

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[10:08 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: In a few moments we'll have a presentation to give you some of the background. Prior to that I'd thought I would give you some of the reasons as to why we are here, why this committee exists, what our function is. Prior to that I'll introduce members of the committee, and then I'll ask you to introduce yourselves, if you would. So I'll wait just a moment for a couple of others who are coming. If you'd like a cup of coffee, help yourself before we begin.

We've got the chairs arranged in this way for the slide presentation. Walter, maybe just pull those chairs around a little bit, and then we can move them back again for the slide presentation, if you'd like.

I'd like to begin by introducing the members of the committee who are here today. Stockwell Day, the MLA for Red Deer-North serves as the vice-chairman of the committee.

MR. DAY: Good morning.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Frank Bruseker from Calgary-North West is with us, Mike Cardinal from Athabasca-Lac La Biche, and Tom Sigurdson from Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Good morning.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And I'm Bob Bogle from Taber-Warner.

There are two other members of our committee who are not with us today: Pam Barrett from Edmonton-Highlands and Pat Black from Calgary-Foothills.

I wonder if we might at this point in time go around the room to introduce yourselves. Walter, you lead off so that . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The one with the mouthful is Walter Paszkowski, MLA from Smoky River.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. SIMPSON: John Simpson, president of the Grande Prairie PC Association.

MS PATTERSON: I'm Paulette Patterson, past president of the Smoky River PC Association.

MR. BALDERSTON: Gil Balderston, farmer from Sexsmith.

MS JERRARD: Irene Jerrard. I guess you would say past returning officer for Grande Prairie, because it terminates three months after election.

MR. POWERS: John Powers, Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce.

MS MACKLIN: Donna Macklin from Grande Prairie.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Donna.

AN HON. MEMBER: There's one more.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, pardon me.

MR. BILTEK: David Biltek.

MR. CHAIRMAN: David, you were hiding back there. I didn't see you.

First of all, to address the question: why are we here? You know: why are we having a select special committee of the Legislature to look at electoral boundaries? Normally, as you may be aware, we go through a redistribution process after every second general election. We had our last redistribution in 1983-84. We've had two general elections since that time, so it's now time for another general redistribution. However, events which occurred in British Columbia have caused the three political parties represented in the Assembly in Alberta to believe that there was some need to further examine the matter before establishing the actual boundaries commission.

The events I'm referring to were dealt with in a court case. To give you the background: British Columbia established a commission to redistribute their boundaries; it was known as the Fisher commission. The primary recommendations of the Fisher report were that, number one, they should do away with their dual constituencies. There are some dual ridings in British Columbia. Secondly, they should go to a provincial average voter population and then allow for a plus/minus 25 percent variance from that. The government rejected the Fisher commission recommendations. A Professor Dixon then took the government to court using the Charter of Rights as a primary reason. The case was argued before then Chief Provincial Judge McLachlin, and Judge McLachlin in essence ruled that the Fisher report was correct and ordered the government to redistribute its electoral boundaries.

While the government did not appeal the decision by Chief Justice McLachlin, the matter was dealt with further by Justice Meredith, who ruled that while the courts can indeed find in favour of an individual using section 1 of the Charter of Rights, the court cannot dictate to a Legislature the time frame. So the Legislature has some time to go through a redistribution process. In other words, you don't declare all elected members out of a job and the government ceases to exist because of a judgment.

The decision by Justice McLachlin - and Justice McLachlin is now a member of the Supreme Court of Canada - has had a very definite impact on the thinking in other provincial jurisdictions. Saskatchewan had basically completed a redistribution process by the time the McLachlin decision came out, and in speaking with the chairman of their commission, a retired member of the judiciary in that province, the feeling was that their system would stand the test. They had already adopted a plus/minus 25 percent formula. In addition to that, in Saskatchewan there was an allowance given to the two northern ridings so that they could be up to 50 percent away from the provincial mean. In Manitoba the variance, the tolerated variance, is 10 percent, so it's much tighter in that particular province.

So the purpose of our committee as agreed to by all three political parties, and with representatives from all parties, is to examine the McLachlin decision, the Meredith decision, look at its ramifications on Alberta relative to the Charter of Rights, and to travel around the province to give citizens an opportunity to come forward and share ideas and concerns with us.

Yesterday we were in High Level and Peace River. The evening before we met with a member of the Law Society of Alberta while we were in Edmonton. It's fair to say that this is a learning process for us. We're here to share information with you, but we're also here to learn, and we've been learning. We've picked up some excellent ideas so far, some points that will certainly be given consideration as we go down the road in

developing the recommendations that we make and which will be given to the Assembly. It's clear that the intent is that the recommendations that we make . . . Come on in, Glen.

Why don't we just pause for a moment, and if we can get the names of those who have just arrived, I'll quickly reintroduce the committee members who are here today. Stockwell Day is the vice-chairman of the committee; Frank Bruseker, Mike Cardinal, Tom Sigurdson, and myself, Bob Bogle. Glen, we're joined today by – who's this with you?

MR. CLEGG: Elsie Hoffarth, administrator of the town of Spirit River; Art Krefting, MD of Spirit River; and Gerry Beach is administrator of the village of Rycroft.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good. Well, welcome. Pleased you could join us this morning.

I'll just conclude my remarks, and then we're going to go to Stockwell Day, who's going to lead us through some of the population statistics and the impact that the plus/minus 25 percent ruling would have on our constituencies.

Before I do that, I'll repeat that the key purpose of our committee is to make recommendations to the Legislature, which hopefully would be adopted, to set the parameters for the commission that would give the commission guidance on the kind of principles we want to see enunciated in redrawing boundaries for constituencies across the province. I mentioned that we had picked up some excellent ideas last evening listening to the returning officer for Dunvegan. There were some excellent points made about how important it is to get out and ensure that you meet the needs of small population areas that are far away from a main population centre. It's much easier to make those adjustments before you've got something written down on a map and finalized. Then you're back arguing that there should be a change after the fact. So it's certainly worthwhile for us.

Before I turn to Stock, are there any comments, Frank, Mike, or Tom, that you'd like to make to the background?

MR. SIGURDSON: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Stock.

Would you like to rearrange your chair so you can see the screen, and Stock will lead us through a presentation.

MR. DAY: Great. Can everybody more or less see that screen? It's probably not the most exciting motion picture you're going to see today, but it will certainly be a significant one. We're going to put some numbers up here for you so you can have an idea. The past history of redistributions in the province have resulted in a number of cases of large constituencies being divided and more constituencies being created. I think if we go back even 15 years, there's probably only one case that I can think of where a constituency actually disappeared. Would that be right, Mr. Chairman? So in terms of constituencies disappearing and being lost in larger ones, that has not been a factor in past redistributions.

I'd like you to look at the numbers we've got here. This first slide is just every constituency listed in alphabetical order, and the numbers that you see there are the eligible voters. So now that you've got that one memorized, we'll move it off the slide.

This one here is broken down for you numerically: 83 constituencies, and the number beside each is showing the number of eligible voters. You can see that presently the

constituencies in the province of Alberta go from a high in Edmonton-Whitemud of some 31,000 eligible voters, down to Cardston. There is a notation beside Cardston. There are actually an extra 1,800 members of the Blood Indian Band who chose not to be enumerated in this last election. You can figure that if they had been enumerated, Cardston probably would move up from the bottom there. But that's just to explain that notation. So you can see that there is a significant variance from Edmonton-Whitemud down to the smaller constituencies. Obviously, we need to know, then, the impact if we were to go along with the guidelines of the McLachlin court case in B.C.

You'll be interested to see the slides and possible impact here. Eighty-three electoral divisions. If we divide by 83 some 1,550,000 names on our list of electors, then we have an average per constituency of 18,000 electors in each electoral division. So that gives us an idea of what the provincial average is. If we take the guideline as offered by Justice McLachlin, that means you take your 18,000, and what he is suggesting is that you could have a constituency then with a maximum of 23,000 electors or with a minimum of 14,000. That's giving the 25 percent on both sides. We've just been joined by our MLA from Grande Prairie, Bob Elliott. Good to see you, Bob.

Any questions to this point on this 25 percent, just on the numbers themselves? Okay.

Now, what we've got here, we've gone back to the list which shows all the constituencies listed according to the number of electors. The block that you see in yellow represents the number of constituencies, all of which we call urban constituencies, which would exceed the 25 percent guideline. The ones in pink would be the ones which are underneath the minimum of some 14,000 or whatever it was. So you can see that there's a significant number of constituencies that are presently beyond the 25 percent plus or minus.

This is what this looks like on a map in terms of most of what we call our rural ridings. The ones in pink represent all the ridings that would be less than the 25 percent minimum variance which McLachlin was suggesting. So you can see that there's a significant portion of the province falling under the 25 percent.

These constituencies here are the urban constituencies which are in excess of the 25 percent. You can see, for instance, that in the city of Calgary we have a number of constituencies which exceed that maximum, which was around the 23,000 mark. So we are not talking about one or two constituencies in the province here.

Here is the city of Edmonton. Again, the ones in yellow – or jaundiced green, depending how early in the morning this is for you – also would be in excess of that 25 percent maximum. So the city of Edmonton also is impacted here; there are implications.

The city of Lethbridge at the last division was divided into two, and actually I believe both of these fall within the guideline. One has three or four thousand more than the other, but they are both within the guideline there in Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West.

I was just giving a snapshot around the province, both rural and of the different cities.

Medicine Hat is in excess of the 25 percent range, fairly considerably, so that's all marked in yellow. That's the entire electoral division of Medicine Hat, and it exceeds significantly the 25 percent maximum. I think they are around 30,000.

Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. I've been trying to tell my colleagues for years that Red Deer is unique, and now this finally proves it. Red Deer is the one city in which the provin-

cial electoral boundaries actually go beyond the municipal boundaries. The orange line shows the municipal boundaries, but the black outline shows the actual electoral boundaries of the constituencies of Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, and so it is the only city in the province where you'd have the electoral boundaries considerably going beyond the municipal. Red Deer up until 1985 was, I think, the largest if not one of the largest electoral divisions, so it was divided in two and the rural areas brought into it, making them quite unique. Stop in for coffee sometime if you are ever dropping by. [interjection] Question?

MR. CLEGG: I said it'll cost you.

MR. DAY: Oh, it will cost me, yeah.

The city of St. Albert is in excess of the 25 percent variance, and this gives you a picture of the layout of St. Albert and the implications there.

Have we seen that one?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MR. DAY: Okay.

These are the rural ones which are lower than the 25 percent minimum suggested, the ones in purple here. We're just taking these - we're moving along the variance line here. These purple ones are actually more than 35 percent beyond the average.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Twelve thousand or fewer.

MR. DAY: In terms of numbers this would be 12,000 or fewer. It just shows you how far along this variance goes. The ones coming up are actually more than 50 percent beyond the average, these ones down here in yellow. Even at the extreme level there's still a number of constituencies involved here. That would be getting probably less than 10,000 or around there, Bob? Those constituencies are actually 50 percent beyond the average of 18,000 and some.

These blue dots represent the locations of the meetings for this committee to date, and we're open to any suggestions or advice you may have here. Yesterday we were in High Level and Peace River, and this morning, of course, we're in Grande Prairie. This was the first area chosen. We had strong representation from the MLAs, actually, just because this is the friendliest part of Alberta next to Red Deer. So we wanted to come up here. You folks are the first to have these meetings. But this represents the distribution through the province. Albertans need a chance to address any possible implications to their constituency. We're trying to spread ourselves through as well as we can, but we're open to any suggestions you may have for us there.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is that saying, Bob, that you're a long way south and you're not too friendly?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That wasn't part of the script that we had written for Stock. He has a tendency to ad lib.

MR. DAY: These are the locations of the public hearings. The numbers in brackets following - for instance, High Level, Peace River: that's location number one, location number two. That's where we're going to be meeting throughout the province, and the approximate dates. Well, actually, those dates are set, and

only terrible weather would keep us from getting into any of these particular areas.

Again, that gives you an idea of . . . These are the constituencies which - are these the 35 percent ones?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, 35.

MR. DAY: These constituencies here are at least 35 percent beyond the average. It just gives you an idea to show you where we are and how we're spread through the province, especially in light of some of the constituencies which may be impacted here in a significant way.

I think that wraps up today's movie, folks. There's no popcorn at this particular showing.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: But there are doughnuts.

MR. DAY: Yeah, there are doughnuts and coffee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Once Ted finishes with the lights, we'll get the projector off the table, and then if you'd like to come up and join us, we'll sit around the table. I believe some of you have formal presentations, so we'll save one chair right next to a microphone and we'll deal with those. But come on up; we're going to be as informal as possible.

We have two individuals who have recently joined us. I'm going to reintroduce the members of the committee and then ask you to introduce yourselves if you would, please. Stockwell Day is the vice-chairman of our committee; Frank Bruseker; Mike Cardinal; Tom Sigurdson; and myself, Bob Bogle.

MR. GRAYDON: I'm Alderman Gord Graydon, city of Grande Prairie.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm Fred Abbott. I work with Municipal Affairs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Welcome.

As this is a select special committee of the Legislature, our meetings are recorded, and there is a written transcript that's made public through the process. So I would ask that when you do speak, if you would identify yourself, that will help our recording process in terms of identifying who is speaking.

I would suggest that we first deal with any formal presentations that we have. While the information may be given in a formal way, I reiterate that we will try to keep the process as informal as possible. It's important that we be learning from one another in this process, and that will certainly help the committee in its deliberations. Paulette, I'm aware that you have a formal presentation. Would you like to begin, and we'll go from there?

MS PATTERSON: Thank you very much. I'm Paulette Patterson, past president of the Smoky River PC Association, and I feel the task of the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries is crucial as it will have a significant impact on the provincial representation of the people of Alberta. The electoral division changes based on a constituent population of 18,685 plus or minus 25 percent I feel would leave many rural constituencies without fair representation.

Some Albertans claim that current electoral boundaries should be altered considering the average number of electors in urban constituencies versus the lower average number in rural con-

stituencies. Such suggestions ignore the unique circumstances and conditions of rural Alberta that must be considered when looking at this matter of representation. The multitude of diverse challenges unique to rural Albertans and rural MLAs necessitates smaller constituent populations. The geographic size of the constituency impacts on the travel time of the area's MLA and leads to a greater number of environmental issues that must be dealt with. For instance, the Smoky River constituency covers a sizable area of approximately 200 by 150 miles.

An area with primarily rural residents and small towns lends itself to a greater number of community groups, boards, and local governments. In the Smoky River constituency there are 12 school boards, 80 municipal councillors, and three hospital boards, while in many urban areas they may include as few as one city councillor, one hospital board, and one school board. The combination of a large geographic area and the workload generated for the MLA as a result of the various community issues leaves the rural constituency's representative less time to deal with the individual concerns. In addition to this, with the majority of our constituents being involved in the agricultural industry, they require a greater degree of access to their provincial representative, taking into account the current high level of government involvement in the agricultural industry. This is an issue that is extremely important and must be thoroughly examined.

I would like to conclude by urging the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries to consider returning to the Grande Prairie region in order to give the area residents additional time to analyze this situation and to make further submissions.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Paulette.

Is there anyone who does not have a formal brief who would like to comment further on the brief given by Paulette? All right.

Are there any questions or comments any of the committee members would like to make?

MR. SIGURDSON: Maybe I can just start off. You saw on the overhead projector the numbers that vary from 31,000 down to 9,000. When you consider the problems that MLAs in rural Alberta have with travel, is that any greater problem for their constituents compared to an urban area MLA who may have a number of constituents kept waiting because of the number of people who are trying to see the MLA?

MS PATTERSON: As I say, we consider travel time involved with that plus winter road conditions, et cetera, et cetera, and it does become a problem, I feel, more so in the rural area than it does in the urban.

MR. SIGURDSON: So then what you're saying is that rural residents have to have more time with their MLAs than urban MLAs.

MS PATTERSON: No, that's not what I'm saying; I'm just saying it takes longer to get to them.

MR. SIGURDSON: But if you've got three times the number in an urban constituency . . .

MS PATTERSON: I didn't know this was going to be a grilling. I'll have another cup of coffee.

MR. SIGURDSON: No, sorry. I don't want it to be a grilling. Sorry.

MS PATTERSON: But that isn't what I said.

MR. SIGURDSON: I guess what I'm trying to say is that in urban centres because of the population there are frequently occasions when, because of the commitments that I and a number of other urban members have to our job, to our functions, our constituents have to be kept waiting a period of time that may seem ordinary for most everybody. If we were doctors or lawyers or specialists, we'd become accustomed to being kept on hold for a period of time. If you're a politician, you have to deal with the problem immediately. Keeping a constituent waiting, whether it's in rural Alberta or in urban Alberta, is difficult for any member of the Legislature. So I'm wondering how one gives weight to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Tom, the essence of what I heard Paulette say was that if you add distance, add the amount of time it takes to meet constituents in a sparsely populated rural constituency, that's a factor that needs to be in the equation. I don't think in any way she was suggesting that a rural MLA is seeing more people. It's like a doctor, I guess, who is servicing patients in three communities. The doctor has to leave home to drive to two of those other communities before he actually sees patients, but the travel time has to be equated into his work.

MS PATTERSON: The weather conditions in this particular province have to be taken into account. There are several different things that have to be taken into account.

But forget the MLA. Talk about even your constituency activity. Your group traveling to meetings throughout the constituency alone is a fairly large undertaking. Forget the MLA's involvement - but also the grassroots involvement.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else from the committee?

Well, for instance, one issue I'll share with you which I think most rural members, if not all, can relate to - and we'll use hospital boards as the example - if a new project is being requested by a hospital board, the amount of time an MLA spends with that board in the preparation of the brief to the department, in meetings with the minister and senior officials . . . Once the approval is given for the project, you might assume that the work has been completed; that's only the end of phase 1. Then the hard work begins, because you're going through the detailed planning and you can spend an inordinate amount of time with a hospital board re its new project.

I shared this story with Tom just this morning. In the constituency I represent, there are seven school boards and three hospital boards, but I wind up spending much more time with the three hospital boards than with the seven school boards. I think part of that relates to the fact that with a school board, planning and building, there's a set formula in place and part of the funds are raised locally. Therefore, there's much more autonomy in the kind of building to be built and to meet the needs of the community, whereas with a hospital it's a hundred percent funded by the province, and there seems to be much more tension between the department and the board and the administration. Therefore, the MLA is constantly being involved in that process, and that eats up a lot of time. So if you're dealing with three or four hospital boards vis-à-vis one large board in the metropolitan centre, that is merely part of the

equation to be considered. No question that in an urban area, if you've got a larger number of electors on the list on a straight one-on-one basis, there may be more demands. I think what Paulette was saying was add all the local governments and all the local interest groups and the distance, and you do get the challenge.

Anyone else on this particular point? All right. Are we ready to go to the next brief? Gil, do you have one? Okay.

MR. BALDERSTON: I've got some 50-year-old glasses here that are a kind of necessity.

Gilbert Balderston, farmer from the Sexsmith district. I would like to extend my appreciation to this select committee on electoral boundaries for recognizing the importance of conducting public hearings such as this one across the province. The outcome of the committee's findings will help shape the future of provincial representation in our province, and therefore it's very important that extensive consultation take place. Considering this, it is my opinion that area residents would best be served if the committee could return to the Grande Prairie region for further consultation before the conclusion of the public hearings.

With respect to the issues regarding changing or retaining electoral boundaries, I am of the opinion that Alberta's current electoral boundaries offer all Albertans fair and thorough provincial representation. The nature of rural constituencies, with a population dispersed over a large area, creates situations that warrant an extensive system of representation. Along with a limited concentration of population come difficulties associated with a relatively low number and ratio of professionals such as lawyers and doctors serving the area. There are also problems that require extra consideration when we examine the mental health and health care facilities in rural Alberta compared to those in urban areas.

There are also some economic problems that require additional provincial government attention in rural areas because we are dependent on primary industries. For example, in the Smoky River constituency 31.6 percent of the labour force is employed by primary industry, mainly in the agriculture and oil sectors. When these industries experience downswings, a host of constituency problems result. There are also significant problems with respect to the high number of constituents without a high school diploma or postsecondary education associated with an area that is primary industry dependent. A typical urban constituency does not rely on primary industry to the same extent, and they have a variety of community service groups to assist the unemployed and those with limited employment prospects that are not available to those in urban areas.

I look forward to further consultation with the committee in the near future.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Gil.

Anyone wish to add to any of the comments made by Gil in his brief? Any questions or comments by committee members?

MR. DAY: Just that it's, I think, an example of another angle which . . . The committee has started with a blank slate, as it were, not knowing the types of concerns, and we hear different ones. But this particular aspect of the dependence on primary industries: with a downturn, that results in more problems, and you feel that in the cities there'd be more service groups. In a rural area your MLA is going to get called upon more often to tend to these or try and direct government services to these particular problems?

MR. BALDERSTON: Well, I think with the last recession a lot of people in our area went out of cattle and went to the oil patch. The reason they'd go to that was that it was quick money every winter; they got it every winter. All of a sudden, when they'd got rid of all their cattle, the oil activity stopped. So not only did they lose their winter employment, but they lost their cattle. They lost two things at once. All of a sudden there they are; they had their farms, but the aspect of it - when cattle were poor at that time. So these are the kinds of things I think we're talking about. You know, you can't plan very far ahead. If you've got a job, it's all ongoing, but it's not necessarily that. They're working in either the lumber industry or oil activity, and that changes from year to year. These are the types of things I think we're talking about that seriously affect us. You can call it bad management if you want, but you do what's best for you at the time.

MR. DAY: If I could, Mr. Chairman, this is the second person who has commented on a return to Grande Prairie. Do you feel there hasn't been enough lead time, or people aren't sufficiently informed, or what do you see as the problem there?

MS PATTERSON: Well, as far as the constituency is concerned for our particular area, I just didn't have enough time to contact our whole executive and get all their input. It just did not give me enough time.

MR. BEACH: This document actually arrived in most of our offices on November 1, which is a very inadequate time for a council. And I don't even think these were sent out to school boards; I'm not too sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. BEACH: Were they? Okay. But the time was very inadequate. I think every one of us is probably going to allude to the fact that, you know, you should consider coming back to this area because of the lack of lead time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, Gerry. It's Gerry, isn't it?

MR. BEACH: Gerry Beach, yeah. Sorry.

MS PATTERSON: I do realize it was in the newspaper. I happened to miss that particular . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. I think we had it in a general advertisement on October 17 and a specific advertisement on the 24th. The actual letters that we've tried to send to the widest possible distribution - municipal councils, school boards, hospital boards, and so on - were very late getting out. We apologized for that yesterday in High Level and Peace River, and we certainly do the same today.

We're in a short time frame trying to cover the province, and we had some problems with the Quick Printer on our letters. Unfortunately, they didn't get out as quickly as the committee had originally intended.

MR. BALDERSTON: I think also you'll find that our fall has dragged on. We've had a tough year as far as agriculture is concerned. And then some of the things you've shown us today, you know, we have just now - I think if you look at it, it's strictly rural Alberta that's being affected. I think without

exception it's rural Alberta. So that's all quite sparse, and it takes time to put those numbers together when you're looking at something like that. I think that's why we mentioned it. I'm not saying we're unhappy about it, but also we were the first on the list.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's correct.

The other thing we've been trying to do is meet with the executives of the various provincial associations. We've met with the AUMA and the MDs and Cs, and we have a meeting scheduled with the Hospital Association executive and the ASTA. We're able to meet the full delegate body at the conventions for both the MDs and Cs – that's on the 14th of this month, I believe, where we have a presentation to give – and also the Alberta School Trustees' Association. But the agendas were so tight and already set for both the Hospital Association and the Urban Municipalities Association that all we were able to do there was get a basic bit of information in the kits. We'll have a meeting room where we'll be available for one or two periods of time so we can meet with people. The key in this is to get information out and get feedback, and that's what it's all about.

We're delighted with the turnout this morning on short notice. This is a real tribute to the residents of this part of the province, that we've got this kind of turnout.

MR. BALDERSTON: I'd like to mention one more thing in regard to the MLA's involvement in these rural constituencies. I know for a fact that when Walter Paszkowski leaves Edmonton and gets back home, his next meeting could be at McLennan. That's an hour and a half drive to get there before he does anything, an hour and a half back, and the next meeting's in Valleyview, so the next day it's another hour to Valleyview and back. This is time that's wasted. Now, in an urban community you might have half an hour across town, but it's not going to be this type of thing. It's pretty hard to explain unless you drive it. I know when I was doing some electioneering here, it's a long way. When you leave home every morning, before you do a thing, you've sat for that long. So those are the kinds of things we're talking about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Well, both of your briefs, yours and Paulette's, concentrate on that.

Yes, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: I'm just wondering if – you mention in here that you've got a low ratio of professionals such as doctors and lawyers servicing the area. I know that it's very difficult to try and get appointments and have a presence in town in certain areas. If MLAs had access to other facilities so they could have an office and start their day, say, in Valleyview, and you would know that on Monday morning your MLA's going to be in Valleyview and on Tuesday your MLA may be in another area – currently most MLAs have only sufficient funds to have one constituency office located somewhere, usually in the major population centre of the constituency – would that assist you in dealing with your MLA?

MR. BALDERSTON: I don't think it's so much a matter of dealing – we can get hold of him if we have to, but he has to travel. Say on the weekend there's something at McLennan; he needs to be there. The next minute he comes back, and there's something at Valleyview and there's something at Sunset House.

It means that things have evolved that people need him to go to, and as an MLA there are a certain amount of things that go on in the community where they want their MLA there. So in rural areas you spend half your time driving back and forth for a half-hour meeting or a half-hour opening or whatever. That is time that's wasted, I guess you'd want to call it. But it's time where you spend a lot of time just traveling, whatever the weather conditions. I'm saying it's unique. It's hard to understand unless you're involved with it, but it's unique to what it is in urban areas. That's all we're stressing. And the school; the kids get in and they drive 50 miles to school. That's the way it is. They have no choice in the matter.

A constituency office wouldn't help that. Because, you know, Walter can go there and arrange meetings; that's not a problem. But it's these things that go on on the weekends or during the week that people want you there for. That's your job.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else?

Yes, Walter.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Just on the topic of requesting a return, I had two calls from two constituents this morning. As you know, in the Falher area, along Highway 49, there were two tragic accidents yesterday. Two people who had planned on making submissions were directly involved with those accidents. They called this morning. They were unable to make presentations in Peace River, so they were wondering if something could be done to allow them to have an opportunity. Again, they're 150 miles away from Grande Prairie. That's part of the largeness of the constituency.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, without making a commitment for the committee, there obviously are several important factors that we have to consider: the short lead time notice, particularly with the letters that went out to individuals and groups; and the weather, and we know the rain and the icy conditions that existed yesterday. So would you leave that with the committee so we can take it under advisement in terms of the possibility of coming back and holding a meeting in the general region?

MR. DAY: Can I ask a question, too, just to everybody here in terms of determining our advertising? How many people actually saw the ad? Okay, three, four, five. So about half. Did you see both of them or just one of them?

MR. BALDERSTON: I think I just saw the one, but we didn't get any details. You know, it was just the boundary changes and what was happening. So you see this, but you don't . . . The impact that you put on the screen we didn't get a chance to see. I guess that's what we're saying. Okay?

MR. DAY: That's what we're trying to get at. Obviously, we can't go totally commercial with ads: put in bikini-clad men or women to try and attract people's eyes.

MS PATTERSON: Why not? That's what they're going to look at if they don't read.

MR. CARDINAL: Put models on the committee.

MR. DAY: Are you suggesting more wording in the ad that suggests the possible impact of this?

MR. BALDERSTON: No, I just think what happened is – if we'd been last on the list instead of first, we could have read it and digested it. We just got it. I didn't see mine until two days ago. You see that, and you have to spend some time with it. That's all we're saying, I think. It's just a matter of we just didn't get it. It's not your fault.

MR. DAY: No. We're just looking for input on how we might improve maybe our advertising.

MR. BALDERSTON: I don't think it has anything to do with advertising, because you needed to look at the boundary changes and see what's on here to address it. If you just hear there's a boundary thing and come here unprepared, you haven't really accomplished much.

MR. DAY: Okay. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A point.
Yes, John.

MR. POWERS: John Powers, chamber of commerce. I think probably it would be appropriate at this time to have a little discussion about the 25 percent rule. The reason why I'm suggesting that is because you've alluded to the fact that a court case was settled, that a ruling has been made. I guess my question boils down to simply this: are you obliged in some form of rule of law to go with this 25 percent variance, minus or plus, in setting out the electoral boundaries?

MR. SIGURDSON: My understanding is that no, we are not obliged to go with a mean and a variance of plus or minus 25 percent, or as in Manitoba where they've gone with plus or minus 10 percent. However, given that we have the Charter of Rights, we would be wide open to any kind of Charter challenge that would come from any body. In British Columbia it came from a professor and civil libertarians. If we don't as an electoral committee, and if it struck the commission that's going to determine the boundaries probably next spring, and if the commission doesn't have some kind of rationale for the boundaries they draw, it could be very much wide open for a Charter challenge. Then we would find ourselves perhaps in the position of British Columbia, where another commission may have to establish new boundaries and go through the process once again.

MR. POWERS: So what you're saying is that if you don't follow this 25 percent rule, you're subject to challenge and possibly a loss of your position in the event that the challenge was successful. This would then have an obvious impact on the rural constituencies.

MR. SIGURDSON: Yes.

MR. POWERS: I think it's very obvious from the nature of your presentation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: John, Justice McLachlin made reference to what she called extenuating circumstances where you may go beyond the 25 percent variance. She didn't elaborate on what she meant or what the criteria should be. Common sense tells most of us that she must have been thinking of more sparsely populated, remote parts of any jurisdiction. It's important that we keep in mind that in the federal House of Commons, while

the legislation requires a plus or minus 25 percent variance, there are exceptions. There are two seats in the Northwest Territories; there is one seat in the Yukon; there are four seats in Prince Edward Island to ensure that they have the same number of Members of Parliament as they do Senators. And we've heard no suggestion that the federal government will be challenged in the courts using the Charter of Rights.

One of the challenges we as a committee have is to see, if there are extenuating circumstances, what they are and just how far we can go and still sustain a Charter challenge if, indeed, one were to be made.

MR. POWERS: Can I possibly, then, suggest a path that you might want to explore?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please do.

MR. POWERS: It would appear also in looking at the map and the boundaries that a good portion of those constituencies that don't have a great population also seem to have a very, very high proportion of the productive capacity for the economy of this province. I'm talking about resources. If you take a look at even southern Alberta, you'll find that the relationship of what is produced by these areas probably is astronomical compared to what might be considered produced out of the urban areas, where they utilize the benefits or the results of the productive capacity of the smaller representative constituencies. So it might be an area to explore. I know that we could lay claim to a tremendous dollar value in value contributed to Alberta coffers by virtue of what is extracted from this area.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mike.

MR. CARDINAL: I guess, Paulette, just to give some reassurance on your concerns, they are really good concerns. I'm a rural MLA from the northern riding of Athabasca-Lac La Biche. I experience exactly what you describe, and it's tough. I have two offices, for example, right now, one in Athabasca and one in Lac La Biche.

They are two major towns that compete for an equal standard of living and economic diversification and stuff. I can only staff one of them because of the money that's provided. Now, you know, with the increase in salary, I'll be able to provide more effective representation by taking it out of my salary and staffing that. But that's not the point I'm putting here. I think one person, one vote is fine, but we need to also look at equal and effective representation.

The point you brought up is exactly one of the concerns I have also. You know, we have the resources and that. We have regional disparities in the province. Edmonton and Calgary are the growth centres. Our resources are taken out of rural Alberta, processed and manufactured in Edmonton. It attracts the population – it has in the past 30 years – to these growth centres because that's where all the dollars are. It's basically not Edmonton tax dollars; they're provincial tax dollars and resource dollars, I should say. The cities are built up. If you want to go to a good hockey game, a professional hockey game, that's where we have to go; we have no choice.

I feel that when you're talking about equal and effective representation, we need to consider the deficiencies we have out here. The standard of living is considerably lower in rural Alberta than it is in the major centres. The social life and the social structure – there are a lot more opportunities in the cities

than we have in rural Alberta. So we've got to make sure, when we push forward with redistribution, that we consider these factors, that there are regional disparities. I know in my area I have to work on diversified issues: agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, tourism, land claims issues, commercial fishermen, trappers, unemployment as high as 90 percent in parts of my constituency, underemployment – you know, issues you wouldn't believe. And I feel as an urban MLA that we need to continue improving the representation somehow rather than taking away the seats. It's just unfair.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
David.

MR. BILTEK: I share somewhat the feeling that people in this area haven't had the time to perhaps ruminate on the problem. I suppose it would behoove us to perhaps submit written submissions to the committee at some later date if you are unable to come back.

There are couple of things that I'd like to raise, and they may well be inconsistent with one another, because I haven't had a chance to resolve them in my mind. One of the things I find disturbing is that the legislation is silent on the small cities. It talks about urban and rural. Mr. Day pointed out that there are only two constituencies, in Red Deer, that include the urban shadow, that go outside of urban boundaries. Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat stick to the urban boundaries. Perhaps we need to consider the role of the small cities in carving out the constituencies. Perhaps we need to talk about metropolitan constituencies and then urban constituencies, meaning places like Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. Perhaps then we could consider going to a deviation of 30 percent in the rural areas, the strictly rural areas. I think that is one of the problems we face here. A city like Grande Prairie is facing a lot of the same difficulties people in Edmonton and Calgary are facing, except they're not on the same scale. To a large extent some of the interests of people in Grande Prairie are substantially different than those in the rural areas that surround it, so it creates a schizophrenia. I don't mean to say that my MLA is schizophrenic . . .

DR. ELLIOTT: Fair enough.

MR. BILTEK: . . . but I'm sure it creates that sort of problem for an MLA that has to represent, in essence, an urban area. Glen, are you suggesting that he is? You're nodding your head.

MR. CLEGG: I'm just agreeing.

MR. BILTEK: But it must create some problems, so perhaps we need to consider a third level of constituency type.

Perhaps the other thing that we need to do to get away from the large rural areas is to cluster more constituencies around the major centres in areas. Maybe Grande Prairie and Peace River, for example, should not be lumped into one constituency. Maybe they should be carved into three so that bits of Grande Prairie are attached to a variety of rural areas so we can reduce the size. That has certain implications to the rural area in that the city residents may well dominate that area, but it may reduce some of the travel time – that is obvious – which may then leave room for some very small constituencies that need additional assistance and need an MLA for an area perhaps as small as

9,000 people.

It is unquestionable that Smoky River is not a well-designed constituency. It's far too large. The interests are far too diverse in that it has people who live in the urban shadow of this city and people who are homesteading. So again it must prove really difficult for the MLA to look after that. I think some of those factors have not been taken into account.

Again, we need to look at – using city boundaries is quite artificial. We have, around all our urban municipalities, country residence parcels whose interests are urban. They're not rural, you know, as much as Paulette likes to pretend that she's a farmer out there. Her interests are strictly urban. We need to, I think, consider that and look at the areas around urban areas and say, you know, there's no point putting those people in a rural riding because their interests are totally different than the interests of the rural people.

So, as I said, maybe we need to look closely at the kinds of constituencies we have. If we're going to have rural ridings, let's have rural ridings that are clear and that are small enough that people can spend time on them. Let's look at the urban ridings in the smaller cities and make sure those areas are well represented as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.
Yes, go ahead, Gerry.

MR. BEACH: Well, I have a few things that I wanted to speak to, some of the things that haven't been brought up to this point.

We talked about, and I'm reading from your letter, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. To me it indicates, and it's not written in words, of course, that every citizen in Alberta should have fair and equal representation. I don't think anybody can argue about that. But if we start making our rural electoral boundaries larger, we may get equal representation, but I don't think it's going to be fair. I have several reasons for saying that. I don't think we can continue, nor can the government continue, to base it on population and percentages. We do far too many things based on population and percentages. We're talking about grants here now. All our grants, basically, are based on population, with the exception of a few like the community enhancement program and a few of the other ones that we have.

We in the rural areas have just as many needs as the people in the cities, and yet when you base all these things on population, we can't get the same types of services the people can in the cities. I'm talking anything from family and women's issues to agricultural issues, health services, health care, law enforcement, disability services, mental health services, education, cultural services. A bone of contention in our area is the native hunting rights. I'm not saying that, you know, it's in this brief. It's a concern with our citizens, because we're scared that if something isn't done about it, then not even the natives are going to have animals to shoot. However . . .

We're also concerned about having all these special committees that the government seems to form. In a time of restraint that the government keeps talking about, you guys seem to form more committees than Dodds has kidney pills. The village of Rycroft council feels that you are commissioning far too many committees, which are very, very costly. I mean, you gentlemen have your expenses paid and everything else, and that costs money. That's one of the concerns of the council. Our MLA, who's a very fine person, tries to meet the needs of our area. However, because of the geographic situation, Glen isn't able to do that.

We also feel that . . . Okay, I alluded to the programs. I also have a concern with the composition of this committee. You have five city MLAs on this committee and two rural. The current seat distribution in this province certainly isn't that percentage if you want to talk percentages. So I feel that the rural people automatically, because of the composition of this particular committee, are at a disadvantage. The composition of the commission, I think, should consist of equal representation from the major centres as well as the rural areas and should consist of not only our MLAs but also people from the general public, whoever that might be. And it should have a restrictive time frame to deal with it. I don't think we want to drag this thing out, but it should have a restrictive time frame within that commission once it's formed.

As far as historical and current practices go – and I'm aware of the court case in British Columbia as well – isn't it time that government officials became leaders and not followers? We elect you to lead the citizens of Alberta, so I think you have to start leading. Let's be first and foremost in Alberta for a change and come up with something that might be practical.

I already dealt with the grants, that they're based on population. I think the other concern we have as citizens in this northern part of Alberta is the fact that yes, you do listen to our concerns, but the average citizen feels you do very, very little about it. They also feel that most of the MLAs and most of the government employees know very little about the geographic area of northern Alberta, and they also know very little about the needs of the people in the area. Again, that's the concern. I'm talking about the council. We met last night to deal with this thing.

We feel that if you enlarge our rural boundaries – and yeah, we're one of the ones with a very sparse population; we recognize it on the map – the MLA, whether it be the current MLA or another MLA, would have a hard time discharging his duties; we think it would be next to impossible. If you, say, even double the size of our constituency – and that's what you have to do if you're talking about the percentages in population you're talking about here – there's no way our MLA could do the job of meeting the needs of the people in that constituency. There's just absolutely no way.

I also think the committee should take into account the projected growth in certain areas of northern Alberta. I'm talking about the forestry industry. You're talking about numerous plants. Now, whether they get off the ground because of environmental concerns we're not too sure. But I think that's something else that should be taken into consideration, because if we have to wait another eight years to change that, you might have another problem that compounds itself. So I think you have to look at some of the projected growth factors that are going to take place in northern Alberta based on the current industry that you know is going to happen.

Of course, one of the other things we have in this area is that when we need professional services – and we alluded to that – we have to travel long distances to do that. We have to travel to Edmonton. Most people can't afford to come down to the Grande Prairie airport or the Peace River airport, get on a plane and fly there. Most of them have to drive. It takes six hours to go to Edmonton from a lot of these areas, and the further north you get the longer it takes. It takes me about five hours to go from Rycroft to Edmonton by car, which means you've got to drive a day one way and a day another way just to get professional services. It takes months, of course, to get appointments. I know we're in a time of financial restraint, and I know that we

lack certain professional services you in Edmonton and Calgary have.

Then I'm going to get back to what the Alberta government is doing currently. The Alberta government is saying, "Hey, we want equal representation, the Triple E Senate." If you start giving more ridings to the cities, then you are not going to have equal representation. There is absolutely no way you can do it on a population or percentage basis, because it will not become fair. It may become equal from a citizens point of view, but it will not become fair.

The part that was made about resources. Where do most of the resources from Alberta come from? It's not from the urban areas. The people resource: yes; you can't argue that point. But natural resources come from the rural area, and in the rural area we are not getting the benefit from our natural resources that we should. I know I might be a little biased when I say that.

MR. DAY: We didn't perceive that.

MR. BEACH: The other thing that I think was very concerning to our council is the fact that we talked about decentralization of government. We know we have government departments in various areas, but the way our staff cuts are going in the various government departments, it won't take very long before it's all back in central Edmonton. I can give you one example. We've lost 50 percent of our assessors, if you want to use percentages. Percentages are very deceiving, but we lost 50 percent of our staff in municipal affairs in assessment. They can't do an adequate job of doing the assessments in our area out of Grande Prairie any more. It was nine years between assessments of our buildings. Can you imagine how long some of the bigger centres have to wait? That's just one example.

The other thing happening that we're really concerned about is the budget cuts you've been making are really affecting us drastically. The price of social services: you know, if you want to see a psychiatrist, you have to come to Grande Prairie. You might have to wait six months to see him. And that affects every Albertan. I'm not saying every Albertan has mental problems. I'm saying we have people that have those types of needs that can't be met right at the current time, and if you expand these electoral boundaries, it's going to make it harder for us to relate to our MLA what the needs really are.

Thank you for your time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Would anyone like to add to the comments Gerry has made? John?

MR. SIMPSON: I should jump in here and give you my brief before everybody says what I was going to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We were going to respond. I just wondered if there was anyone who wanted to add. We'll come to you next.

MR. SIMPSON: Sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Tom, would you like to deal with the makeup of the committee?

MR. SIGURDSON: Sure. Before I even have the opportunity to address that, maybe I can start with a digression. We have something now called urban disease, and psychiatrists that are

readily available in the urban centres are telling people to take days and get out into the country. So your facilities – maybe people are going to start to turn around and come back.

MR. DAY: That six months' wait – the person could be better.

MR. CARDINAL: That shows you that the city's playground is our country.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's a recreational health area anyway. A couple of areas the chairman has asked me to respond to are the committee makeup. The reason you will find the representation as it is structured is that it's an all-party committee of the Legislature.

MR. BEACH: I recognize that.

MR. SIGURDSON: It's not a caucus committee of the Conservatives, the New Democrats, or the Liberals. Were it a caucus committee of one of the three political partisan parties in the Legislature, you would probably have, if it were Conservative, not entirely rural but pretty much rural. If it were New Democrat, it would probably be entirely Edmonton. Were it Liberal, it would be Calgary and Edmonton. So what we've had to do is structure it so all parties are represented, in that there are two New Democrats on there, both from the city of Edmonton . . .

MR. BEACH: I know where you're from.

MR. SIGURDSON: Our rural representation is limited at the moment. So it's not designed to exclude anybody. It's designed to include as many people as possible, based on the composition of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. DAY: Tom, if I can just add to that. What we have right here today – two urban, two rural, and Red Deer – really is a combination of the two. So what we see here is a perfect split right here.

MR. BEACH: Yeah. But if the other member was here, it wouldn't be.

MR. DAY: We wouldn't let her come in.

MR. SIGURDSON: One of the questions this committee is dealing with is: what would the makeup of the commission be? Now, previously the Electoral Boundaries Commission has been made up of seven members. Four active partisan politicians and three nonactive – I'm not sure how nonpartisan – individuals served.

We've looked at Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They have had nonpartisan commissions. No members of the Legislature serve on the commissions. No sitting members of the Legislature sit on commissions. And that's something this committee is going to determine, whether or not we should have a commission made up of nonpartisan or a mix, or a completely partisan group.

MR. CHAIRMAN: May I jump in right at that point? We've traveled to Regina and Winnipeg. We've got one more out-of-province trip planned, and that's to Victoria.

A key thing we observed when we were in Regina and

Winnipeg would be as follows. In Regina the chairman of their Electoral Boundaries Commission was a retired judge, and we think it more by coincidence than design. But the judge happened to have been a rural MLA between 1935 and 1946, a Liberal MLA. We won't hold that against him, will we, Frank? The key is that he has never forgotten what it was like to be a representative for a rural area. That came out in his comments to us over and over again. So he obviously had a dramatic impact on the outcome because of his roots as an MLA at one point in time.

In Winnipeg, on the other hand, the commission inadvertently was made up of the chief justice of the province, the president of the University of Manitoba, and the Chief Electoral Officer, all of whom live in the city of Winnipeg. So there was no rural or non-Winnipeg representation on the commission. We heard a lot of complaints by government and opposition MLAs about errors the commission made outside the city.

So you know, I think we're all keenly aware of those factors, how important it is in the makeup of your commission to ensure that there are people there who have a feel and an understanding for all parts of your province.

MR. BALDERSTON: Personally, I would rather have Tom coming out here so we could talk to him directly about his feelings about Edmonton, about what we have out here, than us talking to a rural member that goes back and Tom doesn't care because he hears his complaints every day. So I guess I'm not finding that necessarily negative. At least we have a chance to address him, his concerns.

MR. DAY: Good point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else you want to finish up on, Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: Just on the point of input. You talked about a number of commissions being established and a number of committees being established. I think participatory democracy is an extraordinarily expensive asset that we have. I don't deem it to be a liability by any stretch of the imagination. It would be very easy for us to go to a computer programmer and say, "Give us X number of constituencies with X number population base in each one." But that's not the role of the committee, and I don't think you would want to see that. I think it's important that everybody be allowed the opportunity to have input to us so you don't see us as sitting in Edmonton far, far removed from rural Alberta or from constituents whether they're in the urban centres or not. This is a process that quite frankly I'm pleased to be part of, and I'm glad you're here to make these representations to us. I think it's an important area.

MR. BEACH: Yeah. I don't agree with the principle, and I don't think the council disagrees with the principle. They feel that the reason the remark was made by them – they just feel that we've had far too many committees lately for some reason. We've had them in this area for the last year, several in fact. You're not the only people who are sending out letters on a late basis. We got one from Alberta health care that came from Nancy Betkowski. We got it two weeks before we were supposed to submit a proposal or a brief, without even having a council in place yet. This is what's happening. The people are getting a little aggravated because of the short-term notices we're receiving. So I think this is part of that frustration we are

having not only as councils but also as administrators, because let's face it, administrators do prepare some of this stuff, and they rely on their administrators in smaller centres far more than they probably do in the city of Edmonton.

MR. SIGURDSON: Don't kid yourself.

MR. BEACH: But don't kid yourself. I know that's not true. Just the same, you know, that's where the frustration is coming from. Yes, we'd like to input into what the government's doing. However, because of some of the deadlines that have been imposed upon various councils, we can't meet those deadlines because we don't have the resources. I run a two-person office, just as an example, and we have lots of rural areas that have three people in their office. There might even be towns that only have three people in their office. So that's a concern. I realize it doesn't have anything to do with electoral boundaries, but it does in a way, because it's indirect frustration people have.

MR. DAY: Okay. I appreciate that comment just on that point, Mr. Chairman. From a government perspective, it's something I'll take back. In trying to provide participatory democracy, as Tom said, maybe we need to be looking at how we can do it more efficiently, so I appreciate the comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there's always a difficulty when you're around the municipal election time period because of the fact that your focus locally has been shifted.

MR. CARDINAL: Just a quick comment on the representation as far as urban and rural on the committee. Tom didn't expand, but I think whoever's in charge of making up the committee knew that Bob and myself can easily handle the urban MLAs. We're not exactly weak.

MR. BEACH: I certainly appreciate a city member sitting on there, because I can understand their frustration, too, in not being able to meet with their constituents on a regular basis.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is our north/south alliance.

MR. CARDINAL: You hit on a point, I think, that's very important, and no doubt the government should be dealing with that. That's the projected growth. Actually, you can go beyond projected growth; you can make growth. As Edmonton growth was made, you can make rural Alberta grow. I know this government is working on diversification in forestry, for an example, oil and gas, tourism, agriculture, and programs that will promote growth: strengthening the chamber of commerce, the economic development council providing money, guaranteed loans, for small businesses, and possibly even looking at decentralization of services from the major centres to centres like this region. That can be made to happen if there's enough push around to build up rural Alberta again. So I just thought I'd . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Mike. Anyone? Stock or Frank?

MR. DAY: Just a question. Some of them have already been answered. In talking about the government should lead - and I appreciate hearing that comment - is there something specific to us in this area of electoral boundaries that you're suggesting, or was that just a general . . .

MR. BEACH: No, I think that . . . You know, I realize and recognize there might have to be some changes in electoral boundaries. That does make common sense. However, maybe when the commission is formed, they should look at some new, innovative ideas in order to do that instead of following historic or current patterns of our other western provinces or eastern provinces, wherever the committee decides to go. I think that if we're going to lead, then let's lead as Albertans. I'm proud. I'm a native Albertan. I was born here. I'm proud to be an Albertan, but I'm also proud to be a Canadian. I'm a Canadian first. However, as a province I think we should start leading. Let's start showing the way. We've got one of the biggest provinces in western Canada. B.C.'s only the next biggest one in population. Let's start showing the way. That's the challenge to the commission and the challenge to the committee. That's what I meant by leading the way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Tom, on this specifically, and Frank.

MR. SIGURDSON: I want to get back to committees, because maybe what we ought to be doing is looking at the structure of government as well as the structure of the boundaries. As municipal officials, perhaps government ought to be coming out, given sufficient notice. Perhaps there ought to be more committees coming out to receive input so you're not just bound to go to a single member of the Legislature. I can appreciate the difficulties you have, but when there are concerns such as hospitals and medical care or transportation, perhaps committees ought to be going out and around the province to have more hearings, to have more input from communities, so you don't have to, as seven or eight municipal councils, go after Bob or Walter or Glen to try and get your input into another process. Should there be some arrangement to have committees come out?

I've noticed a change in the federal government. They've had two committees that have . . . Again, their problem has been that they've only come to Edmonton. But we had a committee that came in on the unemployment insurance hearings and a committee that came in on the GST. They didn't hit all of Alberta, but to their credit they finally got out of Ottawa and started coming around. Is that the frustration that . . .

MR. DAY: Probably lucky for them they didn't hit all of Alberta.

MR. SIGURDSON: Would that kind of structure - giving you the opportunity of time to prepare and also a committee to then come and hear the concerns you have - somewhat address some of the concerns, knowing as well that there are going to be the attendant costs with it?

MR. BEACH: I think if we are going to continue to be in a democratic situation - I hope that never changes. I had my grandfather and my father fighting two world wars to keep democracy. If we're going to continue to be that, then the government has to recognize that people are becoming more aware of what government's doing; they have become more educated. Therefore, I think you have to get more participation from those people. One way you can do that is having a group go out from the Legislature to just find out what the problems in this area are, instead of funneling it through one MLA. Or, you know, we meet with a minister with a problem that we might have in Rycroft, not recognizing that problem might affect our

neighbours down the road, which is Spirit River. In our area we just happen to be having regional meetings to deal with regional concerns. We've just started that, and we haven't got into the real meat of the matter yet. But we're doing that in an attempt to, instead of dealing with government on a one-to-one basis as a community, deal as a region where we're representing five or six different municipalities or maybe even more.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Gerry, one of ideas that came up last evening was that if the commission, once it's been struck, gets out before an interim report is issued, one of the groups of people the commission should be meeting with are the electoral officers – the returning officers for the various constituencies, the people who have to run the elections – because they see the problems, the challenges, in a constituency in a slightly different way than we as citizens or MLAs or others do.

It seemed to make eminent sense when the suggestion was made, and it's almost that kind of thing that says: "Well, why aren't we doing it? It seems so logical." We might be able to, in that education process, help the commission better understand the task they have by getting them out doing that kind of thing.

MR. BEACH: I don't see anything wrong with that at all.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else before we move on to John and the next presentation?

Oh, sorry. Paulette.

MS PATTERSON: I was just going to add a little to that. For the constituents to go to their MLA with the problem – the MLA in that particular rural constituency already knows the problem, and you're preaching to the converted, you might say. So I think what you have to do to make yourself heard is go to the urban or where you feel the difficulty might lie.

I'm going to use an example, the Wild Rose Foundation, of which I'm a member. We decided to hold our meetings throughout the province instead of Edmonton. Over the last three years it's been most effective in that the urban people saw the problems of the rural and the rural saw the problems of the urban. We've come to mingle and match. I think that's super important, to get a little of both.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good. Excellent. Yes?

MR. ABBOTT: I've got to go, Mr. Chairman.

As I listened to this, Paulette just said that many MLAs are aware of the area and what the problems are. That's true. But I deal with many people who don't have the political awareness, you might say, the political keenness, even the ability a lot of times to contact or . . . They're scared of the MLA, you might say. Because the MLA comes from a long way away, they feel he or she doesn't know what's going on. So if we're looking at bigger areas – I know in our office, in Municipal Affairs, we deal with a group of people who are on, you might say, the lower income scale. We actually find ourselves at times encouraging them to contact their MLA even though the MLA may be far away. They're reluctant. You make a bigger area and what happens with a lot of the people in rural Alberta is that the farther away the person is, the shyer they get. That's not true for everybody. I'm saying that for a large portion of the people we deal with in our program it's true. I think it's true in Mike's area too. Particularly, for example, if he doesn't have an office in Lac La Biche, the people of Lac La Biche might be a little bit

shy to go to Athabasca. I can certainly see that in this area.

I think that if you look at larger areas, at Edmonton or Calgary – I'll give you the example of the river valley residents there. They have a common concern. They know what they want and the MLAs know what they want. But the people up here, if somebody lives over here or over there, perhaps being in a large constituency, get the impression: "Really, is he going to worry about my particular little town? Why should I go?" Again, going back to the idea that the farther away the man or woman is, the harder to relate to him. What you were just saying here to this gentleman from Rycroft about sending out the committees: that idea or that principle is in itself against the idea of having larger constituencies. Because if we're trying to make the government come to the people, we certainly don't want to start making the boundaries bigger and saying the government is now moving farther away.

I think we encourage the people to use the MLAs up here. Certainly we don't encourage them to get us into trouble, but we encourage the people to use them. But we find it's frustrating for many of our people to deal with the distance. For somebody in an area I deal with – for example, Valleyview – to tell them to phone Sexsmith where the MLA's home is, or for somebody in another area to tell them to phone Beaverlodge or Grande Prairie, to a lot of our residents in rural Alberta it's not just a local phone call. It's not something where they can whip over there in 20 minutes and maybe go back the next day and pick up the piece of paper they need, or the MLA will be able to say, "Well, just come into my office over the next two or three days; I'll help you out with the situation." Because it means traveling, sometimes for hours. It means money to these people, a lot of money. As we've heard, the economic situation of this area is not great. To make the boundaries bigger, Mr. Chairman, would be even more frustrating to the people. I think it would make many of the rural residents – many are very politically aware. And as the gentleman was saying, the education level is coming up.

There are also many in the area who are frightened by distance. Maybe "frightened" is not a good word, but it's a word I can use at this time, I guess. To move the government away in the sense of making the boundaries bigger would be frustrating. Already in northern Alberta we know, as we talk to people on the phone, that they feel, "Well, you know, it's another government program and it comes out of Edmonton." We hear that extensively, especially the farther north you go. If you go to High Level, you even hear that about programs coming out of Grande Prairie. They just say it's another government program. To make these boundaries bigger, to make the MLAs less accessible just by the fact that you give them more area to cover – a lot of people just shrug their shoulders and say to us, "Well, it's just another government program."

I'm talking here, Mr. Chairman, not of the politically aware people in this room. There are many in northern Alberta who are politically aware and politically active, but I deal mostly with people who are not that way. They're probably in the majority in the Peace River, Dunvegan, Smoky River, Grande Prairie areas, probably in the majority in Athabasca and Bonnyville, and probably in the majority all over the province. These are people, when we talk to them – you know, making the government farther away from them I feel would just lessen their input into it, would inhibit them from going.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.

John, would you like to come forward?

MR. BEACH: I just have one other point I'd like to mention, if I may.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Go ahead.

MR. BEACH: If you have larger rural boundaries, I think you're going to make your political campaigns more difficult to run. They're going to become more expensive, and when you make political campaigns more expensive, you're limiting the number of good potential candidates the various parties are going to get to run in those constituencies.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Gerry. John.

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. We certainly appreciate the opportunity to come forward and address the special committee on electoral boundaries. I should say at the outset that again I would like to echo some of the comments that were made earlier in regards to the time frame. In fact, it wasn't even clear in terms of the letter – at least not in my reading, anyway – that this committee would be recommending something to another commission. Part of our comments have to do more, I guess, with the commission rather than the committee.

In regards to the court case that everybody seems to be hinging standards on, knowing the way B.C. operates and the fact that they don't like standards – everything seems to be run over there fairly arbitrarily – my guess is that if Alberta were to establish standards and they were set on logical kinds of criteria, they would stand up to court challenges in the future.

However, the purpose of our brief will be to put forward our position regarding the future constituency boundaries. We begin to note that our constituency, which is Grande Prairie, falls within the guidelines of the population threshold levels deemed ideal under the second option, the 25 percent factor. Therefore, should the committee adopt the option, we would not substantially be affected by such decisions. However, we in the north do not always look at ourselves in isolation, rather as a block or a group with common interests and concerns. In this context we submit some of the suggestions to the committee regarding the future of constituency boundaries.

The first point I'd like to make is the establishment of the committee, or commission I guess is more appropriate. After every second election I think is inappropriate and too expensive, particularly where elections are held close together as they have been in the last few years. The boundaries of our riding were changed in 1986 and may be again in 1992, a space of six years. We feel that this is much too soon, too costly, and serves little purpose.

Secondly, adjusting the boundaries on the basis of the time period after an election is unrealistic. The only parameter being used is that of existing population and that only the population shift which has occurred from 1981 to 1986, a five-year time span. This, in our opinion, is unreasonable and hardly an appropriate base on which to determine long-term trends and base decisions on. Electoral boundaries should be done at a minimum of every 10 years, after a federal census.

To comment on the two options proposed, both are somewhat flawed, particularly the second, the 25 percent factor. Any option developments not only take into consideration existing population but, as somebody has already mentioned, the potential future growth as well. We have a situation in the

north where expansion of resource-based industries – a riding which appears to be underrepresented now may well be at or over the threshold limit in the very near future, even before the next election and certainly before the next boundary review. This type of distortion may well be ignored under the existing options.

Some additional rationales which may be employed by the province in determining boundaries include geography; cultural ties; municipal boundaries; telephone service; travel distances; quality of roads; other transportation facilities; boundaries of school boards, hospitals, libraries, and similar institutions. A lot of that has been touched on.

This brings me to the next point of the boundary debate which is the rural/urban debate. It is readily apparent that a second option, if chosen, would certainly benefit the urbans to the detriment of the rurals. This will certainly have a profound and, in my opinion, undesirable impact on the political fabric of Alberta. Let us assume that the province continues to urbanize and the rural areas depopulate. Under option two cities would continue to gain elected representation at the expense of the rurals. Yet when it comes to producing the wealth of the province, it is the rural areas which provide the wealth. It is the rural area which contains agricultural land, oil and gas wells, the forest industry, and yes, even the major tourist attractions. Under this scenario the urbans would continue to prosper and would have more representation, continue to make decisions impacting on the rural area without the benefit of the knowledge of the intricacies of how that rural area operates.

By way of an example, we see in this riding where the mayor of Edmonton was all set to shut down the forest industries in northern Alberta based on some kind of logic. Indeed, we see the press in Edmonton jump all over the initiatives taken by the government. As well, they try to arouse public opinion against these projects. It may very well be that some or all the projects don't get off the ground, leaving Edmonton with all the jobs while we in the north continue to play second fiddle, see our children have to move to larger centres for jobs. I wonder what would happen if the government decided to really decentralize and move whole departments out of Edmonton into the smaller centres to compensate for the lack of opportunities in those centres.

The portrait I'm trying to paint is one of balance. Yes, the people in larger centres should have a say in resource development but not necessarily to the detriment of others. The same can be said for a Legislature based solely on representation by population. In essence we would end up with a Legislature where the majority is with the urbans and, with little thought or care, could trample on the rights of the minority. It's not unlike what central Canada is doing to western Canada.

How this balance is achieved is open to debate, obviously, and that's what we're here for. The province could guarantee a minimum number of seats to rural Alberta; however, in my opinion this is not ideal as rural Alberta could remain static while the urbans continued to increase. Perhaps another solution would be to enshrine a proportional number into the Legislature's makeup reflecting the vital contribution of rural Alberta to the province. The AMD and C, I believe, has suggested 50-50. Perhaps a 60-40 ratio might not be unrealistic, but something along those lines. I've got a third one that came to me while Gerry Beach was talking. I'll get into that at the end.

Let's consider for a moment if a principle were applied such as a vote parity. Under this concept a person producing a

commodity such as agriculture would be entitled to as many votes as the goods he produced. Therefore, a farmer producing enough food to feed a hundred people – while a person contributing virtually nothing to society would get only one vote. Constituencies would then be established on the basis of contribution to society, and those who produce more get a larger say in the way things are going, or at least an equal share. This method would at least drive home the point that the urban areas cannot exist without the rural areas. Without a surplus of food urbans would not be viable entities. I think it puts a little perspective back in the picture.

Realistically, some of the criteria which should be and in fact I think must be used by the province in determining appropriate constituency size – we've talked about geography. If I could use Grande Prairie county as an example, we have large uninhabited forests both to the north and the south, the B.C. border on the west, and the Smoky River on the east. Within that area there are two ridings, but certainly the area is a nice, neat, compact, geographical unit. People within that area share similar concerns. We have similar climates, similar values, et cetera, and there are probably lots of other examples across the province where geography ought to be used as a criterion.

Cultural ties. There are pockets of ethnic groups in many ridings, both rural and urban, and I think it makes sense to try and concentrate them in a riding so they might form an effective voice rather than splitting up into many small factions.

Somebody has mentioned telephone service. Access to your MLA is critical, and the most common method these days is by telephone. In order to maximize access long-distance toll charges to the home of the MLA within constituencies should be minimized. The best way to achieve this is to keep constituencies small enough, to local calling areas.

Municipal boundaries should be considered. Not only does this avoid splits within communities, it also would reduce confusion amongst voters as to who their MLA is, make MLAs perhaps more accountable, and perhaps reduce rivalries amongst MLAs.

Travel distances and transportation facilities. This has been touched on, I think, by Smoky River to a great extent and also by Gerry Beach. Perhaps the biggest criteria should be travel distances, time, and transportation facilities; i.e., roads. There is no doubt that the MLAs serving rural Alberta, especially in the north, have an extremely tough job to do. Long distances and poor roads contribute to long hours of traveling to meet constituents, and not a lot of that time is very productive. Compared to this the urban MLA in Edmonton – pardon me for my biases here – is home every night, 20 minutes from the Legislature, doesn't have to travel to hold meetings with his constituents, and can make the most of a working day.

Institutions. Mr. Chairman, you touched on the institutions, the fact that one MLA in a rural area can serve, in our case, three school boards, three hospital boards, five different municipal councils, a variety of recreation groups, et cetera, et cetera. In Edmonton you've got 17 MLAs serving basically one council, a couple of school boards, and some hospital boards, et cetera. The demands that those institutions place on the MLAs are no different, urban or rural. They're all looking for more dollars or more programs, et cetera, et cetera. Our MLA's time is being split up in so many different ways, it becomes hard to be effective. That's not taking anything away from our current MLA, Bob.

The bottom line in this debate, in review, is fairness and balance. I can see the argument for representation by popula-

tion, but it is a simple answer to a complex problem, and I believe that simple solutions just won't work. You may choose to add to neighbouring ridings by taking from ours, but in the end what have you achieved? We've perhaps made one MLA's job a little bit easier but increased the workload on another one. We've not used common sense. We've increased communication problems, created confusion amongst voters, and we may be playing community off against community, creating some animosities.

This issue is a sensitive one, but in the end it boils down to a couple of fundamental issues. The first is to ensure an MLA's ability to fully discharge their duties in their constituencies. Second is the need to protect the rights of the minorities, which residents of rural Alberta are rapidly becoming. Both objectives cannot be achieved through the second option. My belief is that a well-grounded sort of criteria used to determine constituency boundaries will stand up to any court challenges.

In conclusion, increasing the size of rural constituencies to satisfy the demands of urbans has major problems. So, too, does the concept of increasing the number of urban seats without regard to the impact on rural Alberta. The balance must be struck somewhere.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment. Before I leave, Mr. Chairman, the other option I might throw out, in terms of leadership: something new and innovative might be – and since this province and this government has, in particular, undertaken initiatives to promote Senate reform on the principle that a better Senate, a Triple E Senate, would provide better and effective representation, override some of the problems we have with population, disparities in the country – to look at a provincial Senate where the rural opinion, I guess, would be protected in yet another body. That might be more government; I'm not sure. But it might be something to look at. I mean certainly they have state Senates in the United States. I'm not sure how they exactly work; my political science doesn't go back that far. But it might be something to look at.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, John.

Would anyone care to comment? Yes, John.

MR. POWERS: Just that that last point, John, was a good one, but I think – could you maybe comment on how you see the role of the Northern Alberta Development Council in terms of helping to assist in areas of that nature? They are essentially another forum by which representation can be made through to government and directly affecting the constituency we're talking about.

MR. SIMPSON: Well, they are there to assist northern representation; there's no doubt. But they're still a committee. I go back to a few comments that people have made, especially yourself, sir, regarding perhaps separate offices. What I found in northern Alberta is that people like face-to-face contact with their MLAs. Yes, it's nice to go out and address committees and so on, but they still want to meet with their MLAs. That's why Walter and Glen and Bob and others have to travel to all these places. Because if you don't see him, the first comment you hear back is: "Jeez, where is that guy? We never see him. We never see him." Committees and so on do serve a purpose; there's no doubt about it. They help to focus issues and concerns that could be brought to the government's attention, but there's nothing like face-to-face contact with your MLA.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Committee members? Yes, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah, I'd like to make some comments. I've been silent up until now, so it's time to stop being silent.

I've heard a number of people make representations here that in consideration of the size of constituencies we should consider the resources that are produced and the value of the goods that are in there. I have to object strenuously to that concept. That sounds very much like vote buying to me. If we take Mr. Pocklington as an example, how do we determine how many votes he should get?

MR. DAY: Deduct his subsidies.

MR. BRUSEKER: I wouldn't even want to consider how you might implement something like that, because if you start considering the resources, then you have to say . . . Well, let's consider oil and gas, for example. The oil is coming out of the ground here, but it's the geologists who are working in the offices in Edmonton. How do you decide who is going to split up the votes? So I think that would be a real concern.

MR. SIMPSON: I didn't really throw it out as a concrete suggestion that you should pursue but merely an example of the importance of rural Alberta to the whole economy. The way that 25 percent factor seems to be going, there would be more and more concentration in the urban areas, the same way central Canada has more and more population and they keep developing policies which affect us across the country, across the province yet without really any kind of feel for what's actually happening out there.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I want to address that, so if I can just sort of develop my line of thought here, then maybe I'll throw out a suggestion, and you can respond to my idea anyway.

As an urban MLA I represent Calgary-North West. Mine on the list that you saw up there was the third-largest constituency, with about 30,000 voters. The concern that I have as an urban MLA is that when we go back to the Legislature and sit in our respective seats, I have one vote for those 30,000 people. Yet if you look at the bottom end of the scale, there are three or four constituencies at the smaller end - well, easily three, three and a half, but let's say easily the bottom three - and they're all rural constituencies. They're going to have three MLAs. When it comes time for the vote, those 30,000 people are going to be represented by three votes in the Legislature and my 30,000 people are going to be represented by me. With all due respect to the people in those rural areas I don't think that's a fair representation either, because right now the way the situation's set up is that 35 percent of the population of the province can dictate what's going to happen to the other 65 percent of the population of the province.

But I take your comments very near and dear to my heart, because my family is in one of those very small, poorly populated areas. So an idea that came about as I was listening to Paulette and Gerry and yourself speak was that perhaps what we need is to create constituencies which populationwise are very close, but in order to avoid the situation that Paulette spoke about, of preaching to the already converted, maybe what we need to do is have a teaming where an urban and a rural MLA would work together as a team to represent two constituencies, one of those being an urban constituency and one of them being

a rural constituency, so that the rural people have access to someone whom they could address on a regular basis and know that, "Yeah, we can contact this guy." For example, my constituency borders on Banff-Cochrane which is a very large rural constituency with a whole variety of different things. It's got the town of Banff; it's got two large Indian reserves on it; it's got a good strong acreage base and so forth. Maybe what needs to happen would be a teaming type of effect. That might be a novel idea that I don't think has been done anywhere else before. What do you think? Would something like that perhaps work?

MR. SIMPSON: Well, at the outset - and I think what I tried to state here is, first of all, that it is a complex problem. There are no easy answers to this. That concept certainly has merit. I'm not exactly sure how it might work.

MR. BRUSEKER: Oh, I'm not either. I'm just throwing the idea out.

MR. SIMPSON: Maybe get back into the concept of bigger ridings and two MLAs and, you know, you have to work together to get the job done. Hard to say. But I guess the point I'm trying to make in all of this is that some pretty fundamental questions have to be addressed, and hopefully the committee will give some solid criteria, solid guidelines to the commission to look at.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Paulette and Gil want to get into this.

MS PATTERSON: First of all, I see us as a team. Secondly, as Mr. Elliott and Mr. Paszkowski know and as Dave Bilek alluded to, I live just outside the line. Of course, I do all my business in Grande Prairie, but I also have 25 cows, one bull, and 24 calves.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You've got one that didn't work out.

MR. BILTEK: That's for tax purposes.

MS PATTERSON: As both MLAs know - and even Glen Clegg, because I've been in contact with him even though he's a little further away - I talk to both MLAs, and I would hope that they are working as a team, because if they're not, we have a problem. I want them to work as a team because my interests are for the total province of Alberta, not just my own constituency, and so I have to have a pretty broad mind to look further and above what my own little area wants. So I would hope that we are all working as a team, all three parties, to make this province one of the best places to live in, the easiest to live in and work in. That's why we're here. I know what you're saying, but when you're right on the border of two constituencies, you do do that. Yet I understand the problem of distance. For instance, I might feel differently if my MLA was, as I say, 200 miles away. That's the problem. It's a people problem.

MR. BRUSEKER: I think you've touched on a very good point. I think in all honesty all of us are working together trying to make Alberta the best possible place to live. I'm a native Albertan too, born and raised. So I guess what I was trying to throw out with my idea was the idea that, you know, maybe Tom, as an example, or even myself, as a perfect example - I

really don't know a whole lot about the Grande Prairie area. The last time I was in Grande Prairie was 1979. So I'll be honest; I don't know a whole lot about it, and perhaps an active teaming between an urban and a rural constituency – it might be an eye-opener for the guys in the rural area to come into the city and find out the kind of hassles we get there in terms of total numbers, because as I said, I've got the third-largest constituency in the province, and that's a heck of a pile of people.

MR. BALDERSTON: I'd just like to address a couple of things. I respect that you have 30,000 people, but a good percentage of your 30,000 people deal with the town for their water, their sewer, their roads. They're done by the town. That then becomes in a rural area the problem of our MLAs. You know, we have to deal with that on a regular basis. I can't go to my home out in the country and turn on ITV. It's \$3,000 if you want to turn on ITV. You people don't even think about that. It's just automatic. These are the types of things that happen, and it's a disparity that's happening more and more because the dollar bill has become more and more centred, and the more fragmented we get out here, the less problem we'll have in getting to it.

I'm not saying that we don't need rural Alberta and we don't need urban. I need urban Alberta as a farmer. Every growth centre we get in Alberta helps me as a farmer. But I can't then have those people saying, "Well, I don't give a damn about a farmer." I left a third of my crop out. The average person in the city, wouldn't [inaudible] nothing. If I go out and complain, they'll say, "Well, tough; you should have worked harder." Well, whatever. That's what happens, and we are really concerned when the votes are going to become centralized so we don't have that representation. That's all we're saying. You know, we're not trying to say that you don't have problems. This is not the kind of conflict we're trying to create at all. "Your workload is not big and Walter's is": that's not the way it is at all; that's not what we're trying to say.

MR. DAY: Just a comment on this team aspect. We've already heard that we don't need more committees, we don't need more government expenditure and formation of little groups. To let you know how the caucus system works, our caucus works very much as a team, as Paulette has already suggested. Believe me, as an – I'll call myself an urban member; I'm sort of schizophrenic because I've got rural. I hear and learn. I've learned more about rural Alberta since coming into the political scene than I ever did before, and it's because of guys like Glen and Walter and Bob as we sit around our caucus table filling me in about rural Alberta. So we have a team.

I appreciate the difficulties with the ND and Liberal caucuses, because they don't have that balance. They've got, I think, one each a rural member. Otherwise all they are hearing is the urban thing. So I can appreciate their limited opportunity there. But we hear, and sometimes too much, from these guys about rural Alberta. It's hard to keep them quiet. So we do get a good input there, and I don't think we have to look at layering on another committee structure trying to team up MLAs.

I hear what John is saying about more representation. Frank, I appreciate your concern in reacting there. John, you're not really saying, "Let's definitely set up a system of a certain number of votes for this person, a certain number for this one." But you are saying, "For goodness sake, don't give us any less."

I just calculated something Paulette had said. Her area here

is 200 miles by 150 miles: 300,000 square miles represented by one person. The city of Calgary: Frank has 30,000 electors, and he's concerned about 12,000 casting out his vote. But the other thing is: there's another 16 Calgary MLAs there to join arms with him on a Calgary issue. But on a giant – is it Smoky River? – Smoky River issue covering 300,000 miles, you've got one person to fight for you. So I can appreciate what you're saying there with everything you're providing. You don't want to drive a wedge between urban and rural and get bickering going, but for goodness' sake, don't give us any less.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks.

We've got Mike, Tom, then Walter.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. Just a quick comment, I guess, on the team concept with urban and rural. You know, ideally it's something that could work if we would work together as a team, but let's face it, there are political motives, always will be, and particularly in Alberta now. You look at the issues I'm dealing with in my rural constituency of Athabasca-Lac La Biche to do with the forestry projects. The biggest concern right now is the environmental concern. We're all concerned with that, but there is also a bandwagon and that where Edmonton's really getting involved in environmental issues in rural Alberta. How do you work together? You know, we're trying to diversify the economy and build. They want hearings, for example, of Alberta-Pacific to be held in Edmonton now.

Anytime industry has developed that's attracted the majority of our rural youth population to the city, I've never, ever heard of anybody from Calgary or Edmonton indicating that we should hold public hearings in northern Alberta to determine if all the industries we have in Fort Saskatchewan, Strathcona, and Edmonton are safe industries. I challenge the cities to start looking at that. You know, look in your backyard first before you start going out into rural Alberta to worry about environment. It's just a point. When you're talking about team urban/rural, with the way Alberta's structured presently, it just doesn't work. If you took politics out of it, then it may work. It just doesn't work that way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Mike.

MR. SIGURDSON: The laws that we have in Canada and the Constitution deals with tell us that we don't represent wealth; we don't represent land mass; we don't represent anything other than the people of the land and the problems that they bring to us. I hear primarily two concerns that have been central in all of the presentations. Don't increase the size of a rural constituency – that seems to me to be the primary concern. The secondary concern is don't change the ratio or limit the change of ratio between urban and rural seats. As a committee member my task, and I think all of our tasks collectively, is to look at the existing laws that are going to be before us. They seem to lead to representation by population with some variance tolerated.

What would be your paramount recommendation? Do we not increase the size of rural constituencies, thus allowing MLAs to have some degree of access to constituents without having to travel throughout the night, or do we increase the number of urban seats? If those were the only two options . . .

MS PATTERSON: I'd say change the law.

MR. SIGURDSON: We have a constitutional crisis right now

that deals with a number of issues: Meech Lake, Senate reform. Given that the decision in British Columbia is predicated on the Charter of Rights, it's not likely that we'd be able to change that particular law.

MS PATTERSON: That's your goal. I mean, if you're not happy with the way the decisions are being made in court, you have to go after the lawmakers, and it's that simple. It's not an easy job. It's like the environmentalists. They have a tough row to hoe too. They have their own thoughts. So if you're not happy with the decisions being made in the court, you change the law, and you do that through your MP and your MLA.

MR. BRUSEKER: But this particular law, based on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, goes back to the . . .

MS PATTERSON: But that was one decision. That was one judge, and it wasn't appealed.

MR. BRUSEKER: But it goes back to the entire nature of our country, which is representation by population. That was the nature upon which our country was built. That's how we got B.C. into Confederation, was that we built a railway line to seek that representation.

MR. SIMPSON: Well just on that – I mean there are exceptions. The Chairman has pointed out Northwest Territories, Yukon, and P.E.I. as exceptions. So there are exceptions. I think what the committee has to do and what Alberta has to do is to document those. How are we going to define those exceptions? What kind of criteria are we going to implement to justify these decisions? I haven't read that B.C. case. I don't know, but just living next door to B.C. and sort of watching how they operate from time to time, you know, they fly on a . . . What's good today – well, let's do it. I don't know what kind of logic they use to make their decisions.

I read court cases from time to time, and what the courts say if there's – you know, if things are documented, if they're well thought out, and there is a basis for it, and they're not arbitrary, then things will stand up. I think what we're asking is not necessarily to keep the percentage of rural/urban necessarily the same or don't increase the size of rurals, but when you're making these decisions, what ultimately might happen is we've got to look at the long term, I think anyway – and the continued urbanization is happening, continued rural depopulation – and start looking at all the criteria: what kind of criteria should we use to justify small rural boundaries and so on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: John, we're listening.
Walter, and then Don.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, I think the onus on the committee, basically, and their top priority, really, to my mind, should be proper representation, not necessarily equal representation. I think the whole key to this, what we have to strive for, is proper representation. If we lose that focus and if we lose that definition, your results are not going to be very successful.

Just a typical day, and I consider this a fairly average day for my dealings: I'll deal approximately a third of my day with municipal groups; I'll deal approximately a third of my day with individual groups; and a third of my day is traveling. So if we're talking about individual representation, only a third of my day is used for individual representation. I have a little in excess of

12,000 people who use a third of my day, and that equates to the 30,000 people you're dealing with as far as my time schedule is concerned. I hope that's taken into appreciation. It's not simple for a rural MLA. I have 300,000 square miles that's all cultivated, so I have people living in that whole constituency; they're all over that constituency, and I defy any one of the urban representatives to suggest to me a logical way that I can cover it on an equal basis that an urban representative can. It's not easy, but I hope this committee doesn't lose the focus of proper representation over equal representation, because really our responsibility as MLAs is to look after constituents on an equal basis.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. On this specific point, and then Don.

MS MACKLIN: Actually not on this point. I have an informal presentation I'd like to make, and I wanted to be sure there's time to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll make sure there's time.

MS MACKLIN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Tom first then, and then we'll go to your presentation, Donna.

MR. SIGURDSON: As the chairman pointed out, the committee traveled to Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and we're traveling out to British Columbia, and we well appreciate the role – although it's quite subjective – of effective representation.

In Manitoba we came upon the experience where they have a variance of 10 percent plus or minus. In order to accommodate – their boundaries are their problems – they created one constituency in northern Manitoba that is 1,016 miles by 230 miles. That's going to be absolutely impossible for the MLA to get into to service. It's going to be difficult at the best of times for any constituent to come forward. So we are cognizant of the problems. What we're trying to do is a difficult job, in trying to rationalize constituencies.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Oh, I understand your problem.

MR. SIGURDSON: You know, we are aware of it. I wanted to point that out to you because it is a good concern; it's a justifiable concern, and we are cognizant of it. I'm very concerned about the representation that people have right across Canada, but I'm also very concerned about the ability that an MLA has. I think that given the size of a constituency that has happened in Manitoba, that MLA is going to be having a very difficult time trying to represent those people and it may render that MLA ineffective.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, John.

MS MACKLIN: I want to talk specifically about the northern area. Grande Prairie is larger than Smoky River and Dunvegan. The last electoral division divided the county in half – part of it into Smoky River – and left some of the rural area with the

urban area. I think that as far as representation, there's not much difference between someone living on the east side of Grande Prairie or the west side.

One way we can equalize the boundaries to some extent is to put all of the rural area around Grande Prairie together, leaving Grande Prairie an urban riding. The equalization between Dunvegan and Smoky River could be done at the east end, where there's some possibility of changing the boundaries there. I think one of the concerns about the northern area that has been discussed here hasn't taken into consideration that both Peace River and Fort McMurray are the largest areas in our area, yet they're both within the guidelines - so there's an inequality there - whereas the smaller areas that go well below the 35 percent are in the south, where the rural areas are not as big as the areas up here. I think there's a real inequality there for the people in Peace River and Fort McMurray, because the distances are so much greater than even in Dunvegan and Smoky River. I think that's one thing that has to be looked at: the inequality between the rural areas as well as between rural and urban.

I think it's important for the public to hear what your recommendations are when they come out, to have input into that, and to have public hearings as well at the time when you have made your recommendations, possibly with hours that are accessible to people who are working during the day as well as daytime hours. I think both opportunities are important for people in order to have full democratic representation. Some people just don't have the ability to take off from their work and come to make presentations, and I think that's one opportunity for democratic representation that we don't have here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Donna.

Anyone wish to add to Donna's comments? Questions or comments by the panel?

MR. BEACH: I just want to see the numbers. Excuse me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's one observation I'll make relative to the smallest ridings. The five smallest ridings are all in the south, as you know. One important thing to keep in mind - and I'll use the Chinook constituency as an example; the largest community in the Chinook constituency is Hanna, and Hanna has a population of - what? - 3,000. The one common denominator you find with all those small ridings is that they don't have a large town. It's a bit of an anomaly in a sense in Alberta vis-à-vis Saskatchewan and Manitoba in that there's very little development in the northern parts of those provinces. The town of Peace River, the city of Fort McMurray, tend to bring up the total populations of those constituencies. You look at the Chinook constituency, and I believe there are 15 or 16 towns and villages within that constituency. The MLA for that area travels enormous distances, because it is all a settled constituency. There may be long distances between farms and ranches, between villages and towns, but it's all settled. It's like Walter's comments about his constituency: it's all settled. That's yet another dimension in the process.

We know we heard yesterday when we were in High Level how pleased they are with the representation they receive from their MLA. It's also a three-hour drive from High Level down to Peace River, but at least you've got a good paved highway that entire distance.

So those are some of the factors we're looking at. A very key point.

MS MACKLIN: Okay, so you're looking at resource constituencies, agricultural constituencies, rural residential constituencies, as well as the urban constituencies as far as a breakdown to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're open to suggestions and ideas. That's why we're here. We're listening. We're not here to sell you on a preconceived concept we've got. We're here to show you - all right, this is the Charter of Rights; this is the impact it has on us. We also know that Justice McLachlin gave an extraordinary circumstances provision, so we're here to get ideas from you on what you think. As I've said, in the meetings we've had to date, there's not one that we haven't picked up some new ideas and new thoughts. And certainly we're appreciative of the concerns.

MS MACKLIN: In your statement on Peace River and Fort McMurray constituencies, those are resource based, so there are isolated settlements rather than having it completely settled, like an agricultural based . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. My comment was primarily to the effect that it's a bit of an anomaly in Alberta in that our two most northerly ridings are both within the range: the 25 percent plus or minus. The reason for that is that we've got two large population centres, one in each of those ridings, which Saskatchewan and Manitoba do not have, whereas our smaller ridings that fall below the range have in common the fact that they don't have towns of above 3,500 population; they're very small areas. I used Chinook as the example, with, I believe, 15 town and village councils in established communities. Each community expects some of the MLA's time, and each community's needs are slightly different from the neighbouring community's needs.

MR. BILTEK: Mr. Chairman, I think that Donna raises a very, very interesting point in that we talk about urban/rural split, but I think the much more problematic point is the north/south split that we have in the distribution of these ridings. The absolutely largest ridings are all in northern Alberta, north of Red Deer. One of the breakdowns that we didn't get in the presentation was geographic centres. We got population breakdown, we got all sorts of other breakdowns, but we didn't say: here are the ridings according to geographic size. I suggest to you that despite the things that you have mentioned or in addition to the things you have mentioned, a much more crucial factor relates to the introduction that Mr. Day gave us, and that is that we've only lost one riding in the last 50 years.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fifteen years.

MR. BILTEK: The last 15 years.

I think a much more important factor is this historical thing: that we simply refuse to give up on these ridings in the south; that they are going to stay the way they are because that's the way they've always been, and that we are prepared to make the northern ridings larger. I think it reflects a bias within the system, within the government, we have that we've always had.

The complaints you've heard here are ones of size. No one's complained about the numbers of people. They've said the ridings are too large. So if we were to use the same arguments you're using, Walter here has more than 12 or 15 municipalities that he has to deal with in Smoky River, plus he has the enormity of the size. So if we were to make Smoky River only

9,000 people, and Peace River – if we were to use the same geographic size we see for Cypress-Redcliff and Taber-Warner and drop them on the northern part of the province, it would have a devastating effect. I think it's absolutely amazing that we don't have ridings in the south the same size as Peace River or Dunvegan.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, just to be clear, though, let's compare Dunvegan and Chinook. If you look at the map, they're approximately the same size in geographic terms.

MR. BILTEK: I suggest to you that that's not the case.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, look at your map.

MR. BILTEK: I am looking at my map.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Smoky River and Chinook.

MR. BILTEK: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you suggesting they're not approximately the same size?

MR. BILTEK: And I'm suggesting to you that they're not. That's why I asked if you did the analysis based on size . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will.

MR. BILTEK: . . . you will see that there is a huge discrepancy, and that's our concern.

I think the other thing you have to look at is the transportation system. Chinook may well be the same geographic size in terms of square miles, but it's a much more compact area than Smoky River. Smoky River is 200 miles long; Chinook certainly isn't 200 miles long.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: You need some more bridges across the Smoky.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think your point is valid in terms of additional information which we need. We need to look at not only the geographic area of the constituencies but the settled areas. There are a lot of factors that . . . In fact, we as a committee just made a decision on one computer firm so that we can get a lot of additional information on the various constituencies. We want to look at, for instance, the total population within the constituencies. Up until now we've only looked at the number of electors: Canadian citizens 18 years of age and over. We want to see what impact there would be if we went to a different formula, if we went to families, including from birth on. Tom has suggested that because the birth rate in rural Alberta is slightly higher than it is in urban Alberta, that may have an impact. We're going to look at that. So we want to make sure that no stones are left unturned in looking at the process.

Tom, you wanted to get in on this question?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah, I just wanted to get in on the matter of Chinook and Dunvegan.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. Chinook and Smoky River, was it not?

MR. BILTEK: No – whatever. That's . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: You took Dunvegan because it had a similar population. Smoky is about 4,000 or 5,000 more.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, Dunvegan is certainly larger in terms of geography.

MR. SIGURDSON: As a researcher I was on the last commission, and we were given a certain set of instructions. We were told that there had to be X number of rural constituencies and X number of urban constituencies. The guidelines for urban constituencies were plus or minus 25 percent off the mean. The guideline for rural constituencies was: draw your lines. Okay? When we examined where lines should go, we looked at sparsity of population or density of population. Looking at Dunvegan, going north of Worsley, you've got trees, and an MLA doesn't too often get a call from a tree.

MR. CARDINAL: Tree huggers but not trees.

MR. SIGURDSON: That area was included, because prior to there was an attempt to equalize it. Now what we're doing is operating under a very different set of circumstances and a very different set of rules.

But earlier there was also the point made – I believe, John, you made it – about projections. Indeed, from all of the information that was given in 1982 and '83, all of the projections that were provided to the commission at that point have come to fruition, and we based the subsequent boundary change for seven years down the road. We're now six years down the road, so we did take into account all of the projections for changes. The commission then did try to accommodate people the same way we're now trying to accommodate our constituents this time round. What we're doing, though, is operating under different rules in 1989 than we did in 1983.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Gil?

MR. BALDERSTON: I'd like to mention two boundaries we have. Federally we have Alberta divided into 14 areas. I don't know whether it's just agriculturally or otherwise, but in agriculture we're divided into 14 areas. Guess what one area is? Peace River. Out of 14 in Alberta, Peace River is one. Now, every program that's come out, we have got it in the ear – both of them; not just one: both. Provincially we're divided into six regions, and we're one area again. It affects us in that we continually hear that they've got a poor crop in the Peace River area. They may have a hell of a good crop at High Level, but there was bummer-all in Grande Prairie or the areas around. And they don't consider that they're talking 350 miles, you know; they just don't consider that. Any time we get a boundary change, the same thing is going to happen. That's what happens. People look at numbers and squares; they don't look at anything else. I guess that's why we're talking about some of these things now: not to try to put our head in the sand and say you can't make change or do things, but don't do it without doing something [inaudible]. Okay?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.

MR. SIGURDSON: A point of interest. Perhaps Bob Elliott – can I ask you what percentage of the constituency is urban?

DR. ELLIOTT: The city of Grande Prairie contains somewhere around 64 percent of the voters in the Grande Prairie constituency. That's subject to correction, but that's the figure I have.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Anyone else? Any wrap-up comments that any of you would like to make? Have we heard from all of you? Okay. Elsie.

MS HOFFARTH: I'm not going to repeat my entire presentation. This is on behalf of the town of Spirit River and the MD of Spirit River.

We pretty well agree with all the rest of the things that we've heard. The one thing I might add is that we're concerned about the funding programs the province has that are tied to constituencies - specifically the municipal recreation and tourism areas program, the community facility enhancement program - with each MLA getting a set figure for their area. With large rural constituencies and possibly even larger ones, we're going to have an awful lot of small towns competing for very little dollars, and that's just one other thing that we're concerned about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone wish to add to the comments that Elsie's made?

MS PATTERSON: I would just add that that's a very legitimate concern.

MR. DAY: Elsie, that's from the perspective that if the constituency grows bigger, then you've got it bigger but you get the same amount of dollars. Do you think the competition will get even fiercer then?

MS HOFFARTH: Well, I know the competition is terrible right now, because there's a great number of small towns. Each one has an arena. An awful lot of them have pools and stuff. I don't think that happens as much in cities. I'm sure there isn't - I don't know how many arenas Glen has to deal with - probably 15 or so in his riding. I'm sure there aren't 15 arenas for an urban MLA to try to get . . .

MR. DAY: There sure as heck are going to be now.
Okay. I appreciate that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anything else?

MR. KREFTING: Two built, and two more on the go.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Art. Thank you.

Is there anyone else who has a brief, formal or informal, they wish to make? Are there any wrap-up comments that any of you would like to make?

MR. KREFTING: One thing I noticed here today in the comments . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's Art, isn't it over there?

MR. KREFTING: Yeah, it's Art Krefting from Spirit River.
The urban areas continually expand, over history, and I'm not

just referring to Edmonton. But as the MLAs increase in these areas, the services increase, naturally. The rural area is a typical example. I don't think there's any of us that hasn't got a son or daughter that lives in Edmonton. This is because they can get what they want there, and you can't blame them. A lot of these things - a good suggestion was ITV; it cost me \$3,000, too, to get it. You go to Edmonton - I can go to my son-in-law's and watch anything I want. That's just an incentive.

MR. DAY: Then you see you're not missing much.

MR. KREFTING: Yeah.

The point is, though, that the incentive for them to stay here is nil.

MR. DAY: Because there are less services, you mean?

MR. KREFTING: Well, definitely; especially in the outlying areas of Grande Prairie.

MR. BEACH: Less services and job opportunities.

MR. KREFTING: The job opportunities follow with the services, because most of the jobs are in some type of service industry anyway.

MR. BEACH: I think the point I'd like to make, if I may, is that once you've made some type of decision as a committee, I think it's important that you send out that draft decision before it's finalized, and if we have any additional input as municipalities or school boards or constituency members or whatever, that we have an opportunity to have additional input into that, if that's possible. I know you're working within a very confined time frame. I don't know whether you could do that or not.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. Gerry, let me describe the process - and we are under a tight time frame. This committee was formed by an Act of the Legislature.

MR. BEACH: I'm aware of that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Our mandate is very specific: we must report during the spring sitting of the next session.

MR. BEACH: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We are running our hearings right up to what we believe will be the beginning of that session. In other words, we're going to be meeting across the province at meetings like this with people. It's our intent, then, to write our recommendations once we're all in Edmonton and at session; in other words, we'll be meeting two or three nights per week working on that. Our recommendations then must go to the full Assembly, when they're made public. I wish there were time to come out with an interim report, if you will. One thing we'd be very happy to do, and I'm not sure if we've got - we should have a process so that we have addresses of people. We've got names now, Gary?

DR. GARRISON: We've got the names. We can collect addresses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If we can get your addresses, we'll commit

to mail out a copy of our recommendations to the Assembly, keeping in mind that there will be a period of time from the time the recommendations are made; the various caucuses will have to look at them. It will then require other amendments to legislation. So there will be an opportunity for you to have input through your MLAs. Our committee will cease to exist at that point in time. That's the best we can do in terms of communication. But if we get your addresses, we'll ensure that you get a copy of the report as soon as it's tabled in the House.

MR. BEACH: The other thing, of course, is that because I'm representing a council, I'm sure they're going to want to know what went on. I can assure the committee, also, that I will send a typewritten copy of my brief to the office in Edmonton, because we didn't have time to have it typewritten.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we have it all recorded.

MR. BEACH: I realize that. I skipped some of the points in there because of the time element. But I'll send the full brief in to Bob Pritchard.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Gerry; yeah, Bob Pritchard. There are several people who were here earlier and have left. If you can help us with their names. Anyway, we'll work on that afterwards.

Yes, Donna?

MS MACKLIN: The Legislature has the option of striking another committee after first reading or something like that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. What's required by our legislation is that we establish a commission which would actually do the redistribution. The purpose of our committee is to make recommendations as to the parameters and makeup of the commission. So our report will go in. It may be accepted in its entirety; it may be modified; it may be thrown out. It would then be up to the Legislature to decide re the selection or the striking of a commission, and the commission would go about its work.

MS MACKLIN: But they could also decide to have more public hearings on the recommendations before the legislation is finalized?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, if the Legislature deemed that more hearings were required, that more input should be sought, they could direct our committee to do that. Yes.

MR. SIMPSON: Mr. Chairman, it's nice to see a committee that is made up not primarily of lawyers and so on.

MR. DAY: That was one of the requirements.

MR. SIMPSON: I have great faith, then, in the committee's recommendations, because I'm sure they'll be made out of common sense rather than legal precedent, so on and so forth.

MR. DAY: And readable.

MR. SIGURDSON: There are no lawyers on this committee.

MR. SIMPSON: That's even better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any concluding comments by any of the committee members?

MR. DAY: I just appreciate the input: some ideas and suggestions that we certainly hadn't entertained at this point. I appreciate it.

MR. BRUSEKER: I think it's nice to see that there's this many people that came out, especially in light of the fact that, like you said, Gerry, it's very short notice. I think it's very commendable to see people that are showing this kind of interest. So thanks for coming out.

MR. CARDINAL: I, too, appreciate specifically the strength of rural Alberta. The concerns you brought up are justifiable, as you can see where we're at as far as growth in urban centres: there has been a shift in population for the last 30 years or so. Some of the reasons for that, of course, are not only the geographic location of the cities but the strength in their economic development councils and chambers of commerce and the funding they've had to be able to attract the industries that we haven't managed to do. So we do have alternatives now which suggest that you start working on those.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Mike.

MR. SIGURDSON: We have an extraordinarily difficult job before us, and your presentations this morning have made it even more difficult. But those are the considerations that we have to take from all parts of our province and all Albertans.

I hope, whatever the recommendations of the committee are to the commission, that you're involved in the process that determines the boundary, the structure of constituencies. That's going to be an opportunity then as well to be involved. So if time limitations are such that we're not able to come back, that shouldn't be deemed as being the end input for you. There is going to be the opportunity with the commission, that body which will be drawing the lines, and please come out and make your points of view known to the commission members as well.

Thank you for coming out today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. The only thing I'd like to add to what the other committee members have said is that we appreciate your coming out on short notice. We've heard you loud and clear – your request that we come back and possibly in an evening, and we'll certainly be looking at that to see if we can fit it in. The fact that we're here first in terms of the northwest part of the province and there wasn't as much lead time as there will be for other areas is certainly a factor we'll be looking at very carefully.

A special thanks to colleagues Bob Elliott, Walter Paszkowski, and Glen Clegg for working with you and helping get you out, because we know that – again because of the short time frames, I asked the MLAs from the area if they could assist. A special thanks to all of you for taking time from your busy schedules to be here. I'm glad to see and I'm just delighted that we've had input from at least three political parties and citizens at large. That's excellent. That's what we want to see across the province. So thanks very much for coming.

MR. BEACH: I think we also want to thank you for the opportunity of allowing us to express our opinions and concerns.

DR. ELLIOTT: They had no choice; it's in the law. to pick one up for anyone else, feel free to do so.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There are a few extra letters. If you'd like [The committee adjourned at 12:41 p.m.]