

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[7:09 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to begin the meeting. We are expecting a few others, and if a number of participants and interested citizens come later, we may want to go through the presentation again for their benefit. If so, please bear with us.

I'd like to begin by welcoming you here and indicating that while in one sense this is a formalized structure and we do have *Hansard* present – therefore, everything that's said will be recorded – we've tried in the first three hearings held in the communities of High Level, Peace River, and Grande Prairie to keep the meetings as informal as possible. So I'm going to begin by introducing the members of the committee who are present. I would ask you to introduce yourselves.

The process that we'll follow is that for any formal briefs there are to be presented, we will go through the brief, the Chair will then ask if there are any questions from panel members, we'll ask for questions or comments from any of you, then we'll go on to the next brief, and so on. The purpose of our meeting is to give you an opportunity to give us your thoughts and ideas, and we're here to share with you the facts as we know them today. We do not have any preconceived solutions. We want input.

I'd like to begin by introducing our panel members. At my far right is Mrs. Pat Black, who is a first-time member of the Assembly. She represents the constituency of Calgary-Foothills, and she's very active in the Assembly for a first-time member. Next is Tom Sigurdson from Edmonton-Belmont. Tom was first elected in 1986 and re-elected in the last general election. He also worked as an assistant to Grant Notley, who was on a previous Electoral Boundaries Commission, so Tom has some experience on the administrative side of the workings of this process. Coming over to my immediate left, Pam Barrett. Pam represents the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. She is a two-time member – two-term member.

MS BARRETT: There's nobody to two-time on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: She's also the opposition House leader for the New Democratic Party. We're expecting Mike Cardinal. Mike likes to tease us about the fact that he's got a lot of committees, and we know that. We expect him to come at some point in the not too distant future. My name is Bob Bogle; I'm the MLA for Taber-Warner. The other gentleman with us at the table is Bob Pritchard, who is the administrative arm of our operation. Just before asking you to introduce yourselves, I would like to introduce a distinguished guest we have with us this evening, Mr. Patrick Ledgerwood, the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. We are pleased to have you with us tonight.

Okay, if we could begin over on the side and just go around. Give us your name and where you are from, please.

MRS. POOLEY: Arleen Pooley, and I'm in Edmonton-Whitemud.

MRS. MacDONALD: Jean MacDonald from the constituency of Stettler.

MR. MacDONALD: Sam MacDonald, Stettler.

MR. POOLEY: Erwin Pooley, Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. STEPHENSON: Bill Stephenson. I'm the president of the Edmonton and District Labour Council.

MR. HERBST: Neil Herbst, Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Back, please?

MRS. STEPHENSON: Agnes Stephenson.

MR. WORTMAN: Robin Wortman. I'm co-ordinator of public hearings.

MS HUDSON: I'm Karen Hudson, and I work for the committee.

MR. KUHNERT: My name is Peter Kuhnert.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Peter is Karen's better half.

Okay, why are we here? Normally after every second general election we would go through a redistribution process in Alberta, and that's required by our statutes. We would strike an Electoral Boundaries Commission. The commission in the past has been composed of a judge, who has been the chairman, the Chief Electoral Officer, several members of the Assembly, and one or more citizens at large. The Assembly would give the commission the parameters, the framework within which to go about electoral redistribution. In the past a set number of urban and rural constituencies were noted, and the commission then went about its job of drawing lines. As I've indicated, that's required by our legislation after every second general election. The last redistribution occurred in 1984, and we've had general elections in 1986 and this spring 1989. Therefore, even though it's a very short time frame, we are back to redistribution.

But other events have unfolded which have an impact on the process. In the province of British Columbia, when the province did not act upon the recommendations of a commission it had appointed, an individual took the province to court, citing the Charter of Rights, and the case was heard by then Chief Justice McLachlin. Chief Justice McLachlin found in favour of the plaintiff and deemed that indeed the province's electoral map did not fall within a reasonable limit of an established norm. Chief Justice McLachlin, incidentally, is now a member of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Now, that decision was not appealed by the British Columbia government. However, in a later decision by Justice Meredith, while Justice Meredith upheld the main elements of the McLachlin decision – i.e., that the government had to go through a redistribution and had to take into account the various factors raised by Justice McLachlin – he indicated that it was not feasible for the courts to impose a deadline time frame on the Legislature itself. It is fair to say, though, that the British Columbia government is moving to establish boundaries consistent within the parameters as recommended by Justice McLachlin.

We're going to show you some slides, trying to relate what the decision in British Columbia would mean in the province of Alberta if implemented here. I want to stress that our committee has not made any decisions. We have not talked about solutions. We're going to be visiting 17 centres across the province to get input from Albertans. We've already met with the Chief Electoral Officer, we're meeting with constitutional lawyers, we've met with members of the commissions in Regina and Winnipeg, and we'll soon do the same in Victoria. We're

learning; we're trying to get a better understanding of how we can ensure that the very unique and historical circumstances here in Alberta are adhered to while at the same time respecting the Charter of Rights. That's a difficult task, no question, but we're determined that it's one we're going to give our very best efforts to.

Our mandate as a committee is to come back and report to the Legislature, to recommend the parameters, so that when an Electoral Boundaries Commission is struck, the commission will be guided by the parameters just as past commissions have been guided by the parameters contained in the legislation.

So without any further comment, I think we should go to the slide presentation. Tom, would you like to co-ordinate us through this portion, please? Then we'll stop for questions and comments you may have.

**MR. SIGURDSON:** What you're going to see on the screen is pretty much contained in the packages that were handed out to you. Instead of having to jot down all the information that's here, you can refer to your packages.

The first slide is that of all the constituencies in alphabetical order. You can't really appreciate the range of the number of constituents until we get to the second slide, which shows just the real variance that we have in terms of voter population throughout the constituencies of Alberta. We start in Edmonton-Whitemud, with 31,536 voting constituents - we only talk about the registered voters; we do not talk about non-Canadians or people under the age of 18 - down to Cardston, with a voting population of 8,105. Now, the anomaly about Cardston is that there is the Blood Indian Band, and at the last enumeration they chose not to participate in that enumeration process. So there are about 1,800 members of the band who are not on the voters' list. So Cardston, while still very low, could in fact be inflated at any time the band chose to participate. But there you can see the range: from 31,000 for Edmonton-Whitemud down to Cardston at 8,000.

We have a total of 1.55 million names on the voters' list. We have 83 electoral divisions in our province. If you divide the larger number by the smaller number, you get the average of 18,685. That should be the average. But what the McLachlin decision in British Columbia suggested was that there could be a variance from the average of plus/minus 25 percent. If you take plus 25 percent and add 4,671, you would have a maximum number of 23,300; less 25 percent, you would have a minimum number of 14,014 voters.

If we go to the next slide, what we'll see is, again referring to the slide by population, that you've got these constituencies falling above the population maximum, and these constituencies falling below the minimum. There's a good number in between, but still almost half of the constituencies in our province fall outside of the limit that's been prescribed by Justice McLachlin.

On the map of the province what we've taken are the constituencies - this particular map shows all of the constituencies that fall below the minimum number. You can see that they are indeed all rural constituencies. If we go to the city maps, the city of Calgary, this highlighted colour notes the constituencies that are above the limit suggested by Justice McLachlin, and again the outlying areas pretty much of Calgary are those areas that are growing. Same thing with the city of Edmonton: constituencies in the outlying area pretty much are still growing, and they are above the mean plus 25 percent.

Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West fall in that area that's perfectly acceptable. There's no problem with those two

constituencies. Medicine Hat, however, is one of the largest constituencies in our province. I think there are about 28,000 eligible voters in the constituency, very large and well over the limit suggested by Justice McLachlin.

Two constituencies in Red Deer, Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, are rather unique in that in 1983 when the commission was struck, Red Deer was very large and had to be divided into two constituencies; however, at that point, when the division came along, they were too small. So what happened was that the commission suggested and indeed went outside to the county boundaries and followed county lines rather than municipal lines. These are the municipal lines highlighted; these are the county lines. Those are the two constituencies of Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. The urban constituency has gone into rural Alberta to absorb some of the population into the two constituencies to make, I suppose, those two constituencies legitimate in terms of their voting population.

St. Albert constituency: again very large and certainly well outside the suggested limit that was proposed by Justice McLachlin.

Again back to the map of the province, what we've done is highlighted a number of constituencies that are outside the minimum by 35 percent, not just the 25 percent that we showed you earlier. These constituencies are well below the average suggested, so you can see that there's quite a number that fall within that 35 percent below average range.

The next map is showing the communities in Alberta that we're going to be traveling to to have meetings, such as the one we're having tonight, to have some input. You'll see later on, I think, a map showing those constituencies that are very low in terms of their voting population and go over these areas also, showing that we are trying to get to those constituencies that may be - may be - most affected by any changes that any commission may have to look at in the future. [interjection] Oh, we've missed a map.

This map shows these constituencies: Pincher Creek-Crowsnest, Cardston, Little Bow, Cypress-Redcliff, and Chinook. These constituencies are 50 percent below average, so they're well below the mean.

These are the dates of the public hearings around the province. If you enjoy tonight's presentation, you're welcome to come back tomorrow, and if you're thrilled by tomorrow night's presentation, you're certainly welcome to travel with us, follow us, to other communities around the province. However, I don't think you'll probably want to do that, but you may want to advise other interested parties of the hearings as they'll be coming to their communities. So those are the locations.

**MR. PRITCHARD:** That's the last one of the overhead.

**MR. SIGURDSON:** This is the last slide, again of those constituencies 35 percent below the average, with the dots noting our locations. As you can see, we will be getting into those communities that may be most affected by whatever a commission does as it draws its boundaries. So we are hoping to hear from as many Albertans as possible about the kind of representation that they need and the kind of services they expect from their members of the Legislature.

That concludes the presentation. Thank you.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Thanks very much, Tom.

We've been joined by one more participant and by one more panel member. First, if we could have your name, please, and

where you're from.

MRS. PALS: Judith Pals, Edmonton.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

And Mike Cardinal. Mike is the MLA for Athabasca-Lac La Biche. He's a first-time member and a very busy fellow. He's just come from a meeting re the environment.

Could I pause now for a moment to ask if there are any questions that you have relative to the presentation which has been given? Once we're sure we've dealt with questions as well as we can, we'll see if there is a comment you'd like to make, and then we'll go right into the briefs which there are to be presented this evening. First, any questions for us on the material? Did we leave any gaping spots in terms of understanding? All right.

Yes?

MR. MacDONALD: I see you have three in the Lethbridge area: Stand Off, Lethbridge, and Pincher Creek. Why three in such close . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: The meeting in the far south is actually on the Blood reserve. We're going to meet with the chief and council to try and get an understanding of why they resisted the enumeration process.

The reason there's such a concentration here - if you put the other map back on, Bob, showing the constituencies of a lower population, 10,000 or fewer. You'll see they're all in the southern part of the province. So we've got a meeting in Pincher Creek-Crowsnest, a meeting in Cardston; the meeting in Lethbridge really should be able to take care of the two Lethbridge ridings, Macleod, and Taber-Warner. There's a meeting in Vulcan, the Little Bow area; there's a meeting in Medicine Hat, and there's a meeting up in Hanna.

Do you want to put the map back on, please, Bob, that shows the locations for the various meetings? So in your particular area we'll be in Red Deer. We'll be out in Hanna, and we're up at Viking.

MRS. MacDONALD: Bob, did you say you present findings, or does this committee make recommendations?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Our committee will issue a report that will go to the Legislative Assembly, and the Assembly then will have to decide whether or not to incorporate any or all or part of our recommendations.

MRS. MacDONALD: You do make recommendations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, we do.

MRS. MacDONALD: You don't report just findings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No; we will make recommendations. For instance, it's been suggested to us at some of the previous hearings that we have to do a better job of stimulating growth across this province if we want regional representation and balanced representation. That point was raised again yesterday when Pam and I attended the municipal districts and counties convention. So our recommendations may go well beyond merely the short-term objective of boundaries; we may talk about ways of getting more balanced growth. That's exciting.

Other questions? All right, then, we'll proceed with the briefs. I think we have one ready from the Edmonton and District Labour Council. Bill?

MR. STEPHENSON: Thank you. The Edmonton and District Labour Council would like to thank the committee for allowing us the time to present this brief on behalf of the 35,000 trade union members who are affiliated with the Edmonton and District Labour Council. There are three main areas of concern that we would like to address for your consideration: one, the makeup of the redistribution committee; two, the principle of proportionate representation; and three, the present boundaries commission Act.

The makeup of this committee. It is the opinion of the Edmonton and District Labour Council that a committee made up of Members of the Legislative Assembly cannot truly look objectively at redistribution of boundaries. We feel sure that the committee members have the best interests of the voters at heart, but it would be only natural for the members to consider the safety of their own and their party's seats when considering redistribution. A committee made up of people who have nothing at stake would make much more sense when one considers that we are talking about something as important as fairness in the democratic system we live in.

The principle of proportionate representation. Section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees relative equality of voting power. In fact, this country was built on the principle of representation by population. The Constitution of Canada provides for proportionate representation of the provinces in the House of Commons. It is only right to expect that the same rights afforded the provinces in the House of Commons should carry over to the provincial Legislatures. The Edmonton and District Labour Council realizes that having an exact mathematical solution would be unreasonable. But just as unreasonable is the fact that in Alberta we have MLAs representing as few as 8,000 voters, while others must represent as many as 30,000. Surely the committee can recognize the need to change such a grossly undemocratic system. To the layman it appears that representation by population was not even considered when the present boundaries were drawn up.

The present electoral boundaries Act. As mentioned earlier, the present Act does not specifically address the need for fair representation but rather states specifically the number of seats to be allocated to rural and urban ridings regardless of population. As more and more people move from the rural to urban centres, it becomes even more apparent that the urban ridings must be granted more representation in the Legislature. That is, after all, why we have a democracy: for people. I have never heard any academic or politician speak of a need for democracy to represent landmass. Democracy must represent people fairly, regardless of whether they live in an urban or rural area. The present Act allows for a 25 percent discrepancy in the number of voters in ridings. I do not know the reason for such a high rate of difference, but I do know that such a high rate is the single most unjust reason why we have such an unfair election process in Alberta.

Recommendations. One, the committee to look at electoral boundary changes should be nonpartisan in makeup. This would allow the committee to truly look at the boundaries from a democratic viewpoint and not have to worry about voting habits of each region. Two, a study should commence following each election rather than the current every two elections. This would allow for changes of population in areas to be dealt with

immediately. Three, the number of voters in each riding should not exceed 20,000 and should not be under 15,000. The 5,000 discrepancy could take into account some problems which may be incurred in some areas of the province but would not undermine the fundamental right of equal representation in the Legislature. Four, in any case the number one priority of the committee looking into boundary changes should be representation by population. This is the system this country was built on, and it is a system which is guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Conclusion. Equal representation and one person, one vote is at the very root of democracy. That is why this committee must look closely to change the Alberta system. The court in British Columbia has already ordered the B.C. government to change their boundaries to reflect the fundamental right of representation by population. Now it is your turn to abide by that order in Alberta before it goes to court. You hold in your hands the very concept of a democratic society. The Edmonton and District Labour Council hopes you will put fairness into the Alberta elections process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks for your presentation, Bill.

Any questions from any of the panel members first? Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just one on the third recommendation proposed, that the number of voters in each riding should not exceed 20,000. I'm just curious because my addition didn't work. Do you know what that would take the number of MLAs to?

MR. STEPHENSON: We looked at this through our political action committee and that and did some dividing. What we would be hoping is that the number of MLAs wouldn't really change. I think you had on the board 18,000 if you divided all the ridings evenly. Really, that just allows a split in between that number you came up with. It's basically the same figure we used to arrive at ours.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. The other question, on recommendation 1. The committee is going to be making recommendations to the Legislature. One of the options I suppose we have is the option of making the recommendation that the commission be nonpartisan. Your concern is to make sure that the people who are actually redrawing the boundaries are nonpartisan, more than this committee, or . . .

MR. STEPHENSON: No, I would suggest the whole committee should be nonpartisan so that when they make a recommendation, it is on the basis of what they feel is fair. I don't want to make it sound like I think anybody on this committee is unsavoury, but let's face facts. When your job is there, that can't help but be in the back of your mind, and I feel if you're going to have a fair look at this, you have to eliminate that thought of your job.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Pam.

MS BARRETT: Who would you recommend to be on the commission; that is, the body that would actually be redoing the boundaries? Do you have anybody in mind or any system in mind for that?

MR. STEPHENSON: We didn't get too much into that discussion. It would be very hard to find people who are

nonpartisan, I suppose, but nominations from the general public would seem like a fair way of doing it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Other questions from panel members? Yes, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Can I just respond to a couple of things that were raised? Again you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, that I was involved in the 1983 commission peripherally, and I just want to point out a couple of points.

On page 3 at the top you say that the population "was not . . . considered when the present boundaries were drawn." The legislation that came forward in 1982 or early '83 told us that there would be 41 rural seats, 42 urban seats. There was no committee struck prior to the establishment of a commission to look at any of the things we've been mandated to examine, so it was a figure that perhaps was arbitrary and just handed to the commission to examine.

On the bottom of page 3 you say there is an allowance "for a 25 percent discrepancy in the number of voters" in a riding. That only applies to urban constituencies, not rural. That's why today we have in rural Alberta those constituencies that are very, very small and well outside 25 percent. So you're absolutely right when you talk about a discrepancy being allowed. But the 25 percent discrepancy is only applicable to those urban constituencies.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions from panel members?

Bill, back to Tom's first question to you, where you recommend that you would like to see ridings with a voter population that would not exceed 20,000 but would not be under 15,000, and you believe that could be accommodated within the existing 83 ridings so that no new ridings would be created. Have you done a calculation as to what that would mean to the urban/rural mix? In other words, the losers would be rural seats where the population is smaller, and the winners would be urban seats. Have you done that calculation?

MR. STEPHENSON: We didn't do an exact calculation on it, but from looking at the maps, obviously there are some rural ridings, particularly in the south, that seem to be very small in area mass as well as very low in population, whereas you look up north and you have these huge ridings. To me, that seems grossly unfair under that standard, so obviously a number has to be reached.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Some people have suggested that if you applied the pure formula of roughly 18,000 electors across the board, you could wind up with as many as 12 rural seats disappearing, which of course would mean as many as 12 new urban seats, mainly in Edmonton and Calgary but not exclusively, because you recall that on the map we noticed Medicine Hat and St. Albert both with constituency populations well above the mean figure.

Any questions or comments from any members of the public who are here tonight? Yes.

MRS. MacDONALD: I would ask this gentleman if he's happy with the Canadian government's representation by population at this point in time?

MR. STEPHENSON: How I feel about it?

MRS. MacDONALD: Yeah.

MR. STEPHENSON: Well, democracy always has its problems when you look at a country as large as Canada, but I feel representation by population is the only mix that can possibly work in a democracy. If we start electing MPs that just represent landmass, it doesn't mean a whole lot, does it?

MR. CARDINAL: I have a comment as a rural MLA from northern Alberta, where there is lots of landmass. It takes me two hours to cross my riding. You know, we always complain, and this lady complained about regional disparities in Alberta, where central Canada has beaten us because of numbers of elected officials they have, compared to Alberta. I think we rural residents feel the same way in Alberta, that there are regional disparities that exist between urban centres like Edmonton and Calgary and rural Alberta.

You know, you mentioned fair representation in your paper. And you do have good statements; I have to commend you for that. Your people did a lot of work. But you mentioned fair representation. I think we have to look at fair and effective representation, because if you look at the distribution of Alberta right now, the standard of living we face in rural Alberta is considerably lower than what you have in Edmonton and other major centres. You have the cultural facilities; you have the major recreational facilities; you have all the fancy things in Edmonton. For a good hockey game, I have to drive two hours to come to Edmonton and drive all night going back. If you'd really look at where the tax dollars come from to support Edmonton and Calgary and the other major urban centres, the provincial rural tax dollars support these cities. So there is a problem there, because representation shows it's not good enough the way it is now.

If we lose more seats in rural Alberta, then we really have a problem. Then we have urban centres running the whole province, utilizing resources from the rest of the province and administering the whole works out of a five- or six-mile square area, and the rest of the province is a playground where the resources come from. So if you look at it from the rural side, it doesn't look very fair to cut out the seats. Because we do have a lot lower standard of living than you guys do in Edmonton, and our tax dollars from the province pay for what Edmonton has. It's not Edmonton's tax dollars. The resources are all piped here, they're manufactured here, and they're Alberta resources, not Edmonton's resources. The coliseum, the roads, the hospitals, all the cultural facilities you have are not Edmonton's; they're Albertans'. It just happens that processing is taking place here and the population is here.

The time it takes to represent my constituents is unbelievable. I could walk or run through an Edmonton riding in 15 minutes. It takes me hours to go through my riding in the north, and the same with southern Alberta. For a person from the extreme south of Alberta, to go to a good hockey game, you have to drive six or eight hours to come to Edmonton.

Those are the regional disparities we face within Alberta. They're terrible.

MR. STEPHENSON: I would hope some of my tax dollars stay in Edmonton anyway. I'm sure it's not all going outside the city. And I agree, there are some problems, particularly in northern Alberta. You know, just look at the map and look at the way the ridings are drawn up in northern Alberta, and then look down south at these small ridings. You're right. That has to be

looked at and has to be changed. I think this is a system of doing it, not by saying we have so many seats in rural Alberta and so many seats in urban Alberta when you have to represent the people. You represent the people where they live. I mean, we could say we could have 30 or 50 or 60 rural MLAs, but who are they representing? You have to look at the fact that we're electing people to represent us, not the area.

MR. CARDINAL: But the bottom line of representing people is the standard of living of the people you're representing. If it's much higher one place than others, then there is a problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Tom, you'd like to get in?

MR. SIGURDSON: I've just got a comment on the last statement that was made by my colleague. I don't intend to prolong debate or incite debate tonight, but I can certainly tell you that if you go from the inner city of Edmonton, where you see abject poverty - you can see people, you know, living outside, homeless - you can then go to Edmonton-Whitemud, where you do not have the same kinds of situations. So you know, it comes down to: there are problems throughout our province; they're not isolated to rural Alberta. There are different kinds of problems in every area and segment of our society, and that's what we're trying to address fairly, the need for representation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think the key to the whole process is that we're here to get input, and the Edmonton and District Labour Council have given us input. They've given us a brief with a number of recommendations, which they thought out and justified. We appreciate you coming forward and giving us that information.

Are there any other briefs anyone has to give us in a formal sense tonight? Are there any other matters members would like to raise. You know, would you like to say anything without the presentation of a brief? Are there some comments you'd like to make on what you think?

As a committee, we will be guided by what we hear across the province from you, the electorate. This input's very, very valuable to us.

MRS. MacDONALD: We in the rural areas are certainly concerned about our ridings, and we will be formally sending some presentations to you. I think at this point in time I'm not quite ready to make . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

One of the greatest challenges I think we face as a committee, and all elected people face, is balancing between working with individuals on individual problems and concerns and working with local governments and local bodies. I'll include in that community associations in the cities. They may not be a government per se, but they're still organizations of local people with needs. I think when we were in Peace River, Glen Clegg, the MLA for Dunvegan, said it very well when asked how he spent his time. He said, "About a third of my time is spent with individuals on their concerns, about a third with local governments and hospital boards and schools boards, and about a third of my time is traveling." It's trying to find some way to give recognition for that element, while at the same time respecting the concepts in democracy of, you know, one person, one vote.

MR. MACDONALD: That's the thing that bothers us in the rural. MLAs may end up with the same problems the MPs have. It takes our MP something like seven hours to drive from one corner to the other corner of his constituency, and this could happen with MLAs. So I think, Mr. Cardinal, that's . . . I appreciate a lot of his comments. Where you draw the line I'm not really sure. But it's something that really has to be watched, or you end up with the rural people saying we have no representation because we never see our MLA. A chap that drives and spends a third of his time would end up spending 50 percent of his time on the road. It's a big problem. I'm not sure how to handle it.

MR. HERBST: Is it within the scope of this committee to recommend that there be more ridings? It seems to me that would be a rational approach to the problem of traveling.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're not limited, and that indeed could be a recommendation. When redistribution last occurred, there was an increase in the number of ridings. By four?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It went from 79 to 83. I think to be fair – and other committee members may wish to comment on this, because I'm not speaking for the committee – over the past 15 years, with one exception where a rural riding disappeared . . . That's when the old Hanna-Oyen and Sedgewick-Coronation ridings were merged into Chinook and bits and pieces on the edge went to other ridings. That was a very painful experience for the people in the Hanna area. We know from the former members who represented the two constituencies, who sat side by side, knowing one of those ridings would disappear, how difficult that was. The current member representing Chinook constituency – she's only been a member of the Assembly for a few years – speaks very eloquently and very strongly about the views her constituents have about that process. What's happened is that we've made a number of the easy decisions over time. In 1975 there were 75 seats and we're now up to 83, so we can't keep adding seats to solve the problem. I mean, there's a limit. But clearly that is an option – I'm glad you raised it – we'll be looking at in terms of whether that's a partial solution. Yes, Pat.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I was wondering if we could ask a question of the people of the table, because there is a concern about the distribution between rural and urban, et cetera. I'm wondering what you feel is the most important function of your MLA or your representative.

MRS. MACDONALD: Our feelings from rural people? The most important function?

MRS. BLACK: Yeah. What do you require of your MLA? I'm thinking of course it is to represent you, but how do you feel they best do that? Is that through accessibility, through a one-to-one basis, from a distance basis, communications?

MRS. MACDONALD: The rural areas feel accessibility is really, really an important issue.

MRS. BLACK: Is that like on a one-to-one basis?

MRS. MACDONALD: Not really. It doesn't have to be one to one. Probably just to be able to realize he is working for the interests of that whole area and the accessibility through his office. I suppose you can say we consider a one-to-one basis as important. But I don't think we have to talk directly to the MLA; we don't get much opportunity now at this point. But just to have him seen the odd time in each little local constituency . . . Those little people out in Oyen like to know that person was in their town even at a coffee party, at anything. Even if they didn't see him, they know he was there, and if they need him, they know how to get him. But if he's not ever there, then they get that feeling they're just neglected. A lot of those people are different.

MRS. BLACK: Well, they are. As an urban MLA, I deal with two school boards – which my other 17 colleagues also deal with, the same two school boards – I think five or six hospital boards, one city council, and one group of aldermen.

MRS. MacDONALD: That's not one rural person.

MRS. BLACK: Now, I would ask you, how many municipalities does your rural MLA deal with? Your one only. I'm talking 18 in Calgary who deal with that group.

MRS. MacDONALD: Ours probably deals with six or seven municipalities. Not that many?

MR. MacDONALD: Not ours.

MRS. MacDONALD: Not ours. They certainly deal with more and more school boards, more hospital boards. A rural MLA has to deal with more bodies, more groups certainly.

MRS. BLACK: One of the things I've been looking at through this committee – I bring it up every so often, but nothing . . . I've been trying to play with a formula – the Chairman's laughing at me; I'm an accountant, so I like formulas – to factor in the demographics of ridings and characteristics of the differences between urban and rural settings, one being accessibility, one being mileage, and of course population being one of the main factors, and have a variance level within the formulas, between the two, that would automatically adjust for shifts within populations and communities.

If Calgary, say, had a stand and we stood still at 680,000 people – we're larger than Edmonton now – and Edmonton had a surge, automatically through a formula an adjustment would be made. The same would apply in the rural areas. If there was a surge in the Cardston area, the adjustment would be made automatically according to a formula of some sort. I think you would have to factor in . . . Like, to drive my riding takes me approximately 15 minutes to get from one end to the other, and I have one of the upper-end ridings. My riding is too large according to the factoring we have right now. I have almost 24,000 people within my riding. In Mike's riding it takes him two hours.

MRS. MacDONALD: We relate probably to our federal constituency boundaries right now because of a drastic boundary change and a group that didn't want to be put in with Crowfoot. There was a natural border of the Red Deer River and this little group, quite a little group, was dumped into a boundary over here on the other side of the river. They feel they're misplaced.

We didn't not want them, but everybody's having a difficult time. Our MP has got another massive amount of miles, and he's not seen in places. So we relate quite strongly to these boundaries, and that's why we wanted to attend this meeting, just to see what the thinking is. It's a difficult situation.

MRS. BLACK: What factors do you see as being important for consideration, say, to . . .

MR. MacDONALD: Is it easier for you to talk to – I forget the numbers – 28,000, did you say, in your riding? You've got 15 minutes from one end to the other. Can you not talk to those 28,000 easier than Shirley McLellan talking to 9,000? They have a two-hour drive to get there; your people have 15 minutes. Can you not call a meeting and get the interested people there easier than Shirley can?

MRS. BLACK: Well, that's what I think happens, quite frankly. As an example, I went through and dropped some information throughout my riding. I have 13,500 households in my riding, and I dropped information to every household in two nights.

MR. MacDONALD: Right. Try that in Stettler or Chinook.

MRS. BLACK: I didn't personally do it all myself, but I had a hockey team that went with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks.  
We have Bill and then Tom and then Pam.

MR. STEPHENSON: Just a comment on what's been said. You know, I can realize it's a problem in the rural areas getting hold of your MLA and being around when he's around in such a vast area. I guess it brings up another problem, because how do you decide if your MLA is doing a good job? You look at what he's doing in the Legislature. We're in a province here where the Legislature meets about once a year for a month or two and then it's gone. I wonder how you people keep electing those guys when you haven't got a clue what they're doing for you.

MR. CARDINAL: They're good MLAs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now we're getting partisan.  
All right. Tom and then Pam.

MR. SIGURDSON: I know that there is difficulty in travel in the rural parts of our province. I've worked for a rural member of the Legislature; I know the difficulty that he had in trying to get around to his constituents, and you certainly expressed that.

I just wanted to put one question out to you. Are you worried about increasing the size of the constituency and, therefore, the accessibility to your member of the Legislature? Or are you worried, perhaps, about losing the ratio of number of urban constituencies to number of rural constituencies?

MR. MacDONALD: That's one of my biggest fears; yeah.

MR. SIGURDSON: So you're more concerned about rural Alberta losing its position?

MR. MacDONALD: That's part of it.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's part of it.

MRS. MacDONALD: I'd say it's an equal part of it, basically.

MR. MacDONALD: My own feeling is that it's an equal part, probably. I shouldn't say it's . . .

MRS. MacDONALD: Probably if it came right down to it, it would be an equal part, I'm sure.

MR. SIGURDSON: That one-third of the population should have almost 50 percent of the seats?

MRS. MacDONALD: Right.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MRS. MacDONALD: That's personal, anyway.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Pam and then Peter.

MS BARRETT: I think it's important that that question got asked. I mean, it's sort of been boiling for a long time. Sentiments are involved here, and you ain't going to change that. So it's important to know, and I respect the honesty of that reply.

I want to ask you about communications. Let us say that we decide that we're going to try to live by the Charter ruling in British Columbia. The suspicion amongst all members of the Assembly is that we're going to have to conform to some degree. Otherwise, we wouldn't be engaging in this exercise; this committee wouldn't have been struck. Obviously, some decisions are going to have to be made. Would you see as a reasonable trade-off, if you were to end up with a couple of fewer rural seats, an enhanced communication system? Or are you satisfied that the telephone gives you sufficient access to your MLA through the RITE line system? Have you thought about other technologies and how they might be used?

MRS. MacDONALD: We certainly don't have any problem with communications in most of the rural ridings. The people are very aware of the RITE government line and now the fax machines. We're as aware down there as Edmonton people, certainly. So we don't like to have to think about trade-offs.

MR. MacDONALD: Well, I think Mr. Cardinal probably hit it on the nose pretty closely earlier when he talked about the tax. Coming from the rural, why should we pay the tax and not have representation?

MS BARRETT: So, in other words, proportional representation should be based on wealth as opposed to the right under the Charter of Rights.

MR. MacDONALD: To a degree.

MS BARRETT: You can understand that I'm probably going to disagree with that concept.

MR. MacDONALD: I know you are. That's no problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.  
Peter.

MR. KUHNERT: I'd like to ask the committee if they have gone to the federal government to see how they have dealt with these problems of differing sizes of constituencies in rural [inaudible].

MR. CHAIRMAN: The federal government and a number of provinces now use a mean population figure and plus or minus 25 percent. In the case of the federal government specifically, there are exceptions made for the Northwest Territories where there are two seats, for Yukon where there is one, and for Prince Edward Island where there are four to correspond with their number of Senators. So while they've accepted, basically, what you might call the McLachlin formula and they had done so prior to the Charter of Rights, there was also recognition of more sparsely populated remote areas and a greater flexibility so that, as I've indicated, there are now two seats in the Northwest Territories and there's one in Yukon.

When we met with the chairman of the commission in Regina, the formula that had been worked out in Saskatchewan again looked at the plus/minus 25 percent. Then for several ridings which had been deemed to be more remote or isolated, the commission had the right to go up to a 50 percent variance. So again there was a built-in factor to try to take into account some of the concerns that have been expressed here regarding distance and sparse population.

Any other committee member wish to supplement that or add to it?

MRS. BLACK: Oh. No, I was just going to ask another question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anything else on that point? Go ahead.

MR. KUHNERT: Do they have a cutoff line by which they went from the 25 percent variance to 50 percent?

MR. CHAIRMAN: In Saskatchewan?

MS BARRETT: No, federal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The federal government has named the ridings where there is to be the - as I mentioned, all three are in our territories. The anomaly in Prince Edward Island is that they're assured the same number of seats in the House of Commons as they have in the Senate, in the upper Chamber.

In Saskatchewan, if I'm not mistaken - and Pat or other members may know the answer - the northern ridings that were deemed to be rural/remote were named.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Those are just two ridings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Two ridings.

Any other comments on the points raised? Pat, you had another point?

MRS. BLACK: Well, one of the questions that has been asked of me back in Calgary is: why not look at the possibility of combining urban and rural ridings? In a lot of the federal ridings there's a combination where the federal riding cuts into the urban centre and goes out into the country. I was wondering, just as a general comment, do any of you have an opinion on that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're really talking about the Red Deer kind of situation?

MRS. BLACK: Uh huh.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is the only situation we have where there's what you might call an urban/rural constituency. You recall Tom pointed out that the brown line represents the boundary of the city of Red Deer. During the last redistribution Red Deer went from one seat to two. The only way that could be made practical was to go beyond the city boundaries into the county of Red Deer, so the constituency actually includes a combination of city and rural areas. Was that your point, Pat?

MRS. BLACK: Yes, and I'm wondering what the feeling is, if that's a problem. Or do you think combining urban and rural sometimes is appropriate?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We may hear about that when we're in Red Deer.

MRS. MacDONALD: You may. There's definitely going to be more urban people within that riding than there are rural, but I don't think there's any . . .

MRS. BLACK: Could you put up the map of Edmonton? That's a prime example. If you look at the map of Edmonton, it's quite interesting, particularly Edmonton-Whitemud, I believe it is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is Calgary. Sorry. There; how's that?

MRS. BLACK: You can see the growth patterns around the outskirts of the city of Edmonton, particularly to the south. I believe Edmonton-Whitemud is the largest riding in the province, is it not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud, yes.

MRS. BLACK: And Edmonton-Mill Woods is another highly populated riding. Now, similar to what happened in Red Deer . . . I believe we have a representative from Edmonton-Whitemud here tonight, don't we?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, there are two: Arleen and Erwin.

MRS. BLACK: Arleen and Erwin. Right?

MRS. POOLEY: Right.

MRS. BLACK: What do you think of ideas like that? Do you have any thought on it at all?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, let me use another example using the same thought process that Pat's on. You remember that we looked at Medicine Hat, which has an electoral population of close to 30,000 people. So there are too many voters in Medicine Hat for one seat, and yet there are not enough for two. We've got two constituencies, Cypress-Redcliff and Bow Valley - actually, Cypress-Redcliff surrounds the city, but Bow Valley comes so very close to it. Using the same example Pat has given, is that something that might be considered? What do you think of a city constituency called Medicine Hat-Centre, if



you like, in terms of bringing the population of the city down to 22,000 or something thereabouts? Then you've got another 7,000, 8,000 electors to be added to the two rural seats.

MRS. MacDONALD: Possibly some thought from your committee should go into that because . . . A prime example right now is that the rural municipalities are meeting this week and the urban people are meeting next week. Why can't we get along, and why can't they all meet together? Our problems are similar. I don't know what the answer is, but maybe that's something that your committee better . . .

MR. STEPHENSON: I'm just thinking off the top of my head, but I would tend to have a real big problem if we got too many ridings like that, and in favour of the rural people. I feel that the rural people would be virtually ignored, because the votes for whoever is running are going to be in the urban part of the riding. That's where the population mass is. Those people are going to look after where their votes come from, not their rural constituents. I think you'd run a real fear of a problem like that.

MRS. BLACK: Bill, in that situation around Medicine Hat, the majority of the votes would be in the two existing rural, Cypress-Redcliff and Bow Valley. Some of Medicine Hat would, say, go out to either riding. So the majority of the voters would already have been in the rural setting, and it would shift urban people out to rural instead of rural to urban.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I can assure you, Bill, that if you want to be successful, regardless of the party you represent, you don't ignore any part of your riding.

MR. STEPHENSON: Well, I agree, but I can remember being out in West Yellowhead about two elections ago during the campaign, and the campaigns out there were centred around two areas, Hinton and Edson. You know, they went to the rest of them and certainly gave them some attention, but the candidates hung out where the votes were, in Edson and Hinton. You know, too many ridings like that and too many politicians running like that – I would be really leery of what would happen to the rural vote in a case like that.

MRS. MacDONALD: How are the two Red Deer ridings working out? Do you get any feedback from Stockwell Day?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Stockwell Day is a member of our committee, and he will be with us tomorrow evening for the hearing here in Edmonton. So it's really a question of meeting with either Stockwell Day or John Oldring.

I used to represent a small corner of the city of Lethbridge. It was an area that had been annexed, and I didn't have any difficulty relating to the people in that area.

MRS. MacDONALD: It is an age-old problem. It's the county versus the town, no matter what. I've worked on county recreation boards, and there's yours and there's ours.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I remember that when I first ran for office, some people said this is an impossible constituency, Taber-Warner, because the northern end of the riding is intensive irrigation farming, two large towns with agricultural processing, and the southern end of the riding is dryland farming and

ranching. They were very different. Yet I think if anyone suggested that we should change those boundaries and throw the irrigated part into another riding and take the dryland part, you'd have a revolt on your hands because they've come to identify with the area. I think that's the case in Stettler and all over.

MRS. MacDONALD: Yeah, it is. We have Stettler and we have the county of Stettler, and it's been a forever thing. As long as we have equal representation on things, we're getting along. But as soon as that changes – this is why we're concerned about the representation on the boundaries [inaudible].

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, just to point out, in my constituency when the city of Edmonton annexed a great deal of farmland, we took the communities in between what was existing Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan. I inherited a number of farms. I have Edmonton-Belmont, this far northeast corner. I border on an air base; Namao air base is right here. The city of Fort Saskatchewan is right there. My constituency pretty much ends right about there in terms of the densely populated area. I have a parcel of acreages there, and the rest is farmland and farmers, of course. I know the problems; I have to cross 167th Avenue, and I get into a very, very different kind of setting and a different kind of constituent. So I'm pretty much aware of the diverse role that one has to play and the diverse issues as well. It is difficult.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Tom. That's a good example. It's an urban/rural mix as a result of city annexation.

Pam.

MS BARRETT: Yeah. I'd like to go back to Mrs. MacDonald. First of all, do you reside in town or in the county?

MRS. MacDONALD: County.

MS BARRETT: In the county. So you're on a farm or acreage. Okay. Now, you just said something that I wondered about. You said that the pull between town and county is sort of continual but you can cohabit happily as long as you have equal representation. Can you describe how that works?

MRS. MacDONALD: We've tried out some different boards and committees and things within – mind you, we're at almost an equal population base in the county of Stettler and the town of Stettler. Often the committees would have more members of town people than county, and then you got the feeling that it always swayed towards the town. Now we've started working things out with a one-to-one type thing, and it's working fairly well. We're getting along on a regional basis very much better than when there were more votes in the town part of it than there were in the county.

MS BARRETT: All right. If, for instance, you were in an environment where the actual rural population exceeded the nearest town's population in the same type of relationship, would you still want it to be equal?

MRS. MacDONALD: As far as I can see, that's yes. Like, if we had more county residents than town people, you mean?

MS BARRETT: Yes.

MRS. MacDONALD: Yes, I would definitely say a one-to-one basis in the situations that I've been involved in at any time, and I've lived there forever.

MS BARRETT: Uh huh. Now, why would that be so important, so compelling to you?

MRS. MacDONALD: I don't know. It's just that it has worked out better with all our recreation involvement, tourism, economic development. We've worked together with one to one, one country representation to one town. Now all our economic development boards are one to one, and it seems to be working. It would be practical for everybody. It's worked for us.

MS BARRETT: I have one more question. It may seem unrelated, but do you have community leagues in your area?

MRS. MacDONALD: Uh huh.

MS BARRETT: I think Edmonton, if I'm not mistaken, is considered the community league capital of Canada. It was a couple of years ago, in any event. Are they large or active, or primarily children centred?

MRS. MacDONALD: They're not active, really, the community leagues. No, I wouldn't say we have active . . . We have little associations all over, but not a community league as such that has . . . Do you mean that have both town and county involvement or just in each?

MS BARRETT: Well, I'll tell you what I'm getting at. You keep talking about things that I don't relate to because I live in the city. So when you talk about recreation and economic development, I deal with a gazillion agencies and community leagues, but I don't know what you deal with, and that's what I'm trying to find out. Community leagues, then, are not really high on that totem pole, but what are the As, Bs, and Cs of what are high on that totem pole?

MRS. MacDONALD: Things like all our recreation boards, recreation commissions, the town commission, the county commission, the economic development boards that have equal representation, where the county appoints a representative and the town appoints a representative.

MS BARRETT: That answers a lot. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Are there any other questions anyone wishes to raise? We could run a table discussion. Okay, last call.

MS BARRETT: Going once . . .

MR. MacDONALD: We could be here all night, Bob.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we anticipate as a committee that the primary interest is going to be in the rural areas, because that's where the concern is that there's something to lose. If you're on the receiving end, there's not . . .

MR. MacDONALD: I do have one for Pam. How do you feel about redistribution? Should the cities have twice the votes of the rural people?

MS BARRETT: How I feel is not entirely determined. I do have a general posture that says I don't have time to be on committees if these are predetermined. I've got a lot of constituents who would like my help on other matters. I have operated on the assumption that the legislation which empowers this committee to exist was legislation that was struck in good faith. I'm going to continue to operate on that assumption. But, in the meantime, I certainly would like to examine people on a nonsubjective basis and have discussions on a nonsubjective basis. I confess I don't enjoy it when people get personal. I believe that the enormity of this task is one that deserves the fundamental respect of the individuals on this committee, and I for one intend to uphold my responsibility in that regard and not predetermine the outcome of these hearings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else have any closing comments?

Mike?

MR. CARDINAL: I don't have anything else.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Pat?

MRS. BLACK: I'd just like to thank everyone for coming on a very cold night.

MS BARRETT: You bet. On a balmy winter evening.

MRS. BLACK: I think there's even an Edmonton Oilers hockey game on tonight.

MS BARRETT: So I've heard. So it's a major sacrifice, we understand.

MR. CARDINAL: We're used to that in rural areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just in closing, let me say this. This is a fascinating process. It's also, as Pam has just said, an extremely important process. All of us are very busy people; we're not merely going through an exercise to spin something out. We're very seriously trying to find a solution, trying to find a balance between a court decision with some pretty rigid requirements and a historical pattern which we've had in our province. To do that, we're going around the province to listen to people.

There was a recommendation made by a constitutional lawyer we heard here in Edmonton two weeks ago, and the same recommendation was repeated when we were in either Peace River or Grande Prairie; I've forgotten. Pat will be interested in this, because he will no doubt be part of the commission as our Chief Electoral Officer for the province. The recommendation was: "When you do strike a commission, why don't you ask them, or direct them through the legislation, to come out and hold some hearings before they write an interim report?" In other words, come and see us; give us an opportunity to express the concerns we have. They may be minor; i.e., a boundary matter. One example was given about people who live right on the Alberta side of the B.C./Alberta border, and because of transportation and communication they go into B.C. to come back into Alberta in another area. They said: "So we'd really like the opportunity to give our views to the commission before they write an interim report, and then let them go through the process of writing their report, preparing their boundaries."

Then, of course, there's the follow-up opportunity for input."

We've thought about that as a committee, and we have a hard time seeing any fault with it. We're looking forward in a future discussion with Pat and others to bouncing that idea off them to see how they feel about it. We hope that before we make our recommendations to the Assembly, we'll be able to sit down again with some of the constitutional experts and some of the – I'll call them the experts in terms of drawing boundaries, and that's our Chief Electoral Officer – and get input from them and feedback so that the recommendations we give our colleagues in

the Assembly are the kind that are going to help us solve a big problem but ensure that we don't lose the very special fabric of our Alberta.

So I just echo what Pat and others have said in thanking you for coming out tonight. We do appreciate it. And thank you, Bill, for your formal brief. That's very much appreciated. So thank you all, and a safe trip home.

[The committee adjourned at 8:25 p.m.]

