

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[7:03 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm pleased to now declare the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries meeting held here in Viking officially open. A very special welcome to those of you who have come out tonight. This is an extremely important process that we're involved in. As you know, we have been holding hearings across the province, and the kind of input we've received to date has been very gratifying to us. We've received new ideas and some very exciting challenges in terms of meeting our responsibilities as a committee.

At the outset I'd like to introduce the committee members who are here, and starting on my immediate left: Tom Sigurdson. Tom is the MLA for Edmonton-Belmont. He's a New Democratic member of the Assembly, and he acted as chairman of the meeting earlier today in St. Paul and at the meetings yesterday. I do appreciate that.

MR. SIGURDSON: It was Pat yesterday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, it was Pat yesterday? I thought it was you involved both times. All right. So, good to see you here, Tom.

Pat Ledgerwood, the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. Pat has extensive involvement not only in our electoral boundaries work in Alberta, but he served on the federal commission which saw the number of Alberta seats expand from 21 to 26. We've found him to be a real wealth of knowledge for our committee, and that's greatly appreciated.

On my immediate right: Frank Bruseker. Frank is a Liberal member of the Legislature, and he represents the constituency of Calgary-North West.

Unfortunately, the other elected members of our committee are not with us this evening. All are away for other matters, some long-standing and one or two matters that just recently came up.

We're also extremely pleased to welcome to the table tonight your host MLA for the constituency of Vermilion-Viking, the hon. Dr. Steve West. It's been our practice at other hearings to invite the host MLA to join us. If there's a comment that you wish to make, Steve, while we're going through the process, or if you have a brief you'd like to present at the end, you'll certainly have that opportunity.

We're also joined by Bob Pritchard, the senior administrator. Some of you, I think, have spoken with Bob on the telephone in terms of the process that we follow.

I might mention at the outset that while there are microphones here, we hope they don't in any way tend to inhibit the process. Because this is a select special committee of the Legislature, everything said is recorded. There is a record that is kept in *Hansard*, and that's of course available to the public. We have our two *Hansard* officials with us: Gary and Doug. So, while everything is recorded, we've tried to develop a system that keeps the process as informal as possible.

We will invite the first three participants forward, who will sit over at the side, and I'll give an example. The first presenter will present a brief. The brief can either be read, if you've got a formal brief, or it can be given orally, if you wish to summarize from the brief. That actually is what we prefer, and then we would take the written brief and read it into the record later. Or if an individual has comments that he or she wishes to make off the top of their head, that invitation stands open as well. Once the first presenter has finished, members of the committee

are given an opportunity to ask any questions, and then we turn it open to those of you in the audience, if there's anything you'd like to add. Then we go on to the second presenter and so on through the process.

One of the things I'd like to stress is that because our mandate as a select special committee is to look at a number of factors affecting the redistribution process – and I'm going to ask Pat Ledgerwood in a couple of moments to go through the background to that – we are not a commission. We are not the Electoral Boundaries Commission; therefore, we are not drawing lines. So if as part of your brief you are recommending that a particular area be added to a constituency or taken from a constituency, that's not the kind of thing we're able to address as a committee. The commitment we've made to individuals and presenters in the past is that we will ensure that those recommendations are passed on to the commission when the commission is struck. It's been the practice in Alberta for a good number of elections to include the Chief Electoral Officer in the actual commission, so we expect that Mr. Pat Ledgerwood will be part of the commission. So we ensure that any points you have on lines will be forwarded in that particular way.

Any other points, Frank or Tom or Pat? Okay. Well, then I'm going to ask Pat to give the background, the British Columbia situation, and the circumstances that have led up to where we are now. Then Frank will lead us through some slides. Pat.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Normally at this time we would have a commission struck and would be sitting drawing the lines Mr. Bogle referred to. There was a situation in B.C. that developed. Normally we would have our commission struck after every second general election. The last provincial commission was in 1983-84. The commission is struck after every second general election, so we had the '86 general election and the '89 general election.

The B.C. situation I refer to is a situation that developed because they had a real anomaly in their numbers in that the lowest riding had a population of just under 5,600; the highest had over 68,000. The B.C. government had a commission struck, headed by Justice Fisher, called the Fisher commission. They basically made three recommendations: first, that British Columbia eliminate all their dual-member ridings; secondly, that they increase the size of the House from 69 to 75 seats. The portion that impacts on us is that they take the total population of British Columbia, divide it by 75 to come to an average, and that no electoral division be plus or minus 25 percent from that average.

The B.C. government didn't react quickly enough in the eyes of a Professor Dixon, so he took the British Columbia government to court. The case was heard before Chief Justice Madam McLachlin. She basically agreed with the Fisher commission that the Charter of Rights prevailed: one person, one vote, and votes should be as equal as possible. She supported the Fisher commission on the average plus or minus 25 percent. However, she felt the court did not have the power to implement this ruling and that it was up to the Legislature to implement her ruling. There was no appeal to this particular judgment. Madam Justice McLachlin has been elevated to the Supreme Court of Canada and is one of the nine justices there. Now, whether that's had any impact on the appeal process, we don't know.

At any rate, Professor Dixon was unhappy that the B.C. government was not doing anything. He went back to court. This time the case was heard by a Justice Meredith. Justice

Meredith basically agreed with the McLachlin decision, but he said that it was not up to the courts to legislate, nor was it up to the courts to govern. So he passed it back to the B.C. Legislature. They had a commission which basically followed the lines drawn by the Fisher commission. They had the 75 seats, all single-member ridings, and all of the numbers within plus or minus 25 percent of the average. That legislation was tabled on January 15 this year and became law at the end of January.

That's basically the B.C. situation which impacted on Alberta and delayed the commission. So the three House leaders got together and decided they would have a committee established to go out and hear from Albertans, and that's what we're going to do tonight.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Pat.

Any questions of Pat on his portion of the presentation? Okay, then we'll go to Frank and the slides.

MR. BRUSEKER: The slides we're going to show you on the overhead there will just be projected on the wall. What we've got is a number of slides. The first half of the set of slides which we'll show you this evening is basically duplicated in the package of information, which you may have received before or picked up at the door this evening. So we're going to go through the first half fairly quickly; then the second half is some information which we have picked up and generated during the course of our hearings.

The first slide which you see is on the first page after the letter, which is a list of eligible voters. It lists all 83 constituencies. The number to the right of the constituency is simply the number of eligible voters as calculated using the last enumeration prior to the last general election. The second slide is the same 83 constituencies. Now, though, instead of being in alphabetical order, they are in order of largest populationwise to smallest populationwise, the largest being Edmonton-Whitemud, 31,500. The smallest is Cardston with just over 8,100. Cardston has a bit of an anomaly in that 1,800 members of the Blood Indian Reserve chose not to be enumerated in the last enumeration, so in fact their number is not reflected in that 8,100 and could, therefore, be added to that total.

Now, if you added up all of those numbers that were on that sheet, you would come up with a total of approximately 1.5 million eligible voters throughout the entire province. If you divide that 1.5 million by the number of constituencies, which is 83, then you achieve an average figure of 18,685 eligible voters per constituency. If you then apply the 25 percent rule which Mr. Ledgerwood spoke of earlier, you get an upper limit of 23,000 and a lower limit of 14,000. Applying that to that list, the green-coloured constituencies, those which have been highlighted with green, are those constituencies which exceed the 25 percent guideline or, in other words, are more than 23,000 in terms of population. They are all urban constituencies. The constituencies which are highlighted with the pink colour are below the 14,000, or below the minus 25 percent guideline, and they are all rural constituencies. Those constituencies which are not highlighted fall within the guidelines of plus or minus 25 percent. Now, applying that 25 percent rule to the map of Alberta, as you see here, those constituencies which are coloured in pink represent those that are below the minus 25 percent rule, less than 14,000. You can see that it spreads right across the province, north to south and east to west.

This is a map of the constituencies located within the city of Calgary. The green-coloured ones are those that are over the

plus 25 percent rule. The next slide is Edmonton, again some green-coloured constituencies. One thing you probably may notice is that the constituencies which are over the 25 percent guideline are for the most part those constituencies around the edges of those two cities; in other words, where the city is growing.

Now, this is a map of the two constituencies in the city of Lethbridge, Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East. They are not coloured, indicating that they fall within the range of plus or minus 25 percent. This is a map of the city of Medicine Hat, again coloured green. It is the fourth largest constituency in terms of population within the province.

Red Deer is a bit of an anomaly in that it's a little bit different. It is actually two constituencies. The brown line which you see on the slide right now represents the current city limits of the city of Red Deer. Now, at the last electoral redistribution the city of Red Deer was considered to be too large for one constituency yet too small to be made into two constituencies. As a result, the Electoral Boundaries Commission at the time looked at the city limits and added some rural area and used the county of Red Deer to add more population and more area so that two constituencies could be created that had sufficient population to justify their existence. In other words, Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South both have a mix of urban and rural within one constituency.

This is the city of St. Albert, located just to the northwest of Edmonton, again over the 25 percent guideline.

When we looked at the map of Alberta, we also noticed there are some constituencies which are quite small in terms of population. We then calculated a minus 35 percent, which means those constituencies that are 12,000 eligible voters or less. They're shown on this map coloured in purple. We noticed there are some that are even smaller, 50 percent of the average or less; in other words, 10,000 voters or less. Those are shown in yellow down at the bottom. There are five constituencies which are very small in terms of their population.

The dots on the map here show the locations which the committee has traveled to in its various travels. We have a few more hearings scheduled. We're going back to Hanna and back to Red Deer. But you can see the different locations where we are traveling. This is a list of the different hearings: February 13, or today, in Viking; earlier today we were in St. Paul; tomorrow the committee will travel to Donnelly, up in the Peace River country. We're going to go back to Edmonton. Also, we could add here that we're going back to Hanna, we're going back to Red Deer, and we're going back to Wainwright because we had quite strong interest and input from people there.

This particular overhead transparency shows both the constituencies I mentioned as being coloured in purple, those that are 35 percent below the mean, and it shows the locations where we are going. You can see that what we have attempted to do with our committee is to travel into those regions which are most likely to be affected by any electoral redistribution that will occur.

Now, all of the foregoing slides I have just talked about have all dealt with eligible voters. One of the things that came out as a result of a number of hearings was a concern: what about those people who don't vote; in other words, the under 18-year-olds, the kids? What about the immigrants who are the new Canadians and perhaps are not yet Canadian citizens and are not eligible to vote? What about the Indian reservations that choose not to be enumerated and don't show up on eligible voters lists? As MLAs we represent all of the people who live in the

constituency, whether they voted for us or not, whether they're eligible to vote or not. So the question was raised: what about considering the impact using the total population?

Now, we're going to go through a series of slides, the same kind of slides, that show the impact using total population. The total population of the province of Alberta is just under 2.4 million people. If you divide 2.4 million by the 83 constituencies which we have in the province, you get an average figure of 28,500. If you apply that plus or minus 25 percent variation again, that means you get an upper limit of 35,600 and a lower limit of 21,000. So it allows for a little bit more variation.

Now, this slide looks very similar to one that we showed you earlier, but there's a significant difference here. There are again some constituencies highlighted in green. Those are the constituencies which exceed the 25 percent guideline. But on this list, if you counted, you would find there are only 18. If you counted in the package which we handed out to you or which you picked up, there are 19 constituencies, so one fewer using population. Similarly, using the constituencies which are 25 percent below, if you counted there, you would find there are 22. On the package we gave you, using eligible voters, there are 24 constituencies. So, in fact, what it means is that it appears that if we use population, there are more constituencies, first of all, that fall within the guidelines, and any future impact that may be felt as a result of electoral boundary redistribution may, in fact, not need to be as great if we can use the population figures. One of the problems is that population figures are not quite as current as enumeration figures.

Now, applying that again to the map of the province of Alberta, one of the things you'll notice right away is that there are two rural constituencies here which are coloured in green. In the previous one using the eligible voters, there were no rural constituencies coloured in green. Here we have Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray which actually exceed the 25 percent guideline; in other words, they have more than 35,000 in total population. We still have quite a number in pink but not quite as many as on the previous slide which was shown to you.

Now, this is the city of Calgary. If you look in your package at the city of Calgary and you compare the one you have there to the one that's now on the wall, you'll see there is a bit of a difference. Some of the constituencies on your handout that are coloured in green are not coloured in green on this one. So there's a bit of a shift, and some of the constituencies, in fact, fall within the guideline using population. The same applies here with the city of Edmonton. Again, we gain some and we lose some, for a net gain of one over the entire province.

On this particular slide there is a substantial impact, however. The purple colour again indicates those constituencies which are 35 percent below the average of the entire province. The first slide that I showed you, using eligible voters, had 16 constituencies that were highlighted in purple. This particular slide only has 12, suggesting again that if we use population, in fact, the changes that will need to be implemented would be less far-reaching than using eligible voters. The really significant one – recall that on the last one I showed you, of those constituencies which are more than 50 percent away from the average, there were five using eligible voter lists. Now, using the population list, there is only one constituency that is 50 percent away from the mean, and that is the constituency of Pincher Creek-Crowsnest in the very southwest corner of the province.

That's the last slide about this data regarding population and eligible voters. Does anyone have any questions that I maybe didn't make clear or that I went over too quickly?

MR. JOHNSON: Just one I've got is: where do Hutterite colonies fall in? Are they enumerated, and do they vote or do they not vote?

MR. BRUSEKER: Pat, perhaps you could answer that question.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: It depends on the colony. Generally, they are not people who vote. However, some of them do vote, and some of them are enumerated. It depends on the colony.

MR. BRUSEKER: If you used total population, they would all be included.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions for Frank? Yes.

MR. THOMPSON: I'd just like to know: who were the forces behind this? On August 15, 1989, when this motion was . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You mean why are we doing it?

MR. THOMPSON: Who were the forces behind it, or who made the motion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You may not have been here when Pat gave the background. There was a legal case in British Columbia.

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, but who brought it as a motion to the Alberta Legislature?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The three House leaders of the three parties represented in the House said that before we form a commission, because of what's happened in British Columbia and the turmoil that has thrown the whole process in not only in B.C. but in other provinces, we'd better get a group of MLAs to study the matter. One of the things that the committee's to do is to hold public hearings such as this one.

MR. THOMPSON: Just wanted that clarified.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else?

Okay, Bob, I think we're ready to go on to the first three presenters.

MR. PRITCHARD: I'd like to ask the presenters to just come up to the table here, and I'll call out the names of the first three: Bill Reister, Bill Mattinson, and Rod Krips.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Bill, we'll begin with you.

MR. REISTER: Mr. Chairman Bob Bogle and members of the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries and fellow concerned citizens of Alberta, my name is Bill Reister. I'm the reeve of the county of Flagstaff, and it is on behalf of county council that I am making this submission. I believe this is the last in a number of hearings – but I understand they've been added on now – that are scheduled to hear. Consequently, some of what I'm about to say you probably have already heard. If so, I encourage you not to let it fall on deaf ears but digest it with impartiality.

I would like to express our concerns in regard to your committee's mandate to establish a basis upon which the

electoral boundaries of Alberta would be drawn. Ample consideration should be given to the fact that much of this province's wealth is located in rural Alberta. I speak of our number one industry: agriculture. I speak of oil and gas, forestry, parks, wildlife, and so on. Rural Alberta must have an equal say in these resources, as they are in our backyards. It can only happen by having an equal voice in the Legislature.

Another concern for consideration is the actual area of rural electoral divisions versus those of urban divisions; that is to say, in comparison, the number of blocks for urban areas versus the larger number of townships for rural areas. Rural MLAs already have enough problems getting to all their areas of the constituency, and they have more local governments and boards to contend with than do the urban MLAs. Time, mileage, and personal energy spent on the execution of the rural MLA's duties can in no way be compared to that of an MLA of urban areas, whose constituency and constituents are concentrated in a small area.

We feel that if boundaries are changed using the percentage of population factor, this would leave Alberta in much the same position as western provinces are in regards to the rest of Canada. As recently as last fall we, the citizens of Alberta, elected a Senator in an attempt to alleviate this problem. Why, when we have the problem on the federal level, would we want the same problem at the provincial level? Your committee was set up "to establish a basis on which the citizens of Alberta may best be represented by their Members of the Legislative Assembly." Merging rural electoral constituencies together is not in the best interests of rural Alberta.

In light of these concerns, members of this committee, I'm here to say that the county of Flagstaff is opposed to any major changes to electoral boundaries in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Bill.

Questions from the committee members? Yes, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: I'll start it off. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill, thanks for the presentation. We know that whether we represent an urban constituency or a rural constituency, there's major rural depopulation going on not only in Alberta but throughout North America. You identify that there are more urban dwellers than rural dwellers. Currently, I believe, the numbers are something like 60-40 urban: 60 percent of the Alberta population residing in the city, 40 percent residing in rural Alberta. Currently the seats are split 50-50. Is there a point where you would suggest that if depopulation continues, we start changing the ratio between rural and urban constituencies?

MR. REISTER: No, I couldn't give you a figure on that.

MR. SIGURDSON: None at all? Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Any other questions from the committee? Anyone from the floor? Okay, just before we move on to our next Bill, I'm pleased to introduce to you Stockwell Day. Stockwell is the vice-chairman of this committee. He's also the Whip of the government caucus. In addition, he is the MLA for Red Deer-North and was in his constituency today because of the anticipated announcement regarding the Fletcher's plant by its board. So, Stockwell.

Okay. Bill.

MR. MATTINSON: Yes, I almost had a name change tonight, too, but we got it corrected.

Could I ask a question of Stockwell Day before I start, being as he wasn't here at the beginning?

MR. DAY: Hitting me right off the bat, are you?

MR. MATTINSON: On the slides I noticed they talked about Red Deer having two constituencies that were partially urban and partially rural. How is this working out - your ability to serve both populations?

MR. DAY: Well, I find it all right myself. As a matter of fact, I appreciate the fact that I'm dealing with what would be called urban issues but also have to be acquainted with the rural issues. It's funny to think that in a city constituency you have feedlots, for instance, and grain farmers, and yet that's a fact; it's just how it works in Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. Now, it's not a lot in terms of percentage, so I can handle it. I don't know what it would be if there were three times the amount, let's say, of farmers in the constituency that there are, but I find it's at a manageable level myself.

MR. MATTINSON: I'm Bill Mattinson, and I represent a number of committees in the community. Because we find that rural Albertans are having quite a struggle to retain their viability, we are banding together and seeking ways that we can gain some extra strength and some added clout that will help us to access and influence government that will help us to enhance our way of life. I'm appearing here tonight because I feel a proposed change to the boundaries might have a detrimental effect on what we're trying to do to correct the imbalance.

The select special committee has been given a major task to establish a basis on which Albertans may be represented by their MLAs or, conversely, on which MLAs may best represent their Albertans. To be meaningful, the review will seriously consider many factors that affect equal representation and endeavour to compensate for disadvantages relevant to Alberta's diverse circumstances such as distance and communication, as Bill already alluded to.

I feel that Alberta is made up of two distinctly different societies - not like Quebec, but we are distinctly different, urban and rural - each with different needs and concerns, each dependent on the other and equally important to the province's strength and viability. It would, therefore, seem appropriate to have each equally represented in the Legislature. The present distribution of 42 urban and 41 rural provides for this equality. How many urban ridings feel that they are underrepresented?

One option being put forth is the 25 plus or minus that we've been talking about, and we all know the populations that would be involved there. This appeared reasonable at first view, but let's look at another option. Let's look at territorial limitations. The problem is that Alberta has a landmass of approximately a quarter of a million square miles. If you divide that by 83, you come up with an average area of 3,000 square miles. Now, that fact would fit in very well for most of the rural ridings, but would this be fair to the urban? Of course it wouldn't. We're not sure that making boundaries based on population is fair to the rural people. I think we have to look at the two scenarios. If one isn't fair, then perhaps the other isn't either.

We hear a lot these days, especially in the media, about

minority rights, and rural Albertans are fast becoming minorities. I think we have to look at ways that we can stop that erosion. We talk about the MLA's ability to represent, and in order to represent any group meaningfully, we have to know and understand their points of view; we have to know their priorities, their concerns. This can only be achieved through communication, and it is well known that communication is much simpler to achieve in the urban ridings than in the rural ones for reasons that the former speaker already mentioned: mileage and all the municipal bodies you have to deal with.

Over the years Albertans have lamented about the significant influence exerted by the populous areas of central Canada to the detriment of the maritimes and Alberta. Alberta is championing the Triple E Senate approach. It would seem somewhat of a contradiction to support a revision of electoral boundaries in favour of the populous, more powerful urban centres which already possess a multitude of power and expertise with which they can access and influence government.

I realize that the courts became involved in B.C. and are apt to do likewise in Alberta if we don't make a move. I hope Albertans as a whole will grasp the need for equal representation, the one that we presently enjoy. The theory of one to one in equality does not always hold water. I favour retention of the present formula for electoral boundaries division.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Bill. Questions? Anyone else? Thanks very much.

Rod.

MR. KRIPS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Bob Bogle, committee members, I'm Rod Krips, and I'm here as a private citizen this evening. I have a short presentation.

As I view the role of the Alberta Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries, 1989, it is to gather information on the premise of one vote, one representation. How, then, do you define equal representation? Is it always based on the pure sense of population, or are there other factors that must be analyzed in order to make a true comparison?

In Alberta we have 41 rural constituencies and 42 urban constituencies. Although the 42 urban constituencies have a greater population than the 41 rural constituencies, the urban ridings are easier for the MLAs to administer than their rural counterparts. The logistics of looking after a rural constituency must be taken into consideration. For example, the Vermilion-Viking constituency is approximately 110 miles by 50 miles, with a voters list of some 10,711. The size negates having just one constituency office and requires a tremendous amount of travel to be an effective Member of the Legislative Assembly.

The Vermilion-Viking constituency contains four active treatment hospitals, three auxiliary hospitals, 17 schools, several county councils, and 10,711 voters, all of which require the ear of their MLA. Compare this to the urban constituencies, which may contain from zero to one hospital, five to 10 schools, and one city council and require one constituency office. Granted, the voters list may contain a range of between 15,068 and 31,536 voters, but these are contained in a very concentrated area. It does not require hundreds of miles of travel to meet constituents.

I would ask you to consider three points as you decide how the citizens of Alberta may best be represented by their numbers in the Legislative Assembly. One, I urge the committee not to recommend any changes and to consider option 1; that is, based

on current legislation and historic Alberta practice, which has led to the development of the current electoral boundaries. These boundaries are based on a redistribution rule of 42 urban and 41 rural divisions. Point two, the geographic and demographic factors of the rural constituencies, using Vermilion-Viking as an example, indicate that to increase their boundaries would make them unmanageable. Point three, the larger rural constituencies would severely handicap the Member of the Legislative Assembly to carry out his or her duties in a reasonable and responsible manner.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Rod.

Just before I ask if there are any questions, I'm pleased to welcome a neighbouring MLA, Derek Fox, who serves as the Whip for the New Democratic caucus in the Legislature. Welcome, Derek.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, any questions for Rod from the committee?

MR. DAY: Rod, I appreciate your presentation and concern about the size of the rural constituencies. In point one you recommend that there not be any changes. What about the prospect of an increasingly growing urban constituency, say, in Edmonton or Calgary, one that would be maybe approaching 32,000 right now? Keeping the rural constituencies the same size, would you have a problem with splitting an urban riding that was, say, 33,000 people?

MR. KRIPS: Splitting it into two?

MR. DAY: Exactly. Or taking two and making them three; not necessarily two for one.

MR. KRIPS: I haven't studied what the implications of that would be. I guess if the member is serving that constituency well now, would there be any need to redefine it?

MR. DAY: I guess the only way you'd find out if they're serving well is at election time. That complicates it a bit. Okay, thanks. I just wondered what your thoughts were on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: I've got one question, Mr. Chairman. If you take a look at the map and take a look at the constituency you cited, Vermilion-Viking, it has approximately 10,000 voters. If you take a look at the constituency of Fort McMurray, it's I don't know how many times larger than the constituency of Vermilion-Viking but almost double in electoral population. Would you argue that there ought to be two constituencies for Fort McMurray?

MR. KRIPS: Well, I believe that in Fort McMurray – correct me if I'm wrong – the population is more concentrated in that area up there, and therefore the representative for that area would not have to do the amount of travel. Okay?

MR. SIGURDSON: Let's move over, then, to Peace River.

MR. KRIPS: Maybe the same situation.

MR. SIGURDSON: It's not the same situation. This one is much more spread out. Or Grande Prairie: I'm trying to find something that's double in size and double in mass, and I'm trying to find if you would argue that your formula is consistent; that if you have the same population and the same mass, would you double the number of constituencies?

MR. KRIPS: I have no answer for you on that right now.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: For the audience, the numbers game is such that Vermilion-Viking fits almost in the middle. Of the 41 it's 19th in area, so there are 22 that are larger physically in area than Vermilion-Viking.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Pat.  
Yes, there was a question from the floor?

MR. DOBBIN: Yes. Back to your question, Tom, of Rod. Possibly in those two areas there may be one – maybe a task-oriented factor should be added in there. Had you cited Grande Prairie?

MR. SIGURDSON: Peace River, Grande Prairie, or Fort McMurray.

MR. DOBBIN: They may not have as many tasks for the MLA to do in his long travels. If you throw tasks in – as someone mentioned, the number of hospitals, the number of school boards, whatever. So a task-oriented factor may have to be included too.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Good. Thanks very much, Rod. Thank you, gentlemen.

MR. PRITCHARD: If we could have the next three presenters come forward, please: Doug Johnson, Bill Taylor, and Pamela Mykityshyn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Pam?

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: Chairman Bob Bogle, Hon. Steve West, hon. Derek Fox, members of the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries, on behalf of the Viking Chamber of Commerce, I petition the members of this special committee to very carefully consider the impact on rural Alberta as a whole and our constituency in particular if the boundaries are changed. Alberta has been in the forefront working towards an elected Senate to help redistribute the seat of power from the heavily populated areas of eastern Canada and to make all regions feel an equal part of Confederation. The redistribution of seats in the province would produce an urban versus rural imbalance as acute as east versus west in our Canadian picture. We truly want all parts of Alberta to feel that they have an equal voice in the future of this province.

Fair and equal representation can be viewed as more than just

one person, one vote. We need fair and equal access to our MLAs in order to have our needs properly brought before the government. Now we have 41 rural and 42 urban members, but our MLA, who represents under 11,000 individual voters, is supposed to be accessible to nine towns and villages, five counties and municipal districts, five school divisions, and four hospitals. His constituency covers 6,638.84 kilometres, and on top of this he's a cabinet minister. His time that could well be used with voters is used traveling between appointments. Increasing the rural boundaries would add to this already cumbersome burden.

The rural resident is fast becoming a minority. Our government shows a concern for minorities and often helps them overcome their feeling of inequality. It makes good economic sense to have more government services available in the urban areas and for us to travel to them, but we do need a local representative to acquaint us with the services available and help us through the red tape. Many times we are the only person in our area needing the special service, and locally we have access to our MLA one day a month.

As we enter this decade of environmental concerns, we will have to look to our MLAs to be advocates of our land rather than spokesmen for our people. Our land and our resources will need more care than our voters, and our MLA will have to be our steward.

We like to visualize Alberta as a strong, vibrant province, not just three or four pockets of economic wealth surrounded by dying small-town Alberta. Rather than seeing the rural population being further penalized by losing their elected voice, we would encourage the government to decentralize some of its services, such as the Department of Recreation and Parks is doing, and move to the outside areas, giving opportunities for employment to our rural youth. There are only so many dollars available for government projects. We need a fair shot at getting our allotment just to keep the services that we already enjoy accessible to our constituents. The rural constituent is already shouldering a heavier cost burden in postsecondary education and in special health care because of distances to available services. The costs of these the individual accepts; we don't expect public transportation or a college in every town or a W.W. Cross cancer hospital. What we do want is a strong rural voice in our Alberta Legislature.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Pamela.

Questions by the committee? Yes, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Pam, are you suggesting, then, that we just stay with the current boundaries the way they are? I think you said, "a strong voice." I guess I'm asking you what you mean by a strong voice.

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: Well, I would like that personally. I think that in order to have a strong province, we can't just have all the say in the urban areas. Our resources are out here. The interests of many people who are employed in the cities are really rural. They just happen to get their paycheques in the cities.

MR. BRUSEKER: The question I would ask, then, is . . . I represent one of those urban constituencies. Since the last redistribution my constituency has grown by 10,000 voters. There are a lot of houses scheduled, and conceivably by the next

redistribution after this one it could grow by another 10,000. So I guess I'm wondering: when do we change it? I mean, right now it's at just over 30,000. By the next time around it could be at 40,000. I don't know what the projected growth is for Vermilion-Viking, but I don't think it's going to grow quite as fast as my constituency. So when do we . . .

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: I guess what we're worrying about in the country is that our constituencies are losing ground rather than gaining at all. And we see that as we lose our voice and we lose government projects, we're going to lose population and we're going to get farther and farther behind. When you talk of growth, that sounds wonderful to the rural people. We would love to have 10 new people move to Viking. So by losing our government representative or having him more inaccessible to us, we look at you and we envy the fact that your constituency is growing. It's not happening in rural Alberta.

MR. BRUSEKER: I just think about the 2,000 more houses that I'm going to have to go knock on their doors.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.  
Anyone else? Yes, Stock.

MR. DAY: Pam, you're president of the chamber here in Viking?

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: No, I'm not. I'm secretary.

MR. DAY: Sorry; you're on the chamber here. You mentioned there are nine towns. Of those nine, how many would also have a chamber, or do you know? There would just be Viking?

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: Oh, no. Most of them would have a chamber, I would think.

DR. WEST: I would say there are six.

MR. DAY: Six anyway. I don't know, in a rural area, what kinds of demands a chamber puts on the MLA. I know in an urban setting like Red Deer they like to sit down with me, if they can, a couple of times a month. Would you like to sit down with this guy a couple of times a month, or do you? What kind of . . .

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: He's visited us twice in the last year, and both times we've appreciated the input. Well, I guess actually he came both Februaries. But yes, he has visited our chamber of commerce, and yes, we have appreciated it.

MR. DAY: So each town, then, having a chamber and each chamber wanting their MLA - is that what you're talking about? You're talking about equal access?

MRS. MYKITYSHYN: Well, I realize there's no such thing as equal access, because of distance. He can't be in Edmonton looking after Recreation and Parks and in Viking at the chamber of commerce at the same time. Although if he was in the city, he could do that, because he can do it in the evening.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, if I could just ask a question for clarification to the MLA for the area, for information. How long would it take - what's the traveling time from, say, a

meeting at the chamber in Killam and then they want you up at Vermilion? What's your traveling time? Driving the speed limit, of course.

MR. JOHNSON: Slightly under.

DR. WEST: To answer, it's about a hundred miles: 95 to 98 miles. So you can address that in your own car, but it takes an hour and a half at least to make that trip.

MR. DAY: Okay. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Anyone else? Anyone from the floor?

Thanks very much, Pamela.  
Ross.

MR. BROWER: Chairman Bogle, Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries, I represent the town of Viking for our mayor, Bill Taylor, and the members of council, as well as residents of this community.

At our regular meeting of Viking town council held on January 22, 1990, we discussed and opposed amendments to the electoral boundaries. Council unanimously supports maintaining the current distribution of 42 urban and 41 rural electoral divisions and feels that any major changes to this formula would negatively impact on rural Alberta.

The main purpose of the committee is to establish a basis on which Albertans may best be represented by their MLAs. The challenge is to define what is equality in representation. Fair or equal representation must be based on much more than the one person, one vote scenario. Allowances must be made for disadvantaged association with certain regions. The purpose of electing members to the Legislature should be to provide Albertans with equal access to Members of the Legislative Assembly for information and assistance, to express concerns which in turn will allow government to better understand the needs of all Albertans.

In recent years governments have seen the need to assist minorities in working towards equality. Revision of electoral boundaries in favour of urban ridings could be seen as a backward step to attaining equality. There are numerous instances in which mere numbers are disregarded. For example, property owners with vast holdings do not have more votes than the small or the non-owners.

An urban MLA representing numerous constituents living in close proximity can serve them all from one office, with no time-consuming travel required. There is one municipal council, perhaps one hospital board, and a few school boards under their jurisdiction. On the other hand, the rural MLAs must cover hundreds of square miles and have countless boards under their jurisdiction. For example, Vermilion-Viking encompasses nine towns and villages, five counties and municipal districts, five school divisions, and four hospital districts. It is thus more difficult to serve these approximately 11,000 constituents than those in the urban riding of twice that number.

Representation based purely on population is, therefore, not truly equitable. Larger urban centres already hold distinct advantages over the rural ridings in that in addition to their MLAs, they have their own clout based on sheer numbers, their highly trained and educated administrations, their access to competent legal advice, and their organized labour and strong business organizations which frequently lobby government to

address their particular interests.

The current distribution seems fair in that more densely populated urban ridings have a slight advantage: 42 to 41 seats or about 50.6 percent. It accepts the reality of Alberta's urban/rural character, each with unique and diverse concerns which are hence equally represented. It would, therefore, seem that any major deviation from the current ratio would seriously jeopardize the rural MLAs' ability to serve their constituents and rural Alberta's influence on policy, and it would be detrimental to the province as a whole. Urban boundaries should continue to be revised based on the 25 percent plus or minus in their relation to average urban riding populations.

The dramatic shift of population in recent years attests to the numerous advantages urban ridings have over their rural counterparts. We believe the fairest way to correct this imbalance would be to support initiatives that would reverse this trend. We reaffirm our support for maintaining the current distribution of urban/rural electoral divisions.

Yours truly, William R. Taylor, Mayor.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Ross.

Questions by the committee members? Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: One of the arguments that came out in the McLachlin decision was that there had to be equal representation in the Legislature, so that when a member casts their vote in the Legislature, it's equally weighted regardless of where a person lives in a province, whether it's urban or rural. We have situations in our province - I'll just take the bottom corner of the province. If we were to add Pincher Creek-Crowsnest, Macleod, and Cardston together - those three constituencies - their total voter population would not reach the voter population of Edmonton-Whitemud. So there, then, in the Legislature you have three MLAs representing approximately 30,000 people outvoting one MLA who represents over 30,000 people. Do you think that's equitable?

MR. BROWER: Probably not.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: One thing I want to point out - and I don't want to get into a debate with the colleagues on the committee, but we have a lot of inequities in the system. If we look at our federal House of Commons, Prince Edward Island has four seats in the House of Commons with a population that certainly doesn't warrant two, let alone four. We have two seats in the Northwest Territories. We have one in the Yukon. Special considerations have been given for those areas of very sparse population. In the case of P.E.I. it's because they have four Senators. An amendment was passed, I believe, Pat, some years ago in the Constitution to ensure that a province's representation in the House would not drop below that of its representation in the Senate. So there are anomalies in the situation.

MR. SIGURDSON: Based on the Constitution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there are anomalies. All right.  
Anyone else on the committee?

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah. Is it my turn, or can I just add to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You can add to that, Doug. You won't lose

your turn.

MR. JOHNSON: Okay. Just add to it that maybe scenic value should count when you're talking about this.

MR. SIGURDSON: I won't disagree with that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's what your MLA is telling us in the House all the time.

Anyone from the audience?

MR. DOBBIN: I came in late, but did you explain where we got the 42-41 rural in the first place?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, we didn't. It's important to recognize that there's been a gradual shift that's taken place over the last number of years. Pat, possibly you could give us some numbers.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Okay.

At the '79 and '82 general elections, we had at that point 79 members in the House. At that point we had 42 rural and 37 urban. It was based on general factors, such as four rural votes would equal seven urban votes. Of course, there's been depopulation in the rural area since that time, so the '83-84 commission was directed to establish the current 42 urban and 41 rural.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Derek, on this point.

MR. FOX: Just for the information of people at the hearing here, we tend to think of the word "urban" describing those who live in cities and "rural" describing those who don't live in cities. Several of the ridings that are now designated rural or considered rural are, in fact, largely urban in their population makeup: Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Wetaskiwin-Leduc, Spruce Grove, and Stony Plain, for example. So when used to describe electoral divisions, it's a term that doesn't mean quite the same as we think it does in everyday life. I just point that out for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, but it's key to remember that there's been a gradual shift. I think you could trace back to the creation of Alberta as a province, as our population became more urban, where we've seen more seats added in the urban areas and, sadly, consequently a decrease in the number of seats in the rural areas.

MR. DOBBIN: So the 42-41 was based solely on population?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. To go back to what Pat said, we had in Alberta an Alberta-made formula that roughly saw seven urban voters equal four rural voters.

MR. DOBBIN: How did we arrive at that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's something we are researching now as a committee to find out. It's been in place a long time. But it was to take into account geography, the number of communities, and the very things presenters tonight and at other hearings have told us.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Mr. Chairman, if I can just add another bit to that, the urban ridings were established at an

average and they had to fall within plus or minus 25 percent. There was no average for the rural ridings at the '83-84 commission.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, a question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Sorry, Stock.

MR. DAY: A question to – is it Mr. Bower? There's a water jug sitting there. I can't quite see. Brower. Okay.

Just as an example – you're from the town of Viking?

MR. BROWER: That's correct.

MR. DAY: If, as an example, the town of Viking needed a water treatment plant and you're looking for money from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, how many MLAs would you call on?

MR. BROWER: We'd be calling on our local MLA.

MR. DAY: Okay. If you ever get in a position where you call on him and he doesn't come up with the goods, it's interesting what happens in an urban riding just for your information. That is, if the town of Red Deer needs a water treatment plant, they automatically call on two, and two of us bang on that door up in Edmonton. If Calgary needs one, there are going to be about – well, given that the government MLAs win Frank over and get his support – 15 or 16 banging on the door. So you know what this guy here is up against. We're out knocking them as hard as we can.

MR. MATTINSON: I'd just like to make a comment. I notice the two urban members of the panel are in the firing line with all these shots taken from the rural people about this vast difference in population. I got the feeling from . . . Tom, in your remarks you said that in Edmonton-Whitemud you only get one vote to three out in the rural. I'm just wondering. I don't think you're getting the short end of the stick, or else there wouldn't be 10,000 people running into one of your constituencies within a year. I think that takes away from the need. You don't really need the clout in that respect in the Legislature, because you've enough things going for you that you're getting people streaming into your area anyway. Three votes in the Legislature don't get rural Alberta three times the clout you do in Edmonton.

MR. SIGURDSON: I don't propose to get into debate with you at the moment.

MR. MATTINSON: I'm saying that's just one area that's not really . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: As I say, I don't propose to get into debate with you at the moment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Doug.

MR. JOHNSON: I've just got one comment to make before I start my presentation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll call it part of your presentation. The clock is ticking. Go ahead, Doug.

MR. JOHNSON: Okay.

We in rural Alberta, along with most of the smaller cities and towns and whatever, kind of live and die with the farmer, and in the urban centres they live and die with the LRT.

Hon. Chairman and members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, I thank you for the opportunity of addressing this review committee and for the privilege of submitting a brief to the select committee on electoral boundaries. I have come here tonight representing no special interest groups or council, although I have been and still am very involved in all aspects of my community's life. I suppose I would classify myself as a basic grass-roots and ordinary concerned taxpayer and resident of the province of Alberta. When I became aware of these hearings, I had originally planned to attend the one held in Hanna, but because of a medical appointment for my younger son which conflicted with the date, I find myself traveling four times as far to attend this one. I consider these hearings to be of the utmost importance and not to be taken lightly.

While recognizing the democratic principle of one person, one vote and the fundamental principle of representation by population, it has become very apparent that there are flaws within this system. These flaws apply to the province of Alberta, just as they do to the Confederation of Canada. A number of years ago the federal government of Canada imposed, because of its makeup at the time, a very unfair tax on Alberta's natural resources. The Canadian government of the day was able to do this because it was basically a majority government elected by only two out of 10 provincial populations. This is a prime example of representation by population not working. Although supposedly having some built-in checks and balances, our democratically elected government took from one area of the country and gave to another area.

I have unfortunately had firsthand experience of the problems associated with living in a low-population area. I live in the far corners of three municipal jurisdictions whose boundaries also coincide with the boundaries of three provincial electoral districts. While having vast and varied natural resources and paying some of the highest taxes per capita in Alberta, we have trouble getting our views and problems addressed by various levels of bureaucracy.

When discussing the changing of electoral boundaries, it would be very easy just to give the urban populations more seats at the expense of the rural voter, but this would just compound the problems as I see them. Already we have more urban seats as compared to rural ridings, and yet we do not have a close enough population count to give every voter the same power of the ballot. As these hearings have progressed, you have become more aware of the problems faced by rural residents and their MLAs concerning distance and time, just as you also have become further aware of the urban problems related to your MLA duties. It would be nice if instead of representing a certain sector of Alberta's population, you could truly represent all Albertans more evenly. It would also be reasonable to hope our government would not get any larger, as our tax load is getting a tad heavy. For these reasons I propose a whole different concept of electoral boundaries.

Instead of having rural and urban ridings, why not have the divisions in the shape of a wagon wheel, with all electoral divisions having roughly the same split of urban and rural voters? By rural votes, I would consider most towns under

5,000, along with some of our smallest cities, to be mostly rural in their thinking and problems. True, some of these divisions would be rather long in mileage, but each MLA would face the very same problems and would not be guaranteed election by just addressing the concerns of a small group of voters. Every MLA could honestly say that they were truly elected by a majority of Albertans rather than by a certain part of a city or rural area and hopefully would understand all the problems concerning the people they represent.

I realize this concept of drawing boundaries is rather a new approach, but if you do not consider all the ideas put forward at these hearings, you may as well save the time and money. We in Alberta have always been considered politically at the forefront of change in Canada. To have the first provincial government members that are truly representative of the populations they serve would be unique.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Doug.

Questions from the panel members? Yes, Stock.

MR. DAY: That is a unique suggestion. We haven't run into that one yet, Doug. How many wagon wheels would you see in the province, if I can use the analogy?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, you'd have to use seven or eight probably. You'd have to define where they should run. Some would be shorter than others but would encompass . . . Like pieces of pie: some would be a little jagged, all right. But at least you would not just be, like you say, knocking door to door; some of you guys would be on the horse type of thing, out in the country here. Also, you wouldn't be guaranteed election just by, you know, talking or being with a certain part of the population. You would truly understand what goes on in the backwoods just as you understand what goes on in the middle of the town.

MR. DAY: Okay. Thanks. It's an interesting idea.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? The audience?

Thanks very much, Doug.

MR. JOHNSON: Oh, you're welcome.

Could I just point out one more thing before I leave?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure. Go ahead.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm in the constituency of Stettler. At the present time we have four major towns, eight major villages, two summer villages, perhaps between 12 and 14 hamlets, just depending on how many people you think live in a hamlet anymore, and 4,500 other voters at large. To make that area any bigger and to service that area is going to be a bit hard to do. We've already got four different telephone exchanges, all of them long distance. Each one of those towns and summer villages, plus the villages, has a council. You know, four different school divisions, so . . . And this is for one MLA to deal with. It's not just like you can go and talk to three or four people. You're going to be pretty busy when you get this job done.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Doug.

MR. PRITCHARD: Could we have the next three come forward, please? Heather Hill, Michael Barlott, and Kent Staden.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Welcome. Heather, would you like to lead off?

MS HILL: Okay.

Mr. Chairman, committee members, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Heather Hill, and I'm here representing the Vegreville provincial New Democrats. It is our belief that the provincial Legislature should remain the same size, with the 83 electoral divisions. What we would like to see is the constituencies more evenly represented so there would be the same number of eligible voters in each constituency, with a variability of about plus or minus 25 percent.

We gave a lot of consideration to boundaries when we had our meeting, and geographic boundaries play an important role. North of Vegreville, for instance, is the North Saskatchewan River, and west of the riding is Elk Island National Park. These are natural boundaries, shall we say; they tend to split the people. So geographic boundaries would be a choice when considering how the constituency should be split. Also area: if all the constituencies are equally distributed, if there's the same number of voters, then the size, of course, is going to increase. In Vegreville, for example, we have three constituency offices. One is located in Two Hills, one is in Vegreville, and one is in Tofield. So if the area was increased in the southwest to include the county of Beaver, for instance, on the corner there, they would have the same representation as a person up in Two Hills or people in Vegreville because there are constituency offices throughout the riding.

Vegreville has a primary industry of agriculture. So if the boundaries were extended to the south, let's say, or the east, you would be including people who had a common economic base with the other people in the riding. That's an important consideration as well.

Trading patterns are also something that should be looked at by the committee. To the east of Vegreville are Innisfree and Ranfurly. They're currently in the Vermilion-Viking constituency, but these people trade with the people in Vegreville. An example of this is that when AGT offered their extended flat rate calling, they chose to deal with Vegreville because that's where they normally do all their business. So trading patterns are an important consideration when you're choosing the boundaries in constituencies.

As well, Vegreville is known provincially, nationally, and internationally as well as a distinct cultural identity, and this is another consideration when boundaries are chosen. On the northeastern corner of the Vegreville riding but on the Lloydminster side, these people have a historic background that's common with the people in Two Hills and common with the people in Vegreville and the people south of the North Saskatchewan River, for that matter. So we would also like to see cultural identity included in your decisions when you make boundaries.

When the boundaries are chosen, we would like to see a boundaries commission set up. The people on this commission should be maybe the Chief Electoral Officer, a member chosen by the government, and a member chosen by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Finally, the Vegreville New Democrats feel that this commission should hold public hearings before and after drafting the

revised boundaries so all the people in the constituencies would have an opportunity to express their concerns.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Heather.

Questions?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah, just one with respect to constituency offices. Heather, you said there are three constituency offices in the constituency of Vegreville. One of the things this committee has the opportunity to do is make recommendations to other bodies of government, I suppose. Would you argue that other large, sparsely populated constituencies should have an increase in their budgets to accommodate more constituency offices and constituency services for their population?

MS HILL: Does their caseload demand it? I don't know how many people are going through their door every day.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, I wonder about . . .

MS HILL: I guess in order to be fair to all the people in the riding, it would only be fair that the money be provided so the elected member can represent all the people. So yes, I wouldn't mind seeing more money put aside for that.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Yes, Pat.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Heather, as I understood your brief, you're recommending that we divide the province using the average, plus or minus 25 percent?

MS HILL: Plus or minus 25 percent, yes.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Now, you appreciate that that could have an impact on the number of rural ridings in that they would be reduced. You'd get quite a domino effect. In fact, we've been given scenarios where the number of rural would be reduced by nine, 10, 11 seats.

MS HILL: But they would still be representing the same number of people.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Uh huh. But you can appreciate that many of the rural ridings as we now know them – say nine, if we use that figure – would disappear, so you would be looking at completely different boundaries. You'd be looking at a completely different rural amount.

MS HILL: That's correct.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just to add to that, notwithstanding your remarks, there's no guarantee that Vegreville would be one to survive. It may not.

MS HILL: That's true; it may not.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fair enough.  
Anyone else?

MR. DAY: Did you check with your MLA on that one?

MS HILL: Vermilion-Viking may go. Clover Bar may go, you know.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No problem there.

MS HILL: Whatever. Redwater-Andrew . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.  
Michael.

MR. BARLOTT: I'm Michael Barlott, reeve of the county of Minburn, and I represent that county.

Mr. Chairman, the members of the council of the county of Minburn No. 27 are pleased to be given the opportunity to express their views and suggestions on the review of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The county council are aware as to the B.C. Supreme Court decision, ruling that the B.C. system of electoral boundaries violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The consensus of the county council is that if at all feasible, have the rural electoral boundaries in Alberta remain as is, but definitely the assurance that rural representation does not decrease.

If the population scheme is the formula, we wish to note the following concerns. The MLAs in some rural ridings will have unreasonably large constituencies, thus losing true representation to one's electorate. Urban representation will increase and the rural representation will decrease, which undoubtedly would result in a lack of understanding of rural needs as legislation could become too urban oriented.

Trusting the committee will take due note of our comments, sincerely, the county of Minburn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Michael.

Questions from the committee members? None from the audience? Thank you.

Kent.

MR. STADEN: Mr. Chairman Bob Bogle and members of the provincial electoral boundaries review committee, I'm Kent Staden. I'm representing the council for the village of Mannville.

Rather than reiterate what has been said here tonight by previous speakers – and I feel a lot of their comments were very warranted – it's Mannville's point of view that the existing system of government is working; it's working well. We still foresee that it will work well in the future. Our point of view is that until such time that it appears it is not working well, why fix it?

I believe Bill Mattinson pointed out previously that the two societies, urban and rural, are two distinct societies. I think that has to have some formula that can achieve representation and the requirements of both those societies. The tasks that are required have been mentioned earlier, and I think that comes into play where possibly our urban representatives have to . . . I guess our MLAs must know if they're now able to represent those populations where possibly there are 40,000. If they increase to 50,000 or 60,000 – as Frank had previously mentioned, that he may be getting there – will he still be able to represent them? And if in fact they can be well represented, then maybe that's the situation, that it can be 60,000 to 10,000 because of those requirements and the tasks those MLAs are

required to perform.

Basically Mannville appreciates the work in decentralization that our Minister of Recreation and Parks has been looking at. It's something that the trend is going to, and I feel we still will go that way to urban 'populization.' It has a great impact when we do receive it in the rural areas such as Wainwright, et cetera. It's a real boost to the local economy, whereas centralization certainly doesn't have that impact. They're going to succeed as is.

We want to be able to stay away from the strict east versus west where we're situated now in Canada, where it would possibly be urban versus rural. I think we have to look at Alberta as a whole, as a unique province where we can be the leaders in establishing and setting a new precedent for the rest of Canada: we're not versus each other; we're Albertans.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Kent.

Questions from the panel? Yes, Stock.

MR. DAY: Could I ask a question, Kent? Something just struck me – and I haven't asked it at any of the sessions – in terms of expectancy of rural constituents seeing their MLA. Let me give you an example. I had a call this morning. I had a day of meetings; different things were lined up, but somebody phoned and said, "Have you got 20 minutes?" I said, "I've got exactly 25 until my next appointment." They lived on the furthest extremity of Red Deer-North. They said, "I'll leave now," and they were there in seven minutes. So it's not a major problem for somebody to hop in their car and come and see the MLA, or for someone to call and ask me to drop in at their business because of the proximity.

Because of the distance factor, is there a feeling of reluctance, let's say, for someone in Mannville to call their MLA and say, "I'd like you to drop in here for 20 minutes; I've something I want to show you"? Is there a feeling of reluctance or is there a feeling of demand, "You're the MLA and you've darned well got to be here"?

MR. STADEN: I'm not sure how to answer that as yet, Stockwell.

MR. DAY: Like, does the distance factor cause people to hesitate to phone their MLA if they've got to get together with him?

MR. STADEN: To a point it does. It depends on how organized those two individuals are and the reasons. I see the need occurring a lot more living in both an urban and a rural constituency, actually in four constituencies altogether – that's myself. The need has occurred to discuss a lot more with an MLA in a rural situation. Now, certainly that distance is a factor. But I see that the task or the requirement to discuss items with your MLA seems to be more prevalent in a rural area, and that's where I see that it may deter that representation if there's too much emphasis put on this magical 25 plus or minus.

MR. CHAIRMAN: From the floor first, and then Tom.

MR. DOBBIN: I wouldn't have a problem calling my MLA just because he's far away. How he responds would depend on what the problem is and where he is at the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.  
Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just a follow-up question to the answer. I'm puzzled, sir. You'll have to help me out here. How is it that you feel that a rural resident requires greater attention from their MLA than an urban person?

MR. STADEN: I believe the speaker on my far left . . . Possibly it's those geographic areas in which you have many times a different segment of cultures, et cetera. You may very well get those in Edmonton or in Calgary. It's the makeup of the various activities that are going on within the community. I think there's an increased number of activities in a rural area as opposed to an urban setting, where your activities are provided within a community league, et cetera.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else?

MR. JOHNSON: If I could just add to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. JOHNSON: By being a rural resident, you might have a problem with oil companies one day. The next day you might, by being a rural resident, have a problem with access to your land by hunters or fisherman or whatever. You also might, by being a rural resident, have a problem if you've got some Crown land and have to hire a lawyer. So within a span of one day, as an MLA you might have to deal with that same resident over not only three or four different things but it might go on. Now, most of us aren't that troublesome, but you know, sometimes you've got to do it, and sometimes you don't live too close to the centre or to the middle of the access of the MLA.

MR. DOBBIN: Also, in the city you may have 15 or 20 people you could call for a given problem, whereas in the rural areas you may only have one or two between yourself and the MLA.

MR. SIGURDSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to respond. One of the things we've heard frequently on our travels is that a rural member of the Legislature has X number of hospital boards, X number of school boards, X number of towns and councils and villages and ID councils and irrigation districts, and then 10,000 constituents. It seems that everybody – again, from a sort of very narrow perspective perhaps – seems to fit into one of those groups or another. So if you live in the town of Vulcan, you might go to your town council if it's a town problem, or if it's a problem with irrigation, you might deal with the irrigation and then you might move on to your rep. But you know who it is. In some of the urban areas, where you've got your MLA and perhaps one alderperson, one school board trustee in a given area and 31,000 people, they may not know and probably don't know who the school board trustee is. They may not know who the alderperson is. If it's a problem about a hospital, they may not go to the hospital board, because they don't know who the hospital board is, but go directly to the MLA. Sometimes I've thought, gosh, wouldn't it be nice if I had a buffer zone?

MR. DAY: Just further to what Tom's saying is an observation I've made at meetings, whether an urban meeting like this or

rural. You know, all of us are upset about representation in Canada because of the population centre in eastern Canada. There's a lot of animosity between us here in Alberta and the folks down there in central Canada. I would never want to see that animosity develop in Alberta between people living in the country, so-called, and people living in the city. If it does help you understand at all, first of all, I look at my rural colleagues and scratch my head sometimes and say, "I don't know how they do it." But in the same breath, I look at my urban colleagues, and just to let you know, these guys and ladies work their boots or loafers off equally as hard. If you measure it out in hours and stress and pressure, I don't think you'd find a difference. So I don't want you to feel that one batch of MLAs has it easy and the other has it hard. They all work hard. As far as these opposition members, I wish they didn't work as hard as they did, because then we'd have an easier time next time around. But just to let you know, so you have a sense for the urban representatives, they have a huge workload too. The concerns are the same that we're hearing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. DOBBIN: My name's John Dobbin, by the way, and I live in the country. I appreciate your comments. If everything's so equal, why are we changing it? What's the big deal?

MR. DAY: Well, that's what we're out to find out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The big deal is that if it had not been for the court case in British Columbia, chances are we would have struck a commission during our last sitting. That would have been in keeping with our own legislation to redistribute our boundaries after every two general elections. We'd gone through general elections in 1986 and 1989, and the commission would be doing its work right now. But because of the ramifications of the court case, we were asked by the Legislature to consider all factors and try to ensure that whatever recommendations we bring back are challenge-proof. A better way to phrase it, because we may be challenged regardless of what we do, is that it would withstand a challenge using the Charter of Rights as a basis. That's why we're here.

MR. BRUSEKER: And we're reasonably certain that if we don't make any changes, there will be a challenge and the courts will impose it upon us and we'll have no say. So we figured it's better to try to do it ourselves rather than have someone else impose it upon us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Steve.

DR. WEST: I was just going to say that an interesting thing went through my mind when you were coming up about representation and the vast mosaic, I guess, of needs in a rural constituency; again, with the problems you have with a high population and an urban density in just getting around from door to door. Coupled with that is one of the problems that would evolve in Alberta if we allow it. That has to do with the federal government. I spend an awful amount of time doing federal issues, because their representation by population makes their riding in Alberta so huge in geographic nature that they use the MLA to go after UIC and pensions. Anybody, whether urban or rural, will be shaking their head yes, because we feel a responsibility to our constituents and we deal with the federal

issues too. That's because Canada in its distinct nature, too, has not addressed this with their representatives, and that's the problem we have right now. Our MPs have constituencies too big to serve the people with the programs and are too far away from it lest we do that here in Alberta.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Steve.

MR. PRITCHARD: Our last presenter for the evening is John Hunter. If you'd come up, John, please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We haven't missed anyone? There's no one else who intends to give a brief tonight?

MR. WILSON: Mr. Chairman, I don't have a written brief, but I would like to make a comment or two.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, would you like to come forward?

MR. WILSON: Sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: John, we'll proceed with you first.

MR. HUNTER: Yes. I'm here representing the county of Beaver. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity of addressing you this evening. In our January meeting we had passed a resolution, followed by a letter which went to Mr. Larry Goodhope. The basis of the letter was dealing with the question of boundaries. At this point I think I'll just go through and read the meat of the letter, which is basically the county of Beaver council's submission on the matter.

It is suggested to you as the council that you maintain the position that further boundary reorganization resulting in less representation from the county of Beaver and rural areas in general be opposed on the basis of the following. The MLAs in rural areas are required to travel extensively within their constituency over a number of miles, which places an increased time load on such MLAs. To extend their boundaries further would result in less efficient representation from the people located in that constituency. Secondly, to reduce the number of rural MLAs would reduce the general representation of the rural population within the Legislature, thereby giving more weight to urban interests, which may be diverse from those of rural areas. The government should recognize that there are differences in ways of life and interests distributed between the urban and rural areas, and have a duty to preserve the rural way of life.

That, gentlemen, is the basic submission. I might make a few other comments in regard to that. I think as the county council saw it, looking at the position of the MLAs, the concern was effectiveness and accessibility to the MLA and also preserving rural interests. You've had a number of people address you here this evening who have dealt with those issues, basically saying we don't want to have our regional interests reduced. Our county and county council look to the MLAs for a number of things in the way of advice, and we have certain demands placed on us in the area of economic development. The MLA's time is very valuable, and it's certainly something that isn't readily accessible. If we are going to affect distribution under the present numbers and reduce the number of MLAs serving the rural population, our job is going to be more difficult in getting access to government.

In the position of economic development these days, you can't proceed without the help of government. You chaps are in

there, and basically the rules fall by you. Any major expansion, whether it be through the Environment department on the basis of grants and so on – it's crucial. To reduce representation to the rural people who are trying to make a go of it in my opinion is not fair. Government policy has recognized regional diversity, the most noted one being the Recreation and Parks expansion to rural areas, so I think it's obvious to most people that the government has a concern to protect the rural area and to make it grow.

The form of the letter and some of the other conversation that was going around – I may have a question for the committee. Keeping in mind that we want accessibility and want to do a good job and it's obvious from what we're hearing tonight that you chaps are very, very busy, is it the committee's feeling that the number of seats should be expanded on the basis of workload or on the basis of strictly representation?

MR. CHAIRMAN: John, we very deliberately as a committee have not sat down to begin our deliberations. I'm not saying that as a cop-out; I'm saying it because to give full respect to the hearing process, it would be unfair to those communities we are visiting last if we began to formulate opinions and draw conclusions before that part of the task had been completed. So while each of us, I'm sure, are developing ideas in our own minds, we have not sat down as a committee to formally discuss them, and we won't do that till we finish the last of our hearings.

MR. HUNTER: I think I've got some wrapping up. The interests of the county of Beaver were somewhat general. I don't think we are concerned whether you expand your Legislature to increase the number of members so the city members have their workload reduced or there's more accessibility for members of the cities to their member. But I think on a general basis we don't want to see our influence or our level of service presently provided by government reduced. If you fellows can come to a conclusion to preserve the rural life-style and the rural influence on a realistic basis and take care of your 30,000 city people in one constituency by including another member, I don't think we as a county have a problem with that. We perceive government services as very important, as opposed to changing boundaries and eliminating MLAs for the rural population: we do not see that as a benefit to our group.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, John.

Questions from the panel? Anyone else? Okay, thank you. Ralph.

MR. WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was listening with interest to each of the presentations that have been made. I felt some empathy with Mr. Johnson particularly, because he, too, is a farmer and has a background in agriculture, as opposed to these people who are representing small towns, villages, or municipal districts. After all, it has been brought out that agriculture along with the other resource industries is basic to the province and should have the representation it deserves.

Now, I don't find too much fault with the boundaries the way they are at the present time. If they must be changed, so be it. But we have a long-standing situation, as has been suggested, of 7 versus 4, which I imagine would, if the judgment of the hon. justice is taken into consideration, go by way of the board. I feel that the people who suggested this 7-4 ratio probably had their heads screwed on fairly straight, because they realized the situation that has been brought out by the previous speakers,

that we do have a unique situation, that we are not . . . I think of our present Vermilion-Viking MLA, Dr. West. Someone has said he's got about the average size of the rural riding to traverse. Now, it takes him just about all day to drive around the darn thing. What would it be like for a bigger one? I know; I was a candidate one time, and I've done a little bit of campaigning. I know. And as far as knocking on doors is concerned, even if you've got 30,000 people to call on, which I think is too many, if they're all in several blocks together, you can still do it. But I challenge you, any of you, to go out and call on every farmhouse in a constituency such as Steve has here and meet every person and shake his hand. You can't do it, not within the confines of the time they have that is set aside for campaigning.

Therefore, if we look to your terms of reference on your sheet here,

The Select . . . Committee on Electoral Boundaries will consider:

- a) the appropriateness of the provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act;
- b) the implications of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for electoral boundaries and the distribution of constituencies,

the first part of the second here, "the implications of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms," I take it would mean that we have access to our MLA and the MLA has access to his people. If you make these boundaries any larger, Mr. Chairman, this will be denied. The access to him will be denied his constituents. I feel we have a very legitimate point. Others have brought up the matter of western alienation from the east as a parallel to what we could face here in Alberta, and it's a valid point. I think it's something you should take into consideration.

You have your bottom matters:

- e) any geographic, demographic, and other factors that should be considered in the distribution of constituencies and the determination of their boundaries;
- f) the impact of the determination of the constituency boundaries on the ability of Members of the [Legislature] to fully discharge their duties . . .

I think I brought out this matter: that it is incumbent upon the MLA to be able to talk to his constituents, and it should be a right of every constituent to be able to talk with his MLA.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Ralph.

Questions from the committee? Anyone else from the floor?

MR. WILSON: There's one question that was asked of some others regarding what we think we should do with the burgeoning constituencies in the city. Now, it could very well be – I haven't even thought about it until tonight – a matter of redistribution in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. Undoubtedly there are some inequalities that could be . . . The addition of a few extra MLAs, and they would still fall within the 7-4 ratio, I think is reasonable.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Ralph.

Last time: any questions? Anyone else? Okay, thank you very much, Ralph and John.

MR. WILSON: Thank you for the opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Wrap-up comments by panel members? Stock.

MR. DAY: If I could just . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a second, Stock. Yes?

MR. LUKAWIECKI: Mr. Chairman, I'm Albin Lukawiecki from the Holden area. I've heard this has been well documented and well represented as far as great distances that are going to be experienced by the rural MLAs. I guess I'm going to make the comment and ask you the question - I'm sure you've thought of it. I think accessibility to our MLA is very important, and I hope that you, the select committee, use modern technology that we have today to have accessibility. It's nice to meet my MLA, Mr. Fox, and shake hands with him and tell him what I really think of things, and he can tell me. However, if he's going to spend his time traveling, or if Dr. West has a meeting in Killam and he's got to be another hundred miles in Vermilion, if he's going to travel in weather like we had on Sunday here and he's got to get back to Edmonton because he's got his cabinet duties, he's going to become a worn-out man. I think if we used our modern technology - I'm sure we all watch news and we see how an anchorperson sitting in Toronto can speak to almost anyone in the world and ask questions, and they converse back and forth. I as a constituent in the constituency of Vegreville would be happy if the MLAs throughout the province, especially these rural areas, had time set so I could converse with my MLA, whether it be on an individual basis or at a meeting, instead of, say, him having to travel to Tofield and Two Hills and Vegreville. So from a set place in Edmonton, he could converse with us and we could speak on the same terms as we see the news every day.

I think that type of accessibility . . . I'm wondering if the select committee has thought about - well, I'm sure they must have; at least I hope they would - using all the modern technology. We have distance education. I think most of you are familiar with that. It's allowing our children to stay in our small communities yet get the best educational instruction possible. That's modern technology that has made that. I'm hoping they will consider that and maybe that will alleviate and sort of help in this accessibility.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's been raised many times in previous meetings.

I'll just turn to Tom and Frank and others on the committee, if they wish to supplement.

MR. SIGURDSON: Again, this committee will have the opportunity to make recommendations to other committees of the government in terms of providing services that will facilitate the accessibility of the MLA to their constituents and vice versa. Quite frankly, the Alberta government has had a generous allowance for MLAs relative to other provincial jurisdictions. There are still improvements that may be made. Currently there is not provision for fax machines so that you could take a letter to your MLA, have it faxed from the constituency office to the city of Edmonton, and have it faxed back within a short period of time. Nor is there provision for automobile telephones, mobile telephone communications. We do have modern technology that would facilitate and enhance the role we can play, and I'm sure recommendations will be coming forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a slight correction, Tom. You can access out of your constituency allowance funds for both the mobile telephone and the fax machine, but they are part of your global constituency office budget.

Frank, anything to add to that?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. You know, if boundaries are drawn so that constituencies get larger - Derek, for example, already has three constituency offices. He's got to squeeze that out of his constituency budget, which is based upon, first of all, just a base figure and then add-ons for communication budgets. My communication budget's going to be a little larger because I have more people to send letters to and so forth. But every one of us has a budget we work from, and perhaps what we can do is make a recommendation that in the rural areas where communication is a problem, one of the suggestions might be to have a toll-free number into your constituency office so that if you want to get hold of him, not only can you get hold of him but you don't even have to pay long-distance charges. That could be a recommendation that might come forward. Whether or not the Members' Services Committee agrees with that remains to be seen, but that's the type of thing I think we should be considering in light of the concerns that have been raised here tonight.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else on that point?

MR. LUKAWIECKI: I think of such terms, Mr. Chairman, as "teleconferencing" and things of that nature. I know it's a cost, but democracy costs money. If we want to have good representation, I hope you'll use the most modern technology so we have that representation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Last call. Anyone else? Okay, Stock can wrap up.

MR. DAY: Kent raised a question that I'd just like to address and maybe give you some assurance. The chairman's already touched on it. That is, Kent asked us what we were going to do. It's our mandate to approach this whole question with an open mind. Mr. Johnson brought up an innovative idea, a wagon-wheel type of distribution. As I sat here when he first said those words, my initial reaction was, well, that won't work. I thought to myself, well, why won't it? I said to myself, well, because I've never heard of it before. Then I realized: wait a minute; you know, each thing has to be assessed. And we are approaching things that way. To give you an example - I'll just leave this with you - we've made reference to the B.C. Supreme Court ruling. I want you to know that even though that weighs on our thinking, to keep an open mind, we are not saying we are even necessarily bound by that ruling. We've had at least two presentations from lawyers that I'm aware of suggesting that Alberta has a unique history and a unique tradition and background and, in fact, let's maintain our historical setup as we have it and be willing to have a challenge and go all the way to the Supreme Court with it. So we don't want you to feel that we are being driven in an absolute sense by that Supreme Court ruling or anything else. We truly are approaching this with an open mind and trying to sort everything out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Stock.

Any of the other committee members first? Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a brief comment. Stock led nicely into what I was going to say. First of all, I'd like to thank everyone for coming out tonight. We heard a number of people say tonight that they'd like things to stay just as they are. Thank you

very much.

I suspect that one way or another we're going to see some changes either directed by this committee or perhaps imposed by a Supreme Court decision. We have had a number of presentations that say if we leave things as they are and the Supreme Court makes a ruling, they will probably look very strongly toward the British Columbia ruling and probably would impose some changes. However, having said that, as a native Albertan born and raised and proud to say it, I look forward to hopefully making, if we can, recommendations which would help rural Albertans. Even though I've lived in Edmonton and Calgary - I'm ashamed to say it in this crowd, but I've lived in Edmonton and Calgary all my life - I have a bit of a rural background from my family as well, and I would like to see the rural way of life maintained in Alberta every bit as much as rural Albertans even though I don't live in the area. So don't think we're gunning for you, but we may have to make some recommendations for change.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Frank.  
Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Last night in Fort McMurray I heard a presentation - one that I quite concurred with that hadn't been put in so many words ever before in any of the previous presentations - and that was it was about time we got rid of the designations of urban and rural, because we seem to be pitting Albertans against Albertans, and about time we had 83 constituencies.

When we look at the problems we're facing, we come out into smaller communities and discuss rural depopulation. Depopulation doesn't just mean the people disappear. They go somewhere. They end up in urban centres. They end up in urban centres with problems that are brand new to urban MLAs and brand new to the urban environment. And there is a very strong rural flavour. There's a great deal of problems there as well. Those problems have to be addressed. Last night's proposal that we get rid of the rural/urban, we/they situation I think has a lot of merit. It's one that I hope we'll be able to address, because we all are Albertans regardless of where we live. I think what we try and do is going to be in the best interests of our province and the people who reside here.

That's all. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Tom.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: I can only echo some of the previous comments. I appreciate the work the presenters went to, and I'd like to compliment you on the excellent manner in which you presented your thoughts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Pat.

Derek, are there any comments you'd like to make? Then I'm going to go to Steve.

MR. FOX: Well, Mr. Chairman, just to say I hope the committee members are impressed with the calibre and the number of presentations made here. There's obviously great concern among rural Albertans about what will happen to us through the process of redistribution. I think our association, as represented by Heather's presentation tonight, feels there are two extremes in the debate. One of the extremes is that things don't change. I think we have to recognize that they will change. The other

extreme is that all ridings would be exactly the same size based on population. I think what we have to do is insist that if change is going to occur it not be based solely on population, that other things that are important in rural areas be considered, things like geography, trading patterns, history of an area. The 25 percent model is something that's been used in other jurisdictions and maybe one the committee wants to look at. But certainly if that impacts on certain ridings being changed or certain ridings disappearing, those kinds of decisions will be made in the future. I can assure you that if changes are going to be made to the Vegreville riding in the future, I'm going to be there recommending loud and clear that the riding maintain its distinct identity. If areas need to be added to make the constituency a little bit larger, then that's something that would be considered at the time. But I think the committee's got a very difficult challenge, and that is to effect some change, being as sensitive as possible to the needs and concerns of Albertans.

I appreciate the work that you're doing, Mr. Chairman, and I think you've heard loud and clear the concerns of rural Albertans here tonight.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Derek.  
Steve. And then I'll try to sum up.

DR. WEST: Thanks, Bob, and I want to reiterate what Derek just said on the fine representation that we've had here tonight. It makes me very proud for my area and the area surrounding. We have constituencies, I think, with the same concerns, if you look at Vermilion-Viking and that it sits in the centre - almost like the centre of that wheel you talked about, Doug - but everybody on either side has the same problem with density. So if indeed the purest of thoughts went through, there would have to be somebody leave, and that would be the tragedy.

I'm not going to go into the task that rural MLAs have compared to other Albertan MLAs. Suffice to say it's been covered fairly well, and I'm sure this committee has heard it across the province.

But back in the beginning the fathers of Confederation addressed a system that acknowledged the distinct nature of Canada, some 4,000 to 5,000 miles across. At that time only Upper and Lower Canada had a concentrated population, and they sat in a bicameral house which had an upper and lower House: a Senate and the House of Commons as we know it today. Of course, in 1897 they pointed out that we'd be here today, whether it be provincially or whether it be as a country. We laid off too long in Canada doing something about it from a Senate position, and all people sitting here today have acknowledged that Senate reform is a problem in order to get proper representation throughout this country. If you apply that against Alberta as we look at a formula - and we don't have a bicameral House; we don't have an upper and lower House - we have one Legislative Assembly. Therefore, the formula cannot be based on representation by population as the House of Commons and a so-called Senate to cover off the other problems. And it isn't even set up right. So we have to find a formula that weights in favour of regional representation to address - again that term - "the distinct nature" of Alberta: its history and its people.

I think we have heard "status quo" here - to stay at status quo - and we know that that won't exist as we see the increasing populations and constituencies in the city. I guess from a balance to what everyone has said, I would ask that perhaps we look at another interesting thing in a parliamentary democracy

in which a simple majority carries the day.

If you win by one vote in our elections, you become the elected member. We have seen all the stats put out that "Oh, that isn't fair; there isn't equity in that," because sometimes the elected member only has 32 percent of the popular vote; that because of our party system the MLA that went to the Legislature did not represent two-thirds of the people. Well then, if you use that and base it against a formula to look at proper representation and that fairness, we only need 1 percent more than 50 percent variation between constituencies. So you could use the 49 percent formula and again you would only see one constituency that had a problem at the present time. Then you would balance against other weighting factors that are going on in the city where you have too high a population at one end, and you would have to then spin off some of the population rather than add to. Therefore, you would have to take the total cities of Edmonton and Calgary and some of the rest and put their total population in a pot and divide it out again and readdress the boundaries within those cities.

The wheel would be an interesting concept, but again you might be traveling 300 miles in a slot. I don't know. That probably wouldn't happen with Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray and some of them. But I thought it was interesting.

But we need to look at a weighted formula, and with our computer technology and some of our whizzes at our universities and in our political sciences, you would think they could look at population densities, geography, square miles – as brought up here tonight – the type of services, the size of the communities, the economic contributions of constituencies as a total factor. I know constituencies with 10,000 voters that add a tremendous amount of oil and gas and agricultural revenue into the cities, into this government, and we could weight those factors based on population and geography, and again you could also bring in property values and other areas that might contribute to it.

We have a diverse and distinct province, as do all provinces. This country is weighted the same way, and I think the answer doesn't rest in the B.C. formula. I think it was come at in too fast a manner, an irrational manner, and I would ask that it be revisited and that the committee consider putting forth a broader formula than is based on the one presently being thought of.

I can't say much more except that I like my representation as well as the ones that come from what we call our urban areas. It's a challenge to try to serve in rural Alberta, and if you have the honour of being a minister of the Crown, it becomes a greater challenge. I look forward to this committee's representation and to the commission. Then, if there's an ensuing court case, I trust they have all the information before they base their opinions.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Steve.

On behalf of the committee, a very special thank you not only to those of you who have braved the cold to come out tonight, but for those of you who have presented briefs.

We've listened this evening to some very carefully presented briefs. It's obvious that a lot of thought and effort has gone into the briefs. Each and every one of you who came forward, whether you were representing a local government, a club, a political organization, or whether you were here on behalf of yourself, took the time to think about what recommendations you wanted to make and what ideas you wanted to share with us. I've tried to identify the main points that have been stated, and

I'll attempt to summarize those with you now.

The first presenter suggested that rural Alberta must continue to have an equal voice in the Legislature, and that is a recommendation we've heard over and over again.

The second presenter suggested something that we haven't heard in quite this way – it was very articulately pointed out – and that is that Alberta is really two distinctive and different societies and that when you look at our lifestyles in urban Alberta versus rural Alberta, they are different; both very special and complementary, but different.

Again we heard the need for equal representation. Then we were given a quick visit to the Vermilion-Viking constituency, looking at the unique geographic makeup of the constituency, the towns and villages and the various hospital boards and other boards that are in the area.

Again a recommendation that we keep the existing 42 urban, 41 rural balance, and I hope we've been able to share with you, both in the explanation Pat gave and other members of the committee, how that has changed over the years; it's not something that was written in stone. We were asked to consider the impact that change will have on rural Alberta.

We were asked to look at Senate reform, the very thing we're struggling for with central Canada as a model.

Fair and equal access to our MLAs was brought up, and that again has been repeated in a number of meetings: fair and equal access.

Decentralization of government services. A number of you used the decentralization that's taking place in the Department of Recreation and Parks right now as an example. That has been alluded to in other areas as well, Steve.

One speaker spoke of the problems of living in a low population area of the province and some of the challenges that gives you.

Then we had, as several others have mentioned in their summation, a new, creative idea that we should create joint urban/rural constituencies like a wheel: use the urban area as the hub and go out from that hub.

The next brief suggested that we should keep the 83 divisions but redistribute the ridings within Alberta to conform with the plus/minus 25 percent rule, so that there would be a truer form of representation by population than we currently have.

A suggestion made is one we've heard earlier, and that is that the commission, when struck, should go out and hold public hearings before they prepare their interim report. As you know, the process the commission follows is that once struck, the commission will sit down and review a multitude of background information, almost all of which is given by the Chief Electoral Officer. They will attempt to follow the parameters they have been given by the Legislature, draw some tentative lines, prepare their maps, and then, when the interim report is presented, go out in the public hearing process and give individuals the right to have input at that point. A number of people have suggested that a commission should hold some hearings first, and that's a matter I think we would want to discuss with past members of commissions to get their input and ideas on.

Again a suggestion that rural representation should not decrease.

The next presenter suggested that the existing system of government is working; why change it?

Then there was an impassioned plea to preserve rural interests, and again Recreation and Parks was used as an example of how we can decentralize some government services.

The 7 to 4 ratio was used, and then we were reminded that

not only is the access to the MLA important as a concept; MLA access to his constituents is equally important. Then, of course, the two MLAs gave their summation comments.

So you've given us additional food for thought, in addition to the briefs we've heard in other communities across the province. You've certainly helped strengthen the democratic process in our minds. It doesn't make our job any easier, but coming out and listening and hearing what you have to say and obtaining your ideas is helpful. What we're doing is, by using some of that technology you spoke of earlier, sir, putting all the briefs on – I don't know; Bob, you're in charge of this area – a computer, so that when we are deliberating, we can pull out the key elements from each and every brief given. We'll be able to see what recommendations were made and in what numbers. That's going to be helpful.

So I conclude by again thanking you so much for coming out and being with us on this cold night and showing your interest.

And this really is showing your interest. So thanks for helping us.

MR. JOHNSON: Excuse me. Before the committee breaks up, I'd just like to add as a footnote that a number of years ago the constituency known as Chinook was amalgamated. The late Henry Kroeger and the MLA of the other constituency, Jack Butler, went head to head at a nominating meeting. Jack Butler lost. Today Henry's trying to sell St. Peter a Massey tractor and Jack's still chasing cows. So you guys will probably get amalgamated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Jack was out to give us a brief when we were in Hanna. He hasn't lost any of his sharpness.

[The committee adjourned at 9:17 p.m.]