

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[10:05 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll officially call the meeting open. Gary, welcome to you. Have you had an opportunity to meet all the panel members?

MR. DICKSON: Informally, I think I've met most of them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let me go down the list then. On our far right, an honorary member of our committee, Mr. Pat Ledgerwood, the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. Seated next to Pat is Tom Sigurdson. Tom is the MLA for Edmonton-Belmont, first elected in 1986. Next to Tom, of course, no stranger to you, Frank Bruseker from Calgary-North West, elected this spring. Stockwell Day, the MLA for Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Hi.

MR. DICKSON: Good morning.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Stock serves as the caucus Whip for the Conservative caucus.

On my . . .

MS BARRETT: It's all right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On my immediate left - immediate left; you noticed that? - the House leader for the New Democratic Party, Pam Barrett. Pam was first elected in 1986. She represents the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. Pat Black is a neighbour of Frank Bruseker's, as I'm sure you're aware. Pat was first elected to Calgary-Foothills this spring. And Bob Pritchard, our senior administrator, on the far end.

As you may be aware, this is a select special committee of the Legislature; therefore, all our meetings are taped. There is a copy of *Hansard* which is being developed and will be available to the public on demand. So while there's a formality in that part of the structure, we've tried very hard to keep the actual process as informal as possible. What I'd like you to do is go through your brief. I want to ask panel members if there are any questions they have of you. If in the meantime we're joined by anyone else, we'll give them an opportunity to get involved in the discussion as well.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. Let me just make sure everybody's got a copy of the three-page written presentation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm assuming you've gone through our letter and don't need any further background on why the committee's been struck and what our mandate is.

MR. DICKSON: No, I think, Mr. Bogle, I'm familiar with that. I'd just make a plea for colour-blind Albertans everywhere. The colour coding always is an interesting challenge in these things. It's a small rearguard action we're trying to fight as colour-blind people of Alberta - I don't think with much success.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. What would you recommend?

MR. DICKSON: Oh, I'm being facetious. Sometimes dots or hatch or things like that are alternatives to the green and red or pink coding.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thanks, first of all, for the opportunity to make the presentation. The Alberta Liberal Party appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the review of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act and related matters. The Alberta Liberal Party is aware of the need for reform of the Act in order to accommodate the changing population distribution of our province, the changed distribution of seats in the Legislature, and the British Columbia Supreme Court decision in the case of Dixon in British Columbia earlier this year.

In the British Columbia Supreme Court decision, the court ruled that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms embodies the concept of equal representation in the right to vote, but it does not dictate absolute voter parity in the context of electoral distribution. However, the court stated that the dominant consideration in drawing electoral boundaries must be population distribution and that it is appropriate to set limits in variances in population distribution between constituencies. The court cited examples, including the Canadian federal 25 percent variance limit and the Australian 10 percent variance limit.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Liberal Party believes it is in the best interests of Albertans that our legislation be amended to take into consideration the dicta or statements of the British Columbia Supreme Court in the Dixon decision. The Alberta Liberal Party believes that a variance from the population average between constituencies should be established at 25 percent. This figure takes into account the British Columbia decision as well as the nature of Alberta's population distribution. To have a greater variance would be inconsistent with the Charter provisions. A lesser maximum variance might well lead to unreasonably large constituencies in the far north and far south of Alberta. Exceptions should only be made with substantive justification. Equal representation should clearly be the governing factor in establishing the size of constituencies.

The standing committee should give some consideration to the total number of MLAs in the province relative to the population. In other prairie provinces there is one MLA per 9,000 to 10,000 voters. In Alberta this figure is one MLA per 18,600 voters. Clearly, there is room for expansion of the total number of MLAs. This would have the effect of not diminishing the total number of MLAs representing rural constituencies. For example, if the number of rural MLAs remained constant and the number of urban MLAs increased by 10 to 12, the result would be an average constituency size of approximately 17,000, with all constituency sizes complying with the 25 percent variance requirement. With redistribution and the creation of a more equitable share of representation for the urban centres, it is plausible to assume that there may be increases in the size of some rural ridings. In this event, the Members' Services Committee of the Legislature should consider establishing extra constituency allowances for those members representing large rural ridings. The increased allowance should allow for increased constituency facilities and staff and increased travel and communications capacity.

The Alberta Liberal Party, Mr. Chairman, has examined the option of combining existing urban ridings with some rural sections in order to more equitably distribute population amongst constituencies. The Alberta Liberal Party finds this notion unworkable. To combine an urban riding that is on the edge of a municipality with rural sections of the next municipality ignores the important principle that boundaries should be

related to and sensitive to existing communities.

With redistribution of constituencies, it's respectfully submitted that it is vital that an important principle be considered paramount. In addition to the principles outlined in the British Columbia decision, the principle of community integrity in electoral distribution should be maintained. The splitting of natural, established communities into two or more constituencies diminishes the MLA's ability to effectively represent the constituency. Consideration, Mr. Chairman, should be made for existing elected MLAs in adjusting constituency boundaries. Inasmuch as possible, the home communities of the existing members should be maintained within the revised boundaries, and the remaining communities in the constituency should complement the member's constituency.

Now, turning to the makeup of the commission itself and the membership. The current Act, as you're well familiar with, establishes the Electoral Boundaries Commission membership as follows: a judge or retired judge, the Chief Electoral Officer, one appointee of the Speaker, three government members, and one Official Opposition member. We, the Alberta Liberal Party, suggested that ideally we ought to go to a nonpartisan makeup. And what we propose and recommend is that the membership of the Electoral Boundaries Commission be as follows: one Queen's Bench judge, the Chief Electoral Officer, one appointee from the city of Edmonton, one from the city of Calgary, one representative of a major agricultural organization in the province, one appointee from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and one appointee from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. That would be our preference, and that's what we see as a more ideal makeup of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Now, if your committee, Mr. Chairman, is not disposed to recommend this type of nonpartisan representation, then we strongly urge that the commission representation include a representative of the Alberta Liberal Party.

The Alberta Liberal Party, Mr. Chairman, looks forward to working with the people of Alberta in addressing the important issues that have been raised in this submission and the other submissions you have heard and will hear. We welcome, of course, feedback, input, and reaction.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Gary.

Questions? Yes. Tom first, then Stockwell.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thanks very much for your presentation, Gary. I appreciate the work you've put into it.

If I can just get a couple of points of clarification. In the fifth paragraph on your first page you talk about the tolerable variance being 25 percent. The last sentence of the paragraph says, "Equal representation should clearly be the governing factor in establishing the size of constituencies." We have had representation that stated that we should work towards zero, work towards the mean, and if there is a variance that is 25 percent or in that neighbourhood, that ought to be justified. Could you comment on that recommendation?

MR. DICKSON: Well, that, at least as I recall from the British Columbia decision, is the American practice, to try and establish almost virtually a zero departure from straight parity. I think our reaction is that that simply may be not realistic. Given the geography and the makeup of the province, we think it's more reasonable to recognize a degree of tolerance. We think 25

percent is a reasonable degree of tolerance and insist on a strict adherence to that 25 percent as much as possible. I think clearly that's our preference, rather than going for what we think is virtually an unworkable system of trying to go to a zero tolerance.

MR. SIGURDSON: The next page talked about combining urban and rural sections of the province together. We have right now Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South that have taken in part of the rural section to bump up their population to a sufficient number so that they can have two constituencies. We have Medicine Hat and St. Albert that are well over the 25 percent variance. If we were to divide those two constituencies into two again, they would be probably under the 25 percent variance. Bringing in rural areas to bump up the population sufficiently to give a sufficient number of voters to two constituencies: you're opposed to that? Is that still a workable solution, or an unworkable solution?

MR. DICKSON: I think what we're saying is that we'd like to avoid that wherever possible.

MR. SIGURDSON: Wherever possible? Okay.

MR. DICKSON: Wherever possible. And we think that with maybe some creativity and ingenuity, there may be ways of avoiding that result. I don't think what we're addressing here . . . We're attempting to deal with what we suggest ought to be first principles rather than dealing with particular constituencies and readjustment of them. But we'd very much like to avoid that situation of combining a rural and an urban riding. We think it's problematic, and we think it ought to be seen as just a last resort.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just one last question then, Mr. Chairman. The makeup of your nonpartisan committee: who would you have appoint this nonpartisan committee? The reason I ask that is that there are . . .

MR. DICKSON: You're thinking of the commission?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yes; I'm sorry. Of the commission. Would the Premier, the Speaker, or the Leader of the Opposition make from these organizations certain appointments?

MR. DICKSON: It's not indicated, of course, in the presentation. I think what we envisage is that we would go to each one of those, if you will, corporations or organizations and have them designate or appoint an individual representative to join the commission.

MR. SIGURDSON: I see. Okay. Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: As opposed to somebody in the House going and tagging somebody on a city council, it'd be a question of going to each one of those organizations and having them appoint an individual.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.
Stockwell, Pat, Pam.

MR. DAY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Gary, I appreciate the work that you've put into this. It's given us some good food for thought.

Just some questions. I appreciate that you've noticed that Alberta MLAs averaging 18,000 voters per constituency, compared with other prairie provinces at about 9,000, do have twice the workload. It's a good point, just in case people have missed that one. I hadn't missed it. It is significant though. It potentially doubles the amount of calls, the amount of petitions, et cetera.

Can I just get further explanation on the bottom last paragraph on your first page?

If the number of rural MLA's remained constant, and the number of urban MLA's increased by 10 - 12, the result would be an average constituency size of approximately 17,000 . . .

Okay. I haven't gone through those numbers, but I understand that you did.

. . . with all constituency sizes complying with the 25 percent variance.

How does that help the rural constituency of 10,000? I can appreciate that if you add 10 to 12 urban and then average across the province, you've got 17,000, but what you're saying is that you would still have to make boundary adjustments in the rural. Is that what you're saying?

MR. DICKSON: No question; no question.

MR. DAY: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that.

On page 2, just as a matter of interest to you, it is - you talk about existing communities and combining rural and urban. That situation does uniquely exist in Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, and it adds actually quite a positive flavour to the community as a whole. The people living in Red Deer-North itself are kind of intrigued by the fact that they are in the same constituency as their rural neighbours across the highway out on the farms. So it's not totally unworkable. Coming from the only one in Alberta, I can comment on that just as a point of information to you.

I have some questions on the makeup of the Electoral Boundaries Commission; if we went with this type of approach, if you could just help us in anticipating some questions back. There are some major agricultural organizations in the province. Some of them, it could be generalized - I hope without getting into trouble - may tend to lean a certain way politically, and another major one may tend to lean another way politically. How would you deal with that in appointing just one of those organizations? Or how could we deal with that?

MR. DICKSON: Well, just to step back from that a moment, the thrust and the purpose clearly is to find an organization that is to the greatest extent possible representative of rural Alberta. That's the purpose. I expect, as is usually the case with organizations, that will change over the years and isn't necessarily going to be constant. It might be a question that - that would have to be a gap. You might identify that it will be a major agricultural organization or association, unnamed, and then develop some procedure for being able to identify that when the commission is about to embark on a set of hearings and deliberations.

MR. DAY: Any actual thoughts on the procedure itself, or are you just tossing that out as an idea?

MR. DICKSON: We don't have a specific formula in terms

of . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: If I could maybe just add a comment to that, in discussion when Gary and I were talking about this earlier, I think one of the reasons we put in a mention of an agricultural association in the province was sort of to address the concern that we heard when we went to Manitoba. What we heard there was that the commission that was established in Manitoba had the Chief Electoral Officer, had the Chief Justice, and had the president of the university, all from the city of Winnipeg. We heard the comment, "Gee, there's nobody there representing rural interests." We felt that somebody, somehow, needs to represent the interests of the rural populations, and that's why . . . But we didn't mention a specific.

MR. DAY: Yeah, and certainly I don't question that at all in terms of that representation. It's just that there would be some unique procedural obstacles to leap over in looking at that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we pause on that point for a moment and see if there's anyone else who'd like to piggyback in as Frank has done? Pam.

MS BARRETT: Well, what you could do, it occurs to me, is adjust the recommendation. You've got the AUMA represented and the AAMDs and Cs, but there's also the rural municipalities. Between the MDs and Cs and the rural municipalities, you may in fact end up with the sort of balance that you're looking for. Because it does occur to me that you'd have difficulty with the farm organizations unless you were to try to take two.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm on the same point. The one thing consistent with your recommendations, down to a farm organization, is that they all represent a form of government.

MR. DICKSON: Yes, that's true.

MR. CHAIRMAN: They're all local government. The municipal districts and counties would represent - and I'm going to use a ballpark figure - two-thirds of the organized rural part of the province, so chances are that whoever their representative or member on the commission would be, it would be someone with a farm/rural background.

There is one other body that represents basically everything else, and that's the improvement districts, and they are another form of local government. I'm wondering if any consideration was given or if you might wish to go back and consult with others in your party and see if you wish to make a further addendum to your submission with some consideration to adding the improvement districts.

MR. DICKSON: Sure. That's something actually we'd be pleased to reconsider. The thrust, I think, is pretty clear, and in terms of the mechanics, I don't think . . . We're not weighted necessarily . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Your intent is certainly clear. Okay. Anything else on that? Then we'll go and finish off with Stock and then over to you, Pat. Okay, Stock.

MR. DAY: I think in bringing these out, Gary, by all means I'm not challenging any proposal, just anticipating questions that would come to us. I'm saying help us or, you know, how to

work this.

The other thing with an agricultural – and Bob has touched on it. All the other forums represent some form of government, all the other suggested appointees to a commission. An agriculture rep, an organization representing a large economic base in Alberta: do you think we would anticipate, then, a concern from the oil and gas industry saying: "You've got agriculture represented in there; that's a major part of your economic base. Oil and gas is a major economic base. What about a representative from the oil and gas sector, the energy sector?"

MR. DICKSON: I suppose the claim might be made. I think it would not be that difficult to distinguish the two situations. I think the agricultural thing – it's true that it represents a type of industry, but it also uniquely goes together with rural Alberta in a sort of geography aspect in a way that oil and gas doesn't.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else, Stock?

MR. DAY: Just on the one point too. The city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary – since I come from neither – there are of course the standard jealousies that go on between those two cities. And, of course, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray are always saying that Edmonton and Calgary get the lion's share of everything. Would we, do you think, anticipate concerns from others of our cities in Alberta if they perceived that Edmonton and Calgary were going to be getting, as they might see it, a leg up on a commission?

MR. DICKSON: Well, there's always, I suppose, apprehension that there may be that kind of concern. I think it was to address that that we've suggested it was important that there should be an appointee from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and I think the expectation would be that it would be someone from a city in Alberta other than Edmonton and Calgary. Now, it may not be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm going to interject. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association includes much more than the cities. It includes the towns and the villages as well, and it may well be that if we went this route, the representative would be from a town or a village. It includes all urban municipalities. Anyway, just a small point.

MR. SIGURDSON: Maybe even somebody from Red Deer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else, Stock?

MR. DAY: No, those are my questions. Thanks, Gary. There are some good thoughts in there.

MR. DICKSON: The only thing I'd just say in response is that I appreciate your comments in terms of the mixed urban/rural split. I grew up in Drumheller, and I remember when Stan Schumacher then was an MP and we had a federal constituency – Palliser, I think, was the name of it – that would have included Drumheller and also a chunk of Calgary and everything in between. I remember that at the time I don't think he felt quite as positive about having to represent such a diverse kind of constituency.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good point.

Pat, and then Pam.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Gary, for your presentation. It's very, very good, and we appreciate the effort you've put into it.

Some of the points I wanted to deal with have been dealt with, but I want to go back to the first page, with the last paragraph where you deal with keeping the status quo in the rural settings and then adjusting to an average constituency size of approximately 17,000 for the urban settings and the rural. I'm concerned – and it came up yesterday. One of the presenters was talking about reducing the size of government, and if we went with an increase of 10 to 12, we'd have between 93 and 95 MLAs. We already are the largest government per capita of any province in the country. I have some concerns with making government bigger, particularly up into the 90s. It's a tremendous expense to the taxpayer, because it's not only supporting the MLA and being there but all the peripheral costs that are associated with that. I'm wondering, if we have to look pretty hard and fast at increasing them . . . We ran into a case in Victoria where actually their Legislature, their Assembly room, would not accommodate any more because of the age of it. They were wondering how they were going to add the extra seats. There are things like that that occur.

MS BARRETT: Bleachers.

MRS. BLACK: Well, Pam, that's what we suggested, actually, bleachers. It's a tremendous expense to the taxpayer to increase any more than we have, and I'm wondering how we'd justify that.

Then when I get over to the second page, you talk about the distinction. "Boundaries should be related to and sensitive to existing communities." This is where we talk about not combining the urban and rural ridings. I'm wondering – you've identified a distinction between urban and rural – if, in fact, we should have a distinction between urban and rural. We talked yesterday in one of the presentations about the idea of having a mean for rural with a variance of 25 and a mean for urban with a variance of 25, if that would satisfy the constitutional side of things, but also not add the added expense but keep the distinction between urban and rural, as you've stated in here, as "sensitive to existing communities." I'm wondering if that would be a workable concept for you and your party.

MR. DICKSON: Well, just going back and dealing with the first point you raise, clearly we're not anxious to see MLAs sitting out on the front lawn for want of space in the legislative Chamber. I guess it's a judgment that has to be made, and a decision has to be made as to which is the less satisfactory evil: whether the additional expense and infrastructure that's necessary to expand the number of MLAs or whether the fact that you've got more and more people looking to a single individual as their MLA and expecting the full range of services that constituents expect from MLAs. I think our judgment was that we would sooner see an increase in the total number and, I guess, the additional cost to the province, the ancillary to that, rather than to overload MLAs by having them represent more constituents than we think they can effectively represent. So it's a judgment.

MRS. BLACK: I guess I'd come back and say to you, and I would assume it's fairly consistent – Pat, maybe you can help me out here; I think you were on the federal review – that the MPs

from Alberta represent roughly 80,000 constituents per MP.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: The average is 86,066.

MRS. BLACK: Eighty-six thousand constituents in Ottawa, and we're talking 17,000. There's a substantial difference there.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Mr. Chairman, I should point out that that 86,000 is citizens – that's the population – vis-à-vis ours, which is electors.

MRS. BLACK: This is electors. Well, we figured, did we not, if we boosted this up by a third, that would be the effective population?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: About a third, yes.

MRS. BLACK: So even with that there is a substantial difference that we expect our Members of Parliament to represent as opposed to our MLAs, and their distance factor is much greater than what ours would be, staying within our own province. So I do have some concerns there with larger sizes being considered. It's just food for thought, I guess, because I've seen both sides of distribution take place. That's a concern I always have: how much is this going to cost? So you have to bear with me on that.

The other thing I wanted to go to was on the makeup of the commission. I'm not that sure that I agree that representatives from the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary – other elected representatives – should be involved in determining the makeup of our representation. I would much rather see nonelected people entirely, or representatives, or a combination of elected representatives and private citizens as opposed to other elected representatives and other jurisdictions making the decisions. I don't know if you've thought of that at all. I don't know why you would pick someone from the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton. I presume that would be someone from their elected positions.

MR. DICKSON: I think the expectation is . . . That's right; it would be somebody from the city council of each of those municipal corporations.

MR. BRUSEKER: But not necessarily so. I mean, the way we worded it, I think it says one appointee from – or maybe it should have said "by" – the city of Edmonton and one appointee by the city of Calgary.

MRS. BLACK: So it could be a citizen at large then.

MR. BRUSEKER: It could very well be.

MR. DAY: Someone from Red Deer, for instance.

MRS. BLACK: Yes, someone from Red Deer.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes, if the city council in the city of Calgary lost their senses, they might appoint someone from the city of Red Deer, but that's unlikely.

MRS. BLACK: But you wouldn't be opposed to a citizen at large being appointed, say, from the city of Calgary as opposed to an elected member of council.

MR. DICKSON: No. I think the point was to have it someone selected and tagged by the municipal corporation, whether it's from the city council or just from private industry or what have you in the city. I don't think they hold any brief in terms of that.

I wonder if I can just respond to the point you raised earlier. You were talking, as I understand, about treating urban and rural constituencies differently. I guess part of my reaction is that I'm not sure you can do that without having some substantial constitutional problems. That would be one of my concerns. I think, though, that I don't want to make too much of the rural/urban thing. I think what we would like to see, what we're trying to achieve, is to ensure as much as possible that there's no disproportionate weighting between a rural vote and an urban vote. Beyond that I don't see any tremendous merit, speaking frankly, in terms of treating rural constituencies in a different way or having a different mean for rural constituencies than for urban constituencies.

MRS. BLACK: So you don't really feel there's that much of a distinction, then, between them?

MR. DICKSON: Well, there are some different needs, and we've got some different geographical considerations. But I think what we're looking for is a provincewide model and not one model for . . . We really have two models now. We've got by legislation – the Act itself defines how many urban MLAs we're going to have and how many rural. I think we'd just prefer to see one variance and one formula that would apply on a provincewide basis.

MRS. BLACK: The last question I have for you. Right now we have representation or distribution based on eligible voters. Do you feel we should have representation and distribution based on full population? I'm thinking of southern Alberta where there are, say, the large Indian reserves that are not enumerated and have chosen not to participate – that's by choice – or, say, the Hutterite communities that have again chosen not to participate but still have the rights of being citizens. Should they be represented and included in the total number when you're factoring up redistribution? For that matter, in the urban settings the people who are new immigrants or who are under the age of 18 add to the population base.

MR. DICKSON: Clearly, Mrs. Black, we haven't addressed it in our presentation. I guess my reaction would be that I think there are some advantages to basing it on electors, as it is now. But it's not something that we've addressed, and I can't tell you that the Alberta Liberal Party position on that is that we're anxious to see it changed. I think we're not asking that the existing arrangement based on electors be changed.

MRS. BLACK: This only came up when we were in Victoria last week. Their distribution is on population, not on electorate.

MR. DICKSON: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: I think when we sat around and started to talk about it, that was one question that kept coming up, and I know Tom has asked it several times. Should it be on population in the true sense or on eligible voters? Keep in mind that the grade 12 students this year will be eligible voters next year, but if they are not enumerated on distribution, they would not be

included.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you.

MS BARRETT: I'd like to ask if you or your party is comfortable with the notion that in proposing a 25 percent variance, in reality that could result in a 2 to 1 voter power, because the real discrepancy could come to 50 percent.

MR. DICKSON: I think what we're looking at is a workable formula and a compromise that reflects what we think is the make-up of Alberta. We think the 25 percent is reasonable.

MS BARRETT: Do you operate on the assumption that where the limits are set at 25 percent, that will tend to be reflected in the new divisions, or do you operate on the assumption that 25 percent variance should be the extreme and the target should be minimal variance?

MR. DICKSON: The latter.

MS BARRETT: The latter. That's not spelled out.

MR. DICKSON: No, and it's a good point. I guess that's always a problem if you talk about the 25 percent variance. Whether that becomes accepted is . . .

MS BARRETT: It's implied in the formulation that you eventually propose, but one has to ask specific figures.

MR. DICKSON: Let me say expressly: no, we'd like to see it smaller than that. We're saying 25 percent is what we suggest should be the outside . . .

MS BARRETT: So if you were writing the instructions to the commission or writing the legislation, you would state: the commission shall wherever possible attempt to have an equal number of electors per division, and where exceptions force the commission, variances up to 25 percent could be allowed.

MR. DICKSON: That's the target.

MS BARRETT: That's the way you would write that. Okay. The other question I have relates to . . .

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, could I just interject? Unless my math is off - it might be, early in the morning. The McLachlin allowance of 25 percent up or down: I fail to see where that results in a 2 to 1.

MS BARRETT: Technically, Stockwell, if you ended up dividing ridings on the basis of going to the maximum variance, whether it's below or above the mean average, one-third of your ridings could have 50 percent fewer electors than two-thirds, or even more distorted, which would give them greater voting power.

MR. DAY: Yeah. It's not 2 to 1 though. Like, if you've got 20,000 and then one at 16,000 and one at 24,000, it's not - it is an upset.

MS BARRETT: Although it could be the case of 2 to 1 in terms of the number of people the MLA is representing. You

see what I mean?

MR. DAY: No. But that's something we can - I'll show you later on the calculator. I just wanted to bring out that point.

MS BARRETT: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. We'll come back to that internally.

Pam, you're on.

MS BARRETT: Now, in British Columbia the average number of electors would be - what did you say, Pat, earlier when I asked?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Just over 38,000 population, which would be just under 30,000 electors.

MS BARRETT: Right. Okay. That then compares to something I didn't know about until I read this, which is the relative size of ridings in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. On that basis it looks like we're sitting somewhere in the middle with an average number of voters per riding, mean average, of 18,500. Can you tell me why it is you would recommend an actual increase in that number and the number of the MLAs or propose the reduction in the number of electors per riding when you can see that B.C., with a higher population, functions, I assume, reasonably well with greater voting population per riding?

MR. DICKSON: I guess if you're comparing to other provinces . . . It's just that the geography of British Columbia is unique. We have much more in common with the other prairie provinces, and there are some just really severe problems that are apparent, at least as I read through it. I thought it was fascinating reading through the British Columbia judgment. It made me a little more appreciative of some of the really severe kinds of geographic problems they have that we don't have. So I think what we're saying is that the more appropriate model for us is looking at the other prairie provinces. We really think we wouldn't want to see MLAs responsible for larger populations than they are now. We'd like to see it reduced.

MS BARRETT: Okay. But you just stated that British Columbia faces really unique and tremendous problems in terms of voter representation, yet they actually have larger voter constituencies than do we. So how does that argument fit together?

MR. DICKSON: Well, I think it's a question of their trying to deal with some particular geographic problems and considerations that we don't have here.

MS BARRETT: Are you arguing that that justifies them having even larger ridings?

MR. DICKSON: Yes.

MS BARRETT: Oh, all right. Okay, that's all. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I will just put an interpretation on it. If I'm reading you wrong, Gary, you tell me. You're suggesting that we should look to the two other prairie provinces as being closer identified with Alberta because of the geography, the

terrain.

MS BARRETT: I understood that.

MR. DICKSON: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Whereas in British Columbia, while there are more voters per constituency, the development is very much a ribbon development, you know, down in the valleys.

MS BARRETT: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're covering larger concentrations of population. Some of their northern ridings are very large, but the population is in a more confined area.

MS BARRETT: That isn't the argument he was making. He wasn't stating it that way, but is that what you meant?

MR. DICKSON: Yes.

MS BARRETT: That's what I was testing for. I couldn't get it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's what I was reading into it.

MS BARRETT: All right. Okay. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, anyone else?

Well, thank you very much, Gary. Feel free, as I earlier invited, to provide us any further information you wish upon reflection of our discussions.

MR. DICKSON: Good. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll certainly add that to your report.

MR. DICKSON: Good. You've raised some things that, I think, warrant some further consideration, and we'll have a closer look at some of those points.

Thanks very much for your time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Mr. Chairman, I can give you some numbers on the prairie provinces if you want. Manitoba has 57 elected members, population of just over a million; Saskatchewan has 66, population just under the million; B.C. will have 75 with about 2.8 million population; Alberta, 83 with just over 2.4 million population.

MR. BRUSEKER: Pat, do you have census information for all

of these? It's been raised a number a times. I'm wondering if it would be worth while to have census information and then have a ranking of the 83 constituencies like we've done with electors but instead rank them with the census information.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Frank, I think Bob is very close to having that information for us. He's been working with Pat and with Alberta vital statistics.

MR. BRUSEKER: I think it would be a worthwhile comparison . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: They are putting that together for us.

MR. BRUSEKER: . . . to see if it shifts them around substantially or whether it's not significant.

MR. CHAIRMAN: They are working on it.

MR. DAY: That would be good.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: What it won't show are the population trends between 1986 and 1989 in that the census figures were the 1986 census figures, whereas these are the 1989 electorate figures.

MR. BRUSEKER: And the census is only done every 10 years?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Every five.

MR. DAY: But the population shift in some areas could be significant.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: That's why I say as long as you remember that you've got '86 figures in one column and '89 figures.

MR. DAY: In some areas it could be very significant, not showing up or down.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Unfortunately, you see, we won't be doing a census till '91, which will be too late for the commission.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah, there's probably a vast migration out of Red Deer-North into Calgary-North West now.

MR. DAY: No, I doubt it.

[The committee adjourned at 10:50 a.m.]

