-Wainwright be changed to Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Speaker, these are the three largest communities within this constituency. They represent a large proportion of the population, and they, in fact, reflect that two constituencies have been melded together, Vermilion-Lloydminster and Battle River-Wainwright, and certainly Wainwright is the largest part of that constituency that is being added in. I would argue that that provides some consistency and some clarity, and it also acknowledges the fact that these three communities are all very important in their own way to the constituency.

I would ask my colleagues to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

We'll refer to this as amendment A2.

I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think the hon. member has made the case that Lloydminster is the largest community by quite a bit within the constituency, and the omission of its name doesn't sit right with the people of that community, and rightly so. So I have no problem in urging my colleagues to support this amendment.

The Speaker: Any questions to the Government House Leader under 29(2)(a)?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Speaker: On the amended motion, are there any other members who wish to speak? The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak to this motion. I guess I want to start with a little bit of the process involved with this boundaries commission and the work that they did. Now, what happened in our communities up in northwestern Alberta, Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti in particular, is that the interim report came in. Of course, it had the city of Grande Prairie receiving its own constituency, and it had taken Grande Prairie-Wapiti, a significant portion of the farming community west of Grande Prairie, and put it up with Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Of course, when that interim report hit the communities, there was substantial backlash to that. The communities west of Grande Prairie didn't feel that there was any kind of correlation between their community and the communities that they were lumped together with in the interim report, so they all spoke against that. It was odd, too, because in order to go from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley in the north to the west in the interim report, they would actually have to travel through two other constituencies to get there. It didn't make a lot of sense to have it that way, and of course there was lots of backlash. The suggestion that most had was to leave the constituencies as they are.

Now, I think what was very surprising is that when we received the final report, we found out that instead of taking Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley and taking the west side of Grande Prairie and

putting it into that constituency, they changed it and put the area east of Grande Prairie into that constituency. Of course, the people in those communities east of Grande Prairie – Valleyview, DeBolt, Crooked Creek, Ridgevalley, that area there – never had an opportunity to express any concerns over that because they didn't find out about that until the final report came out. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it was quite alarming to the people to find out that the final report was so substantially different than the interim report. Obviously, that doesn't give an opportunity for communities to have a say in the matter. It completely negated their opportunity to have a say in what happened. What's happened is that we have a substantial chunk of what used to be the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency now lumped together with Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, and of course they now in the final report have called it Central Peace-Notley.

8:30

This new constituency is 400 kilometres long. On the map alone there are 66 different communities listed. Now, I've gone through, and I actually found I think at least five other communities that aren't listed on the map, so that brings it up to about 71 different communities in that constituency. There are four First Nations reserves. For two, I believe, it doesn't include the whole reserve because the reserve is split into two parts, with part in one constituency, part in this constituency. There are eight MDs and counties and, of course, not the complete eight: half of some, all of another, kind of a random hodgepodge of how the MDs and counties got split up into these constituencies.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, as a matter of interest, I don't live in the farthest corner of the constituency, but the Legislature is actually just as close to my home as the farthest community within this constituency now. Downtown Edmonton is just as close for me to drive to as the farthest community, not the farthest area in the constituency but the farthest community from me in the constituency. That's a three-and-a-half-hour drive.

Now, it appears that what the commission did was that they used populations to justify giving more urban seats or, actually, I guess, more accurately, to remove three rural seats. Of course, they actually removed more rural seats than that because they gave some cities their sole constituency. Before, some of them were split into rural and urban. They've actually taken away four, maybe even more, rural constituencies.

Earlier today I tabled in the Legislature some maps. Now, it's as simple as eight maps to redraw all the constituencies in Alberta and have them populationwise fall within the parameters of the current legislation. That affected only 21 constituencies, which means that 66 constituencies remain completely unchanged. To me that makes sense, but unfortunately we have a situation here where we've changed 87 constituencies, some dramatically – some disappeared altogether – when we could have adjusted 21 and had the same result.

Now, the problem with some of the constituencies, in fact the Central Peace-Notley constituency, is that there are no natural trade corridor similarities in that constituency. The people of Fox Creek or the Fox Creek community have nothing in common with the community of Clear Prairie or Worsley, yet they are lumped into one constituency.

Now, I don't think anybody should feel sorry for an MLA that has to represent their constituency and their constituents no matter how big the constituency is, no matter how diverse it is because we're here to do a job. We're all happy to do our job. I know I am happy to do my job. I don't mind driving. I don't mind getting up

early, and I don't mind staying up late to do my job. I'll drive across Alberta. I'll drive through the night. I'll do whatever I have to. I'm not asking anybody to feel sorry for me, but what I would ask is for somebody to take just a little bit of consideration for the people in these communities, these 71 communities, that want to feel like they're represented. That's what I want to have. That's what I would like somebody to have just a little bit of consideration for.

With the existing constituency I had to make a decision on November 11 between four different November 11 Remembrance Day events. With the new constituency I don't know how many it could be. It could be six or seven. I'm not even sure. Now, if you have three or four in your constituency, I guess in a four-year cycle as an MLA you should be able to hit each one at least once, but if you have seven or eight, some of these communities will never see you on November 11 because you won't have an opportunity to get to them all. The same with Canada Day. Most of these communities would love to see you on Canada Day. I've done it where I've hit two or three or four events in a day, but with over 400 kilometres in between it's going to be hard to hit multiple events.

Now, I know that when I look at the map that this final draft has put forward, I think all anybody would have to do is look at the constituency of, I believe, Cardston-Siksika and look at the shape of it. I mean, it's absolutely bizarre. I don't know the dimensions, but I'm going to guess it's close to 200 miles wide at the bottom and close to 200 miles wide at the top and is probably five miles across in the middle and right in the middle.

An Hon. Member: Alberta hourglass.

Mr. Loewen: Hourglass or number eight, whatever you want to call it, two triangles stacked on top of each other point to point. Now, does that make any sense to anybody? I'm sorry, but what this looks like is gerrymandering. When you have bizarre stuff like this, that's what it looks like.

Madam Speaker, there's been a lot said about this already, but there's going to be more said. My colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills had several comments. He was looking at the minority report. I just want to read a couple of parts from it.

1. The eroding number of MLAs representing Albertans outside of Calgary and Edmonton as discussed above. This concern was expressed consistently throughout our hearings in both rural and urban settings and in a great many of the submissions.

This is something discussed both inside and outside the cities, the eroding number of MLAs representing Albertans outside of Calgary and Edmonton. That was a great concern that was brought up many times. Like I said, the most common submission in our area was: leave it the way it is.

I'm going to go on.

2. Sparsity and density of population 14 (b). The increasing geographical size of some rural ridings has made it even more unmanageable for the MLAs to effectively represent their constituents as we heard repeatedly in our hearings. Conversely, in the densely populated urban divisions MLAs are more able to well represent their population even with a larger positive variance because of easier communication and travel logistics, shared responsibilities amongst neighboring MLAs, ease of access to other levels of government officials and the availability of other resources to meet the constituents' needs. In our hearings, I don't recall hearing concerns expressed by urban MLAs and their constituents that their riding was not sufficiently and effectively represented.

Clearly, the concerns were on the rural representation, not on the urban representation, on the rural representation, but that didn't seem to affect what the commission came up with.

It goes on to say:

Both types of MLAs work tirelessly to represent their constituents; I acknowledge and respect that their roles are very different and equally important. On February 21, 2017, urban MLA Ric McIver at the Calgary Public Hearings said: "I think the expectations are in many cases harder on the rural MLAs because in Calgary there are 25 or 27 of us, and if you can't get McIver, you can get somebody else. If you can't get somebody else, you can get McIver. I think that in the public's mind there is an element of interchange-ability whereas in Rocky Mountain House: That's our MLA. We want you there."

8:40

I think it was already mentioned here today, too, how much these communities actually appreciate their MLA showing up. I know that because that's what I hear and that's what I feel when I'm travelling around in the constituency. People appreciate it. I'm not sure why. I don't think I'm that special. But for some reason they appreciate their MLA showing up. I guess it shows that there's some care, some concern for that community, so they want to see that.

3. Unnecessary disruption. In spite of population growth, many existing ridings could have remained unchanged . . .

Like I said, 66 could have remained unchanged, 66 out of 87.

I'll carry on.

. . . and been within the allowable variances both positive or negative. Because of the perceived need to reach voter parity, the final maps include significant changes to most rural and urban boundaries. This disruption, in my view, was unnecessary given the provision in the Act for justifiable variances.

4. The effects of increasing the geographical size of the ridings. Sections 14 (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) mandate a Commission to consider many factors, including sparsity and density of population, community interests and organizations, community history, First Nation reserves and Métis settlements, number of municipalities and local authorities, urban neighbourhoods and municipal boundaries. I am concerned that we may have joined together disparate communities in the pursuit of lower variances. This joining together of disparate communities puts pressure on MLAs to meet the diverse needs of unique communities and the key economic industries like agriculture, oil and gas, forestry, mining, recreation and tourism. Additional organizations, municipalities, hospitals, First Nation reserves and Métis settlements, schools and school boards often increase in numbers along with the geographical size of the riding.

That's one thing I haven't gone through and figured out, how many different school divisions that will be in this new constituency. Obviously, it will be many.

I do want to go on to another part here. Just bear with me. [Mr. Loewen's speaking time expired] Aw. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before I recognize the hon. member for 29(2)(a), I remind all hon. members that we don't use individual surnames in the House. Even when quoting or reading, use the constituency name, please.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Cyr: I think that that was a great job you were doing there. I would love to hear how your constituency is being impacted by the

fact that it's growing so much and how diverse it is, so if you would continue, Member.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Loewen: What I would like to do is – and this will maybe help answer that question – read from one of the submissions. It's from the county of Grande Prairie, from the reeve Leanne Beaupre. In this letter to the commission she says:

Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as the Supreme Court decision on the topic of Electoral Boundaries (Sask) (1991), states that effective representation takes into account "factors like geography, community history, community interest and minority representation" . . .

With this in mind, the County's preferred option is to maintain the status quo – an option also supported by many of our neighbours. Our region, under the current electoral boundaries of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky, has been very effective at developing partnerships that promote shared goals between our municipalities, while supporting each municipality's autonomy and perspectives. This is a formula that has proven to be very successful. It can be measured by our region's strong economy – one of the most robust and fastest growing in the nation – an unemployment rate that sits below the national and provincial average, and our competitiveness on a global scale.

Obviously, this is from the reeve of the county of Grande Prairie, right there in the heart of this previous constituency. That's what they requested from the commission, and obviously this voice went completely unheard or unrecognized.

I did want to go on to one other one here. Just let me find this here, too. Now, this is a quote from another presenter.

Although the commission argues in the report that respecting urban and rural balance per se is not listed in the legislation as a factor for consideration, that the commission has the authority to assess all factors deemed appropriate is indeed explicitly provided for. In fact this distinction is acknowledged by previous commissions as we see here. Otherwise, how are we to make sense of the 2010 recommendation on rural representation . . . referenced above? Setting a precedent for ever increasing the size of rural ridings due to the lower proportion of rural residents to urban ones impacts effective representation in other ways as well. Making rural ridings even larger than at present and thus even more time consuming to represent effectively while being able to maintain anything approaching a work/life balance will deter [the] quality people from considering running at all – especially those with family responsibilities, mobility challenges and so on.

Now, what's interesting about that one there is that that was brought forward by the MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, so I'm presuming that he can't be very pleased with what's happened with this commission either as far as what they've brought forward. I would hope that he'll be voting along with us against this.

Now, I just want to read from the conclusion of the minority report. She says:

I admit that I am not able to fully address all the possible results to potential boundaries and variances applying my perspective. The opportunity was not available to explore this.

As an Albertan, I believe that we are very fortunate to have such a variety of electoral constituencies: rural ridings that also encompass towns and villages, 16 small cities, city/rural blends, and two metropolitan cities. We need to focus on the gift that this social mosaic brings to us as Albertans and recognize that we are in fact interdependent. Working hard to preserve effective representation for all Albertans, as we review boundaries, will best maintain better government as a whole and preserve our strength as a leading province in Canada.

The Majority's final report reflects a great deal of thought and diligence. The resulting maps and report have been an immense amount of work. Using the lens and fully believing in the primacy of population, the results of the report are understandable.

But obviously we have issues here.

She goes on to say:

Respecting our Canadian historical style of representative democracy sets the foundation for effective representation, which is further affirmed by existing legislation and case law. It is clear that population needs to be balanced with the other elements of effective representation. In conclusion, I believe it would have been in the best interest of all Albertans to adequately consider all mandated factors and, where justifiable, preserve existing ridings using allowable variances. Adding ridings to the cities of Calgary and Edmonton could have been avoided, which would have resulted in much less reconfiguration throughout Alberta while still providing effective representation for all Albertans.

Very interesting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to respond just to one comment made by the hon. member who just spoke, and that is that the suggestion that what the commission . . .

The Speaker: I'm advised that if you were to speak, it would be to close debate.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly forgot that it's a motion and that you can only speak once except to close debate. As tempting as it is, I'm not going to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. She taught me a lot about memes.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the boundary commission and its final report and just a little bit about the interim report. The way that the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville looks right now is – I'll describe it to you. There are 12 municipalities, including villages, towns, and cities. There are four county municipalities. There are more than 10 agricultural societies. There are more than 20 schools. There are seven high schools, which means seven high school grads, seven high school awards nights. There are schools across the constituency, which is sometimes a lot of fun because you get to do Read In Week all across rural Alberta. Because there are so many municipalities, there are three Legion branches.

8:50

You know, everything in rural Alberta has an exponential factor. Each municipality has lodges, libraries, Elks clubs, Lions clubs, fish and game associations, ag service boards, Boys & Girls Clubs. Every summer is a tour of rodeos, parades, ag days. All year it's perogy dinners, steak fries, fish fries. I probably go to a hundred hot dog fundraisers a year, the same when it comes to pancake breakfasts – this is how a lot of fundraising is done in small municipalities – seniors' drop-in centres, fire departments both hired and volunteer, EMS services, junior trap shoots that take place in different rural areas. There are cemetery blessings that take place in many of these communities. There are rotating church services all across. It's a really, really diverse way of life. Anyone that thinks that it is sleepy in rural Alberta is quite mistaken. It is a nonstop way of being able to represent a constituency.

I'm just going to read a little bit out of the final report here and just comment on a few things that are mentioned here. The first line: "It is recommended that the boundaries of the electoral division . . . be as shown on Map 62." And it calls it, of course, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, which is nice because in the interim report Vegreville had been dropped, and it was on a drawing that pulled in St. Paul north of the river, which made no sense.

The commission had been asked to pull together constituencies that were based on shared interests, and what that did was that it pulled St. Paul away from its shadow communities and families and people and business dealings. It made no sense. We went to the commission I guess it was in late summer, and it was what everyone said. I love St. Paul. It's a great place. I love to visit it. But it makes no sense to be pulled in, away from its communities with shared interests, from above the river. It's tough to argue against pulling some people in, but sometimes you have to look at what that bigger picture is. I made sure that I spoke to the county of St. Paul and the town of St. Paul before I argued against those communities being included in that new redraw, and they felt the exact same way, that it just didn't make any sense.

Also, the name Vegreville being pulled, as was mentioned earlier: it's 6,000 people, which may not seem like a lot, but it is currently the second-largest municipality in the constituency. To make no mention of why this community was being moved between constituencies, why there was seemingly no reason to mention 6,000 people being moved made absolutely no sense, and it added insult to injury in a year that has been devastating with the continued moving forward of the closure of a federal government centre there that does case processing for refugee, citizenship, and immigration claims. It is the worst man-made disaster in a generation, and they didn't even deserve a mention in the report.

I'll go on. It talks about the variance. The new variance of population would be 11 per cent above the provincial average. As much as I understand that it is a real challenge across the province to try and find an ability to balance populations and figure out how that works – because once you change one, you know, an east, west, north, or south boundary, it has a knock-on effect across the province. I understand that that's a challenge. But when you pull it 11 per cent above – and in the report it says that it's justified because the growth is expected to drop – it is very difficult to have a report that sounds like it is counting on rural areas to depopulate. I find that very, very troubling.

The commission was told that the average age of residents in parts of the electoral division is well above that of other Albertans. That is absolutely true. There are municipalities that are not having new families the same way as they once were. It's difficult to move away from your community sometimes because you don't have the same socioeconomic means as other families. So we have communities that do continue to age, and it brings with it a lot of needs, a lot of one-on-one needs that these people have, where they need to come into an office and be provided a service. Knowing that there are different challenges when it comes to growing, booming young populations, as I have seen in Fort Saskatchewan with an incredibly young average population, there are other needs on the other side of the spectrum when you're talking about aging populations. I just wanted to address that.

I am glad to see that the request for counties to be kept whole was brought more together, not completely together but brought more together, in some cases. The new boundaries of this constituency pull Minburn together, pull Two Hills in, keeps Lamont whole, so I appreciate that work.

It talks about a public concern of travel distance. Absolutely. In the interim report they wanted a constituency that went from Fort Saskatchewan all the way to Saskatchewan. That makes it really

difficult, to know that you are putting someone on a highway potentially in the middle of winter to come to your office because they don't have the same connectivity that people in urban areas enjoy.

Part of the interim report was talking about Internet connectivity. It said, you know, that we're in a changing dynamic of having more people online, more people able to access offices through e-mail. Well, that's really nice if you have connectivity. But in the report itself it says that they're hoping that everyone gets connectivity by 2026. So we would be changing these boundaries knowing full well that we are hoping for some distant date in which we would have more farms, more rural municipalities connected into our offices, into our Internet. That was also quite frustrating to hear.

But there are some very good things with this. Like I said, it keeps some of the counties whole. It focuses on the highway 16 corridor as being more taken in because those are areas, municipalities with shared interests. I know that, representing Fort Saskatchewan and getting to know so many of the families there and getting to know families in Vegreville and around Strathcona county, people live, work, and play between those communities very much so. They live in Vegreville and work in Fort Saskatchewan. They live in Fort Saskatchewan and work in Vegreville. It's a very, very fluid area, where people travel and are connected. And when people move and sell their farm, it is often one of those communities that they choose a home to retire in. The families that I meet in places like Fort Saskatchewan have really deep roots, very recent roots to farming communities that are just outside in the region.

9:00

It was said earlier – and it is quite true – that with all of these events and places that you are graciously invited to, your attendance is appreciated, but your absence is noted. That's because you are the only representative for your constituency. You don't have the same ability to call on your neighbour to come and fill in for you if you can't be there. Truth be told, they often don't want to see someone else; they want to see you. You are their connection to the government, to the Legislature. You are their voice.

I absolutely love the constituency that I have the privilege of representing. You know, it's big. There are a lot of people, there are a lot of municipalities, and there's a lot to do, but I am privileged at the picture of what my position affords me the opportunity for, to get to know so many incredible people doing so many incredible things all of the time. It is just second to none.

I don't begrudge the growth in the area or the growth in the population. It will have its own set of challenges, but I absolutely support the changes to this constituency. I know that there was a lot of work put into this report, so I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions to the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Just a pleasant warning to the Speaker that from the way she described her riding when she started – it's not a criticism but, rather, a warning. If you describe your riding that way, you might have 87 people running against you for the riding. You made it sound pretty good.

That's what I had to say, Mr. Speaker. Outside of that, if the hon. member has something to say, I'd be glad to hear it.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It pleases me to rise this evening to speak to this important topic. I did want to make a couple

of comments and agree with many of my colleagues on both sides of the House that rural voices have always been incredibly important to our province and remain especially important as we continue to grow. Even with the advances in technology there will never be a substitute for a handshake or a face-to-face meeting over a cup of coffee, as the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville spoke to and, as well, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster talked about. That can be a challenge as an MLA, especially when these people are as far away as three hours, as we've seen proposed in several of the new maps.

However, to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the recommendations of the commission were tantamount to gerrymandering, as suggested by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, I think is overstretching things. For example, if you look at the riding of Camrose, you can see that that socialist bastion now includes such communities as Loughheed and Hardisty and the Tofield area. There's no evidence to make the suggestion that the commission is dipping into the field of gerrymandering, and I really think it's beneath the dignity of this House to suggest that the commission has conducted themselves in a way that would be considered contriving the ridings other than in a way that they saw fit, following the rules and the mandate they were given. We may not be completely satisfied with the results, but to go ahead and suggest that gerrymandering was involved is, I think, something we should all avoid in this House, being respectful of the commission, that did very hard work in a very difficult situation, as it always is when you come up with new boundaries for the electoral divisions in the province. Let's please avoid those types of accusations in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions for the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an amendment to move, and I have the requested copies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I basically want to move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-Falconridge be changed to Calgary-Bhullar.

As you know, Calgary-Greenway got divided into a few other ridings, got redistributed, and the new name is, like, Calgary-Falconridge. My humble request to all the members of this Assembly is that we change the name of Calgary-Falconridge to Calgary-Bhullar to honour the man who passed away coming to work, representing his constituents, and who, in my humble opinion, was the best public servant I have come across, a personal friend. Still, to date, there isn't a day when I go into my constituency that I don't come across anybody who gives me a reference to Manmeet, about how he made him feel, how he treated him, how he helped his constituents. Whether they were part of Calgary-Greenway, whether they were part of Alberta, whether these Sikhs were in Afghanistan, he was there to help.

Mr. Speaker, you always tell me to keep quiet in the House and tone it down. I can't even speak today. It's one of those things for me, knowing him personally for over a decade. You've all worked with him. We have all known who this person was, what he meant for this province, for this land. And it's really, really hard for me to carry on and talk about Manmeet.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I just ask all the members to support this amendment so that we can honour his legacy for the future generations, so that they know who Manmeet Bhullar was, what he did, what he meant, what his legacy was. That's all. Thank you very much. I wish I could speak more, but it's emotional for me to talk about my friend.

I hope I can get support from all of you. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) for the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the proposed amendment A3? The Member for – how could I forget? – Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just rise briefly to offer a very small token of support to what I think is a very important amendment to the motion. You know, we were all present in the House together as a large family when we experienced such a great loss together. I think that we have a unique opportunity to honour and respect that unique public servant that was Manmeet Bhullar.

9:10

You know, I would just like to point out that we aren't deviating at all from the traditions of this Assembly when it comes to honouring and respecting those who have lost their lives during their public service. I know that the government side will be very aware of that case. I think that this is another opportunity for us to take a really appropriate step and provide an appropriate honour to a public servant who tragically lost his life doing what he did best, and that was helping other Albertans. On that tragic day just a little over a year ago, on the side of the road, on his way to this place, on his way to work, he so tragically lost his life. I think this is just a small, small step to be able to honour and respect that sacrifice and that service that he made to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members that would like to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for his words, clearly delivered with a great feeling of respect and friendship for his friend. I worked with MLA Bhullar as well across the aisle, and I have to say that I did respect the work that he did, particularly as Minister of Children's Services. He certainly opened up the process and provided, I think, significant improvements in a very bad system. I recognize that.

I note, however, Mr. Speaker, that the commission's report deals specifically with this issue, and we have moved that the report should be adopted. I'll just read this:

While the Commission acknowledges the sincerity behind those recommending that Calgary-Greenway be renamed Calgary-Bhullar as a memorial to MLA Manmeet Bhullar, who died in [a tragic] accident while on his way to the legislature, it continues to believe that his legacy will receive a more enduring and effective tribute when recognized in other ways, as for example, by way of the naming of a Calgary elementary school for him, a school that opened in August 2017.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is a very difficult issue to address because I know that all hon. members were very deeply touched by the death of Manmeet Bhullar. As Minister of Transportation I was one of the first to be informed of the tragic accident and had the unpleasant duty of informing members of the Progressive Conservative caucus about the accident involving their colleague although the death was

not confirmed for several hours. I recognize the deep feelings that people have and the emotions that this stirs up.

I have a concern – and I've expressed this in the past – that the public would rather have the constituencies named for them reflect the communities in which they live, whether they be urban communities or municipalities within a rural constituency. I continue to believe that very strongly.

We have a number of instances of members who have died in office. For example, the Justice critic of the NDP opposition, Gordon Wright, passed away while a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and that was very tragic. There are others, Mr. Speaker. My concern is that if we continue to name constituencies after politicians, whether they be deceased or alive, as the case was with Ralph Klein when that riding was renamed for him, very soon we're going to have a fairly confusing situation for citizens and so on. I think we now have one constituency named for a Social Credit member, being Ernest Manning, two named for Progressive Conservatives. We have one named for Laurence Decore, the Liberal leader, and one named for Grant Notley, the NDP leader. That naming took place 20 years or more after Mr. Notley's death and was introduced by the Progressive Conservatives and very much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the practice has got to have some limits, and unfortunately, with regret, I don't believe that we can support this amendment.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Government House Leader?

Any other members who would wish to speak to amendment A3? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this amendment. I guess I would respectfully ask the Government House Leader to reconsider the position he's just taken. I don't think it's any stretch to say that Manmeet was a special individual. You know what? I recognize that we're all special individuals, and I mean that in the most sincere way. Everybody that's here has their place in history and does things that those that sent them here will be proud of along the way.

But Manmeet was a little bit different in many ways: the first turban-wearing Sikh to be a minister, I think, in the British Commonwealth – I think that's historically a little bit more remarkable, as remarkable as the rest of us are – certainly, somebody that, in my view, was probably bigger than one political party, with the way he conducted himself during his time here. I'm not sure that all people on all sides of the House think that I'm their teammate. I had the feeling, though, when Manmeet was here that members of all sides of the House felt like he was their teammate. I mean that with the most respect. Historically he certainly did some difficult things during his time in office, including the work that he did on the children in care file. He was an icon and remains an icon in Calgary and, I think, in other parts of the province, and that's a status that not all of us elected people get to achieve. On top of all that, he lost his life on the way coming to work here while trying to help somebody else in difficult circumstances. He put himself at risk.

For all of those reasons and more that don't all need to be said, I sincerely hope that the Government House Leader will change his position and support this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Hays?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I too feel compelled to rise on this and encourage the Government House Leader and members of the government caucus to reconsider their position on this. I don't think anybody in here disagrees with just what Manmeet Bhullar brought to this Assembly and brought to the province of Alberta. That's not up for debate here.

Really, the question boils down to, you know: how do we appropriately honour and remember one of our colleagues? The minister brings up some good points. There have been other MLAs who've passed away while in their term of office. Tragically, we learned just a couple of weeks ago that an MLA that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the Member for St. Albert and I met in Charlottetown last month, Kevin Phillips, the MLA for Melfort, Saskatchewan, passed away suddenly in Saskatchewan. I don't believe for a moment that there should necessarily be any expectation that the Melfort constituency be renamed in his honour. I don't think that's an expectation.

9:20

But I do think there are special circumstances in this particular case. It's already been pointed out very clearly that in this situation Manmeet was travelling to the Legislature to work. I will never forget for the rest of my days that that morning he was on the caucus conference call with us. He was scheduled to give a question that day, and as House leader I told him to not rush, to take his time, that we would have somebody else cover his question slot, and that he could have a question the next day. Well, as we all know, that next day never came. You know, there are still times when I wonder if that was advice I should have given, but the reality of it is that Manmeet is not with us.

Specifically in the political realm, the naming of a constituency is one of the very small things that we can do as a group of colleagues, as a nonpartisan group of colleagues, to honour a former colleague. I know that the constituency name has already been changed. Falconridge is not known to anybody other than the folks that maybe have specifically read the report. The idea that there is proposed to be a constituency called Calgary-Falconridge is not known by a large number of people.

We already have a number of examples of not just members of specific political parties, as was pointed out by the Government House Leader, but of other figures from Alberta history: Alexander Rutherford, Nellie McClung. You know, these are all folks that have a place in our history. I think we have a unique opportunity here as the colleagues of Manmeet to honour him in this very special way, because I'm not entirely sure that as time passes and as the natural passage of time occurs, some Legislature 20 years from now who never had that privilege of working with Manmeet will ever make that decision to rename a constituency in his honour.

Manmeet was the quintessential public servant, the quintessential representative, and I think that we can all feel very privileged to have worked with him and worked alongside him. I know that I feel that way. While I respect, certainly, the opinion of the Electoral Boundaries Commission on this issue and I know that this was no doubt a difficult decision for them to make as well, they didn't know Manmeet Bhullar. But we did, and because we did, Mr. Speaker, I would urge members of this House to honour his memory by renaming Calgary-Falconridge to Calgary-Bhullar.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster?

Any other members who wish to speak? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: This is to amendment A3?

Mr. Gotfried: To the amendment, yes, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to speak very briefly on this. You know, I knew Manmeet before I was given the privilege of serving in this Legislature. Through much of the great work that he had done in the community, he had become a friend, a contact, someone I respected. He was a young man. At the time he was the youngest legislator in this House. That floor has been broken, and I'm glad to see that. Maybe it will be broken again, but at the time he was the youngest MLA to be elected in this province. I know that not only was his community proud of him, but I think that all Albertans were proud of him for doing so.

He was a mountain of a man, and with great power came great responsibility. I had the pleasure – he sat right here beside me. I posted a picture the other day of the Alberta flag and some flowers and a holy book that was sitting in here, and it reminded me of the time that I was able to spend with him here and to sit with him, as a younger man, some probably 20 years younger than me, and to take the time to learn from him. And I think that we learned much by living and working with him and embracing him as a colleague.

But I think we also learned on his death that his commitment and his passion and compassion for people allowed him to put himself in danger on that fateful day, the one day that we had bad weather on the Queen Elizabeth II highway, Mr. Speaker. I look back on that. We had two winters in a row where we hardly had any bad weather, and that was that one we did. He took the time. He could have kept on going. As the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster noted, he didn't have to come back. He had given a speech to a group that morning on, I think, children and youth rights. He didn't have to come back, and we urged him not to come back. But he chose to come back because of his sense of duty, and he chose to stop to help those people because of his sense of compassion.

Here's a chance for us to honour that memory, Mr. Speaker, not just the memory of someone who died while they were helping someone and who served in here but a young man who, by any imagination, was in the prime of his life, with a young wife and no family started yet. We all run into his family back in Calgary. You know, I think that some of this is not just about us in the House. This is deeply personal when we run into them. He is still being missed every day.

As I think the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said, this is an honour which we have one chance to do here. He may be forgotten in future Legislatures. This is a chance for us to honour that memory. I think there is precedent to say that we can do this. We don't have to do this. We're not compelled to do this.

I would ask you all to reach into your own hearts today. It's just over two years ago now that he passed. It seems like just yesterday that I was listening to him giving his whoops and hoots and hollers and being quite an unusual seatmate here, and I miss that. Let's think and reach into our hearts, think about his family, think about the legacy, and let's give him the honour of that, as we would hope for any of us who distinguish ourselves as he did, both in service to this Legislature and service to his constituents but in service to strangers on the streetside. This is an opportunity for us to honour that. We have one chance to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under 29(2)(a), are there any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Speaker: Back on the motion as amended, the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking to Government Motion 34. I wish we'd passed that amendment moved by my colleague from Calgary-Greenway.

Anyway, I'm speaking to the main motion here for now. Mr. Speaker, I do not concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I would like to echo the comments of my colleagues on both sides of the House who are facing substantial increases to the size of their constituencies across rural Alberta. The increases are so big that some of the constituencies are even disappearing.

I currently represent the constituency of Calgary-Foothills. Under the redistribution plan my constituency as it exists would be redistributed among three new constituencies: Calgary-Edgemont, Calgary-Foothills, and Calgary-Beddington. It's going to be three ridings. While certainly the new Calgary-Edgemont contains the Calgary community of Edgemont, this constituency is the largest part of the old Calgary-Foothills. It provides spectacular views of those foothills and the mountains to the west, and residents there have lived in Calgary-Foothills for decades and decades.

9:30

The new constituency of Calgary-Foothills is up on a plateau, largely north of Stoney Trail and west of Panorama Road. The growth of the new suburban neighbourhoods will happen here, where the plateau slopes down into the Symons Valley and across Nose Creek. These are the newer communities and are collectively known as Symons Valley.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe the new constituency of Calgary-Edgemont should be properly named Calgary-Foothills. I also firmly believe the new constituency of Calgary-Foothills should be appropriately named Calgary-Symons Valley. For these reasons, I would like to move an amendment, and I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: Please proceed. Are there comments you'd like to make in reference to amendment A4?

Mr. Panda: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the amendment. I'm just waiting for the copy. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment. I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-Foothills be changed to Calgary-Symons Valley and Calgary-Edgemont be changed to Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate and trust that the members opposite will agree with my assessment and adopt this proposed naming convention for the future constituencies in the north end of Calgary. I actually spoke to my neighbouring MLAs who represent those affected constituencies. Also, for the reasons the Government House Leader mentioned, people would prefer the names of the communities where they live.

Today we actually approved a few other changes through a few amendments, so I hope the Government House Leader and all members of this House use the same logic as when they agreed to the amendments from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and also from other members today.

There are already examples, so I'm asking everyone to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Foothills under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members who wish to speak to amendment A4 as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Foothills? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regret, I don't believe we can support this particular amendment. The hon. member has referenced some of the amendments to names that we did support, but these were simply a matter of restoring names that had been previously attached to those constituencies as opposed to creating new names.

You know, we certainly haven't had the opportunity to look into the appropriateness of this name. For example, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: there was a proposed name change, and the proposed amendment changed it back to the same name. In the case of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, St. Paul was added. In the case of Highwood a different name altogether was proposed, and the amendment just moved it back to Highwood. So in these cases, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty straightforward. We didn't have any difficulty making these changes. But in this particular case it's a new name, not one that was recommended by the commission and not one that we've had a chance to look at. So, unfortunately, I don't believe we can support this amendment.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments to the Government House Leader under 29(2)(a)?

Are you ready for the vote on amendment A4 as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Foothills?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Speaker: We're back to the main motion as amended. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 34, that's before us, on the Electoral Boundaries Commission's final report. Similar to the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I do believe, as she felt, that the interim report was a failure by the commission. I believe that the final report is failing to allow effective representation for all Albertans. I concur with a lot of comments that have been made already with regard to rural representation and the need to recognize the different dynamics within communities, but the thing that I will highlight that we need to also recognize is that effective representation needs to recognize the effective representation of industries throughout the province also.

When we move in a direction that has considerations primarily on population for representation, we fail to recognize that MLAs that are in the rural ridings not only represent people, but they represent industries. Many of us are working with industry in bringing forward the concerns from industry and the concerns that they have on being able to successfully compete in a global environment, and these are very significant concerns that need to be properly represented.

When we look at the need for proper representation for industry, I believe that when we have proper representation for industry, whether it's from the oil and gas industry, mining, forestry, agriculture, tourism, which largely takes place in the rural areas of our province, when we have effective representation for industry, then we also have very good looking out for the best interests of all Albertans.

I believe that when we talk about effective representation, we have to recognize that industry and all of those that are working in industry create jobs down the line. In my riding last week I received a report of a mill that was shutting down, Mr. Speaker, a mill that had not a lot of jobs right at the mill, but when you take a look at

all the jobs that it affects down the line, from the loggers to the truckers to the equipment suppliers to everything that has played into it, it affects a lot of jobs. Good representation for industry is important, and I believe that MLAs are not only representing constituents, people, but they are there representing the industries that are within their ridings also. To spread that MLA too thin makes it difficult for the representative to do a good job for their constituency.

9:40

I look at the constituency that's been proposed, and I'm thankful that we were able to add the name "Westlock" into the Athabasca-Barrhead constituency. I live in the county of Westlock, and that is the proposed riding that I would desire to represent if the people so choose. It extends all the way from Swan Hills in the northwest right into St. Paul county. If I was to drive from St. Paul to Mallaig – and you can google this and get a better understanding of the kind of drive that would be faced. According to Google it'd be three hours and 38 minutes without traffic. You take a little bit of moderate traffic: all of a sudden you add half an hour. You take some poor weather and driving conditions: you add even more. For context, the distance from Swan Hills to Mallaig, that driving distance, is the same as driving from St. Albert to Okotoks, south of Calgary, which, in my mind, just doesn't make sense. This type of constituency, with those types of distances, makes it very difficult to have effective representation.

You know, we look at the legal requirements that the commission was given – the requirement is effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to ensure that – and we go through a lot of the decisions that were made and that the commission talked about with regard to Madam Justice McLachlin. The primary goal of effective representation: this is very important to consider in being able to have a vibrant economy as well as a vibrant society and social aspects within our society. I am quite disappointed that we now have a riding that's Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock and many other rural ridings that I believe are going to have a very hard time receiving the effective representation that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is demanding for us to have in our democracy.

The other thing that I'm quite concerned about is that the commission decided that representation by population was the target and then didn't have enough foresight in their final report to see that having a riding, such as my colleague here with the Cold Lake-St. Paul riding, that would be 15 per cent above the recommended number, a rural riding that is the largest by population, has all the difficulties of a rural MLA trying to represent all of those people and all of those communities.

You know, it's necessary to take a look at what the commission talks about. They talked about it in their interim report, but they also talked about it in their final report. With regard to 10 years from now because of slower growth, I don't believe this was in the commission's mandate, to decide or to try and interpret what the growth was going to be in these constituencies. They were supposed to be looking for effective representation now, not for 10 years from now. Yet they made a decision that they feel that that riding was going to grow slower than the rest and that in 10 years it would probably meet the requirements. Well, that wasn't their mandate. That wasn't what they were charged to do. They were charged to do a job, to find effective representation not 10 years from now but for those people in that region now. So I believe that they failed in their job.

You know, I can take a look at the new riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. They took and split many of the counties, little

corners off here, little corners off there. There are now nine counties in that one riding and several towns, summer villages, hamlets, and just in county and town councillors well over 100 individuals that the rural MLA needs to build a relationship with and get an understanding from of the needs within their municipality. These are significant concerns.

The new riding has 232 townships, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and thirty-two townships. If you take a look at a township, that's 36 square miles.

An Hon. Member: The township count?

Mr. van Dijken: Two hundred and thirty-two. An urban riding is likely to be smaller than one township. How does that make any sense? It boggles my mind that they were able to feel that this commission, that this report was in the best interests of effective representation within our democracy that would serve us well well into the future.

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to move forward. I have an amendment to move, so I would like to move forward with that at this time. I have the copies necessary, but I didn't keep an amendment.

The Speaker: In the interests of time, hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment that I've put before you now was a request from Sturgeon county. It's a county within my current boundaries; I represent them. They came forward with concerns that the name "Sturgeon" was being dropped in the commission's report. The amendment is that I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Morinville-St. Albert be changed to Morinville-St. Albert-Sturgeon.

In consideration of the fact that Sturgeon – there's always been a riding of Sturgeon. All the way back to 1905 we have had a riding of Sturgeon within the province of Alberta. The name "Sturgeon" is in the current riding of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, and we have an understanding that, moving forward, from this point on there should be a consideration for the names of original electoral districts and that, out of respect for Sturgeon county and the request that they're putting forward at this time, this House would recognize the name as being Morinville-St. Albert-Sturgeon.

I would submit that this meets the requirement of the commission and also meets the requirements of the naming advice that's put forward, so I would ask that this House consider it and allow this to move forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock? Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, with respect to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Correct. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to my colleague the esteemed Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock: I'm just curious to know if you've had the opportunity to speak to the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater or anybody else in that region that may be affected by this and if they had the opportunity to provide any comments to you with respect to this particular amendment as well as some of the changes in that region and how they may affect some of the neighbouring MLAs that are, you know, quite likely to be affected as well and

if they had the ability to provide comment either to the House or to you or some of the other counties in the region as well.

9:50

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you for the question. The request that came forward to me also came forward to other MLAs that are representing Sturgeon county, so the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater received the same e-mail that I got. The Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert: there's some of his riding that is part of Sturgeon county. We actually had a quick little talk about it when the e-mail came forward, and it was agreed or we had considerations that, yeah, it's worth making a request known to this House and trying to work towards the request from Sturgeon county. Hopefully, that answers your question.

I encourage everybody to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Speaker: Any comments or questions to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members that would speak to the amendment, which we will identify as A5, as proposed by the hon. member?

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Speaker: I believe we are back to the motion as amended. The Member for Chestermere-Westlock.

Mrs. Aheer: That would be a big riding, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: So many names. That's big. Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: It just takes a little bit of country, a little bit of rock 'n' roll.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to be able to speak to the commission. There have been so many interesting things that have happened. One of the more interesting parts that I found when I was able to participate was actually going to the boundaries commission and sitting and listening to so many of the groups that came in and spoke.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

One of the things that was really noticeable was that when so many of these communities, especially even in the urban communities, would come in, their discussions around the boundaries were a lot around people who shared community centres and had a lot of interesting things that were similar about their communities. A lot of these folks that came in were volunteers on these committees that had been put together to actually talk about their particular ridings. It was very passionate; it was very thoughtful. The amount of work that went in when these folks would speak about what was important to their ridings: I actually found it quite overwhelming at times to listen to all the information, Madam Speaker, and all of the things that were put into putting together the information on a particular riding.

What I found also really compelling was that so many of these people that came together actually had to reach out to many of the areas that they hadn't normally spoken with and would come together to the commission to speak about the various changes that were happening and how it was going to impact their communities, their children, the schools, a lot of different things. As a person who's rural, I guess, being Chestermere-Rocky View, it was very, very interesting to hear their information.

A lot of changes have come down, and we've heard a lot of discussions around name changes, around the way that we should look at the way the lines are being drawn. One of the things that

was also very interesting was that the commission had originally proposed that they wouldn't be going past natural boundaries and all those kinds of things. Actually, just before the last part of the commission was put through, there were a bunch of different ridings that had gone past the natural boundaries. The people that had come forward from these various areas to speak about their ridings had very compelling information with respect to natural boundaries that actually had not been taken into consideration when those lines were being drawn. Thank goodness so many of the people that volunteered their time to bring that forward had the ability to be able to speak about this.

I have an amendment, but before I go on to the amendment, one of the things I'd like to mention is that all of the people that are coming here into the House to talk about the changes to names and all those things: these haven't come lightly. They've come with a great deal of thought behind them. All of the MLAs in here who have had concerns have done a great amount of outreach into their communities to speak on behalf of the municipalities, on behalf of the people that live there. There's emotional attachment to some of these names. I think it's very, very important that we take that into consideration.

With that, I'd like to move an amendment. I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Central Peace-Notley be changed to Peace-Notley.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, another speaker to amendment A6? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Just under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Did you want to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: I do. Yes, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Why?

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. Government House Leader. I was confused. Did you want to speak under 29(2)(a), or did you want to speak to the bill?

Mr. Mason: I did. I've already done that. The question I asked was: why?

The Deputy Speaker: All right.

Hon. member, we're still under 29(2)(a). You don't choose to respond, hon. member?

Go ahead.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The reason why this amendment is brought forward is that I think we can tell now that there's hardly anybody in Alberta that's really happy with this commission's report. It changed so many boundaries, so many names, created so many issues that there isn't a lot of love lost for this.

Now, one thing that happened here is that because of the commission and how they changed things, I guess they proved how little they knew of these constituencies and how little they knew about Alberta in how they were reworking it. For one thing, in the commission's report they've done away with Grande Prairie-Smoky. Well, in the final report they couldn't even spell "Smoky" right. So that gives you just a bit of an idea.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, what happened is that when they created this new constituency, Central Peace-Notley, what they didn't realize, I guess – I'm not sure what went through their heads at all, actually. They added in a huge chunk of the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. Now, the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency included a town called Fox Creek. Fox Creek is not in the Peace Country. Valleyview, DeBolt, Crooked Creek, that area there, is considered south Peace. The existing part of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley is Central Peace, and of course the northern portion of this new constituency is north Peace. By having this constituency still called Central Peace, it does not at all reflect what the constituency is, which is Peace plus part of Fox Creek.

10:00

It may have been more accurate to call it Dunvegan-Smoky because Dunvegan has such a rich history along the Peace River, over 200 years, in fact. Dunvegan-Smoky would have represented the constituency much better because Dunvegan would have taken in the Peace River, and Smoky would have covered the Smoky River and the Little Smoky River, which actually runs fairly close to Fox Creek, which is about as close as we could get to having a name that's actually representative of the area. By having Central Peace in this name when south Peace, north Peace, central Peace, outside of Peace are all in the constituency – I think it is a simple change, you know, maybe to give some sort of satisfaction to the people from these areas that have been so disrupted by this process. I think it would be a simple thing to support this amendment to the motion and have this called Peace-Notley.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: The hon. member, if he ever loses an election, certainly has a future as a geography teacher, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I don't think the hon. member has made the case, so I would urge my colleagues to vote against the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone under 29(2)(a) to the Government House Leader?

Mr. van Dijken: Simply, why?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question. I was looking closely at the map, and while the hon. member certainly did do a job of sorts of expressing the extent of the riding, essentially it still covers the central Peace, Mr. Speaker. That's why.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other speakers?

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Speaker: Back to the amended motion.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I just rise to tell you that I think that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the motion as amended?

The Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: I know that the hon. members would like me to close, but I'll pass, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 34 as amended carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:04 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Miranda
Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Bilous	Jabbour	Phillips
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Coolahan	Kazim	Schreiner
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Shepherd
Dang	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Drever	Loyola	Sucha
Eggen	Luff	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Turner
Goehring	Mason	Westhead

Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Rosendahl
Barnes	McIver	Schneider
Cooper	Nixon	Starke
Cyr	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried	Piquette	

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 14
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[Government Motion 34 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for their contributions to this debate. It's not always easy and not perfect. Nevertheless, we now have the basis for bringing forward a piece of legislation to implement the changes recommended by the commission.

Having completed the evening's work, I would move that we adjourn the Assembly until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:10 p.m.]

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