

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[2:21 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: [Not recorded] as the very first participant in the public hearing process.

MR. WALTER: Hey, that's pretty good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So if you rough us up too badly, we'll wear the scars through this entire process across the province.

MR. BRUSEKER: And that's on tape.

MR. WALTER: Oh, I think I'm kind of outnumbered here, so I don't think I can do too badly, really. You'll have to take everything with a grain of salt.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Bob, I think you've met the members of the committee who are with us: Tom Sigurdson, MLA for Edmonton-Belmont, a member of the New Democratic Party; Stockwell Day, Red Deer-North, and Stockwell is here as the vice-chairman of the committee; Mike Cardinal, Athabasca-Lac La Biche, as you well know; and Frank Bruseker, and Frank represents Calgary-North West. I represent Taber-Warner. There are two members of our panel who aren't with us today: Pat Black, who is also serving on the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, and Pam Barrett. Pam has a real fear of flying.

We have a short presentation that we'd like to share with you. It's factual; it gives you the background on what we're into. Then we'd welcome your views on the subject.

First, we've got a list of the 83 constituencies, listed alphabetically. Go to the next overhead now, Ted. That puts them in terms of their size, in terms of the number of electors. Maybe we can focus it just a little bit. Edmonton-Whitemud has a voter population of 31,500 people. It ranges all the way down to a low of Cardston, with 8,100. The one factor we point out about Cardston is that there are approximately 1,800 members of the Blood Indian Band who are old enough to vote, are eligible, but who have chosen not to be enumerated in the past. We're going to be meeting with the chief and council to try and get an understanding of what their concern is, because it is having quite an effect on that constituency.

Any questions along the way, you just stop us.

MR. WALTER: No. I've seen a lot of this documentation already, so I've got a pretty good idea of where it's coming from.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. One of the reasons our committee is holding public hearings is to get public input. If this were a normal cycle, we would have struck a boundaries commission and the commission would be doing its work right now. At least that's my view. But because of a couple of court cases – in particular the McLachlin decision in British Columbia in which the Charter of Rights was used as a basis and McLachlin came down with a ruling that basically challenged the premise upon which British Columbia has its electoral divisions established. If British Columbia's system is at risk, ours is as well.

If we were using the same kinds of arguments Justice McLachlin used, we would take the total number of eligible voters in the province, about 1.5 million, and divide that by the number of constituencies, 83, and we'd come up with an average population per constituency of 18,600. Now, Justice McLachlin went on to say that you could justify a plus or minus 25 percent

from that mean. If you were to do that, you'd come up with 23,300 as a maximum and 14,000 as a minimum.

MR. WALTER: I guess maybe just stop there a minute, Bob. In my view, population density should not be the only criterion one uses when establishing those boundaries, because there are many other factors that come into it. I'll give you an example. If you take a small constituency in the city of Calgary, it's not very difficult for the MLA to get around that even if it does have 25,000 or 30,000 people, whereas if you get a constituency the size of Athabasca-Lac La Biche or Peace River, it becomes a real major problem to get to the constituents. I'm just saying that I don't believe population density is the only criterion that should be used. It has to be some kind of formula of a number of things. Okay? Sorry about that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, that's fine. We welcome your input.

In the next overhead we've taken those constituencies which are above the 23,300 figure and put them in yellow. You'll note they're all urban ridings: Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, St. Albert constituencies. Those that fall below the range are all rural ridings, starting with Athabasca-Lac La Biche and ending with Cardston.

Now, on a provincial map we've taken again the constituencies that fall below the mean. In other words, there are 14,000 or fewer voters in these constituencies. Again, a quick run-through of the cities. Calgary: basically the core of the city is fairly stable, growth is occurring on the edges, and that's logical. The same is true in the city of Edmonton, with growth in the outer areas, more stable in the downtown area.

Lethbridge has two constituencies, and they both fall within the average. I think Lethbridge-East is 18,000, so it's right on the average, and Lethbridge-West is about 22,000.

MR. WALTER: Just slightly below the index number.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On and just above the average on a provincewide basis.

Next we have Medicine Hat, which is well above at almost 30,000 electors. We have the one case where an urban constituency goes beyond the municipal boundaries. It exists in Red Deer: Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. The coloured line represents the city of Red Deer boundary, and the constituency boundaries, as you can see, are larger.

MR. WALTER: I didn't know that. You learn something every day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: St. Albert, as is the case with Medicine Hat, is above the limit. Therefore, using the plus/minus 25 percent, there'd have to be redistribution in that area.

Now, back to our map of constituencies that fall below. These are all constituencies that have 14,000 electors or fewer. The next one shows those constituencies which have 12,000 electors or fewer. You'll note there's quite a drop from the earlier map. These constituencies all have 12,000 electors or fewer, and they're 35 percent or more away from the mean provincial average of 18,000. If we were to go to those that are 50 percent away or more – in other words, an electoral population of 10,000 voters or fewer – we have five constituencies, all in the southern part of the province.

Now, we've established hearings across the province. High Level is not only first but also the most northerly of the sites

that have been identified.

MR. WALTER: The only thing wrong is that I can't see High Level. I can't read, I guess. Maybe that's my problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll tell you what's happened, Bob. It appears in large letters, but we covered it with that big blue circle.

MR. WALTER: Thanks so much, Bob. I'm very much parochial, you know.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's good. High Level can be proud of you for doing that. We've tried to ensure that we're around the province giving people an opportunity to come in.

Maybe the next overhead, please, Ted, which shows the list of communities and the dates.

We know that you had very little lead time here because the letters just went out, and we're cognizant of that.

MR. WALTER: I just have a question on that one specifically. High Level is one, two, three, four; Edson, five; and then Edmonton, four. What does the four mean?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It means that we're going to hold hearings in the city of Edmonton, I think, three or four times and the same in the city of Calgary.

MR. WALTER: Oh. Four hearings in the city of Edmonton on two different occasions. Is that right?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, Bob, our administrative person listed the number of communities we'd be in, I guess. So we've got 17 communities, and both Calgary and Edmonton appear. Edmonton is number four, Calgary number six. I think it was just to indicate the number of communities we'd be getting into.

Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: What we have is an evening meeting on November 15 in Edmonton. Our fifth meeting is actually in Edson on the afternoon of the 16th, and then we travel back to Edmonton the night of the 16th. So it's considered a part of the fourth meeting, although it's interrupted by . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: It's just sequential numbering, because obviously we're not going to be in 17 communities in Viking.

MR. CARDINAL: No. The process of numbering – should that be left out?

MR. BRUSEKER: It just says that numbers indicate different locations to be visited. So we're actually going to be in 17 different locations around the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Seventeen locations. Viking is the 17th.

MR. WALTER: It's the last one. Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MR. WALTER: There are just two hearings in Edmonton on two different dates. That's all. Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, if you'll put the last overhead on, please, Ted, you'll see the correlation between those constituencies that are 35 percent or more away from the mean and the location of the hearings.

So that's the background. Maybe I could pause for a moment and ask if other members of the committee have anything they'd like to add to the presentation. Stock?

MR. DAY: Just that as you can see, Your Worship, the implications could be considerable in terms of looking at some way to accommodate guidelines that have been laid out by the courts in B.C. which ultimately may affect us. We appreciate the fact that you've already distributed to various members of the community the notice of the meeting and things like that, but we are looking for any input you might have or causes, concerns about what you've already mentioned, which is a valid one, because the implications could be far-reaching.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: Nothing to add for the presentation, but certainly a question. You've pointed out the discrepancies and disparities between some constituencies' populations and/or just geography. We certainly came upon that example in Manitoba where, to try and get in line a particular constituency, they created a constituency some 1,060 miles by 230 miles, making it very difficult to service for the MLA and impossible for constituents to get an opportunity to see the MLA. I'm wondering, though, with all the modern technology that's available – fax machines come to mind – if an MLA that represented a large geographical constituency, say Peace River or Dunvegan, were to have additional funds allotted to their constituency budget to have perhaps extra staff or office, would that then somewhat compensate for that large geographical area being covered by one individual?

MR. WALTER: Do you want a response to that now, then, Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah, please, if you want.

MR. WALTER: Okay. I think that might be a vehicle that could be used, but I'll tell you what it is. You get people up in this region. Particularly when you move north of the major centre, people out there have a major thing they have to do, and that's to provide a living for them and their family. They're not too involved in the issues. But when something bothers them, they want to be able to get at somebody; they want to be able to discuss the issue on a one-on-one basis. Now, there are many people out there that can't write a comprehensive letter and state their facts the way they want them to come out, but if they stand there and talk to you, they will get their point across. If you get these large constituencies – I'm sure Mike is aware of this in his, and I know Adair has been aware of it in his over the years. I guess what you have to do is have the ability to be able to get to your MLA when your need to get at him. Unfortunately, the way the geographics are laid out, most of us have to go to our MLA rather than have our MLA come to us. We can't do that up here. We've got to get down there. What you try and do: you pile all this stuff up, you know, and then all of a sudden you try and have a short meeting with your MLA and say, "Well, these are all my concerns." By the time this gets ferretted out, you lose a lot of time. I think it's a real problem.

It might be, though, that . . . What do you want to call it? I don't know how you'd do that, but if some of the larger constituencies had a better constituency organization, particularly based on funding, we could do that. Still, there are many, many people who don't want to stop at that in-between individual. They want to go right to the top and get their answers so they know what kind of answer they're getting, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah. Maybe I can just show you the problem on the other side too. When we had the Principal Group of Companies collapse, I had a number of constituents who wanted to see me. I was actually surprised by the number of constituents that wanted to see me, that phoned in for appointments. It got to a point where we had to schedule appointments and they were going days past. The response was, "The MLA doesn't care if he can't see me right away." There were so many people that came in. I know that travel is difficult for a lot of people, but again, if you've got a population number that's too high, your constituents also construe that as meaning that the MLA doesn't care enough to see them right away. People always have problems, and if you can take their problems on right away, then you're a very caring MLA. If you've got to schedule an appointment sometime and it's not convenient for them, somehow they interpret that as being that the member is not all that concerned.

MR. WALTER: Maybe I've got an easy question here that I'll ask you all. How do you feel with regard to the west and eastern Canada? Do you feel that we are being sort of dictated to by the eastern segment of our country? Do you feel that?

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, you know, I guess it comes down to: what do we represent? Do we represent people? If we represent people, then we have representation by population. Or we can go out and represent sections of land that may or may not be populated at all. I think there are a number of problems that have to be addressed. We are trying to address one here and wrestling with all the terms. Do I feel as though there have been some bad decisions made? Of course. But I feel that in the context of the Alberta government as well. It's not just isolated to Ottawa.

MR. WALTER: You know, I'm not pointing out any specific government or anything, and I couldn't care less. What I'm saying is that I have that feeling right in my province here where I live in High Level, 500 miles north of Edmonton, and I must say very honestly that if we had not had an exceptional MLA for the last 17- or 20-year type of thing, this community would be in very dire straits. Because that was a gentleman we could get up with a phone call, and I'm telling you it happens many, many times.

But whether we are talking government or not, Tom, my concern as a person is that I just truly feel the city of Edmonton currently does not support the northern part of this province. Yet if you take the histories over the past 25 years and take the economic base that has been poured into the city of Edmonton from this region, I think it would make your head swim.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Why don't we pause for a moment and go to Frank to see if there's anything he'd like to add to the presentation.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, nothing really to add to the presenta-

tion. The only thing is that we had a couple of maps there representing the constituencies that were below the mean. The ones - of course, I'm representing one - above the mean were all in the city of Calgary. So there is a sort of concern in both directions there. I'm looking forward to hearing your comments about how you feel about this particular constituency. I think in area it's probably the second largest in the province.

MR. WALTER: I believe we have to look at equal representation, if we can. Maybe it has to be by population, but unfortunately I don't concur in total with that. I think we have to find some medium in between the two where you look at population plus the geographic issues in the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Stock?

MR. DAY: Well, Your Worship, back to your original question, which is in terms of the east dictating to the west. If somebody walked into this meeting now, they would think we were talking about Senate reform or things other than the issue at hand, but I understand what you are getting at. Actually, in the short time I've been listening to you, I can sense a frustration that you obviously are picking up from the people you serve in terms of their sense of whether they are being represented or not, not due to the lack of efforts of an MLA. But, in fact, looking at the population, you are comparing eastern Canada and western Canada, but actually you are comparing High Level and Edmonton.

It wasn't until you just mentioned this that the thought struck me that when we and when the courts look at balancing out this population difference - because a city MLA could say there are less people in High Level with their MLA than there are in my little constituency here in Edmonton. But the point you are seeing very obviously is that for the interests of High Level, there is one MLA. For the interests of Edmonton, there are . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: Seventeen.

MR. DAY: Seventeen. So in fact there is a real soft . . . It's not a case of one city MLA versus one High Level; it's versus a block of MLAs. So I can sense your concern there.

MR. WALTER: I think the number you have put on the board here, 18,000 plus or minus 25 percent, sets it about 23,500, some 23,700. I think the city of Calgary currently, with 433,000 electorate on the list, their average representation is 24,000. Average. Sure. You know, Calgary-North West has got 30,000, and some of the other ones here are substantially smaller than that. I think the smallest one is Calgary-Elbow with 17,794. That's the smallest one. Take the city of Edmonton with 386,000 population, and divide that by 17 MLAs. That means that you are actually below the average that has been established by McLachlin. You sit at 22,740. You know, I guess when you look at Edmonton-Whitemud with 31,000 people, there's 8,000 people out there that supposedly aren't being represented appropriately. But when you take the whole thing on an average - and when you get into the major centres you must look at the average - I think you can't build up the major centres at the expense of the outlying regions. I guess that's basically my case.

MR. CHAIRMAN: First, Mike. We didn't get to you to see if you had anything you wanted to add to the presentation.

MR. CARDINAL: Just a quick comment. I'd like to thank Bob for taking time from his busy schedule to come and attend this hearing, because I think as mayor for this area Bob, no doubt more than anybody else in this region, realizes the importance of equal and effective representation. Being a former municipal councillor myself and living in the lower part of the province all my life, I know what Bob is talking about when he says there are regional disparities. There are definitely regional disparities between parts of Alberta and Edmonton and Calgary. If you look at the resources, for an example, that are processed and manufactured in Edmonton, they all come from rural Alberta – the majority do. Unfortunately I guess for rural Albertans, the major centres have always had an advantage because they had stronger economic development councils, they had stronger chambers of commerce, and they had the dollars to promote the industries which, in turn, attracted rural people in the last 30 years to move into the growth centres.

Again, I know Bob realizes – and I'm sure he'll be working with his urban municipal councils to look at some of the solutions as to how we may reverse this. And thank you, Bob, for attending. The issues you addressed definitely are right on, because as a rural MLA, I know. For example, I deal with seven municipalities, about 30 summer villages, Indian reserves, Metis settlements; issues relating from oil and gas, forestry, agriculture, and tourism. Roads alone is a major issue that sometimes an urban MLA may never hear of – how many roads you have. Maybe you do; I don't know. But I have hundreds of miles of roads from secondary to primary highways to municipal highways that we're dealing with which are undeveloped basically, far from being paved.

Communications was talked about a bit. Rural areas of Alberta – while the major centres enjoy the modern technology as far as communications, television, radio, and stuff, you go a few miles out of here and you'll get CBC if you're lucky, and that's it. That's rural Alberta.

MR. WALTER: I'd like to add one more thing, Bob, if I could. I think what I'm going to say now has nothing to do with any government specifically but I think it has to do with all of us as people of Alberta. I think if you continue the process that is currently going, gentlemen, we're going to have a major problem 10 years down the road, maybe 15 years down the road. Rural Alberta is disappearing very rapidly, and what's happening is that two major centres are starting to eat up our population.

I speak specifically on one issue. I run an electrical business here in High Level. Do you think I can get anybody to come out of the city of Edmonton to come and work up here? No way. No way. Why? Because the social infrastructures that are being offered by our major centres because of the population base attract the people from the rural part of the province, attract them to the major centres just like a magnet: it pulls all the nails out, and you've got them sticking up all over. Once they get in there, they like that life-style, but they don't know what to do with themselves. The first thing you know, they're unemployed. They don't have work, they have no place to go, they have a problem with regard to accommodations because they don't have a job, and I think we compound this problem by attracting these people.

I think what we have to do, as people of Alberta and politicians at all levels, is start looking at providing better infrastructures to keep these people out of our major centres, because all they're doing is creating problems for government – government, period; I don't care what branch. The infrastructures that you

have to provide for transportation, the infrastructures that you have to provide for LRT: all these things add up to big bucks that you do not have to spend in your small Alberta municipalities. It's just a point of view that I think we're going to have to look at down the road. Now, you review this election process, supposedly to do justice all equally nice and fit. As you attract more people to these communities, this whole thing is going to change, and maybe 50 years down the road we'll have 25 or 40 MLAs in Edmonton, 40 MLAs in Calgary, and maybe another 10 throughout the rest of the province. I'm sorry, but that's my view.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any direct response to Bob on that? I go to Tom, who is next on the list.

MR. SIGURDSON: It flows into actually what my question was. Currently in the electoral boundaries Act we have the definition of what's an urban seat and what's a rural seat, and the government in its wisdom said there'll be 41 rural seats and 42 urban seats. The decisions that have been handed down by the courts in British Columbia and thereafter have been followed by all western provinces – and Alberta is now in the process of looking at handing instructions to the next commission – are based primarily, I think, on population density. But you seem to be indicating that we ought to maintain some kind of urban/rural definition in the Act . . .

MR. WALTER: I believe I do.

MR. SIGURDSON: . . . so that you can allow for some disparity.

MR. WALTER: Somehow we have to address the needs of those people that are living 300 to 500 miles away from the major base, be they in the southern part of the province or in the north. I don't know how you would do it. It's a very difficult job for you guys. I appreciate that. But what I'm saying is that somehow or other you've got to recognize that those people that live in sparsely settled areas also have the right of representation, even if they represent only one person per one square mile, if that's the count. They still have a right as well as somebody that occupies 6,000 square feet on a lot in an urban centre, you know. Just because he occupies 6,000 square feet, he has a right, eh? One vote or one opinion or whatever. But up here what you've got to relate to is the fact that that individual might have a whole square mile.

It's very difficult for you guys, and I don't envy you your job at all. I think you've got some pretty good people sitting around here that will come up with something that is equitable. I guess what I have tried to say is I've tried to point out our view up here.

MR. SIGURDSON: I appreciate it. As I say, I know that there are inequities built in, and that's what we're trying to address. I also know that in the Manitoba experience, having looked at what they've done in Manitoba, I believe they've created an even greater problem by trying to make the population as close to the mean as possible, because they've created constituencies that I don't believe are going to be as serviced as they ought to be, and if some MLAs try and service those constituencies, they're going to have to do it at times when the weather isn't the best, when conditions aren't the best. My God, if it were me, I wouldn't be running for re-election in some of those constituencies, because

I think it's going to seriously harm the well-being of the MLA and then, thereafter, the well-being of those constituents.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, what they did in Manitoba, just to give you the background, is that a three-member commission made up of the Chief Justice of the province, the president of the University of Manitoba, and the chief electoral officer was given the mandate from the Legislature to create and adjust boundaries, and it was plus or minus 10 percent. Well, even with the plus or minus 10 percent, had they used the variation they were allowed, they would not have been forced to abolish two rural constituencies. But they chose to keep the variation away from the mean as tight as possible. In fact, it's tighter in rural Manitoba than it is in the city of Winnipeg, as I recall, by a fraction of a percent. One of the criticisms, by the way, of their commission is that all three are from the city of Winnipeg, so there wasn't the appreciation for rural Manitoba. The end result is they've got a system. They're trying to get back to that pure one-person, one-vote concept, but in so doing they've created a couple of northern constituencies that are absolutely impossible to service. One is . . . What did we decide? How long is Rupertsland?

MR. SIGURDSON: 1,060 miles by 230 miles.

MR. WALTER: I think the province of Alberta is fairly fortunate in that you have your highway going from south to north, which is called basically Mackenzie Highway up here. Access is available. Sure the distance factor is there. It's 500 miles from here to Edmonton, but you can still get at it. On the eastern part of the province you get as far as Fort McMurray, but then you've got a major portion between there and Fort Chip. But taking into consideration again it's a very large territory with a small population base – I think the population base in Chip's about 1,500, something like that, and then there'd be some outlying people. So you've got a big area, but you can get at Fort McMurray where you've got most of your base, eh?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Another concern I have is that we represent voters. All of the numbers you saw on the screen were the voting populations of constituencies. Should we be representing families, so that we've got people under the age of 18 included in that number?

MR. WALTER: That would really change the numbers, wouldn't it, Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: Oh, indeed it would.

MR. WALTER: But I don't think the net result from that would change awful much. I mean, you'd still wind up with maybe a constituency in the city of Edmonton where you've got a current electorate base of 25,000 people. If you go with the families included in that – you were talking about children, were you not?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yes.

MR. WALTER: So that might change to 100,000 right away, quick, because you have all these extra names.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, we'd certainly take it from about – it would increase about a million. Now, whether or not there's some indication that there's a greater number of children per household in rural Alberta than there is in urban centres, it also comes down to: do we represent people regardless of whether or not they vote, because there are a lot of people that are on the voters' list that don't vote, or should we go by the census?

MR. WALTER: My point was that if you change that, do that. You go from 25 to 100 down there. You'd probably go from 10,000 up here to the same number. So the ratio would not change appreciably is what I'm saying.

MR. SIGURDSON: I see.

MR. WALTER: I don't think it would.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mike, did you have your hand up?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, just a quick comment on something Bob mentioned. Here again is the right of representation, which we all know is important. But if we define that as to what it really means, I guess to me if a person can maintain a certain life-style that's acceptable for all Albertans, then I say we're all equally represented. But when I see the standard of living lower in some parts of the province, considerably lower than others, then I say we're not equally represented now, not even near. I think an additional factor that has to be looked at is: how do the rest of Albertans live outside of Edmonton and Calgary? TV stations for an example. You know, I say we have one channel in rural Alberta, when in the city you can enjoy how many ever channels you want to watch on the TV.

MR. WALTER: If I could just comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. WALTER: Mike mentioned the fact that he sensed there was some frustration on my part. Well, I guess he's probably right in that. Not frustration as such with any specific arm of government; not government, and I don't care. But in my private life, in the private sector with my business, all our contact is with Edmonton. You pick up the phone and you talk to some donkey at an order desk, and he doesn't care whether he serves you or not. But we don't have an option, you know. We have to go to that city to get our needs, be they for my business, be they for groceries, be they for whatever. And I think because of that the frustration is created by the lack of sensitivity of the larger centres for the outlying areas.

Before I go any further, I'd like to introduce Gary Peterson. Gary Peterson is the town manager.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think you met most of us as you came in. Did you meet Tom then? Okay. Stockwell Day, Mike Cardinal, and Frank Bruseker. We're just having, really, a roundtable discussion right now on some of the challenges in both urban and rural constituencies and looking at whether we represent voters or represent all people. We were developing a bit of a speakers' list, so there's obviously some interest on it.

Stockwell, and then Frank.

MR. DAY: Bob, I need to ask you – you've obviously gotten your finger on the pulse of the community; that's obvious in how

the community appreciates you and supports you. Can you give us an indication – I know you'd maybe be hazarding a guess, but given the climate you're talking about right now in terms of a sense of frustration, let's look at something hypothetical. If, in the wisdom of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, this constituency of which High Level is a part were to grow, in fact be given even bigger boundaries than now, would the people you're talking about and their sense of frustration – would that increase to the point that people would just pull back and get apathetic and say, "Forget trying to get representation"? Or do you think they would say: "Well, that's the way it goes. Let's keep trying to deal with government; let's keep trying to get hold of our MLA, as busy as he is"? Which way do you think it would go, or can you hazard a guess?

MR. WALTER: I think my response to that one would be this. Three years ago there was a very dire sense of frustration out here in the general area. There was a movement afoot to try and split the constituency into two. I think that's what would happen. As soon as you expand some of these bases where the people can't get access to an MLA, regardless of who he is, I think the next step would be, "To hell with it; let's do something so we can get somebody in here so we can talk to him," you know, and you'd wind up splitting some of these major, large areas. I think it would create a lot of pressure for government, because if you get 5,000 or 6,000 people out there all in behind the same package, how do you not listen to them, even if they only represent 50 percent of a whole constituency? I think it could create some problems.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: My question is along the same sort of line. As you say, you've lived in the community, and you know sort of what's going on, and I guess the question I have for you is: based upon what you've heard from your constituents in the city and across the constituency of Peace River, what do you perceive is the . . . If the boundaries were to change, how would they best be changed to meet the needs of the people who live here? How do you think people would like to see things changed if a change were to come in?

MR. WALTER: Yeah. You don't change things just because it needs a change. If it's broken, you fix it, eh? When you look at your map that you have, the Peace River constituency as an example, I guess I have to zero in on my own area because it's the one I know.

MR. BRUSEKER: Sure.

MR. WALTER: I'm not as comprehensive in some of these other areas there are in this part of the country, because I've lived here for 25 years.

You take the two adjacent ones, and then Lesser Slave Lake, and you take Dunvegan. They're both under, right? Well, if you wanted, this one falls into place. I suppose what you could quite conceivably do in the opinion of the commission maybe is to say, okay, we'll cut this one back; we'll just add this part here to the Peace River one; to get this one into line we'll do this. Then maybe this one here's still under, so maybe we have to do this. And you start to change lines around like that. I would say that if all the lines are changed by the time you get down to the bottom here, and you do a count and that count says you've got

somewhere, maybe 30 MLAs out here and 55 in the cities, I think you'd have a very serious problem in the province. That's my perception.

If you have any question, I'm sure Gary would probably respond to anyone very differently, because Gary has lived here for probably eight or nine years, but he spent the last year at Hinton. He just came back here. I'm sure that if Gary would have any comments, he'd be more than happy to make them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Did you have a chance to see the letter that we sent out, Gary?

MR. PETERSON: The one that Bob has?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Were there any observations you wanted to make?

MR. PETERSON: Not in particular. Again, I don't think I'd personally like to see the rural ones cut down. I think if you look at the area, certainly in the Peace River area, there's a large area for one MLA to cover, and I think you have to take more into consideration than just straight population as far as area to get proper representation. You can't look at population alone. It's a large area to cover for one MLA, and if you make it larger, it's going to be that much more inaccessible for people to get to their MLA. Al Adair, being our MLA, has done a very good job in here, but I think that's something to do with his personality more than a typical MLA. The next person may not do that.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: One of the things we discovered in Saskatchewan was the problem of relatively low populations in the northern parts of the province. This goes right across the country, of course. What they've done in Saskatchewan is come up with a ratio and said, "Well, we need to stick to the ratio." But they've said, "The amount of variation we will allow will be greater"; in other words, the constituencies in the north would be allowed to vary from the mean much further so they don't have to be quite so large. Perhaps that might be something we need to do here in northern Alberta as well. We threw up that provincial average of – what? – 18,000 or 19,000 or whatever it was. If we had that average but then allowed for a greater variation in the northern part of the province to perhaps reduce the total area of the Peace River and Fort McMurray constituencies, would that help to service the needs of the people in those constituencies?

MR. PETERSON: I think you have to take that into consideration because of distance. And certainly you want local representation. It would be pretty hard if, say, you increased the Peace district and the only representative would be, say, out of Peace River or larger centres. They would have a hard time representing people from High Level, Meander River, or La Crete – that type of thing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But Frank is saying that if through special circumstances you allow some constituencies that are more isolated or more remote to fall outside that strip range, obviously you'd have to justify it in the event of a court challenge.

You'd have to make your case. But Saskatchewan has the provision to do just that. Do you want to comment on that, Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: Not on that, no.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else on that specific point?

MR. WALTER: I think something one doesn't want to lose sight of is the fact that we elect a representative to government or to the legislative body. His or her job is to represent those people in that area that have elected him. Okay? I think when you talk in that vein, you should also look at how big that area is, because, you know, you take a constituency in the city of Edmonton; an MLA can probably cover every doorstep in maybe five days, six days. I don't know. Well, I don't know. I've never tried it; I don't know.

MR. BRUSEKER: I've got 14,000 doors in my constituency.

MR. WALTER: That'd give you quite a few a day, wouldn't it?

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, during the election campaign I was out five hours every weeknight and weekdays, and I didn't get to half of them.

MR. WALTER: Is that right?

MR. DAY: I appreciate what you're saying, though, Bob. Regardless, it's a lot quicker in the city. In Red Deer we've got urban and rural, and I can sure cover a lot more doors in the urban sector than I can out in the county, no question about it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's another thing to look at. Frank, how many school boards do you work with?

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, parts of two.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Parts of two.

MR. BRUSEKER: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. How many do you work with, Mike?

MR. CARDINAL: I work with four here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Four in your constituency.

MR. CARDINAL: Parts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Parts of.

MR. CARDINAL: Two whole ones and two parts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, there's another rural riding. In my riding, that's smaller than yours in a geographic sense, I work with seven. That's another element in the job.

Al, your MLA, must work with at least half a dozen, with the public and separate.

MR. PETERSON: No. This is all just Northland School Division up here, I think.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, Peace River.

MR. WALTER: Peace River School Division, Fort Vermilion School Division, and Northland School Division. He works with at least three.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And separate boards?

MR. WALTER: Oh, sorry; there's the separate board too. That's four districts.

MR. PETERSON: I don't know how many hospital districts. At least three hospital districts.

MR. WALTER: He probably has to work with three hospital boards that I know of. I don't know what other boards.

MR. DAY: How many town councils?

MR. WALTER: Fifteen municipalities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You know, this is one of the hardest things for us to get a handle on: the workload associated with that other form of government.

MR. WALTER: The urban MLAs, you know, have to really satisfy that individual out there. But you're not really working with so many municipalities. You take the city of Edmonton as an example: you have that one municipality. It's the municipal government, city of Edmonton.

MR. SIGURDSON: So that you can appreciate what I go through as well: inside my constituency I've got seven community leagues. It's true that while I deal with municipal government, I probably deal more with the seven community leagues than I do with the municipal government. I deal with a body that's called the North East Task Force. The North East Task Force is comprised of 10 interests ranging from transportation, sports facilities, northeast hospital, and schools as well. So I think that what we've got are different layers. That's the difficulty; you know, perhaps people in urban Alberta don't appreciate the needs of rural constituents, and perhaps rural constituents don't appreciate the kind of structure - you may think that it's as easy as going from the south end of my constituency. I can travel from one point of my constituency to the other in 15 minutes. I know it can't be done. I used to work for Grant Notley. It was three days for him to take on a constituency tour.

MR. WALTER: Well, I sit on a regional planning commission, and every time that I have to go to a meeting, it takes me three hours to get there and three hours to get back. That's without any question. So there you've got six hours of your time to attend to those functions. I'm sure that those functions, when you relate them - an MLA's duties are a lot worse, and that's probably one of the reasons why we don't see him up here too often. You know what I mean?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah.

MR. WALTER: It's just too damned difficult.

MR. SIGURDSON: I think that all MLAs are busy.

MR. WALTER: I think that's right.

MR. SIGURDSON: The structure is different for each MLA.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, fair point.

MR. WALTER: Just for your edification: I sort of agree that maybe you guys weren't getting paid enough.

MR. DAY: The tape was running, was it not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The tape was running.

MR. DAY: Good. Thanks, Bob.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. DAY: I think we could belabour endlessly the workings of an urban MLA versus rural.

It is sort of unique, as you've already pointed out in the overviews here, Mr. Chairman, that Red Deer is the only urban riding that also takes in rural.

MR. BRUSEKER: It's the only aberration in the province.

MR. DAY: Well, they figured we could handle it.

Dealing with a community league, which I also deal with, they of course are vitally important and plugged right into the heart of the community. I think it's fair to say, though, that dealing with a town council or a city council is significantly more detailed, time-consuming, and requires more links in terms of one individual issue. I'm just saying that comparing the two – I know the time it takes us to deal with just our one council – it must be very significant, thinking of dealing with 15.

MR. WALTER: Yes.

MR. DAY: I say that with a good working relationship with our council.

MR. WALTER: Well, maybe Gary wants to respond to that one. I don't know. I'm probably talking out of turn here if I respond. I'd probably be biased.

MR. PETERSON: I can see in larger centres, the urban centres, there are probably more issues than you would have in the rural centres as far as them all in dealings with council. I would say in a place like Edmonton there are a lot more major issues to deal with with the province than in the smaller municipalities. There wouldn't be as many specific issues coming from rural areas as there would be from the urban.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. If I can help with my experience as an MLA, it's fair to say that the community is usually focusing on one issue at a time unless there's an emergency that pops up. But if you've got seven municipalities, you've still got seven issues to deal with; they're all different.

MR. PETERSON: Yeah, that's right. Cumulatively, they're the same things.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sometimes there's an overlap with departments; sometimes there's not. So there's still quite a workload

in terms of trying to meet the specific needs of each of your communities.

MR. SIGURDSON: I think that maybe we've wandered a bit too. We've talk about the needs of the communities, the needs of council, the needs of community leagues, and how important and time-consuming those needs are. But then there's the individual constituent out there who has a need as well, and I don't want to lose sight of that individual constituent's needs. Because if Joe has a problem with unemployment insurance or Joe has a problem with the pothole in the back of the alley and his car has fallen into it, his problem is immediate. He wants it addressed, and he wants it addressed by the MLA. For Joe that need is there, and the MLA best be there. So you can never really measure how many constituents' problems you're going to handle over the course of a year. Well, I guess you can; on average, we seem to be coming to a pretty steady average. But their needs are great as well, and I guess that part of the problem that this committee has to address is population. One of the questions that we do have is population. Aside from all of the municipal councils, the hospital districts, school boards, and all of the government structures that are in place are the needs of constituents and how they're addressed through the bodies of government.

MR. PETERSON: How much consideration is given towards future needs? There's a potential in some of the rural areas – and we're one of them, being the forest industry expanding quite a bit in the rural areas, and even Fort McMurray and areas like that. How much emphasis is being put on potential expansion? You're looking as based on today's population; you don't want to be changing this around four or five years down the road. How much are you looking at as far as the potential for expansion? I think probably the Peace district in our area and Slave Lake, Athabasca, Wabasca, and places like that, have pretty good potential right now for expansion in their population base. So those figures you have today five years down the road could change quite a bit.

MR. SIGURDSON: The last commission that drew the current boundaries had input from all town planners that they could contact and based boundaries, in many instances, on the projected population eight years from the date of the commission being struck. So in '82 they were looking at population in 1990. For the most part, I think Red Deer at the time was under the 25 percent, but they created the two, and that's why Red Deer is the anomaly going out into that outlying area. There wouldn't be sufficient growth to really warrant two, but they created two and went out into the rural part of the county.

MR. CHAIRMAN: As well, it's important to note that historically Alberta adjusted its boundaries after every 10 years. The Act was changed in the late '70s so that the redistribution would occur after every second general election to account for the very thing you're referring to, Gary: so that you could take into account high growth areas. We were at a presentation last evening from a member of a legal firm in Edmonton who suggested that we seriously consider adjusting boundaries after every election to keep the list as current as possible. We thought that adjusting after every second election was pretty good, considering most provinces do it once every 10 years and in some cases less frequently than that.

Mike?



MR. CARDINAL: Just a quick comment, again, on representation a bit. I don't want to dwell on this, but I think it's important to keep in mind that we are hoping to represent people equally, but I think we should also keep in mind that when you represent people equally and effectively, the end result should be that we enjoy a very similar standard of living right across the province and across Canada. We don't want to forget that, because as soon as that happens, then it's not equal regardless of what the population is. I think the end result is the type of standard of living Albertans enjoy. We've got to keep that in mind.

MR. WALTER: Just as a question, does anybody know what Ontario does with their tremendous population base that they have in the southern part and the triangle down in there and then up north? What's the situation there?

MR. SIGURDSON: Toronto has a lot of seats. Toronto's the centre of the universe. If you go into Ontario - I've gone into Ontario a couple of times - and you talk to people who are outside Toronto, they complain about Toronto. They don't complain about central Canada; they complain about Toronto. And Torontonians love it. They know they're the population centre and the centre of activity, business, finance, and they realize that they're the growth area. They're the basin of Canada. But they have, for the most part - I'm not sure that they've got the majority of seats. Well, no, they don't have the majority of seats in the Ontario Legislature, but they have a large, large number of Toronto members of provincial parliament.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you remember from the statistics whether there are special considerations given to the northern, more sparsely populated areas?

MR. SIGURDSON: I can't recall.

MR. WALTER: That was what I was referring to.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I can't remember whether they do in Ontario. They do in Quebec, and they have the opportunity to do so in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

MR. SIGURDSON: They don't federally in Ontario.

MR. CHAIRMAN: They don't federally. No, I think federally it's just the two territories and Prince Edward Island.

MR. WALTER: Well, I don't envy your job, gentlemen. It's going to be a pretty difficult one to come up with an equitable thing that's going to be fair to everybody. I mean, let's face it. If you've got 30,000 people in a place that dictates that you should have 23,000 to represent them adequately, then obviously 7,000 people there feel off base, eh? By the same token, if we have to cover an area of . . . You take the Mackenzie Regional Planning Commission. It's 54,000 square miles, and that basically represents the Peace River constituency. You know, how the hell do you cover it? And if you say, "Well, let's add a little bit more to get the population density up a little bit," you're going to add miles to the thing. So I don't know.

MR. DAY: Well, you look at Boomer's white hair, and you can see how you cover it.

MR. WALTER: That's why he's so miserable sometimes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Were there any others comments that you wanted to make, Bob or Gary?

MR. WALTER: I think I've made all the comments that you want to hear from me for a long time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other remarks by members?

MR. DAY: Just that there were good comments, and it's that type of input that is going to certainly help us in the deliberations, so we sure appreciate you both taking the time.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. Thanks very much for coming down. We appreciate that.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. WALTER: The only thing that I'd like to add to this: I'm very disappointed that there weren't more people here, gentlemen, because it's an issue that's important to us, you know. It's too bad that just a couple of us appeared here before your commission.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On the other hand, Bob, if anyone owes an apology, we owe the apology to you and to your community in that we didn't get our material out as quickly as we had hoped to. We were trying very hard through the Quick Print process to get the letters out, and I think they were couriered up so they could be distributed.

MR. WALTER: I got them on Tuesday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But you still didn't have much advance. You got two days' advance notice, so we certainly understand the fact that the material came in late. We wanted to ensure that we were coming to High Level and give the residents of the area an opportunity to be heard, and we appreciate you coming out. You've given us some good food for thought.

MR. DAY: I would say, Mr. Chairman, too, that knowing the area here, I would think the people you distributed that letter to who knew that you were coming, would probably feel quite comfortable that you were going to be representing them pretty strongly.

MR. WALTER: That might be a point of view.

MR. SIGURDSON: The other thing, though, is that perhaps they shouldn't feel that this is the end. Those people and all people who received the letter or catch wind of the fact that the committee was here: if they want to send any kind of written submission, or if they want to pick up the phone to call any of us as committee members, I'm sure we would be more than receptive to letters or calls.

MR. DAY: I think it's probably safe to say, Bob, that if the demand was overwhelming, we would be back or try to, if there was some way.

MR. WALTER: Again, I pointed out very early in our discussion here today that people in the northern part of the province

– unless it's an issue that is directly going to affect them right now, they're not concerned about things until it happens. Then you hear from them.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's not unique to the northern part of the province.

MR. BRUSEKER: I can find some people in Calgary that are just like that.

MR. DAY: I was going to say welcome to Canada.

MR. WALTER: Thanks very much, gentlemen. I'll tell you, we appreciate the fact that you took time out to come to High Level, because not everybody does that.

[The meeting adjourned at 3:27 p.m.]