

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[12:17 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my pleasure to declare the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries meeting held here in Donnelly officially open, and with that a special welcome to all of you who have come out today in the cold weather to be with us. It's really gratifying to see the turnout that we've gotten, and I'm pleased that Walter and others argued that we should be coming back to the Peace River country, that the meetings we did have both in Grande Prairie and Peace River were not sufficient to allow all people with an interest in coming in - therefore, accepting the request by Walter and others.

MR. SIGURDSON: Bob, is the microphone on?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, it is. I don't think I had it close enough. There. Is that better?

At the outset Bob Pritchard has asked me to remind you that there's a list going through the audience requesting your name and address. The purpose of that is to ensure that you sign the list. We then will have a record of your name and address so that when the report is complete, we can send you a copy. We've been doing that throughout the process.

I'd like at this time to introduce the panel members who are here. I'm pleased that on my immediate left we have Mr. Patrick Ledgerwood. Pat is the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. He's actually an *ex-officio* member of our committee. We feel really delighted in having Pat with us, sharing his expertise as the Chief Electoral Officer here. In addition, Pat served on the recent federal boundaries commission which saw the number of seats in Alberta increase from 21 to 26.

On my immediate right Mr. Tom Sigurdson. Tom is the New Democratic member of the Assembly for Edmonton-Belmont. He served as Grant Notley's executive assistant, so he's certainly no stranger to the Peace River country.

We're very pleased to have Walter Paszkowski with us as the local MLA. It's been our practice in the past to invite the local MLAs to join us. Walter, if you do have comments to make, you're welcome to do that, or if you have a presentation, we'll entertain that right at the end.

I'm also pleased that we have with us Bob Pritchard as our senior administrator, and Robin Wortman. We've developed a practice over time that if you're happy with the arrangements that have been made today and the way things go, Tom, Pat, and I will take the credit for that. If there's anything that goes wrong, we'll direct that wrong to Bob and he, in turn, will direct it to Robin.

We also have Doug and Gary with us from *Hansard*. Because this is a select special committee of the Legislature, we are required to record our meetings. We don't want the microphones to inhibit discussion. We've tried very hard to develop a process that's as informal as possible, because we are here to seek your input, your advice, and we can't do that if you're hesitant about coming forward with your ideas.

The process that we follow is that we have the first three presenters come and sit at the chairs over on the side, and I'll use as an example the first presenter. The brief will be given. Members of the committee are then given an opportunity to respond or ask questions. We then ask if there are any further comments from the audience, and then we move on to presenter two and so on down the list.

I should also mention that we're missing some members of our committee today, and for that we are sorry. Our vice-chairman, Stockwell Day, knew he couldn't be with us today. As the government Whip he sits in on cabinet meetings, and cabinet is meeting today. We're also missing, unfortunately, Pam Barrett, the House leader for the New Democrats, and Pat Black, a Conservative member from Calgary. Both members are tied up in an emergency meeting of the Members' Services Committee, which is an all-party committee of the Legislature. It was not planned. The Speaker requested that they stay back for that meeting. In addition, we're missing Frank Bruseker, a Calgary member of the Liberal caucus, who didn't intend to be here, and our last member of the committee, Mike Cardinal, government member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, was not able to be here.

We've been going at a pretty hectic pace, as you know. We were on the road - what was it? - four days last week, and this is the third day this week. So we've seldom had all committee members at every meeting. On the other hand, because everything is recorded and we will be relying extensively on the recordings when we sit down to draw up deliberations and draw conclusions from those deliberations, we'll be relying heavily on the briefs presented and questions asked at the appropriate time.

With regard to the presentations, I'm sure you all appreciate that we are not the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The commission's task will be to draw the lines between constituencies. Our task as a committee is to make recommendations to the Assembly on the number of constituencies there should be in the province and what kind of mix between urban and rural Alberta. We're dealing with a major principle, not just with lines. So if some of you have in your briefs recommendations that a polling subdivision should be moved from Grande Prairie to Smoky River, we'd ask you to hold that. We will ensure that any recommendations you make on that line will in turn be forwarded to the commission once it is struck. It's been past practice for the Chief Electoral Officer to be part of the commission, and he's part of this committee, so you can be sure that those concerns will be passed on.

Any questions to this point in time? Any supplementary comments, Tom or Pat?

Okay. We're going to proceed, then, with our presentation. I'm going to ask Mr. Ledgerwood to begin by giving you an overview as to why we're here and the matters that developed in British Columbia that have had an impact not only in that province but in other provinces in Canada. Once Pat has finished that presentation, Tom will lead us through some slides and show you not only where we are in terms of looking at the enumeration list, but as a result of one of our first meetings - in fact, I think it came out of the meeting in Peace River - the suggestion that possibly we should look at total population as a basis rather than just the electors list. Tom was the first committee member to pick up on that, so we're going to show you what impact that would have on the rural areas.

Okay, Pat.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The current legislation requires that there be a boundaries commission struck after every second general election. The last commission sat in 1983-84. Since that time we've had the 1986 and the 1989 general elections. So normally the commission would have been struck at the first sitting of the 22nd Legislature. However, the situation in B.C. that Bob alluded to resulted in the three House leaders getting together, and rather than striking a commission, they struck this committee, which is

traveling throughout the province to get input from the electors so that when the commission is struck, it will meet the requirements of the electors of Alberta and hopefully meet the Charter.

Now, the problem in B.C. was that they had such a disparity between their lowest riding and their highest riding. Their lowest riding had fewer than 5,600 population; the highest number was 68,000. So you have this variance between 5,600 and 68,000. They recognized that there was a problem that didn't meet the requirements of the Charter, so a commission was struck headed by Justice Fisher, the Fisher commission. They held hearings throughout the province and basically made three recommendations: to eliminate the dual ridings in British Columbia, to increase the number of members in the Legislature from 69 to 75, and the factor that impacts on us at this stage is that they divided the total population of British Columbia by 75 to come to an average, and no electoral division could be more than 25 percent either above or below that average figure.

The government didn't react quickly enough in the eyes of a Professor Dixon, so he took the matter to court. The trial was heard before Chief Justice Madam McLachlin, and it's called the McLachlin decision. You'll likely have a number of references to it today. She basically based her decision on the Charter, that one person has one vote and that all votes should be as nearly equal as possible. So she supported the Fisher commission on the plus or minus 25 percent from the average and said it was up to the Legislature to implement these procedures. There was no appeal to Justice McLachlin's decision. Since that time she has been elevated to the Supreme Court of Canada, and I don't know whether that had an impact on the decision of individuals to launch an appeal or not.

Professor Dixon again went to court because the B.C. government hadn't reacted to the McLachlin decision, and the case was heard before Justice Meredith. Justice Meredith supported the McLachlin decision but said that the court was not to get into legislation, and the court was not to interfere with government. So they refused to take any action other than to tell the government that they thought they should get on with getting rid of the dual ridings and also eliminating the wide variance between the lowest and the highest population in each of the ridings.

The B.C. government struck a commission, which tabled their report on January 15; it became law at the end of the month. They now have 75 seats, and the population in each riding is within plus or minus 25 percent of the average. So this is what faced the legislators in Alberta, and this is why we're here today to get your input.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Pat.

Any questions of Pat on the background?

Okay. We'll go right to you then, Tom, on the slides.

MR. SIGURDSON: As you came in you would have perhaps picked up a little package of information. It starts with a very personalized letter that says, "Dear Albertan." What we're going to do is go through a slide presentation, and pretty much all of the information that's on the slides is contained in your kit. There will be additional information following, based on total population. [interjection] Okay, we'll just wait a second. As I said, it's very personalized; you should have gotten your copy.

If you could just look at this first slide, this is the list of all 83 electoral constituencies in alphabetical order. The number next to them is the total voter population in each constituency. I draw to your attention the footnote at the bottom; it relates to

the Cardston constituency. Cardston is the lowest in the province in terms of voter population, with 8,100 voters, but it has a wee bit of an anomaly in that the Blood Indian Reserve is wholly situated inside the boundaries of the electoral division of Cardston. Blood Indians chose not to involve themselves in the enumeration process. It's estimated that they have approximately 1,800 eligible electors on that reserve, so Cardston may be a bit artificially low.

Again, all 83 constituencies on this slide, listed in terms of voter population, so we go from a high of 31,500 in Edmonton-Whitemud to a low of 8,100 in Cardston. If you add all of the lists together, you get a large number, 1.55 million. That's how many eligible voters we have in the province as of the last election. If you divide that by the 83 constituencies that we currently have in our province, you end up with an average of 18,000. What the McLachlin decision in British Columbia suggested was that you could have voter population with a variance of plus 25 percent off the average or minus 25 percent off the average. That would be a permitted tolerance according to Justice McLachlin. So we would have a top end of 23,000, if we went with voter population, or a bottom end at 14,000. That would be the suggested variance.

Going back to our list of constituencies by voter population, you can see that there are a number of constituencies that are highlighted. These constituencies are either above or below the suggested variance. Those constituencies that are highlighted in pink are all above the 25 percent guideline; those constituencies highlighted in green fall below. It's interesting to note that all of the pink ones are urban constituencies . . . Oh, I'm sorry. All of the green ones, rather, are urban constituencies and all of the red ones are rural constituencies.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That slip of the tongue on Tom's part was just wishful thinking.

MR. SIGURDSON: We have done this so often, ladies and gentlemen, that I'm hardly looking at all at the slides. I'm just doing this off by heart. So I'll start looking at the slides.

Taking that information and putting it onto a map of our province, you'll see that we've coloured them. Those constituencies that are currently before you that are coloured in pink are those constituencies that have less than the suggested tolerance level. There are two little dots in there that are coloured green. One's nestled up to the city of Edmonton; that's the constituency of St. Albert. Then the constituency of Medicine Hat is also coloured green on this map.

The city of Calgary: again a large area of growth around the borders of the city. The city is still growing, and housing development is increasing the voter population of a number of constituencies inside the city of Calgary. Same with the next slide showing the city of Edmonton: again a lot of growth and a lot of growth potential for voter population inside the city of Edmonton.

Lethbridge, which has two constituencies at the moment, is perfectly situated in the middle in terms of its average, and there are not too many problems in the city of Lethbridge. However, Medicine Hat has a very large voter population. It's currently fourth largest in the province and does present some degree of difficulty.

The constituencies of Red Deer, Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, are unique. In 1983 the last commission met and looked at Red Deer. The voter population in the constituency of Red Deer, which was wholly within the city boundaries, was

far too large for just one constituency. Dividing it in two, it became far too small to have two constituencies; you couldn't really justify having two constituencies for the city of Red Deer. The brown boundary line is the city limit. In order to get the population up, what the commission eventually did was go out to the county of Red Deer and bring in sufficient voters to bump up the total voter population to justify two constituencies for the Red Deer district.

The city of St. Albert: still growing. If you drive down to Edmonton and you go through the city of St. Albert, you'll certainly know what I'm speaking of.

This map shows those constituencies in our province that fall 35 percent below the voter average. So these constituencies are outside of the suggested level of tolerance. This next map shows those constituencies, all in the south of our province, that have a voter population 50 percent below the average. All of these constituencies have voter populations below 10,000 electors.

These blue dots indicate where the committee has traveled to or where we will be going to in the next number of days. You can see that we've been pretty much all over the province. These are the dates; this is supposed to be the second to last hearing. However, we've had such demand in some of the locales that we will be traveling back to Red Deer, Hanna; we are going to go to Wainwright, and I believe that as of today we're possibly going to be flying back to Calgary as well. So we've got a few more hearings to have to attend.

On this map, again the dots indicate those areas where the committee is traveling to or will be going to. The constituencies that are highlighted here are those constituencies that are 35 percent below the average. So the committee is venturing into territory where angels would fear to tread but fools have no difficulty getting to.

Again, to go back, the chairman pointed out at the opening that we looked at total population as well as just elector population. It makes a substantial difference. You'll see later on how it shows on the map of our province. The reason you have to consider total population is that an MLA represents everybody in their constituency regardless of their status as a Canadian citizen. If a landed immigrant has a problem, we deal with it. If a person is a member of a religious organization and chooses not to participate in the electoral process, we deal with it. The other big group that's left out are students, those people who fall under the age of 18. We spend a good portion of our provincial budget providing education facilities and services to students, yet they're not included on any lists; we represent those people who are under the age of 18 as well.

So you can see that the numbers go up quite considerably, from a million and a half eligible voters in our province to 2.365 million total population. Again using the 83 constituencies as the dividing figure, you end up with an average of 28,000 per constituency, with a high end of 35,000 and a low end of 21,000. Putting that information on our map - our constituencies by population - you'll see that there is a wee bit of a change. We've gone from 19 constituencies that were over the 25 percent level to 18, and how many, Bob, did we have below?

MR. PRITCHARD: From 23 to 22.

MR. SIGURDSON: From 23 constituencies down to 22. Smoky River has - Bob, could you just point it out on the map? If you just want to turn to your paper - I think it's the third or fourth page in your package - you'll see that Smoky River was seventh or eighth in that package of constituencies that fell

below. It's now - third or second?

MR. PRITCHARD: Third.

MR. SIGURDSON: Third. So the total voter population helps a number of the rural communities because rural communities tend to have larger families than do urban communities.

Again, you can see the difference in the map of the province. We have two constituencies designated rural, Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, that in the last calculation were within the average; now they're over the 25 percent level. Calgary changes somewhat. Some of the figures move around a bit, and there is some slight change in terms of the constituencies that have voter population over 25 percent. The same thing with the city of Edmonton: a slight change for those constituencies that have over 25 percent voter population.

Here's where you start to really notice the difference. This is the map that shows those constituencies that had under 35 percent of the voter average population. We've reduced them quite substantially, and on the next map, if you recall, we had five constituencies that were 50 percent below the voter average. Now we only have one constituency, and that's the Pincher Creek-Crowsnest constituency. So it does make a substantial difference when you go from elector population to total population.

That's the slide presentation. If you've got any questions on the slides, I'd be pleased to take them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions for Tom on the slides? Yes-

MS HOFFARTH: Could we have those numbers back, the slides with the numbers on population?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The total population?

MS HOFFARTH: No. The one with the plus or minus.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, for the population figures. The formula, Bob. Okay.

Yes, sir?

MR. SUTHERLAND: Mr. Chairman, did the McLachlin decision take into account any of the total population of B.C. in her decision?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Yeah, the McLachlin decision was based on voter population in that British Columbia uses voter population as the criterion.

MR. SUTHERLAND: Just strictly voter population.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: No. I'm sorry, total population.

MR. SUTHERLAND: Oh, total population.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's entirely up to the jurisdiction. The important element, I suppose, in Madam Justice's decision was that there had to be a variance regardless of the numbers you use. Whether it's total population or just voter population, it's the permitted variance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But we're looking at a number of jurisdictions which use total population, and others use voters list.

We've traditionally used voters list.

Yes, sir?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, I have a question to ask on the justice's decision. What basis did she use to come up with the 25 percent variance? Why wasn't it 35; why wasn't it 15 percent? Did she just decide that it was a figure she felt she liked?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: There are many jurisdictions that use a 25 percent criterion, including the federal government. So she looked at Manitoba, for example, which uses a 10 percent criterion, and up to the 25 percent. In Alberta we use the 25 percent plus or minus on our urban ridings. However, we did not have a figure for rural ridings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've generally used in Alberta – and we're trying to research to see when the process was first started – a concept that seven urban voters equal four rural voters, a 7 to 4 ratio. That was to give recognition for geography and the number of communities: the various things that we've been living with. So when the Legislature last gave direction to a commission in 1983, the direction was that there shall be 42 urban ridings, and the 42 urban ridings should not vary more than plus or minus 25 percent, and we said there shall be 41 rural ridings. We didn't use the same criteria in the rural ridings, so there was greater flexibility, but the commission worked within those parameters. It's part of our job as a committee to recommend to the Assembly what the parameters should be this time.

Okay. Are we ready to go on to the briefs? Good. Bob, will you call the first three up, please?

MR. PRITCHARD: Yes. If we could have the first three presenters, please: Phil Gifford, Laurent Lamoureux, and Vern Milligen.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Phil, I understand we're going to take you first.

While we're pausing for a moment, it was my mistake at the beginning in not introducing a former colleague of ours who's here today: Marvin Moore, longtime MLA for this constituency and a good friend and former colleague of mine. Marvin.

Okay. Phil.

MR. GIFFORD: I find myself in a little bit of a difficult position, having come in a bit late – commitments; everybody's busy.

There was some concern from the Nampa council in light of potential boundary changes, which I find, at this point . . . Or, as I understand – correct me if I'm wrong – that there will be subsequent meetings dealing with specifics in boundary changes?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, that is correct.

MR. GIFFORD: My question to you at this point in time being a statement concerning that matter, am I not best to put it off until that later date?

MR. CHAIRMAN: What we've done in the past, Phil, is received any submissions that individuals or groups have for us, and we've given the assurance we'll pass those on to the commission when it's struck. We'd also urge you, once the

commission holds hearings around the province – and they will – that you come out and reinforce your point at that time.

MR. GIFFORD: Maybe in light of that, then, I would just back off and allow things to go on . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. GIFFORD: . . . rather than hold you people up any further.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, thanks, Phil. We'll ensure that that gets on to the commission.

MR. GIFFORD: Sorry for the inconvenience.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, that's no problem. Okay. Laurent.

MR. LAMOUREUX: Mr. Chairman and members of the select special committee, I'm making this presentation on behalf of the council of the town of McLennan and Mayor Meardi, who was not able to be here today.

The first point we wish to make is that there should be no reduction in the number of constituencies in this area. The five constituencies, being Dunvegan, Grande Prairie, Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River, and Smoky River, must continue to exist. The vastness of the area alone justifies the retention of these constituencies. Four of the five are larger in area than the whole country of Belgium. Members of the Legislature from rural areas already find it exceedingly difficult to stay in touch with their constituents, while their counterparts, from metropolitan areas especially, are easily accessible.

Our second point concerns the relative influence of MLAs from urban areas as compared to those from isolated rural areas. Urban members of the Legislature, because of their easy access to the mass media, exert more influence on policy than their rural counterparts, and the power of the mass media, in the large centres especially, more than offsets the perceived lack of representation in the Legislature.

Our third point – and this is one you'll be establishing here in the guidelines that you'll give to the commission – deals with: should the necessity arise for boundary adjustments, guidelines must be put in place to ensure that constituencies represent a commonality of interest. Municipalities and other forms of local government should not be split between constituencies. Areas, for example, which are primarily agricultural should not be lumped in with areas which serve resource exploitation such as timber, natural gas, and oil.

I'd like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by thanking you and the members of your committee for the opportunity to give council's views to you, and we would request, as we've already said, that you put us on your mailing list, so that we'll have a copy of the recommendations once they've been tabled in the Legislature.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Laurent.

MR. LAMOUREUX: I'll leave you some copies.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any questions from the committee members? Anyone from the audience?

I'm sorry, Tom. Did I move too quickly?

MR. SIGURDSON: Yeah. I moved too slowly.

When you talk about keeping the five Peace constituencies, would you suggest that there might be room for boundary movement in the five?

MR. LAMOUREUX: Well, there is not much room for boundary movement.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, you've got three of the five constituencies that are below the 25 percent.

MR. LAMOUREUX: Right.

MR. SIGURDSON: As you know, when we put the total population up on the board, Grande Prairie went over.

MR. LAMOUREUX: Yes. There might be some areas of the Grande Prairie constituency, for example, that could be added to Smoky River, and some to Dunvegan.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Thanks very much then.

Vern, we'll move on to you.

MR. MILLIGEN: Mr. Chairman, members of the select special committee, I'm Vern Milligen, representing ID 17 west.

Improvement district 17 west appreciates this opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the electoral boundaries within the province of Alberta. First and foremost, we have serious concerns with any proposal that utilizes population as the sole criterion in determining electoral boundaries. We are totally cognizant of the fact that a democracy operates for the most part on the wishes of the majority. Representation by population would to a large degree limit the ability of rural Albertans to have an equal voice in the future development of the province. In the November/December 1989 issue of *Municipal Counsellor* the Hon. Raymond A. Speaker stated as follows:

I would like to say that we are moving forward on the assignment given to me by Premier Getty, in association with Peter Elzinga, Minister of Alberta Economic Development and Trade, to work in a co-ordinating role with other provincial departments in exploring ways to enhance economic development in Alberta's rural communities.

Mr. Speaker further noted:

We are looking, for one thing, at provincial statutes which may be acting as roadblocks to entrepreneurs in rural areas.

It is the opinion of our council that any boundary adjustments which would further reduce the number of rural MLAs or which decrease the percentage of rural MLAs are contradictory to the mandate given to the Minister of Municipal Affairs from the Premier.

Consideration must be given to the size and diversity of the various constituencies. In order to effectively serve his electors, a rural MLA is required to travel extensively and be knowledgeable on issues dealing with a multitude of municipal bodies. At the present time this is an extremely formidable task. Further expansion of constituencies would make it next to impossible.

In closing, we would like to strongly recommend that if there is a definite need to alter boundaries – a point, incidentally, of which we are not convinced – it is not done to the detriment of rural Alberta.

Thank you once again for your consideration in this regard.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Vern.

Questions from panel members? Anyone else? Thank you. Okay. Bob.

MR. PRITCHARD: The next three. If we could have Marv Moore, Willie Jansen, and Orest Melnyk.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Marvin.

MR. MOORE: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments to the committee, and I also appreciate you returning to the Peace River country. Some of us were quite busy with a muddy harvest and other things when you were last here, and ever mindful of how difficult it is for MLAs to fit all the work into their schedules, it's well appreciated that you could return to Donnelly today.

I was hopeful that some other members of the committee would be here, but perhaps through your recording of our comments, they will be aware of what we had to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: They will.

MR. MOORE: Mr. Chairman, you for many years have represented a rural constituency, so much of what I have to say will be old hat to you. Mr. Sigurdson, you in representing an urban constituency certainly have a challenging job too. So perhaps in that respect some of my comments will be well known to you as well. I'm mindful as well of the challenges that the other members of the committee meet in representing their constituents.

The B.C. court decision of last year no doubt heard arguments on both sides of the issue as to whether or not an individual was entitled to equal representation or representation in an equal manner. Now, let me explain that. Smoky River, which was first formed 18 years ago and was enlarged again in 1982, is made up of a great variety of different occupations, communities, geographic and demographic features. For example, there are no less than 12 municipal governments in Smoky River, including three improvement districts, which have a special relationship with the provincial government, and one Indian reservation. There are four hospital boards that cover all or part of the constituency. There are three health units. There are three senior citizens' foundations providing lodge-type services. There are 13 school authorities in total, educating children at 17 different school locations throughout the constituency. There are 28 individual communities which have anywhere from two to more than 30 community organizations. There are five area recreation boards. The list goes on and on, Mr. Chairman, and is too lengthy to repeat here, but I'm sure you know just what I am speaking about.

From time to time over the course of the 18 years that I served this constituency, I undertook a constituency tour so that people would have an opportunity to meet with me without traveling to my constituency office and so that groups and organizations, municipal councils, hospital boards, and others would have that same opportunity. A constituency tour in Smoky River, the last time I undertook one, not much over a year ago – in fact, about a year ago now – took six days from early morning to very late at night. Oftentimes when I finished, there were still a number of groups that I hadn't been able to sit down with that wanted to meet the following weekend or

thereafter.

Now, I know that you, Mr. Chairman, and other MLAs certainly are familiar with the makeup of a rural constituency. My purpose is not to suggest that a hardworking MLA cannot adequately represent a rural area or that there is something special and unique about a rural area that makes the job of an urban MLA so much easier. I know there are special challenges in urban Alberta too. But I do have to say that as an area becomes larger and larger, it becomes more and more difficult for an MLA to reach all the people, organizations, and groups that might want to reach him. For example, in Smoky River today, if Walter were to have an MLA office within 50 miles of 90 percent of his constituents, he'd have to have three offices: one in this area, one in Valleyview, and one in Sexsmith.

So what does all this mean? It means that as the constituencies grow larger and larger, rural people can't possibly have access to an MLA with the same frequency and with the same access that urban people might have. If you can't meet with and discuss and talk with your MLA about your concerns, then I submit, Mr. Chairman, that as an individual you're not equally represented.

I come back to my opening comments: balance must be found between the right to equal representation – one person, one vote by strict numbers – and the right to representation in an equal manner. It simply is not possible to take one-quarter of the land area of this province, which you've almost got in Peace River and Fort McMurray now, and expand those boundaries or expand Smoky River so that instead of 28 communities there are 40, and expect those people to have an opportunity at representation that those in urban areas have.

Alberta has been well served in the past by maintaining a population differential between rural and urban. You, Mr. Chairman, mentioned the four rural voters versus seven urban voters in past directions to the select committee that reviewed specific boundaries. I want to suggest that anything less than that or anything less than the 41 rural constituencies which now exist in rural Alberta is going to result in further inequalities in the right to representation in an equal manner. The challenge, Mr. Chairman, that you and your committee face is to be guided by what is right for Alberta.

I know that Mr. Sigurdson, who worked for Mr. Notley, is mindful that Mr. Notley won four elections in a row, beginning in 1971, in the neighbouring constituency of Spirit River-Fairview, now Dunvegan. Committee members might not know that the area that we're in now was represented from 1952 to '59 by a Liberal MLA, Mr. Desfosses. Committee members will recall that during the last redistribution rounds, members of the select committee who were of the government side, Progressive Conservatives, in the city of Edmonton were accused at one point of trying to amend the boundaries so that they might be more successful in the next election. I don't believe that was true, but if it was, the result wasn't very positive. I only mention these things, gentlemen, because you'll no doubt be urged by some to try and draw the boundaries around the people of Alberta in a way that's most beneficial to a political party. Let me suggest that I don't believe that ever in the history of this province and most places in Canada that has ever worked. Quite the opposite is true. The members of the political parties and the members of the select committee who look upon the matter as one of serious and genuine concern for rural Albertans, who make their decision based upon the ability of people to have equal representation, in my view will be rewarded at the polls equally as well as if they used some other strategy.

I conclude, Mr. Chairman, with the confidence that you and your committee have the wisdom and courage to make a decision in support of the representations you hear here today and in support of the people of rural Alberta. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Marvin.

Questions from the committee? Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: All right. Thanks for making the presentation. It's good to see you again.

I'm wondering if I can get a comment. You talked about accessibility to an MLA, and I know how difficult it can be to access a rural MLA. What I'd like to do, though, is point out three constituencies that are in the southwest corner of our province: Pincher Creek-Crowsnest, Cardston, and Macleod. Now, they're certainly a lot larger than the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, but if you take the voter population of these three constituencies, add them together, they don't total the voter population of Edmonton-Whitemud. So then when you've got three MLAs standing up in the Legislature representing those 30,000 people, there is some degree of inequity, comparing MLA per individual, compared to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Would you comment, perhaps, on one of the suggestions that we've heard: that there might be a weighted ballot in the Legislature, so that you still have rural accessibility to a member but that you have equal weight given to a member of the Legislature based upon their total voter population or whatever the voter population might be?

MR. MOORE: Well, first of all, with regard to the idea of having some weighted vote in the Legislature, my experience there would indicate that that would be totally unworkable. As you recall, late in the evening we have enough trouble counting numbers. I recall that in the federal House of Commons one time the Liberals – no, it was the Conservatives – forgot how to count even. So if you have to count on the basis of he's worth 2.1 and she's worth 1.4, you know, I just can't see that as a workable solution at all.

But let me just say one other thing about the size of rural constituencies. Whatever you do as a committee, I hope that you take all of rural Alberta together and have an average size, because you may have a constituency over here that's got 12,000 voters. Your criterion says they need 14,000 or 13,000, but in order to get that, you have to cross a river, go into another municipality and cut it in half, and the boundary then doesn't make any sense. So as far as I'm concerned – like in the Peace River country, I have and I'm certain that most people would have no objections to one constituency being quite a bit larger than another as long as the rural boundaries make some sense. So whatever you do, try not to get locked in to saying, "Every constituency must be . . ." Those ones in southern Alberta: I'm familiar with all of them, of course, over the years, and they all have their unique, specific geographic characteristics as well as a unique and specific type of farming operation or whatever that exists in all of them. So I think you need to consider that as well.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just a second question on a different topic. You talked about offices . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe I could stop you for a second. Walter, was yours on this point, or separate?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: No; it's separate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Go ahead, Tom, and then Walter.

MR. SIGURDSON: Part of the problem, I suppose, is that you do address the question of constituency offices. It's very difficult if you're 100 miles from a constituency office to try and get to see your MLA. But we have the opportunity to make recommendations, I believe, to the Members' Services Committee in terms of constituency funding. Would you think that rural constituencies that have a large land area should have access to more funds to set up additional constituency offices?

MR. MOORE: At the risk of being shot down by somebody, frankly no. I think you've got plenty of funds for constituency offices now, if not too much. People want to see their MLA, not somebody they've hired to run a constituency office. I had one constituency office in the basement of my house for 17 years, and I traveled a lot. I think an MLA's job is to try and contact and meet with the constituents as often as possible, and if you have more funds to set up more offices, then people are just talking to somebody who works in the office and not really meeting with the MLA. I don't think that's a solution.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Walter.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think one of the important points that really has to be addressed is the efficiency and the effectiveness of an MLA's time. I just want to bring one point forward. From the date of the election to January 1, I drove 62,000 kilometres in my car in the constituency. I fly to Edmonton and back, so that has nothing to do with the driving time. But when you equate 62,000 kilometres of driving time with actual ineffective, inefficient time spent, really that has to become a very dominant factor. It's a factor that has to be part of the consideration, or we're losing the total effectiveness of boundary redistribution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Pat.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Marv, great to see you again. You mentioned something about the possibility of a commission being struck that could possibly be accused of gerrymandering. Do you have any feelings on the composition of the commission?

MR. MOORE: Well, my remarks there were a bit facetious. I noted last Monday night, for instance, that the NDP, who for years thought they'd never have any success in Quebec, got I think 67 percent of the vote. So all I was saying is that whatever you do, don't count anybody out.

The makeup of the committee: I have full confidence in any of the MLAs who are presently serving in the Alberta Legislature in terms of their judgment on the committee. The problem that occurs is that sometimes their supporters say do this or do that because we think . . . You know, the same occurs with respect to the numbers of voters in rural Alberta. You have people from the urban areas say, "This is totally unfair," without having any understanding of the issues at hand. Well, certainly

this committee will, I think, have good understanding.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Anyone else? Thanks very much, Marv.  
Willie and Orest, I understand you have one brief that's being presented.

MR. JANSEN: We'll break it in two.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, you go right ahead.

MR. JANSEN: Mr. Chairman, my name is William Jansen. I'm the chairman of ID 20 and have been designated by various municipalities to speak on their behalf. The second half of this brief will be presented by Orest Melnyk of ID 19, who has also had input into this brief.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, we thank you for returning to the Peace River country to hear our views on the provincial electoral boundaries. This issue is vital to the political processes affecting our municipalities and residents.

We represent the improvement district of Birch Hills No. 19, improvement district No. 20, MD 133 of Spirit River, the town of Spirit River, and the villages of Eaglesham, Rycroft, and Wanham. Our representation covers a large portion of the Dunvegan riding south of the Peace River and extends from the B.C. border to the Smoky River. Mr. Glen Clegg is the MLA. We have reviewed your committee's options for realignment of provincial electoral boundaries and unanimously support retention of the present rural and urban balance. We offer the following comments in support of that position.

Regarding the provincial policy direction, the provincial government has recently announced a program of decentralization and economic development with a goal of strengthening rural and small town Alberta. Any change in electoral boundaries which reduces the present balance to one favouring the Edmonton-Calgary corridor would inevitably erode political support for that policy. Our provincial government has also taken a strong stand with respect to regional representation at the federal level through a Triple E Senate. We have a similar need for regional representation at the provincial level, but no second forum through which that can be provided. Regional representation can only be achieved through a rationalization of electoral boundaries which relies on more than just representation by population.

We are proud of our rural communities and the contributions they make to the governance of this province. We applaud the provincial government for its desire to stop the population drain and to provide effective regional representation. Provincial electoral boundaries must contribute to the realization of those desires and can do so only when more than population distribution is considered. Success in these efforts will, over the long haul, reduce any perceived imbalance in representation by population.

Regarding the history. Alberta developed from rural roots. Agriculture has traditionally been the mainstay of the province's economic stability, and as a renewable resource it will return to that predominant position. In the meantime the oil and gas industry and the newly important forest industry nurture the economic prosperity of Alberta. Each of these industries has a tremendous impact on the people in rural Alberta. The bulk of the activity in these industries has always occurred in the rural areas where the resources are located. These rural industries and these rural people working in them contribute enormously

to the prosperity of the province. We must, as major players in these activities, have input into the political decision-making process at a level appropriate to the level of our contributions.

Regarding the geography. Dunvegan riding is already fairly large. It covers about 20,000 square miles and has roughly 8,000 miles of road, most of which are in poor or deteriorating condition. Travel for any MLA in areas of this size is time-consuming and reduces their ability to serve constituents effectively. Increasing the size of this constituency would reduce even further the opportunity constituents have to meet with their MLA. The bulk of Dunvegan riding boundary now follows coterminous provincial, municipal, and physical boundaries which are easily recognized by the constituents. This is a vast improvement over the situation where some residents of a rural municipality were never sure who their MLA was. The municipal councils were also faced with trying to co-ordinate priorities in portions of their jurisdictions with the often differing priorities of more than one MLA. Changing the existing Dunvegan boundaries will undo improvements which were made in recent years and will do nothing to improve effective political decision-making. Electoral boundaries must be readily recognizable and must contribute positively to the political process, making the MLA available to the constituents.

Orest?

MR. MELNYK: Just a suggestion, Mr. Chairman. Maybe at this point, if there are any questions, they could be forwarded to Willie. Otherwise, we'll get lost in the shuffle here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Sure.

Panel members? Anyone else? Okay, Orest, you're on.

MR. MELNYK: I gained nothin'.

Mr. Chairman, I will just continue. I will repeat again. There are seven municipalities that took part in this, and we chose this route rather than seven of us coming and repeating the same thing. Any concerns here are just as vital to any one person there versus any other one, so I'd just like you to keep that in mind. Okay, I'll get down to . . .

Can you hear me? I usually talk loud. I don't normally need this.

Logistics. In addition to the geographic time and distance constraints the Dunvegan MLA faces, there is the multiplicity of organizations seeking assistance. As Marvin Moore mentioned here in numbers - now, I'm talking about Dunvegan - 19 local government councils, wards, and numerous community and special interest groups vie for the MLA's attention. The MLA faces the unbelievable task of scheduling time to meet with each and every one of them.

The MLA's loyalties are forever divided by the number of identical facilities and programs among which he must choose when allocating grants and other services. One ice arena in Edmonton may serve 50,000 people. In Dunvegan riding, it may take five arenas to serve less than 10,000 people. Other examples abound which demonstrate the need to limit the numbers of groups, facilities, and programs an MLA should have to deal with.

Diversity of interests. Dunvegan riding is populated by people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, economic strata, and educational levels. Three major resources, industries, and a host of other commercial enterprises provide economic diversity. Residents participate in a variety of leisure activities and exhibit complex sets of moral and political values. Increasing the size

of Dunvegan constituency would only add to the diversity and complexity of the riding. Increasing size would do nothing to enhance the political process and would limit the ability of individuals to participate effectively in that process. The MLA must be afforded a reasonable opportunity to deal with this diversity.

Shortcomings of representation by population. Representation by population is a philosophy with a proud history of support in North America. In reality, it has seldom been fully implemented. One of the two U.S. federal Houses is elected on a regional basis. In Canada the Senate is appointed on a regional basis and the House of Commons is never achieved through representation by population.

In appointing the cabinet, the Prime Minister and Premiers generally try to balance regional interests. A strict adherence to representation by population ideals appears to have contributed much to the political alienation being felt in Manitoba. Winnipeg obviously dominated the political scene in that province. A review of the electoral boundaries which would result in Alberta even with a plus or minus 25 percent factor indicates the potential for a similar experience in this province. We have noted in earlier portions of this brief the kinds of difficulties MLAs in large sparsely populated ridings face. We are concerned that the burdens and the frustrations related to serving a large riding would discourage good candidates from running for office. Representation by population is an ideal goal but one which must not be achieved at the expense of effective political participation in the less populated but equally important regions of the province.

In conclusion, it is our view that the present number of MLAs is sufficient to govern the province. We further believe that the present balance of rural and urban MLAs is appropriate for our province. If present electoral boundaries are to be changed, we believe a number of factors must be considered when defining new boundaries. These factors should include population, geography, history, logistics, and diversity of interests. Constituents must readily identify with their constituency. They must be able to maintain effective contact with their MLA and must be provided with a fair and equitable opportunity to participate in the political process.

We would like once again to thank you for returning to the Peace country. We know your deliberations will not be easy, but we trust you will keep the best interests of all our residents at heart.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Orest.

Questions from panel members? Anyone else? Well, thank you, gentlemen.

MR. PRITCHARD: If we could have the next three presenters come up: Terry Schneider, Ken Mulligan, and John Simpkins.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and board and everyone else. To start off my presentation, it will reiterate a lot of the other comments, but I will ask you a couple of questions as to what is constitutionally sound and what is equal. We put it to the board on behalf of the town of Falher that population standards alone discriminate against the rural setting.

The province of Alberta is an agriculture based community, and without rural farm production this land would be financially troubled. By redefining the present electoral boundaries, the farmers responsible for Alberta's economic success will lose their

opportunity to decide how their production contributions will be controlled. The rural setting in Alberta is the future in terms of economic growth. The forestry, tourism, and natural resource sectors are strong and improving, thanks to the rural setting, and allowing the urban centre to decide what is proper and right for the people living and working in areas affected by these economic opportunities will lead to exploitation of the land and quite likely irreversible mistakes that the citizens of rural communities will have to live with. Allowing the people to decide is letting the experienced occupants of the area have a say in determining their own direction for the future.

Those are our comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Terry. Questions?

Okay. Ken.

MR. MULLIGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As representative of improvement district 16 in the Smoky River constituency, it's with pleasure and concern that I bring forward the opinion of my advisory council.

Even though the B.C. provincial court has declared that province's electoral boundaries invalid due to unreasonable differences in population, our question is: does that justify Alberta reviewing what currently poses no problem to us? Are the rest of the provinces in the same situation and are they all doing what you're doing?

The issue of representation by population does to rural Alberta what Alberta claims the federal government is doing to it. If Alberta supports the Triple E Senate, one would logically assume that it should also support the current ratio of rural to urban MLA electoral boundaries. The area's constituency should never be so large that the rural MLA is not as accessible as his urban counterpart. Taking for granted that Alberta's largest economic resource generating area is that of oil and gas, one would conclude that rural Alberta would provide the majority of the provincial revenue, and I would assume the majority of the provincial expenditure is not in the rural area. The number-crunching as proposed in the analysis will reduce rural representation and, in doing so, diminish what is quickly becoming a less than powerful rural voice.

Mr. Chairman, we ask that you would allow rural Albertans fair and equal representation within our government. As rural Albertans, we feel we're just as important as urban.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Ken.

Just before I ask if there are any questions from other members, you asked the question: why are we doing the review and what are other provinces doing? You're right in the narrow sense of the word, in that the B.C. court case doesn't have a direct impact on us. If a challenge were launched in Alberta, we would be starting through our own court system. But we know that other provinces have responded. The reason we're responding right now is that it's time for us to review our own boundaries because of our legislation. If we were between reviews, I suggest the review we're doing now would not be taking place just yet. But because by our legislation, as Pat mentioned, we have to review and readjust our boundaries after every two general elections - we last did a review in 1984; we had an election in 1986 and again in 1989 - now it's time. That's why we're doing the work.

We've looked at what they've done in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; we've also looked at British Columbia. We haven't

gone beyond that. Some provinces haven't moved yet because they don't have to; they're not yet ready to redistribute their boundaries. We're trying to put ourselves in a position that is as much as humanly possible Charter proof. We don't want to be challenged. If we are challenged, we want to ensure that we can withstand it. Now, the balancing act is to do that and at the same time not lose the unique fabric of Alberta and the representation we've got.

I'll pause there, Ken, and let other members get in.

Yes, Walter.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Can I just ask a question on that? I realize this is legislative, but I wonder if perhaps along with this we should not be reconsidering the legislation that indeed is in place. Theoretically we could have a couple of elections in a matter of a couple of years, and it seems almost silly that we would be considering a redistribution of the boundaries within such a short period. I wonder if along with this there shouldn't perhaps be some consideration as to the legislation that presently is in place, reviewing that as well with the idea of perhaps identifying a review every five years, every seven years, or something a little more definitive than what we have in place today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Well, normally if elections are held every four years, you don't have redistribution until actually about the ninth year. You go through two elections, you strike your commission, and the commission takes about a year to complete its work, so you're looking at about a nine-year period under normal circumstances. We've had two quick elections since redistribution in 1984, which has compressed the time frame.

Any other panel members? Have you anything to supplement on that, Pat, from your experience?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: I think we should be aware of the Saskatchewan situation, where they have 57 seats in the Legislature. They used a plus or minus 25 percent rule. The rural areas they took very close to the maximum of the minus 25 percent; the urban areas they took very close to the maximum above the average. The result was that they're now looking at a court challenge because some of the urban representation feel they're underrepresented in the Legislature, that the commission went too far when they divided the seats.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And the unofficial government position is "let 'em come at us."

But you're very right. We can't guarantee, no matter what we do, that someone won't decide to take us to court. So we're not running for the hills looking for an absolutely Charter-proof scenario, but we want to make sure we've got a good, solid case.

Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: In that Pat addressed the Saskatchewan situation, I think I'll just touch on the Manitoba situation. In Manitoba they created a number of constituencies, all of which fall within 10 percent of the median, of the average. Now, in northern Manitoba it created one constituency that's 1,060 miles by 990 miles. Yeah, I can see some heads shaking. That's part of the problem, you know. Seven years, eight years ago when the Charter of Rights was signed and agreed to by the politicians, it put into the hands of the courts certain decision-making powers. So what we have to try and do is come up with some

kind of balance that in fact will be Charter proof, and we're not even sure we can do it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Another thing we should mention, and again we're not sure where this would come out in the courts: the federal legislation allows for two seats in the Northwest Territories and one in the Yukon, and population certainly doesn't give the two territories three seats. Special consideration has been given because of their sparse population and the large geographic area. And the legislation of both British Columbia and Saskatchewan allows for special consideration in their northern, sparsely populated ridings. On the other hand, both commissions in Saskatchewan and B.C. stayed within the plus/minus 25 percent. So you know, we're looking at every possible avenue, and . . . Well, I'll save my comments for a wrap-up.

Go ahead, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Because of the very sparse population in northern Saskatchewan, they do have two constituencies, the constituency of Athabasca and the constituency, I think, of Cumberland, and those two constituencies, again due to size and sparsity of population, fall within 50 percent. But those are the only two where the Saskatchewan government felt they would be able to successfully defend that in a Charter challenge.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Thanks, Ken. John.

MR. SIMPKINS: Mr. Chairman and committee members, on behalf of the East Smoky school division, I'd like to read a short brief for you.

The board of the East Smoky school division would like to express their extreme concern regarding any plan which would reduce the level of representation we currently experience. While we accept the fact that there are significant disparities in some of the constituencies, we feel it is important to note that factors such as distance, economic variabilities, demographic uniqueness, and geographical differences justify a higher level of representation. It is true that both Edmonton and Calgary have a similar per capita representation ratio than most of the rural constituencies. However, it is also true that all constituencies in each city share the same economic base, geographical uniqueness, and local governmental structures. In this respect every MLA from either centre is representative of very similar concerns. Such is not the case in rural constituencies.

In Smoky River constituency the geographic and economic variances give rise to disparate concerns which must be addressed by a single MLA. The MLA must also deal with many local governments and groups over a large geographic area, which means that very much valuable time is lost in travel. Any increase in the current geographical size of rural constituencies will have a definite negative impact in the quality of representation available. Subsequently, it is our hope that any action taken will not reduce our voice in the Legislature.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, John. Questions? Anyone else? Okay.

MR. PRITCHARD: Could we have Allan Skretting, Art Dievert, and Alvin Billings come up, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Allan, would you like to lead off, please?

MR. SKRETTING: Mr. Chairman, committee members, and concerned constituents and electors, I represent the Valleyview hospital board. I am the administrator of the hospital. We have one member of our board present, Joan Plaxton, diligently taking notes as representative of our local paper as well.

Basically, our stand is as follows. The Valleyview General auxiliary hospital and nursing home district No. 96 is responsible for health care services for the communities of Valleyview, DeBolt, Crooked Creek, Sturgeon Lake Band, Little Smoky, Sunset House, and New Fish Creek, all of which are located in improvement districts 16 and 17. We have seven board members who represent these communities regarding health care needs. As a board, we feel we could not support their needs with any less representation. Because of the large geographic area our MLA Mr. Walter Paszkowski represents, the present electoral boundaries must not be reduced. The unique geographic, economic, and demographic circumstances in our rural area require a strong voice in provincial politics.

In addition, at a time when our environment is a critical concern, we cannot reduce representation which protects its future. Please consider, if anything, increasing our representation because of the large geographic area, economic concerns, and fair representation.

Sincerely, Ann Martfeld, Board Chairperson.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Allan.

Questions by panel members? Anyone else? Okay, Allan. Thank you.

Art.

MR. DIEVERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am here on behalf of the Grande Prairie hospital board. Our chairman, Mr. Sorgaard, wasn't able to make it. Our board has been concerned. We were a little annoyed at ourselves for missing you in Grande Prairie and have discussed this, the pros and cons, and worried over these boundary changes. So I'd like to introduce our assistant administrator, Mr. Northam. He has been sitting by and listening to us and has gathered our concerns and worries and put them in a brief. So with permission, I'd like to turn it over to him.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, Art.

MR. NORTHAM: Health care is a vital service provided to the people of Alberta. It comprises a very significant portion of the provincial budget. This service is delivered in a variety of institutions and agencies, a large part of which are located in rural Alberta. Health care in rural Alberta is more than just a service. It is an integral part of the community. Often a hospital is the largest employer in the town, meeting not only the general health care needs but a variety of specific needs which are very unique to that particular community. It is not unusual for an MLA in rural Alberta to have two, three, or four hospitals within their existing electoral boundaries. To be just familiar with these unique needs, it is very time consuming and is often impossible. A further dilution of their representation would not only compound this in a manner that would help in no way but frustrate boards and give lesser consideration to their problems.

The redistribution of MLAs as proposed would reduce the

number of MLAs representing rural Alberta. This would affect the level of representation by increasing the number and diversity of institutions, agencies, and political groups an MLA must be knowledgeable about so as to effectively represent them. To be equal, representation must consider not only population but the dispersion of that population, the area that is being represented, the number and diversity of institutions within that area, the number of political entities such as towns and villages.

The time available to rural MLAs for their constituencies is proportionately less than that of urban MLAs. This is major concern of the boards of institutions in rural Alberta. It is a concern of the Queen Elizabeth II hospital. Any further weakening of this process because of increased geographic area and related representational issues needs to be seriously considered as a dilution of equal representation. Health care in rural Alberta is already having difficulty being adequately heard in political Alberta and has the potential of being swallowed by the needs of health care in urban centres.

The difficulty of being heard in political Alberta is not the agenda of these hearings, and it must be heard at some time in the political arena. It is recommended that the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries strongly consider broader issues of representation along with population guidelines in the development of draft recommendations for the revision of the electoral boundaries. This is necessary to avoid rural Albertans becoming treated in a second-class fashion, particularly as it relates to the delivery of health care in rural Alberta.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Jerry.

Questions from any committee members? Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just one question for clarification. I'm curious to know how you feel that the time allotment in rural Alberta per constituent is less than that for an urban Albertan.

MR. NORTHAM: A significant portion of time is spent traveling. To understand the needs of one hospital is a lot different than to understand the needs of three or four hospitals. Therefore, it is tremendously reduced. To deliver a service to a population requires that you understand the needs of that population, and there are many, many more players in the arena.

MR. SIGURDSON: If one has to travel an hour between meetings in a rural community that's got 10,000 constituents, do you not think that hour of travel time might be equal to two half-hour appointments in an urban centre where there are 30,000 people?

MR. NORTHAM: If the travel time were one hour, that would be one thing. The travel time is significantly more. For us to meet with a representative often requires a full day on our part to go to Edmonton or a full day on their behalf to come to see us. For us to schedule appointments with our MLAs is an extremely difficult situation, rarely able to be accomplished without having a very long lead time, so immediate problems do not get addressed.

MR. SIGURDSON: It happens in urban centres too.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'd just like to comment on that. I am a local MLA from this constituency who has three hospitals located within the constituency and a fourth one that we service.

In each case, the issue with the hospital is entirely different. One is just in the state of development; others have different needs. If you're an urban MLA and you have a hospital within your constituency – I don't think there are any who have more than one hospital within their constituency – the basic needs of that hospital are what you address. As a rural MLA you're addressing, in my case, four different basic needs. So you're not just addressing the one basic need of that one particular facility. You're dealing with four totally unrelated needs. Consequently, you have to be dealing with four different groups of people and government; you're dealing with a whole different parameter of concerns. That is the issue Mr. Northam is addressing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anything else, Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else?

Thanks very much, Jerry.  
Alvin.

MR. BILLINGS: Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, today I would like to present improvement district 17 central's views on the electoral boundaries review being undertaken in Alberta. As a council, we feel that a system of representation by population would not be fair to rural Albertans. This system has failed in most Albertans' views at our federal political level. In many cases federally, if central Canada wants, central Canada gets. We feel that regional representation is extremely important, as 67 percent of the population of Alberta is urban and 37 percent is rural.

A large area of Alberta is rural and agriculturally based. Our prime agricultural land produces vast amounts of quality produce from a small population. A weighty urban representation could alter provincial policies and customs of agriculture. Also, it is important to state that the majority of Alberta's natural resources are in rural areas, and rural voters could have decisions imposed on them by a system of representation by population. A ratio of urban versus rural representation in government would become overwhelmingly in favour of urban and result in the decline of opportunities and services in rural areas. More urban power in caucus could speed up the process of centralization which is destroying small towns in rural areas of this province.

At this time I would like to mention some major problems rural MLAs must face compared to urban MLAs. Urban MLAs can travel across their ridings in minutes, but most rural MLAs need many hours to cover their ridings. Rural MLAs must also deal with numerous towns, municipal councils, boards, organizations, et cetera. Constituencies must contain people of common interests. Most urban ridings have problems that are common to most of their population due to their population density. Rural ridings, particularly in the north, have many problems that are unique only to that part of the riding. Our MLA for Lesser Slave Lake, Pearl Calahasen, is very hard-pressed to cover the vast area now. It would be an impossible task to cover a larger area. Rural MLAs have large forest areas, vast river and lake systems, and great amounts of oil and gas reserves in their ridings, which must be handled with care to ensure they are not depleted or destroyed so future generations will also benefit from these natural resources.

In closing, the improvement district No. 17 central council

feels that representation by area is equally as important as representation by population.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Alvin.

Questions? Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Sure. Thank you.

Alvin, I've just got one question. You spoke of there being 63 percent of Albertans now residing in urban areas and 37 percent residing in rural areas, yet the representation is pretty much 50-50 and still we have continuing rural depopulation. Do you see at any time, if rural depopulation continues, that there should be a change in the ratio between urban and rural constituencies?

MR. BILLINGS: Well, I think you have to take in the most important parts – and I mention it here – the differences a rural MLA has to face in his area. I would have to take our own council for an example. At 17 central we have a farming area which I basically represent, and then our area runs all the way up into Peerless Lake in the northern part. If we talk . . . An example would be VSI. Our northern members don't even know what we're talking about. I think all these problems . . . That's just a small one our rural MLAs face, and I would hate to see any major shift in electoral boundaries.

MR. SIGURDSON: So you would always forever keep it a 50-50 ratio.

MR. BILLINGS: Forever is a long time.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, we all know that. You don't envisage, then, if rural depopulation were to continue and go down to, say, 37 – would you still maintain a relative balance of 50-50?

MR. BILLINGS: Being from rural Alberta, I would certainly hope so, but that's a hard question to answer. It's easy to ask; it's hard to answer.

MR. SIGURDSON: It's not that easy to ask either.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Yes, sir.

MR. O'ROURKE: Yes. I'd like to ask Tom how well he thinks rural Alberta would be represented if they had 10 more urban members of parliament and 10 less rural ones. You're talking about equal representation. If urban Alberta gets 10 more seats and rural Alberta gets 10 less seats, we might as well not have an MLA in there because he's outnumbered.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, okay. Sure. That's a very fair question. Let me just put a question back to you. I hate to answer a question with a question, but maybe that's why I'm a politician. Do you believe that if party A in an election gets more votes than party B, party A should form a government?

MR. O'ROURKE: They usually do.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, in a case in Saskatchewan in the last election the reverse happened, and it was based on the number of seats that were in rural Saskatchewan. The government

received fewer votes than the opposition because of the division of seats. So I suppose when your fear comes about the majority imposing a will on the minority, probably the reverse is true in many other areas: the fear of the minority holding up the will of the majority. So I suppose you've got very many different but equally important concerns throughout the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Walter. Then I think it's Terry and the gentleman in the front, and then we'll bring this to a conclusion.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thanks, Bob.

I think one of the important ingredients that has to be addressed and considered is the time an MLA allocates to the various concerns. I know in my case – and I feel very guilty about this – I do spend less time actually dealing with individual constituent concerns than dealing with municipal body concerns. I'm not sure that is a fair allocation of time. I think that's one of the issues the gentlemen have been bringing forward, the fact that the individual should be allocated a certain amount of time as well. Now, again, perhaps you can blame the MLA for allocating the time in whatever manner he does. Nevertheless, I find this is consistently happening, that the municipal concerns – and that involves the whole parameter of school boards, hospital boards, and so on – take so much of the time because of the multitude of bodies that exist. I'm not sure that is fair to the individual constituents.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A brief response to that, and then Terry in the front row.

MR. SIGURDSON: I just want to respond to Walter, because I think what he's saying is something that's very important and something urban residents may not be aware of and rural residents may not be aware of. We've heard in a number of presentations that come forward of all the bodies – hospital boards, IDs, districts – that have to be represented by an MLA. Last night I put out a different position, that sometimes I wish my constituents knew where they were going so that if they had a concern, they might go to the school board, they might go to their alderman or councillor, they might go to the hospital board, but because they don't, they're not aware of that inside their own community. They tend to come directly to the MLA. So while you're spending a good portion of your time with groups that represent many others, I think in the urban centres the reverse may be true, that we deal more with constituents on an individual basis only because they're not going to the group first.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Terry.

MR. SCHNEIDER: To follow up on both your comments there, if you want a good example, why don't you just go ask the Premier of the province as to how it is to serve a rural versus an urban setting?

MR. SUTHERLAND: A couple of points I'd like to make, Mr. Chairman. I think Canada as a whole is really suffering a disparity. You know, that's why we're addressing Triple E Senate. Like Tom says, if you allow the centralized people to control the province, maybe 20, 25 years from now our provinces will be facing the same type of thing. I mean, we as a resource base, from an Albertan's standpoint looking to the east, plus in

the north looking south, need some type of equal representation. If anybody feels equal through an elected or Triple E Senate, regardless if we get the representation or not, I think that's a point to make, that we need equal representation or we're going to be facing the same thing the feds are right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Alvin, you got things moving. Okay, gentlemen. Bob.

MR. PRITCHARD: We have three final presenters today, I believe: Tom McCorkle, John Guerin, and André Bremont.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If there is anyone else who intended to give a brief today and you haven't been called forward, please see Bob now.

John.

MR. GUERIN: Thank you.

Mr. Bob Bogle, members of the committee, I represent the McLennan hospital complex. Many of the issues, the facts, and comments that were stated here today were discussed by our board. At this time I do not wish to repeat everything that was said here today, but we agree with a lot of these arguments. We would simply go on record with the following, and I'd like to present this letter here.

Members of the committee, with regard to the electoral boundaries review, we would like to state our opinion of the board's position. Firstly, we feel there should be no changes to the constituencies in the north because of the vastness of the areas involved and all the reasons that were stated here today. However, if a change is absolutely necessary, we would recommend that the boundaries be set according to the common economic base. I believe one gentleman here mentioned the commonality. We would ask that in the event changes should be forthcoming, we be kept informed of any proposed solution so we may be able to provide you with our future input.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, John.

Questions of John? Anyone else? Okay.

André.

MR. BREMONT: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. My name is André Bremont, reeve of the MD of Smoky River 130. On behalf of the council of the MD of Smoky River and also on behalf of the association of northern MDs and counties, I would like to submit this brief in opposition to any changes that would result in the loss of rural representation in the Legislature.

Although the Peace River country has only 7 percent of the representatives in the Legislature, we cover approximately 25 percent of the area of the province. Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to make our views known.

Now, I have some briefs here. I just wonder: if you're short of time, I could just leave them for you and we'd dispense with reading. Okay? How many do you need? You could have probably them all. It doesn't really matter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good. Thank you.

Any questions of André? Further comment? Okay. Thank you very much.

Tom.

MR. McCORKLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and commission members. I'm Tom McCorkle. I represent region 50 Unifarm, which is in the north Peace.

These are the main points from our discussion at our Unifarm district meetings regarding the boundaries commission. There is concern that larger rural constituencies will be very difficult for our MLAs to cover because of the large number of municipal boards and commissions and councils to be dealt with – numerous town councils, hospital boards, et cetera – and the time needed to travel from Edmonton to rural areas, many of which are accessible only by road. There needs to be a balance of service to constituents, not just a balance on the basis of population numbers. The time required to talk to people in large rural constituencies because of the distances which have to be driven is a concern. Time cannot be used very efficiently.

Perhaps ridings could be split so they are part urban and part rural wherever possible, spreading the population base of a city over a larger area. Larger rural constituencies will have to have more assistance to run their constituency offices so they can have a staff who can talk to local officials and send messages on to the MLA, who simply will not be able to speak to all the municipal bodies or people in the constituency.

There is a concern that the problem of redistribution of constituencies not be solved simply by adding more MLAs to the Legislature. We are trying to control a provincial deficit, and adding the expense of large numbers of MLAs at this time would not be appropriate. Region 15 of Unifarm passed the following resolution which was subsequently also endorsed by the provincial Unifarm convention:

That Unifarm suggest to the boundaries commission that while the large areas and numerous local elected officials to be covered by rural MLAs is a concern, creating a larger government would be more harmful.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Tom. Questions?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Tom, I have a question. You talk about a combination of urban and rural residents represented by one MLA. We've heard the counterargument that if we take a major urban centre and expand it where it only includes a limited number of rural members, those rural members will lose their say. Do you have any views on that?

MR. McCORKLE: I guess that's probably true. Our concern was that the rural population in this process was going to lose out. Possibly a way of limiting that was in areas like you mentioned. You mentioned the Medicine Hat area, and I think there are two ridings in that area that are large and unpopulated. It would be in our mind easy to take the large rural areas and put parts of those populations in with Medicine Hat city, for example, and still keep the three constituencies, not adding any and therefore not adding the cost of more government.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just for clarification, I think Pat missed the meeting in Medicine Hat where there was a brief which suggested that if a rural area – they were looking at the two rural ridings around Medicine Hat, both of which fall under the line, and Medicine Hat has more population than one MLA can handle and yet not enough for two. So the suggestion was made that if a rural riding needs to come in and take a corner of the city, make sure the new total population isn't more than 25

percent city and that way you would avoid that domination factor. I was thinking when Pat asked his question that he may not have been in Medicine Hat to hear that brief. We've got everything on tape and we're able to pull information forward, so when we sit down to try to formulate some recommendations, all the factors can be brought back.

Okay. Good. Any other questions of Tom? Yes, sir. Orest.

MR. MELNYK: Mr. Chairman, I've been listening to all this and I've spoken. I think we're missing one point here. The point is that representation by population is going to weaken rural Alberta. The people in rural Alberta are a little different than the people in the urban. Why I say that is that I have been in rural Alberta 59 years. We made this country what it is. We are proud of it. Rural Alberta has to be strong. Rural Alberta is what makes Edmonton, Calgary, or any other urban centre strong. If we weaken in rural Alberta, the whole economy of Alberta will go down – maybe not down completely, but it will go down. You remember 1930 when the hard times hit. Where were the people scrambling to? Rural Alberta. This is going to happen again. I hope not, but if it does, who is going to pull Alberta out? We are, and that's something you want to remember.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure. And, Orest, the point's been made over and over again that if you go on a strictly representation by population basis, you will hurt rural Alberta. We've heard it here; we've heard it everywhere.

Okay. Anyone else? Yes, sir.

MR. LESSARD: I think an analogy can be made. If you have two boxers in the ring and they're both evenly matched – which you seem to have with the representation from urban and rural – you have a good fight. One's going to give a little bit and one's going to take a little bit. Visiting Edmonton and Calgary, I certainly don't see them suffering too much. But if you happen to take the boxing gloves away or cut one of the boxer's arms off, you don't have a match any more. I think what you have to do is strike a balance. That is the only point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Keep in mind there's been a gradual shift in the weight of representation away from rural Alberta. When Marv was in the Assembly in 1971, more than half the members were rural. We've gone through several redistributions since that time and the shift has changed.

Pat, can you give us a quick statistic on that?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: I think basically all we have to do is go back to the last redistribution. In the 1979 and 1982 elections, we had 79 members. At that time the distribution was 42 rural and 37 urban, and of course now you know we have the 42-41.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So there's been a gradual shift, keeping in mind the 7 to 4 ratio. What we're now faced with – if we went to the straight rep by pop formula – would be a massive loss of 10 seats from the rural area and add 10 to the urban. All three political parties have said we want this matter studied very thoroughly before we strike a commission.

Yes, sir.

MR. WOHLGEMUTH: Yeah, I'm Herb Wohlgemuth. I'm with the East Smoky school division. I'd like to thank you for coming here and giving us the privilege to bring these presenta-

tions. I appreciate the chance of being here and listening to them all, because I think we're all coming from one angle at you. I just have a couple of questions and a couple of comments.

I've heard a couple of comments on: okay, because the government did certain things, they changed the political party in an area in the next election. I just wonder in the back of my mind now: is there something involved in here somewhere where it's a political argument? Now, I'm not pointing fingers or anything else but just bringing the question out.

Furthermore, our superintendent did a study on this. We've discussed it quite a bit on the school board. If you took the city, the urban population is where your MLAs have the majority. If you just took and averaged them out, just within that area, you would bring the top ones down an awful long way. It would make quite a difference. Really, when you look at the way the distribution's gone from the rural communities to the urban area, is it the rural communities' fault that we are losing the population in our area? The schools that have been closed in our rural areas over the last years, the problems we're having with the hospital because there isn't enough population in there: who's to blame for it? I don't point my finger at the MLAs and say this, but I don't think advantage should be taken so the rural people are going to suffer because of this problem. We have enough problems trying to keep our people in rural Alberta, and with this shift of our central government and moving offices into our rural areas – we all appreciate it, but look at the noise we hear when those people are asked to move out of the central area to move into those local areas where we need the people. I think those things should be taken into consideration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I remember when we moved the social services regional office, with a lot of help from the then MLA, over to McLennan and there were people in the department who said, "We'll never move to a town like McLennan." Now some – what? – nine years later it's working very well. But there was a lot of help from the area around, too, making those new people into the community and the area welcome.

But I want to assure you this issue crosses party lines. If it didn't, we wouldn't have an all-party committee. It took the concurrence of all three political parties, with a unanimous resolution in the House, to amend our existing Act, because our existing Act required that we strike an Electoral Boundaries Commission during our last sitting. We had to amend that legislation, give this committee a chance to do its work, and report back with the assumption that we will then create an Electoral Boundaries Commission. So I want to emphasize that we're trying hard as a committee not to play political games. We're trying to address a very complex issue.

Okay, I think that's it. Thanks very much, gentlemen.

You've got two more, Robert?

MR. PRITCHARD: Yes, we have two more presenters this afternoon: Bill Housman and Kelly Sutherland.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Kelly, you're up. Go ahead. Oh, Bill's going to present? Okay.

MR. HOUSMAN: Good afternoon, gentlemen. I guess we're probably going to repeat a lot that has been said here. Maybe one more time won't hurt.

First, I would like to thank the members for allowing the county of Grande Prairie to present their views on this situation. The county feels that the current distribution of 42 urban and 41

rural ridings should be maintained. To a certain extent, both urban and rural populations share similar housing, transportation routes, education, and utilities. However, the very business of farming – and it is a complex business – involves interaction of government at far more levels. Environmental concerns, agricultural chemicals come to mind – agricultural marketing concerns, produce pricing, organic farming, operating and capital loans, farm labour, crop insurance, grazing lands, hunting concerns, water resources and quality, land conservation, and global markets, just to name a few.

Urban communities do not require the same direct interaction with governments. Rural MLAs must deal more directly with a higher percentage of their constituents. As well, the rural MLAs must deal more directly with issues related to oil and gas and forestry development.

The county of Grande Prairie, due to its size, is represented by three MLAs. Each MLA must deal with a far greater number of local governments. An urban MLA has one city hall, one hospital board, two school boards, one recreation board, and one chamber of commerce to deal with. A rural MLA has many more local governments to deal with. If we take the Smoky River constituency as an example – and part of the county of Grande Prairie is included in that – the MLA has to work with four towns, three villages, 10 hamlets, two IDs, one county, one MD, 12 school boards, seven library boards, 10 recreational boards, eight agricultural societies, and four chambers of commerce, which is a total of 62 entities to deal with. I didn't include hospitals, but our MLA does deal with hospitals.

We cannot agree with the argument that population be the only factor used in setting the size of constituencies. If that is used, some urban constituencies will be only several miles across and some rural areas will be hundreds of miles long. The sheer distance involved would create immense traveling and coordination problems for the MLAs.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that population should not be the only factor used in determining constituency size. Due to the increased number of issues a rural MLA has to deal with and the large areas involved in rural Alberta compared with its population, we strongly recommend that it is reasonable to leave the distribution at 42 urban and 41 rural constituencies. We would like to stress again that we would hope you use some criteria besides population alone.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A little common sense with it, eh, Bill?

MR. HOUSMAN: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.  
Questions from the panel? Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to get some clarification or some direction. In one statement you say, "Urban communities do not require the same direct interaction with governments." You infer that rural communities require more, so I'm just wondering where it is that you came to the conclusion that urban communities do not require the same interaction with governments.

MR. HOUSMAN: I think what we meant by that statement was that they require interaction on a lot more subjects because of the rural interface out there. Maybe they don't require any more than urban people, but I think it's a larger, diverse area

that they have to cover.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Anyone else? Anything to add to that, Kelly?

MR. SUTHERLAND: No. I'm just here with Mr. Housman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Thanks very much, Bill.

Now, we haven't missed anyone? Okay. Any concluding comments you want to make, Tom?

MS HOFFARTH: Do you know when the commission's report is going to be tabled in the Legislature?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let me go through the process. First of all, our mandate is to report to the Assembly sometime during the spring sittings. We have hearings scheduled up to and including, I believe it is, March 5. We then as a committee set aside two evenings a week so that while the House is sitting, we can sit down and try to draw some conclusions and make our report. Our report must be tabled in the Assembly during the spring sittings. Logically, it should be and must be presented in time that would allow new legislation, the amendments to the existing Act, to be made – i.e., the new parameters – and the commission appointed. The commission then would begin its work. Normally it takes about a year for the commission.

Pat, you've had involvement with this. Do you want to lead them quickly through what happens in that year?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Okay. The commission, if it's the same as last time, was given one year for their interim report. So when the commission was struck, they advertised the basic parameters throughout all the daily and weekly newspapers and requested submissions. The '83-84 commission received just over 70 submissions, which the commission reviewed along with their own ideas and came up with their interim report.

After the interim report was published, they then held public hearings. At the public hearings they received a number of submissions that recommended changes to the boundaries. They then reviewed those submissions at the public hearings and came up with the final report. In all cases, they did not use the full time limit in that the interim report only took about two-thirds of the time, and for the final report they had six months and they only took a couple of months. So the commission can normally operate very quickly. I think the new commission will have a task of holding public hearings before and after the interim report, and of course this will extend the time they require before they can come up with any legislation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Pat.  
Yes.

MR. O'ROURKE: I was just wondering: have you got any information on if the urban and rural MLAs equal out more or less with portfolios? Which have the most?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's an awfully difficult question, because it depends on your representation. For instance, the present government has two members in the city of Edmonton, so we have two members of cabinet from Edmonton. Now, some might argue that that's disproportionate. In 1971 there

were no government members south and east of Calgary, so there was no one in the cabinet from that area. How could there be? There was no one on the government side of caucus. So that's pretty difficult to address.

Anyone else? Yes, Kelly.

MR. SUTHERLAND: Bob, has the commission looked at redistributing the cities themselves to try to get the average number down?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Kelly, we've very deliberately not sat down and had any formal discussions, and the reason we've done that is that we thought it would be unfair to begin our deliberations before we had heard from everyone. So, while there's been great desire, I think, on committee members' part to "Let's get on with the process," we want to make sure we've heard from everyone. At each and every hearing something new has been presented. When I summarize today, I'll point out a couple of things that we've heard here that have been presented in a very special way relative to the other meetings we've had.

Yes, sir.

MR. MULLIGAN: Mr. Chairman, not with disrespect to anyone on the panel, I feel a little concern over two rural members being on your committee and five urban, being from the rural area. I guess we have to have a lot of faith in the gentlemen from the urban area, that they look at things fairly. I think that Mr. Paszkowski gave a very fine example of what it's like to be an MLA. If you consider a 10-hour working day, he wasted 62 hours in travel last year. That's something that as a constituency we can't be with him in that time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: First of all, in the makeup of the committee, each party was able to nominate its representation on the committee. The parties had agreed that there would be one member of the Liberal caucus on the committee, there'd be two members of the New Democrats, and there'd be four government members. So each caucus selected its members on the committee. The only concern I have is they put such a big brood on from the NDP here that I can't wrestle them down as easily as someone smaller.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's why we put Pam on as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: She's even feistier.

Okay. Anyone else? Now, we're going to have concluding comments from panel members and from Walter, and I'll try to summarize. So we've taken any last questions that anyone has. Okay. Thomas.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you. We certainly have challenges in front of us. I think that was very clear when we first received the McLachlin decision out of British Columbia and looked at our boundaries in Alberta. The problems that we've got are many. There's a sense of us versus them, rural versus urban. In Fort McMurray the other night I had the pleasure, I thought, of hearing for the first time that we get rid of the designations of constituencies as being rural versus urban, because that's creating some artificial animosity, and that we have 83 Alberta constituencies. That is something we're going to have to address because even though I'm aware as an urban member that there's rural depopulation, I may not be aware of the specifics that go on inside the rural economy. I'm aware of the problems that are

brought to my constituency by people who have moved out of the rural areas, off the small towns and off the farms, who come into my constituency and bring along with them the problems that I then have to deal with. So I become aware of rural depopulation from a different perspective than what you offer me here today.

The presentations that you've given to us are well thought out and contain a lot of information. I want to thank you for the time that you've put into them and the time you've taken to come here. As Bob pointed out, I'm one MLA who's worked for and had the honour of serving rural Albertans as an executive assistant to Grant Notley, and I know the problems that he had in servicing the constituency that was then called Spirit River-Fairview. I wouldn't want to have that kind of a task thrust upon me, but then he chose to and members choose to run in various parts of our province for different reasons. I'm sure that he would probably have some difficulty representing an urban constituency because of the different interests that are there. We have all different interests, different perspectives, and I hope that what we'll be able to do is come out with some kind of a formula that's in the best interests of all Albertans.

Thank you for coming out today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Pat.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: I think we should recognize the effort put into the preparation of the presentations today. They were all first-class, and also I've been following just exactly the areas that you represented and the distances that you've traveled to make your presentations. We certainly appreciate that; we acknowledge the fine work that you're doing, trying to provide reasonable and well-thought-out input so that when the committee does their deliberations, they will be aware of your concerns. We appreciate it. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Pat. You speak for all of us on that.

Walter.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Chairman Bob. First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for returning to the area. As you recall, the original meeting had some problems with weather. The roads were quite icy, and we asked for your return, and you did fulfill that commitment. We appreciate that.

I think, certainly after listening to the presentations here today, that we're leaving the committee with a true challenge, and I think the challenge basically is going to be that of determining the true meaning of equality. I think that really is a serious challenge that faces this committee, and I would hope that that will be addressed in a manner that will, indeed, be fair to all of us.

Just before I close, I would like to point out as well that I would hope we really don't consider the other provinces and what they have done in too much depth. I would like to point out that in Manitoba's case, their area as far as population is concerned is less than that of the Peace River country when we're dealing with actual base of population. So, really, as far as area is concerned, I would hope that we don't place too much emphasis on what other provinces have done.

I'd like to thank those who've spent a lot of time, obviously, and a lot of thought in their preparations. I think your presentations were certainly of excellent quality. I'd like to thank Mrs.

Boucher and her council for helping organize this. You've done a super job. Thank you. And certainly for all of those who've driven in some cases up to 150 miles to be here today, I think that really shows the concern that our community poses towards this particular issue. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Walter. I tried to capture the main points that each of the presenters have given. Right at the beginning the very first presenter suggested that there should be no reduction in the five ridings in northwest Alberta. We went on to hear that constituencies should represent a commonality of interests. That was unique because we've heard of the special nature of different parts of the province where people say, "Look, there's something that makes our area a little bit unique," but describing it as a commonality of interests was another way to phrase that.

We should not use population as the sole criterion: that point has come out over and over and over again in our hearings. Then we were asked: equal representation or representation in an equal manner? Again, a challenge put to the committee. The next presenter suggested the real uniqueness of the Smoky River constituency and went through the makeup of the constituency, the communities of interest, and so on. It was encouraging hearing from the former member for the area, and we've heard other former members describe what it's like to serve the constituency. We heard Marv mention the six days that it would take to cover the constituency in a pre-session tour and the meetings that he would have.

Decentralization of government services and the strengthening of rural Alberta was mentioned by the next presenter as a key element that the government needs to continue to forge ahead with.

Then we were reminded in a subtle but very forceful way that Alberta has developed from its rural roots, and that's true, as most societies have.

The MLA must be able to deal with the diversity of the constituency. It's so hard to walk in the next person's shoes, but we've heard over and over again that each constituency is unique, the challenges are diverse, and it does take time. The present balance of urban and rural representation is adequate and should be maintained.

Then we were challenged: what is fair, what is equal? We'll go back and review the tapes on that, I assure you. Again, we went through the geographic size and the travel time it takes to get around the constituency. There was an impassioned plea: don't reduce our voice in the Legislature. Again, we heard about the large geographic areas.

We were asked to consider the number and diversity of the institutions in rural Alberta. That's when we got into the discussion about hospitals and the fact – and we've heard this story before, Walter – that you may have three or four hospitals in your constituency and they're all at different stages of their development. Each one has its own unique characteristics and challenges.

The next presenter suggested that the system of representation by population alone doesn't work. He pointed to the federal government as a prime example and said that that's why we're fighting for a Triple E Senate, because rep by pop alone just does not work. Representation by area should be of equal importance with representation by population; in other words, looking at the geographic characteristics.

Again, we were asked to make no changes to the constituencies in the northwest part of the province. We were asked to

maintain rural representation. Here was one of those unique features that came out: we were reminded that 7 percent of the population in northern Alberta occupies 25 percent of the geographic area.

Then we were asked: could there not be joint urban/rural constituencies? Could we not have a mixture of the two? There was, again, some dialogue that flowed from that.

Tom has pointed out that we should try to get away from the labels "urban" and "rural." That may be one more factor that can be examined.

We were asked not to add more members. That's been a constant theme throughout our meetings. We've had on the two extremes representations that we add whatever new seats need to be created so you don't have to take anything away from rural Alberta; just add more urban seats. We've also heard that we should reduce the size of the House down to about – 75, was it?

MR. SIGURDSON: I thought it was 78.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know that in the mesh of constituencies they had – what? – Peace River and Dunvegan and I think Lesser Slave Lake becoming one riding. Well, it was just a huge thing. That was a recommendation.

We were asked to maintain the current 42 urban, 41 rural riding split, and then finally Walter finished by asking us to examine the true meaning of equality in our system.

So we've heard from you. That's why we were here today; we came out to listen. And you've given us your thoughts and your ideas. You've taken the time, as Pat has said, to develop your briefs and to put pen to paper, and we do appreciate it. While we've all got – what's that saying? You've got a good memory, but . . . No, now I can't even remember it; that's how good my memory is. [interjections] Well, whatever it is. Boy, I've blown that one.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You've got a good memory, but it's short.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, a good memory, but it's short. Thank you very much. You can see how short mine is; I can't even remember the saying. Bob assures us that we've got everything on – what do you call them? – floppy disks.

MR. PRITCHARD: Floppy disks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Whatever that is. So that when we are going through our deliberations, we can pull key bits of information. We can go back and refresh our memory on the key points made in each brief and where there's similarity between briefs and that kind of thing. Our job's not easy. On the other hand, I think we all feel very strongly, and those committee members who unfortunately could not be here today have expressed this view at other meetings. We've learned so much by getting out and meeting people, speaking with them, but most important, listening to what you have to say. So thanks again for coming out and sharing your thoughts with us.

Yes?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, could we get the number of cases that were presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Today?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sixteen. It was very good. We're delighted.

MR. PRITCHARD: There were 16 presentations.

[The committee adjourned at 2:35 p.m.]