

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[10:35 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I declare the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries meeting being held here in Barrhead officially open. I'd like to, at the outset, welcome those of you who have come out today and braved the weather. As you know, our committee has been traveling across the province giving Albertans an opportunity to give us their input on the important matter of electoral boundaries and possible changes, focusing primarily on the principles to be addressed in any changes.

As you know, our committee is not actually drawing the lines between constituencies. If any of you have briefs where you're recommending that a poll or a part of a poll or a boundary be altered in some way or changed from one riding to another, we'd respectfully request that you hold that. We've made arrangements to refer those specific matters on to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and the commission will be actually drawing the lines once it is struck. The commission can't be struck until we complete our work, make a recommendation to the Assembly, and the Assembly then passes the necessary legislation to create the commission.

I would like at this time to introduce the members of our committee who are present today. On my immediate left is Pat Black, the MLA for Calgary-Foothills. Pat is a first-time member of our Assembly, and she's a member of the Progressive Conservative Party. On my immediate right is Frank Bruseker. Frank is a Liberal member of the Assembly, also a first-time member, and represents the constituency of Calgary-North West. On my far right - not philosophically, of course - Tom Sigurdson. Tom represents the constituency of Edmonton-Belmont. He's a New Democratic member of the Assembly, and he's in his second term. I might also mention that Tom served as the late Grant Notley's executive assistant, and Mr. Notley served on a previous Electoral Boundaries Commission, so Tom does have some experience with the boundaries process. My name is Bob Bogle. I'm the MLA for Taber-Warner.

There are several other members of our committee who are not able to be with us today. Pam Barrett is the New Democratic Party House leader, and obviously, with the spring session just several days away, Pam is not able to be with us because of those duties. Mike Cardinal, the Conservative MLA for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, is still quite involved in his constituency due to the decision regarding the proposed pulp mill for Athabasca. Stockwell Day is the vice-chairman of the committee. He's the government caucus Whip, and he represents the constituency of Red Deer-North. Stock was with us yesterday while we were in Hanna but is unable to be here today.

I'm also pleased that we've got Vivian and Ted, who are with *Hansard*. I might mention at the outset that because this is a select special committee, all of our proceedings are recorded, and there is a *Hansard* available to the public following this process. But we don't want the microphones to intimidate anyone. We've tried to keep our meetings as informal as possible.

The process we follow is that we'll invite two or three presenters forward, we'll go through the first presentation, members of the committee will be given an opportunity to ask questions or make comment, and then we throw it open to the public to see if there's anything you'd like to add to what has been said or if you'd like to give another side of the story. Then we move on to the second presenter and so on. So as I've said, we've tried very hard to keep this process as informal as

possible.

We've had in excess of 30 meetings to date. I can say to you with all sincerity that at each and every meeting we've learned at least one new thing. New ideas keep coming forward on the process. When we were in Grande Prairie at one of our very first meetings, it was recommended to us that we should use a total population base rather than an elector base. And by using a population base, due to the fact that rural families tend to be a little larger than urban families, there'd be some benefit there for the rural constituencies. Tom was very supportive of that suggestion. We went back and did some statistical data, and that's part of what we want to show you today.

As a lead-in to the hearings, we'd like to share with you some information. We'd like to share with you, first of all, the background as to why this committee was struck, and Tom is going to lead you through the ramifications in British Columbia in the B.C. court case. Then Frank will go through some slides, the overheads that we have for you, to show you, first of all, the voter list and how the constituencies across Alberta are affected by that. Many of you have got highlights of that in the package. We'll also show you the population base data, which is important.

Just before I turn it over to Tom, I would also like to introduce Bob Pritchard, senior administrator. He's the gentleman some of you have spoken with on the telephone or have addressed your letters to. He's generally with us to help and give support. When things go well, we take the credit, and when things don't go well, we turn to Bob and ask him why he didn't arrange it a little better. In any event, he's with us, and also Robin Wortman.

Okay, I think we're ready to proceed, first with the background, Tom, and then, Frank, the slides.

MR. SIGURDSON: Good. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the normal course of events, we would be having currently an Electoral Boundaries Commission, and based on whatever the Legislature determined, that commission would go out and then after a series of public hearings redraw constituency boundaries. The last time we had an Electoral Boundaries Commission was 1983-84. The Legislature ordered the commission to examine boundaries and come up with the following formula. Rural constituencies, there would be 41; urban constituencies, there would be 42. For urban constituencies there would be a variance of plus or minus 25 per cent off the average. That was the sum total of the instructions given to the commission. So it was based on numbers.

What happened in British Columbia was that there was an Electoral Boundaries Commission struck, chaired by Fisher. The Fisher commission reported that there would be a number of constituencies and that - there were some significant changes. British Columbia had constituencies that ranged from a population of approximately less than 6,000 voters to constituencies of well over 60,000 voters that had two members in each constituency. So there was a great range in British Columbia. The report was returned to the government, and the government decided not to follow the recommendations of the report.

At that point Professor Dixon decided that he would challenge the validity of the existing boundaries in British Columbia and took the government to court under the Charter of Rights, offering that one vote has an equal weight throughout the province and, therefore, the variance was far too great. Justice McLachlin decided in his favour and in her report agreed that the Fisher commission should be implemented and that there

should be a permitted variance to account for sparsity of population, geography, and any other factors that might be deemed necessary to consider, that there be a permitted variance of plus or minus 25 percent off the average, and that these boundaries had to be implemented straight away.

The government of British Columbia appealed the decision and went back to court. Justice Meredith agreed that while the boundaries ought to be changed, there couldn't be time lines imposed on the government, that the Legislature had the supremacy to impose its own time lines with respect to the implementation of the boundaries. So it allowed the government of British Columbia a period of time in which to implement the boundaries and make the necessary changes. As of January 31, 1990, the boundaries in British Columbia have changed to accommodate the Fisher commission. And that's why we are now examining the electoral boundaries process here in Alberta: to make sure that what we do will withstand court challenges.

Back to you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much. Any questions of Tom on the background? Okay.

Frank, we'll go right into the slides, please.

MR. BRUSEKER: All right. We want to show you some slides on the overhead here now. The first half of the slides is very similar to the package of information which you have in the letter that's addressed to "Dear Albertan." I'll go through the first half fairly quickly.

This is a list of the 83 constituencies as they currently exist in the province of Alberta. They're just numbered from 1 to 83. The number to the right-hand side is the number of eligible voters who were listed on the enumeration lists prior to the last general election, which was held just under a year ago now, last March.

This again is the 83 constituencies. Now, instead of simply being in alphabetical order, they're ranked in order from largest by eligible voters to smallest in eligible voters, the largest being Edmonton-Whitemud, the smallest being the constituency of Cardston. You'll notice there's a little asterisk or number one beside Cardston. There were some members of the Blood Indian tribe on the reservation who chose not to be enumerated. Our best estimate for that is that approximately 1,800 eligible voters, or people who could have voted at any rate, chose not to be enumerated, which could actually be added to the 8,100 that's shown on the list.

If you added all those numbers together, you would get approximately one and a half million voters around the province of Alberta. If you take that one and a half million and divide by 83, you get an average figure of approximately 18,600 voters per constituency. Now, if you applied the British Columbia decision to it, then, of the plus or minus 25 percent, 25 percent above would give you an upper end of approximately 23,000; 25 percent below gives you a lower end of approximately 14,000. Again this is eligible voters per constituency.

Going back to that list you saw before, then, we have some highlighted in green. Those are the ones which exceed the 25 percent. In other words, they are more than 23,000 voters, so they exceed the plus 25 percent. At the bottom we have some that are coloured in pink, and those are below the minus 25 percent; in other words, less than 14,000 voters. Showing that graphically on a map, the pink coloured constituencies are those constituencies which have less than 14,000 voters per constituen-

cy and fall below the minus 25 percent guideline. You can see that across the province east to west and pretty much north to south as well. All the constituencies which are over the 25 percent maximum guideline are urban. All the ones which were pink and below the minus 25 percent are rural.

This is the city of Calgary, showing those constituencies which exceed the plus 25 percent. This next map is the city of Edmonton. Again some constituencies are shown in green, indicating that they exceed the plus 25 percent guideline. This is the city of Lethbridge. It currently has two constituencies not coloured in, indicating that they fall within the guidelines of plus or minus 25 percent. This is the city of Medicine Hat. You'll see there are quite a number of divisions there; it's all one electoral district. Those are the poll divisions you see right there, indicating that Medicine Hat currently exceeds the plus 25 percent guideline.

Red Deer city is unusual in that it is a little different than any other city in the province. The dark black line you see around the outside shows the current constituency boundaries of the two constituencies called Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. The brown line which you see on this map is the actual Red Deer city limits. At the last electoral redistribution time, Red Deer city was too large to justify it being one constituency but wasn't quite large enough to justify two. In order to resolve that problem, the commission at that time chose to expand the boundaries and went out to what I believe are the county of Red Deer boundaries. So these two constituencies have a large piece of Red Deer city plus a piece of rural countryside around the outside in order to bring them up to acceptable numbers.

This is the city of St. Albert, located just to the north and west of the city of Edmonton. Again it's one poll, or one constituency, which right now exceeds the plus 25 percent guideline.

Looking at some of the smaller constituencies in terms of their numbers of eligible voters, we looked at a minus 35 percent guideline. That's shown here in the constituencies coloured in purple. All of those are 35 percent below the provincial average or more, meaning, in terms of numbers, 12,000 eligible voters or less. If we go to the extremely small constituencies - in terms of comparing to the provincial average, that is - these are more than 50 percent away from the average. In other words, they have 10,000 voters or less per constituency. You can see there are five located in the southern part of the province.

The green dots which you see on the map here are the locations where we have been, and we're rapidly nearing the end of our hearings process. We have been to most of those locations. We've got a couple left to travel to, and then the hearings process will be pretty well completed. That's simply a list of all the places we're going to. We're going to Waskatenau this afternoon, and we need to go back to Wainwright because the weather was this foggy yesterday and we didn't manage to get into Wainwright. So we need to find an alternate date to go back there.

Combining the green dots, where we've been, with the purple coloured constituencies indicating the minus 35 percent, you can see that what we've attempted to do is to go to those areas which potentially would suffer the most change or would incur the most change in their boundaries.

Everything we've gone through on the slides so far is basically what you have in the package before you, and as Mr. Bogle mentioned earlier, early on in our deliberations the question was raised: well, what about using total population as opposed to eligible voters? So now I want to go through a similar set of slides that you don't have before you, which are the data based

upon total population. This includes the under-18-year-olds who are not eligible to vote, today at any rate, but they may turn 18 tomorrow, so who knows. It also includes all the landed immigrants who have come to this country and do not yet have Canadian status. It would also include those groups which may choose, for whatever reason, not to be enumerated, such as the Blood Indian tribe, such as perhaps Hutterite colonies which choose not to be enumerated, and yet as MLAs, whether they vote for us or not, whether they're even eligible to vote for us or not, we must represent them and their concerns, which is why we addressed the issue of total population. So what I want to do is go through the same kind of number-crunching that we did before.

The total population of the province of Alberta is just under 2.4 million. If you divide that by 83 constituencies, which is again the current standing, you get a provincial average of 28,500 total population per constituency. Adding 25 percent to that, you get an upper end of about 35,000; if you take 25 percent away from that, you end up with a low end of - what is it? - 21,300 in rounded off figures. So the range, then, would be from 21,000 at the lower end to 35,000 at the upper end.

Now, this is a similar slide to what you had seen before in that the ones that are green are exceeding the 25 percent. Remember, this is all with population now. The pink coloured ones are below the 25 percent. There's a difference here though. If you counted them, here there are 18 which are coloured in green. On the sheet, the handout that you have, there are 19. So there is one fewer. In the pink we have 22 constituencies which are below the minus 25 percent on the handout that you have. Using eligible voters, there are 24 constituencies. The net effect is that if we use population, we have 43 constituencies which would fall within the guidelines of plus or minus 25 percent, whereas using eligible voters, there are only 40. So it may result in less radical changes, perhaps, if we used population.

Again showing it on a map, the most significant feature that you can see right away - the pink again are the ones that are below the minus 25 percent. Now, using population, however, you'll notice we have two rural constituencies which in fact exceed the plus 25 percent; in other words, more than 35,000 eligible votes. That's the constituency of Grande Prairie on the west side and in the northeast corner the constituency of Fort McMurray.

Again the city of Calgary. You can see again there are some coloured in green. Basically, with the cities of Edmonton and Calgary there's a bit of a shift. We pick up a few and we lose some, for a net loss of a couple, as I said before. This again is the city of Edmonton; you can see there are still some which are outside the 25 percent guideline. Notice that in both of these two slides, Edmonton and Calgary, and with the enumeration, the constituencies which exceed the plus 25 percent are on the perimeter of the city; in other words, the area where the city is growing. In the centre where the population is more stable, there doesn't seem to be as much of a concern.

This is quite significant, though, if you look at this particular one. You will recall I showed you one before that had the purple colour on it as well. This still indicates those constituencies that are minus 35 percent, but now we have 12 constituencies that are coloured in purple - in other words, that are more than 35 percent away - whereas on the previous slide that you saw in your handouts there were 16. So we've dropped four constituencies. It's a significant change.

The last slide is even more radical. You'll notice that now, using minus 50 percent, there is only one constituency that is at

the minus 50 percent or less level - that is Pincher Creek-Crowsnest in the bottom corner - whereas before, with eligible voters, we had five constituencies that were more than 50 percent away from the average.

Public hearings to date - and these are the total submissions we've had and the total number of attendees - 546 people attending and 209 presentations so far. So we've had a lot of input from a lot of different people from a lot of different places.

I think that's the last slide. Are there any questions anyone might have that maybe I didn't address clearly enough when I went through those?

All right. Mr. Bogle.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much. Bob, before you leave, could you bring up the two slides with the purple, the minus 35 percent. I think you need to see those two side by side to see how dramatic it is.

MR. PRITCHARD: This is the population.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, that's population.

MR. PRITCHARD: This is enumeration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Bob.

If there are no other questions for clarification, we're ready to proceed with the briefs.

Yes?

MR. SCHULTZ: Mr. Chairman, earlier in one of your briefs - I could ask these questions when I'm presenting, but I'll ask them now - it was mentioned that you would be talking to the Blood Indian Band about their decision not to be enumerated. Have you done that, and what was their answer? Also, I realize that the Hutterites in the province decided not to, but is that option available to all the citizens?

MR. CHAIRMAN: First, the question on the Blood Indians. We attempted to have a hearing right at Stand Off. Bob worked directly with the chief and the chief indicated they weren't interested. So we moved the meeting to Cardston. We have not had any direct input from the Blood Indians.

On the second question, about Hutterites, some have chosen to be enumerated; some have chosen not to be. There's no law requiring a person to be enumerated, but if you go to a total population base, you catch everybody. It's not a matter of going and enumerating them; you use the census statistics, and the figures are very dramatic in the way some constituencies come up in total population.

MR. SCHULTZ: Also, further to that, Mr. Chairman, would we be able to acquire the results of your study on total population?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, you certainly can.

MR. PRITCHARD: Everybody who registers or comes to one of the hearings will be sent a copy of the report. That's why we asked for your name and address when you came in.

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. If there are no other questions, Bob,

we'll begin with the first three presenters, please.

MR. PRITCHARD: Okay; good. We have eight presentations this morning. The first three: Harold Junck, Margaret Hanson, and . . . I'm sorry, is it Joan Butler? Would you come up, please. [interjection]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll take Margaret first then.

MR. JUNCK: Margaret wanted to be last.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, you wanted to be . . . All right. Harold, they defer to you.

MR. JUNCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and commission members. On behalf of the council of Swan Hills, the elected school board and hospital board, we'd like to make this presentation to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'll give you a brief. I'm glad this tablecloth is a long ways down, because my legs are shaking.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Relax.

MR. JUNCK: Dear commission members: please accept the attached as the town of Swan Hills presentation regarding electoral boundaries. The undersigned would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that existing social, financial, and historical ties with communities within present electoral boundaries are very strong and dynamic. Therefore, it is felt that any alterations to such boundaries would produce devastating results. The attached proposal highlights a number of key issues at stake which should be seriously reviewed before any decisions are made. Respectfully yours.

The electoral boundaries proposals. The question has been raised as to which riding we should naturally tend toward. Are there logical reasons for staying within the Barrhead constituency or for looking in a northwest direction to Slave Lake? The following parameters should be considered in answering the questions, as these are the natural things we depend on for our goods and services into Swan Hills.

Would the commission, as they have copies of this brief, like us to read the whole brief or just highlights?

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you'd like to highlight, that would be quite fine, because we will take the brief and read it into the record later. So if you'd like to highlight the key points, just paraphrasing, Harold, please do that.

MR. JUNCK: Okay.

One of the things we historically consider very important for the existence of Swan Hills in the Barrhead constituency is schooling. Our high schooling takes place in the town of Barrhead; it has for many years. We have joint use of the high school in existence, and the superintendents are jointly shared by Swan Hills and Barrhead. The board feels strongly that the community of Swan Hills benefits greatly from having joint use and our MLA within the same school district.

Our hospital. The Swan Hills hospital district was carved out originally from the Barrhead hospital. We still have a history of utilizing the larger hospital in Barrhead and the larger medical staff, although we are working strongly at becoming independent within our own town boundaries, but realizing that the cost and the benefits of having a hospital the size of Barrhead's is a

benefit to Swan Hills.

The shopping. We are independent in Swan Hills to some extent, but a lot of our history has dictated that we travel to Barrhead for a lot of services and a lot of things we don't at the present time accommodate in Swan Hills: specialty services, et cetera. So a lot of trade dollars come to Barrhead from Swan Hills, and I might state at this time that the trend from Barrhead is that they are starting to offer a lot of services that come from Barrhead up to Swan Hills. A lot of people have worked on the agreement and tried to work it so it's of benefit to both communities.

The transportation corridor through history has been from Swan Hills south and not north. At one time we were more or less isolated. The only paved or upgraded road came through Barrhead, and that made it economically feasible for us to be going from Swan Hills down to Barrhead and then on to Edmonton or whatever we had to do. So it's been history. We now have upgraded highways that go to Whitecourt and Slave Lake, but the trend and the family connections are still in Barrhead.

Human services, government services, are established in Barrhead. Some of them - AADAC, mental health, social services, and all that - are established in Barrhead and utilized by the citizens in the town of Swan Hills, and that is another historical trend. The only one not being handled in Barrhead as far as Swan Hills is concerned is unemployment. The services tend to be that we don't get a lot of services from Slave Lake, and if we have need for them in the citizenry, the citizenry has to go to Slave Lake. Otherwise, the services we get from Barrhead - we are working on arrangements and agreements that they tend to come to Swan Hills certain days of the week. We'd like it more, but so far we haven't got any more. But we are working on agreements that they will come to Swan Hills rather than the citizenry coming down to Barrhead, so it's working out.

Our population ties. Since the establishment of the oil patch, we're a one-resource town. We're working on changing that, but population ties are - the young people get their education in Barrhead and then higher education on into Edmonton. But they find jobs available in the oil patch and the oil industry in Swan Hills, and they come from the farms and the communities of Barrhead up to Swan Hills. I'm sitting here with two citizens of Swan Hills, and one has three generations in Swan Hills now. But Mrs. Hanson is originally from Barrhead and her family ties are all - except for her children, her mother and dad and everybody lived in Barrhead. They migrated to Swan Hills and call that home now.

Our trading dollars and its history has been that we traded and shopped in Barrhead. Over the years Swan Hills has put many hundreds of thousands of dollars into the Barrhead area, and that has been to the benefit of the citizenry of Swan Hills rather than having to go all the way to Edmonton. They've done it in Barrhead. Also, Barrhead is making efforts to offer the same services in Swan Hills that we don't have. So it's working out.

One thing that I would like to . . . The political side of it. Since the election of Ken Kowalski to the Barrhead riding, we have seen a significant increase in public-type projects; for example, a new hospital, the opening of the Grizzly Trail as a major highway from the north to the south, the finishing and paving and upgrading of Highway 32 from Whitecourt, healthy contributions to the golf club, and various other projects within the town of Swan Hills. The Grizzly Trail Promotional Associa-

tion was given a tremendous stimulus by Ken Kowalski, encouraging the town and county of Barrhead. Alberta was given a large impetus by Ken Kowalski, and when this ever becomes a developed item, much of the credit will go to our MLA.

So politically and history being what it is, our MLA has used us very well, equally with Barrhead and the other ridings. We look forward to that working relationship. Federally we are in the Yellowhead riding – our MP is Joe Clark – and we wouldn't like to see that divided. It's a benefit to us, and it's a benefit to Barrhead to all be in the same riding.

The influence that we think has a very important part, both political and economic, is the fact that we are the second largest town in the riding. It's a benefit to us, because we are politically heard. We make our feelings felt and they're acted on with government agencies and our MLA and MP.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Harold.

Just before I ask if there are any questions, we'll commit to pass your brief on to the commission, because you are really making a case to stay in the Barrhead riding.

MR. JUNCK: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions or comments from committee members? Frank and then Tom.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a couple of real quick questions. Harold, how far is it to Swan Hills from here, and what's the population of Swan Hills?

MR. JUNCK: The population was 2,479 at the last census, and I was going to say 64 miles, but Joan travels the road longer than I do and she says 62. You guys can calculate that into the other language.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. The other question I had: as Mr. Bogle said, this really talks about keeping Barrhead and Swan Hills together in one constituency, but I'm wondering about the overall boundaries. You talk about keeping these two towns together. Did you consider, you know, looking at the overall boundaries and the principle we talked about in our "Dear Albertan" letter of the plus or minus 25 percent? Did your town have any discussion on that?

MR. JUNCK: We've had some discussions on it. As the boundaries exist now, we're not that far out in total population from where the government is trying to put us, and we think it's fair that we stay there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks Harold.  
Okay, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Those were my questions, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Anyone else?  
Okay, Harold, thank you.  
Margaret.

MRS. HANSON: Yes. I'm here for the Swan Hills Chamber of Commerce. My brief is also exactly the same as the town of Swan Hills, supporting the boundaries as they exist at the present time. There were a few things that I felt were missed out of the other brief. The medical care . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. Can everyone hear Margaret? There is a microphone at the table there.

MRS. HANSON: I feel that the link between the Barrhead hospital and the Swan Hills hospital has been a historical one. We still have links with the care centre. We have one representation on the Barrhead hospital board to answer the question of requisition for that board. The Hillcrest lodge still has a member of the town council on the Hillcrest lodge board. The many citizens of Swan Hills still have medical help from these facilities.

The education. Swan Hills school board now has the contract with the county of Barrhead to educate grade 10, 11, and 12 students, with our superintendent shared between both schools.

Various government suboffices are located in Barrhead, with citizens traveling to Barrhead when these services are required. The distance is considerable but is less than traveling to Slave Lake or Whitecourt. Many of our citizens travel to Edmonton or Barrhead on days off to shop and visit relatives in the area. Highway 33 is our major transportation line through our area, and we'd like to keep it in existence.

The tourism. The Grizzly Trail Promotional Association has been supported by the Swan Hills Chamber of Commerce and other communities along Highway 33 to encourage tourism and interest of the area and increase co-operation between the communities.

In conclusion, the Swan Hills Chamber of Commerce strongly believes that we have more in common with our neighbours to the south and wish to remain in the Barrhead constituency.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Margaret.  
Pat.

MRS. BLACK: I'm wondering, in both your and Harold's presentation – do you mean that we should be recognizing historical links between communities . . .

MRS. HANSON: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: . . . as opposed to just a straight 25 percent?

MRS. HANSON: Because of the historical reasons for Swan Hills and Barrhead area being the way they are, we're asking that we stay the same. I don't know how much influence that would have in any other area. I haven't studied it myself, but I think for our area it's a benefit.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you.

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

MRS. HANSON: I have one more, for the Grizzly Trail Promotional Association. I'm representing the Grizzly Trail Promotional Association here today and, as you see, we've given you some of our propaganda to take along with you to remind you that this is a good place to travel.

The Grizzly Trail Promotional Association would like to request that Highway 33 remain within the Barrhead constituency. It has taken four years of considerable work to get the co-operation and involvement of all the communities along the Grizzly Trail. We feel that this could not have been achieved if it were not for the help and encouragement of our MLA, the

Hon. Ken Kowalski.

The goal of the Grizzly Trail is to promote increased tourism on Highway 33. One such project has been the locating of the centre of Alberta, which is three kilometres off this highway. We encourage the promotion of all the other tourist attractions in our area. It is with this in mind that we request Highway 33, the Grizzly Trail, remain within the Barrhead constituency.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Margaret. Thank you.

MRS. HANSON: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions of Margaret?

MR. SIGURDSON: That's fine, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Okay. Thank you.  
Okay, Bob. Where's Bob? Go ahead, please.

MRS. BLACK: Could we have Sylvia Krikun – come on up, Sylvia – Don Schultz, and Adolf Bablitz.

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

MRS. KRIKUN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The council of the town of Mayerthorpe had voiced several concerns about any proposed size increases to rural boundaries. The first one was that rural MLAs have to intercede on behalf of many different municipal governments, rural and urban, and not just a part of one municipality, as MLAs representing larger urban centres. And what benefits one municipality doesn't necessarily help another, so there is always a lot of jealousy between the municipalities within one constituency.

Secondly, rural MLAs have to deal with a vast diversity of geographics and interests, et cetera. In the Whitecourt constituency, where Mayerthorpe is situated, we have everything from a fairly industrialized urban centre, Whitecourt, to farming communities, oil and gas resource centres, forest areas. Each of these has its own unique concerns.

Thirdly, some rural MLAs have to travel several hundred kilometres just to cover their territory from one end to the other, and this doesn't mean being able to stop in to see their constituents at the same time. If rural constituencies were made even larger, MLAs representing this part of Alberta would be hard pressed to serve all their constituents' needs and concerns.

Although the town council realizes that representation by population is a "fair" system, we couldn't recommend a large increase in the number of urban MLAs to the Legislature. We feel that this would be fiscally irresponsible at this time, and we also fear that if there was an imbalance of power, urban interests would almost always take precedence over rural wishes. This is something we wouldn't want to see happen either.

So we wish you a lot of luck in resolving this, because there's no easy solution that will please everyone.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Sylvia.  
Any questions? Yes, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just one quick question, Sylvia. Currently we have 42 urban and 41 rural MLAs. You're saying we should not increase from 83. Are you saying we should keep 42-41 approximately?

MRS. KRIKUN: No. What we said was we couldn't support a large increase. We don't want to see the rural constituencies made larger right now, because there are a lot of problems, which I've outlined here, but at the same time representation by population is probably a better system. So there would be an increase in the number of urban representatives, but we wouldn't want to see it increased too substantially, because there are a lot of costs involved with that too.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. Let me just follow up on that then. Should we keep the 41 that we've identified currently as rural at 41?

MRS. KRIKUN: This is what we would wish, yes.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you very much for your presentation, Sylvia. Have you got the package near you? Could you flip to the map of Alberta? I think it's about three or four pages in. Have you got it?

When you talk about the size of constituencies, you can see that Whitecourt is – I don't know where it would rank in terms of size. If you look at other constituencies, if you go down the Highway 2 corridor, you've got Ponoka-Rimbey, Lacombe, and Innisfail all below the 25 percent, and yet I think if you were to add those three together, you'd probably have something in the neighbourhood of the size of the Whitecourt constituency. When the commission looks at boundaries, would you argue that constituencies perhaps like the three I've mentioned, but not exclusively those three – that there might be some changes there to try and move their population or their size? Lacombe, for example, is the fourth smallest rural constituency in terms of its geographical size in the province. I don't know where it ranks in its population, but if you have the combination of the two, do you think that's fair to a person that, say, represents Chinook or Lesser Slave Lake?

MRS. KRIKUN: Yeah. Well, one of the things here is that, you know, dealing with different municipal governments, there are a lot of municipalities and a lot of towns and villages in that area too. So they would have the other problem where they're dealing with so many different interests. We didn't really discuss those areas. We were more concerned about northern Alberta, Whitecourt constituency, and things like that.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MRS. BLACK: Sylvia, I'm wondering . . . You mentioned your municipalities, et cetera. Like the two previous presenters, do you feel there should be other factors considered when we're looking at the electoral boundaries?

MRS. KRIKUN: Yes, most definitely. I think just the fact that there are so many interests in a different area, and the MLA then . . . I can talk about Peter Trynchy. There are many times when he's been asked to be at two or three different municipalities on the same day, but they can be 300 kilometres apart. So he can't always look after everyone, and one municipality

feels slighted over another. This is also something to consider. Because in, let's say, one of the constituencies in the city of Edmonton, where it's mostly a residential population, they don't have the same diversity. And what is good for one area will probably benefit that whole region, whereas it doesn't happen in rural areas.

MRS. BLACK: Then to carry it a step further, do you feel there should be one system set up for rural and one system set up for urban?

MRS. KRIKUN: Oh, I'll let you worry about that one. I really wouldn't know. Like I said, there's no easy solution to it. I really wish you luck in coming up with something, because there'll be people upset with it. It can't be fair to everybody in different ways.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Sylvia.  
Anyone else? Anyone from the floor?  
Don.

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm here with two hats today. I'm representing the town of Barrhead. I'm a councillor with the town of Barrhead. I'm also vice-president of the Barrhead Progressive Conservative Association. I will go through the town brief. Then there's one other thing in the PC brief that I will outline for you.

Mr. Bogle and committee, the town of Barrhead, its mayor and council want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to address you on this important issue. Some of the things I'm going to say here I'm sure you've heard before, but being a politician, I'm not going to give up a chance to speak. The boundaries in the provincial electoral system not only affect each and every one of us but also affect the future of our province. The task you have undertaken is a tough one, and we wish to congratulate each and every one of you for sitting on this select committee. Our concern is about proposals your committee might be led to believe are better than what we have now. For example, these proposals could lead more in the direction of one man, one vote and less in the direction of duties, obligations, and roles of an MLA. A proposal for more elected representatives to offset these current problems is also of concern.

I'd like to address these concerns a little more specifically. The thought of one man, one vote would lead to the same scenario in our province as exists federally. The urban centres, because of their numbers, would dictate to the rest of Alberta what is going to be done and what direction this province is going to take now and in the future. Rural Alberta, because of its vastness and different ways of life, requires a strong voice and special considerations. A rural MLA may have between 30 to 40 councils or boards to deal with. This doesn't take into consideration the special interest groups. An urban MLA represents one or two councils, two or three hospital boards, two school boards, and far fewer special interest groups. This comparison points out the need for major rural representation. Rural MLAs must spend considerably more time traveling to keep in touch with their constituents. They must deal with far more and different media in order to get their messages out to their constituents. Rural MLAs on the average are more involved in areas of tourism and economic development than their urban counterparts.

It is important to have growth throughout our province. Urban centres will only benefit if the rural base of our province

prosper. Agriculture is still the number one industry in our province and thus has to have appropriate representation. Rural people depend heavily on their MLA and his office to act on their behalf. This dependency increases with the distance from the capital city and other major urban centres. Urban people have access to government departments at their fingertips if they so wish.

In short, we believe rural representation cannot be any less than 50 percent of the elected seats in our province. Increasing the number of seats in the House would not be responsible government. We now have the distinction of having the highest per capita representation in the country. In fairness, we also cannot lessen our representation. The joining of some rural and urban ridings could not, in our minds, work very easily. In this type of scenario the majority of votes would be urban, thus influencing the MLA's decisions in matters of conflict in favour of the majority of voters. Previous briefs have pointed out what matters of conflict could arise in that type of scenario.

One idea as to how the province might look at this is as a population issue. As you pointed out earlier, you have researched that very well, and that was been brought up to you before. In the future some rural ridings in Alberta and southern Alberta are going to grow. This is because of developments already going on in those areas. This could bring them into the minimum requirement sooner than one thinks, and I'm hoping that type of deliberation goes into all thoughts the select committee will pass on.

This brings us to Barrhead's specific concerns. We are surrounded on three sides by ridings with insufficient numbers of voters as some people perceive it. To change the boundaries and even out populations in urban centres is quite easily done. This is not so in rural Alberta, as in the cases of Whitecourt, Athabasca-Lac La Biche, and Lesser Slave Lake. The obvious way to go is to take part of Barrhead into each of them. This only creates larger ridings, with more distance and less exposure by the MLA. This would also give Barrhead a loss of identity. We all know what happens to communities and their people when you change boundaries, causing splits in communities that can never be healed.

Barrhead is at the centre of our riding, thus making us unique as far as MLA accessibility and closeness for everyone concerned. The loss of our riding and riding office would cause considerable hardship to everyone. Our riding is and has been a very stable one in terms of population over the years. We do not anticipate any large growth spurts in the future. This is not so for our three neighbouring northern ridings. Their populations, as I said earlier, could bring them into line quite quickly.

In short, we in Barrhead don't want to see any change in our riding. The present situation is one of stability and a good working relationship with the province. It is one that handles everyone's concerns, including agriculture, quite fairly and effectively. Kindly consider this in the final drafting of your report.

Thank you again for allowing us the opportunity to present our thoughts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Don. Let's stop for a moment and deal with that brief. Questions or comments?

MR. SIGURDSON: Don, on page 2 you say that rural representation should not be "any less than 50 percent of the elected seats in our province." We have a situation of increased urbanization or rural depopulation, depending on your perspec-

tive, I suppose. It's about 60 percent urban residents and 40 percent rural residents, at least contained in the constituencies as they currently exist. If that change continues and we see an increase in urbanization, would you ever find a point on that scale where you would start changing the ratio of urban to rural seats?

MR. SCHULTZ: Because of the vastness of our province and also the large agricultural base, which has to be protected, I don't think our council or myself personally could see that happening. By giving you the uneven balance, we cannot ensure that the agricultural industry will be protected fairly. I'm not saying the urban centres and urban people would do as I've depicted here, as has happened federally, but that opportunity could exist if we had more urban seats than rural. Why give that possibility a chance?

MR. SIGURDSON: Don't you think the same thing could hold true in reverse, though? If you have a smaller population, 40 or 35 percent, which has 50 percent of the seats, do you think that power block might not affect how the other 60 or 65 percent of Albertans live?

MR. SCHULTZ: I think it could. But if you go by history, the province of Alberta has treated both centres, urban and rural, quite fairly. And you have to give credit to the people that are elected.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else?

Okay, Don. Do you want to proceed with your second brief?

MR. SCHULTZ: Okay. The second brief, from the Barrhead PC association, basically says the same things as I've said here. It just happens that I helped write both of them, so there's influence there.

The only thing is that on page 2 of the PC brief, item 4 would pertain more to if the riding was to change. I'd like you to pass this on to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. That's the diverse nature of this riding. As has been pointed out by previous presentations, the diverse nature is also tied closely with our historical ties in this riding. To disturb that will greatly disturb the whole balance that goes on in the Barrhead riding. Our PC association strongly works with these other communities, and we would be very much against the splitting of the Barrhead riding, for personal reasons.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Don. Thank you.  
Questions? Yes, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just one, if I may. Don, you speak of having your office centrally located. I quite concur that there ought to be every available access to an MLA, and I know that for a constituent to travel an hour in some centres wouldn't even get you to the MLA's office. One of the luxuries I suppose this committee has is that in its recommendations it might be able to propose to Members' Services that certain provision be made for increased office funding, so constituencies that are geographically very large might have more than one or two constituency offices and so have that access. Would you argue that it would be fair and equitable for a person that represents a large geographical area to have more than one constituency office?

MR. SCHULTZ: I think that'd be very fair, but you can't make the riding so large that the MLA just does not have enough time, no matter how many offices there are, to visit every corner of the riding.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. Thank you.

MRS. BLACK: Don, in both of your reports you talk about the rural/urban split at 50-50 and that remaining at 50-50 even with tides of urbanization taking place, et cetera. So are you suggesting, then, that there be a two tiered system for determination of electoral boundaries, one for the urban and one for the rural, with a mean or something for each?

MR. SCHULTZ: I can't see how it would be done any differently, given your difference in populations. Some system like that has to be derived, and a two-tier looks to be about the only feasible way of doing it. I'm not knowledgeable enough in how it could be done to give you a proper opinion. In my mind I think that is viable. But, remember, that's only my opinion. That part has not been discussed with the other representatives on these briefs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else?

Thanks, Don.

MR. SCHULTZ: I have one question on the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. SCHULTZ: Would they ultimately have the power of decision on the boundaries, or would that go back to the House?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The commission is normally made up of a judge, who chairs the commission, the Chief Electoral Officer, and several citizens. Now, in the past in Alberta we've had MLAs sit on the committee, but we found that's not the practice in neighbouring jurisdictions. So that's one of the things that this committee will have to recommend re the makeup of the commission.

The commission does not have final, decision-making power; they report back to the House. But looking at the past history of commissions not only in Alberta but other provinces, you'd have to have extremely, extremely strong reasons to override the recommendations of the commission, and I'm not aware of any precedents where it's happened.

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Adolf.

MR. BABLITZ: Yes. First of all, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take this opportunity, as the deputy mayor of the town of Barrhead, to welcome both you and the select committee to Barrhead. We thank you very much for taking the time and coming out to our community and hearing the concerns of our communities and the voters in the Barrhead constituency.

Our brief is presented by the economic development board. Listening to Don's, I find that it's probably much the same. I will just go through it with you and hopefully just add some fuel to the concerns that have probably been voiced already.

The Barrhead and district economic development board,



consisting of members from the town and county of Barrhead No. 11, are very concerned about the effects of any electoral changes in our constituency and its economic growth. Any redistribution of voters could seriously change our constituency or indeed spell its demise, as we are located in the centre, as boundaries would have to be moved toward the centre of the province. This could of course lead to a loss of identity for our community as well as of easy access by voters to the MLA and his office. Presently the town of Barrhead is centrally located in the constituency, allowing voters from all areas of the constituency access to the MLA. As well, this cuts down on his travel time, allowing more time for voter contact and better representation of their views and concerns in the Legislature.

We are an agriculturally based economy, with only a small amount of forestry and oil-based development in our area. This allows our MLA to focus his attention and priorities on agricultural policies and issues. Agriculture is still the number one industry in Alberta and, as such, deserves special treatment and consideration by the Alberta government. Any changes in our boundaries might change the complexion of our constituency, causing the MLA to divert his energies and commitments to areas other than agriculture. We feel any growth in the economy of our region must come in agriculturally based industries and the diversification of the family farm.

The population of our constituency has remained relatively stable in the last few years and lies within the 25 percent guidelines presently being considered by the government. It will probably remain this way or even have a small loss. As our rural population decreases, some of the surrounding constituencies will have voter increases as a result of major developments in their area. For example, Don mentioned Whitecourt and Athabasca. This could bring about greater voter equity in their region compared to ours without having to effect any boundary changes. It would be a natural cycle.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we as a board feel it is very important to maintain the balance in the Legislature of at least 50 percent rural MLAs. Agriculture and the rural voters deserve a strong voice in the provincial government if they are to have any chance for growth and development in the future. We realize there must be some adjustment and changes to balance the voter count in some of the constituencies. However, some allowances must be made to ensure that rural areas have a voice in the government of our province; otherwise, we'll face the same situation as western Canada and the federal government. We feel increasing the number of MLAs will not have any benefit and would be very costly to the provincial government and the taxpayer.

Thank you for allowing us to present our views to your committee, and we very much appreciate your coming to Barrhead for this hearing. We also support the brief and points of view as presented by the town of Barrhead as well as the county of Barrhead.

Again, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Adolf.  
Any questions?

MR. BRUSEKER: Just one quick question. Adolf, over the years there's been an increase in the number of urban MLAs because population has increased, and now we have 60 percent in Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, if we take all of the small urban centres - Wetaskiwin, Leduc, Stettler; all the small areas - about 80 percent of the population is urban now. This is your

question, Tom, but I guess I'm wondering when we should, or should we ever, make a shift to reflect that away from the 50-50 we now have.

MR. BABLITZ: Well, I would think that possibly will be the task of various committees in the future. I believe the government has a policy whereby they take a look at boundaries and so on every second election. As the situation changes, I think that will be the time to look at it. Presently, I don't feel that that would necessarily be a strong case.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else?  
Don, you wanted in on this point.

MR. SCHULTZ: Yes, on that point. When you take a look at the total urban population, when we're presenting our briefs, we're specifically talking about the major urban centres, your major cities, Calgary and Edmonton. The other urban centres are rurally based and tie in with your rural population, and that's where you'd differentiate the two, in my mind.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Any questions?  
Adolf made reference to the brief presented by the county of Barrhead. That was done by the reeve down in Red Deer several weeks ago.

Okay. Thank you very much, Sylvia and gentlemen.

MR. PRITCHARD: Our next three presentations are going to be made by groups of two people, so the first two people to come up are Doug Rice and Steve Chodan, please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Doug, we understand you're leading off.

MR. RICE: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. RICE: Thank you. We represent the town of Westlock, which is presently in the Westlock-Sturgeon constituency. We would recommend the retention of the present distribution of 42 urban and 41 rural divisions. We suggest that a minimum and maximum number of voters for each would be determined using a slightly different formula. For the urban ridings the average number of voters would be determined by dividing the total number of urban voters by 42, and this is using the current enumeration list. So that would give you an average of 23,212. The rural division average would be determined in the same pattern, using the total number of rural voters and dividing that by 41, which would give an average of 14,092. This two-tier system would be justified through the greater distances a rural MLA has to cover, the number of council boards and committees he has to deal with, the economic activity in the rural areas, and the fact that in a lot of rural areas you have different phone services, where you do have long-distance toll calls.

We looked at the 25 percent factor and felt that maybe a 20 percent factor could be applied here. This would apply in both the urban and the rural divisions. Really the 42-41 rule was, I guess, the main focus of our presentation. We feel strongly that representation by population is not in the best interests of Alberta. To increase the number of seats and give the geographically smaller urban areas two-thirds of the representation in the Legislature would recreate imbalances similar to what we see in the federal scene, with Ontario and Quebec sort of

making all the decisions for the whole of the country.

Voter turnout traditionally has been greater in rural ridings, and I think this can be attributed to a more stable population here, involved at the grass-roots level of government action, particularly as it affects resource industries. We're looking at all rural areas, where you have your agriculture, your forestry, your oil and gas, and so on.

Just a quick note on the Electoral Boundaries Commission. We felt it should be made up of a provincial judge, and I've added the Chief Electoral Officer plus members from the directors of AUMA or AAMD and C. We feel that this group would certainly have a tough job on their hands, but they would be well qualified to do it.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Doug.

Any questions or comments? Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. Doug, thank you. A very thoughtful presentation. I just wanted to ask you again: so you're supporting the idea of having two separate averages, and then vary 20 percent around those two separate averages?

MR. RICE: That's correct.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. I've done just some real rough numbers here, and maybe the accountants can come up with some closer numbers. But what I came up with, then, is that for the upper end of the urban we'd end up with a possible maximum of 27,000, and for the lower end of the rural around 11,000, which again is about a 2 and a half to 1 variation. I don't know if you've looked at those particular numbers.

I guess I just want a comment. Do you think that's sort of a reasonable kind of variation to have, a highest possible of 27,000 and a lowest possible of about 11,000?

MR. RICE: I guess we've looked at this, and maybe I'll ask Steve to comment on this as well. We felt that, yeah, you have to start someplace and that there would be a similarity right now, I think, between the maximum number of voters in a rural riding and a minimum in an urban riding. I suppose, if you're looking in the future for any change, if you start at base level and then work from there, in the next review a population shift could be accommodated through that process, looking at a similarity between a maximum in a rural riding and a minimum in an urban riding.

Steve.

MR. CHODAN: Well, I think the question that you're asking is: is it fair to have such a large number for the urban and such a small number for the rural? Is that your . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah, that's the gist of it. Basically, as I said, you've got a 2 and a half to 1 variation.

MR. CHODAN: I think, based on arguments presented earlier in the other submissions, if you look at the importance of the rural areas, there are spin-offs from activities in the rural areas. If you go back in history to the time of the British North America Act, representation by population is very nice, but it just hasn't worked with a country that has so many open spaces and large areas. Ideally rep by pop would be all right but not for our type of province, not for our type of country. It may

seem like it's unfair, but I think the two work together. The rural areas certainly make the cities what they are. So I suppose if you take factors such as distances and number of councils and other things that have been presented earlier, I think you could justify it.

MR. BRUSEKER: All right.

MRS. BLACK: I always say that I love formulas. I love to see formulas. I'm the accountant of the group, so I always get razzed on that.

You definitely are talking, then, about a two tiered system in your presentation.

MR. RICE: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: Do you think that other factors should be involved? You've listed some of them. Did you come up with your formula based on factoring in school districts or MDs or things like that? I'm interested in how you came up with the decision that you wanted a two tiered system, I guess. What distinct factors were you using in your formula?

MR. RICE: I guess initially it was a case of looking at what is there now and working from that. It was the feeling of our council that with the time restraint, it would be not the right time to look at a large expansion in the Legislature, or in our number of MLAs. So we worked from there. But weighted with that were the facts I mentioned: the travel distances, the organizational problems that you do have. Despite all the improvement in the roads – and it is much easier in most cases to get around – you still have the distance factor and the communication factor in the rural areas that you don't have in the cities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you. Your Worship, I want to follow up on something that I think Frank left off and for the sake of clarification. He showed you that there would be a range, using your suggestion of two formulas, of 11,000 to 27,000, again keeping with pretty much a 50-50 scenario between rural and urban constituencies. Correct me if I'm wrong. Did you say that you would establish minimums and maximums and in a subsequent commission might look at changing the ratio?

MR. RICE: We didn't get into this in any detail at all, but I suppose it is the next possibility at a review stage. If there is a continuing shift to the urban side, then this could be addressed at that time. It would allow, then, instead of a large increase in new electoral divisions, that they would come on more gradually.

MR. CHODAN: If I can add to that. I think if the system is going to work effectively, it should be up for review from time to time. I can see 20 or 25 years down the road or whatever. Certainly this group would not just rest on its laurels and say, "Hey, we've got a system that's foolproof." There will be adjustments, and there may be shifts. I think we have to look at changes, and I think we will see significant changes in population as we get into the next century.

MR. BRUSEKER: But our province currently calls for a review to take place every second election. We've seen, again, in-

creased urbanization, rural depopulation. We've seen that over the course of a number of decades. We had a submission yesterday that said that there's now some return, perhaps, in stability in rural areas. Shouldn't we make changes currently to reflect the current situation, and then return and look at after two subsequent elections? I'm wondering why you want to wait another two elections to make some changes. If we're going on a pattern now and we have the opportunity to make some changes now, why would you want to wait another eight years, perhaps?

MR. CHODAN: I think the system is not that far out of balance at the present time. We're quite happy with the distribution right now. I think there's some fine tuning that's required, but I think we're not that far off. If you look at the population division now, it's around 60-40, isn't it?

MR. SIGURDSON: Uh huh.

MR. CHODAN: So we're really not that far off. We're giving the urban areas the advantage that we're being very generous, you see. But I don't think we're far off. It's true that some of the areas need to be looked at, but not that many.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay; thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; anyone else? Thank you very much, Doug and Steve.

MR. PRITCHARD: The next presenter is Sid Gurevitch. Sid, I believe you're bringing somebody with you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please proceed.

MR. GUREVITCH: Thank you. Mr. Chairman and fellow panel members, as an elected representative of the town of Barrhead and the chairman of the hospital board I am pleased to be here today to have the opportunity to present statements on behalf of the hospital board with respect to the proposed electoral boundaries.

Provincially our constituency has been referred to as Barrhead for as long as can be remembered. More importantly, the name Barrhead is coterminous with the county and our hospital district. Our very representation is tied synonymously with this identity, and we feel very strongly about our identity and maintaining it. We understand the dilemma caused by insufficient population in some areas to maintain the status of an electoral district, as outlined by your proposals. However, we feel it's important to point out the following facts that we feel will have a direct implication on changes to these electoral districts.

Number one, many hospitals are identified with the electoral boundaries within which they reside. In the entire province of Alberta only four rural constituencies do not carry the same name as that of their hospital district.

Two, we feel that by increasing the size of the electoral district, this will place added stress on its representative by having to deal with more hospital boards and more county and municipal boards. The resources of this individual will be taxed to an even greater level than they are now. Our provincial government has supported the idea of equal representation with support of a Triple E Senate. Could not the same attention be focused on electoral boundaries? This issue is one of identity

and representation, and we urge the committee to consider these other factors along with population, density, and geography.

For many years we in the west have looked at our federal government structure with respect to its representation and have felt left out because the majority of the power is identified with central Canada. Now to propose the same idea upon Albertans can simply not be tolerated. It is the right of all Albertans to have equal status, maintain their identity, and have representation on an equal basis. This must be the mandate by which these decisions are made. I implore you, on behalf of the hospital board, to keep Barrhead as a separate constituency, to maintain its identity status and its representation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Sid. Questions? Pat?

MRS. BLACK: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No? Okay. Thank you. Anyone else?

MR. PRITCHARD: Our final two presenters this morning are George Visser and Allan Charles.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hi, George. Welcome back again.

MR. VISSER: Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to hear us once more. Mr. Chairman, members of the select committee, as you know, we were in Red Deer. I should state that we came back from an important school conference that we had scheduled a couple of months ago just to be here, because we really appreciate the fact that you did come to Barrhead. We asked you if you would do that, and we thought since you did, we should come back. But not only for that. We are very concerned about the situation that may develop. I don't think you want to have our brief again, and Mr. Charles may back me up. We would like to make a few oral comments about some of the things we've heard, some of the things we've read, and reiterate our position as we presented it in Red Deer.

First of all, we did listen to some of the comments that were made here earlier, and one of them was from the town of Swan Hills, mentioning the situation with the school there. We work together quite closely with Swan Hills. We have separate school systems, so we just were pleased to hear those comments from Swan Hills, because we feel our position is similar. The unity we have with that community is one that we like to build on, and it is there in the school. We were asked to come here on behalf of the school as well in the county of Barrhead. They support our position. I believe they did send you a letter stating that, and we would like to state that our position, then, is not only for the county of Barrhead but also for the school system within the county of Barrhead.

We read some of the presentations that were made, I believe, in Edmonton as well and from that gather that federally there is a grandfather situation in place so rural people do not lose seats. I believe that's correct. That means that if there is any change, there is an increase rather than a decrease. We're not advocating an increase in urban, because we think it would upset the balance, but I guess we're really arguing that we would certainly not like to see a loss in the rural areas. We say that because of the uniqueness of agriculture to Alberta and of the rural mix we have. That's been reiterated over and over again, and I suppose all we're doing is adding our voice to that.

However, I also read that one of the presentations – and this was an urban representative – made quite a point of the fact that a nation's greatness is based on its great cities. I take issue with that, and I hope you do not fall for that. In other words, this particular person was saying that because we have two cities, Calgary and Edmonton – and he differentiated, as I understood, from the other parts of what are cities and said they really weren't cities; it was Edmonton and Calgary – they were to have more representation, and therefore that would mean that this province would become great. I take issue with that. I think the county of Barrhead takes issue with that. We think that there is a uniqueness from the point of view of agriculture. As a matter of fact, it could be argued from the other point of view very strongly that the strength of a nation comes from its land; ultimately we are dependent upon the land, and if the balance is so far out of whack that we don't have that type of voice anymore in rural Alberta – and people do tend to forget their roots. It doesn't take many generations, as people move into the cities, to forget the rock we come from. We simply would like to reiterate that and plead for you to remember that when you make your recommendations.

I think I would like to make one other comment, and then I'll pass it over to Mr. Charles. Don't allow political bipartisanship to make your decision. In other words, I think there is an argument that can be made that the government of the day is represented rurally; the opposition has strength in the cities. That can vary; that can change. Don't make your decisions based on political considerations. Make them based on fundamental values. That is a comment I would like to make.

Basically, Mr. Chairman, that's all we have to present. We thank you very much for coming to Barrhead and hearing our concerns.

Mr. Charles, do you have anything you'd like to add?

MR. CHARLES: No. Other than supporting some of the briefs, of course, from the hospital district which are coterminous, I suppose, or close to being coterminous. I think we have to look at those things as well, and also to say that within our brief. Perhaps Patricia might wish to have a copy of it. I think we circulated it to you before in Red Deer. We have extra copies if you wish.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, George and Allan.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just one quick question, if I might.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just wondering – you're coterminous with your hospital board – do you have other bodies: IDs, MDs? You'll have to forgive my ignorance of the geography, but have you other boundaries that are also coterminous with your constituency?

MR. CHARLES: Well, included within the constituency here, of course, it overlaps into the county of Lac Ste. Anne but also takes in the part of improvement district No. 15 which is to the north of the Athabasca River here.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else?

MR. VISSER: Mr. Chairman, if I may, just on that? We have deliberately tried to maintain principles. I'm talking about principles. When you get into the whole area, I guess, of actually setting boundaries, we would want to be much more vocal about the whole issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Of course. I understand.

MR. VISSER: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Okay, thanks again, gentlemen.

Bob, that's it?

MR. PRITCHARD: That's it, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No one else had a brief to present today? Yes, Don.

MR. SCHULTZ: If I could make one comment. Mr. Sigurdson, you made reference to a question about why we'd want to wait for two elections. I don't know if anybody has the answer, but my view on this is that we don't want to do it quickly just for the sake of change. If it takes one or two more terms to get a proper formula, then so be it. But to do something now for the sake of change isn't necessarily expedient.

MR. SIGURDSON: Would your argument – I'd just throw it out as a question. Would your argument probably not be the same eight, 10 years down the road?

MR. SCHULTZ: It could be.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there anyone else who has a final question or comment they'd like to make? Yes.

MRS. KRİKUN: One of the concerns I have is that just looking over the membership of this committee, there are five large urban representatives and two rural representatives. My concern is: do the MLAs representing the urban centres really empathize with and understand the concerns of the rural constituents?

MR. SIGURDSON: Bob, do you want me to address that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: I think I have an appreciation for the kind of life-style and the concerns that are expressed by rural Albertans. I had the opportunity to serve Grant Notley and the people of then Spirit River-Fairview for a number of years as an executive assistant. It made me somewhat more familiar with problems that are unique to rural Albertans, but it also made me very much more aware that there are not all these many differences a lot of people want to throw out as well. Albertans, whether they live in an urban centre or a rural area, want to meet with their MLA face to face on a regular basis. There are uniquenesses to both, but there are similarities as well. So I think I'm pretty much aware and can empathize with some of the concerns that are being expressed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Pat, or Frank?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes. Definitely I think I can empathize. My wife comes from a rural area south of Medicine Hat, a little town called Manyberries. I don't know if you've ever heard of it or not. If you blink, you'll miss it. Her father - her family, in fact, settled on that farm and have been there since, as far as I can remember, about 1905 or thereabouts, since the beginning of the province. We've been married more years than I care to admit, but we've been going down there and visiting, so I think I have a good impact from their perspective.

I think there are many concerns that are similar to both urban and rural people. I think it's a matter, very largely, of a difference of life-style. I thought there was an interesting comment, though, that came out in the hearing yesterday when Shirley McClellan, who's the MLA for the Chinook constituency, said she didn't realize how tough a job she had until everyone started describing to her what it is she does. I thought that was an interesting perspective that she mentioned.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Pat.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess for me, as a rookie MLA, I've probably learned more on this committee in the last few months about the province and the people who make it up than I didn't realize I didn't know. I've really valued the input the people in all the presentations have come forward with. I think it does make you aware, whether you're down in the Pincher Creek-Crowsnest area and you watch the black topsoil blowing off the land or you're up in the Slave Lake area where there are problems up there and you talk to the people. We've had such a broad range and exposure throughout the province that you can't help but be aware of the concerns and the differences and the regions within the province.

I don't think it's a matter of that's urban, that's rural. I think it's a matter of going throughout the province, seeing what makes up the various areas, and listening to the people as to what their concerns are. Quite frankly, in my riding of Calgary-Foothills a lot of my people have the same concerns and the same problems. There may be a different topic, but their concerns are there. So it's a matter of listening to all of them.

I'm from one of the ridings that is in the upper bracket, where my population is very large but I don't have the distance. So when I look at variables that are being presented, they're very interesting, and I think they're extremely valuable for this committee to hear. The groups have been, I think, extremely candid in their comments coming forward. That's one thing I've really appreciated, and I certainly have made note of them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wanted to make one comment re the makeup of our committee, and George would like to get in on the discussion.

Each of the caucuses represented in the Assembly determined who would sit on the committee from their caucus. The House leaders decided the makeup of the committee; i.e. seven members: one Liberal, two NDP, and four Conservative. From there on it was up to the caucuses, through the caucus leaders, to select the participants who would be on the committee itself. George.

MR. VISSER: Well, Mr. Chairman, it's interesting that you got into this discussion. I just wanted to tell you what happened when we went to Red Deer. I was interviewed afterwards by a

reporter who was young, urban, and from the city of Calgary. He asked me some of my opinions, and I told him. Then, after he shut the recorder off, I said: "May I reverse the roles? May I interview you?" He said, "Sure." I said: "Well, you're from Calgary. You're a young person. What do you think about this whole debate about urban/rural representation?" And I just want to leave you with his comment. He said, "We have 18 MLAs in Calgary, and if those 18 can't look after our interests, then another two or three or four ain't going to help."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else before we have wrap-up comments by the committee members? Okay. Pat, would you like to start?

MRS. BLACK: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to be here in Barrhead. I've been in Barrhead a couple of times before with a different hat on, not as a member of the government. I'm very keen on being here. I was particularly interested in a new submission today on a new factoring with 20 percent. I found that very interesting. Again, I appreciated the candidness that comes out from the comments from presentations. I think that's so important. You have to just tell it like it is and say what you feel. I really appreciate it, and I appreciate the hospitality. Thank you all for coming out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: The role of the committee is taking on a direction that's previously been unexplored in terms of Alberta politics. As I said in opening remarks, normally we would have a commission just redrawing boundaries. This time we're going out and we're doing something that's quite different. It's based on a court case, a decision made by a judge in British Columbia, following the Charter of Rights. We now live in a country that has a Charter, and I think everybody is aware of how the Charter has changed how we operate to a degree.

We've been given, I think, a great responsibility. I'm not sure we're going to satisfy everybody's input. The input has made the task more difficult. When we look at all the factors, though, I believe what we want to try and do is make sure that whatever we do, it can withstand a Charter challenge in the courts. I suppose in doing that - anytime you attempt to do that - you may offend more people than you please. I just hope we'll be able to please some.

Thank you for your input.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. I'm just following up on what Tom was saying. I think when our committee sits down to actually try and write their report, there are going to be many hot and heavy discussions as to what we try to do to satisfy as many concerns as possible.

Getting back to your question just for a moment, Sylvia, you were talking about the appreciation for the province. Yesterday we planned on flying in to Hanna, and we ended up driving and getting there about an hour and a half late because the fog prevented us from getting there. You know, getting into some of these smaller areas where I don't travel extensively has broadened an appreciation, on my part at least, for the sheer physical size of this province. It's a heck of a lot bigger, you

really start to realize, once you start driving around it and you start putting the miles on. It adds up.

I'm very pleased we came today, and pleased with the turnout we got and some very thoughtful presentations. Whew, it's going to be a tough job. So thanks very much. Try not to get too mad; whatever we write, we're not going to please everybody.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've tried in past hearings to capture a key point in the various briefs which have been presented and then give that in a summary at the end, so I'm going to attempt to do that now.

I think it was Harold who gave the first – I might mention his comment that he was nervous. He may have been nervous, but he gave a more comprehensive overview of what links a constituency together than we've heard to date. He went through the social, financial, and historical ties, commenting on schooling, hospital, shopping, transportation corridor, human services, population ties, trading dollars, political infrastructure – including federal – and then that was supplemented by the next presenter on the influences, medical care, and tourism that really tie the Swan Hills-Barrhead communities into this constituency. That was really a marvelous way to begin with the brief, Sylvia, just to start off in that sense. Even though we're not drawing boundaries, what a good case to be made for keeping a constituency together.

We went on to hear that rural MLAs deal with a vast diversity of interests in the constituency. Distances within the constituency was mentioned.

We were actually hearing from Mayerthorpe at this point, I think: that we should not have an imbalance between our urban/rural seats, the current 42-41 seats in the Legislature. I might mention on that point that there's been a gradual shift over years; we've seen more urban seats created. As you know, the size of the Legislature has been increased. When I first entered the Assembly in 1975, there were 75 seats. Today there are 83. We've seen one rural seat disappear. So even using the old seven urban voters equal four rural voters formula, there was a coming together of the representation from the two parts of the province until the present time when we have almost an equal balance.

We were reminded that rural Alberta requires a strong voice, and that rural representation in the Assembly should not be less than 50 percent of the total number of seats in the Assembly.

Again we were reminded of the diverse nature of the Barrhead constituency, that agriculture deserves a strong voice in the provincial government. We were asked not to increase the number of MLAs in the Assembly. By the way, while there have been exceptions, we've heard some who have recommended going as high as, I think, 101 seats. On the other hand, we did hear one presenter suggest we reduce the size to – 75?

MR. SIGURDSON: Seventy-eight.

MR. BRUSEKER: Sixty-nine was the lowest.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sixty-nine was the lowest. But most people have said, "Don't try to solve this problem by creating more seats." That's been a common thread throughout.

That we use a different formula for urban and rural divisions, and in the same brief the recommendation that we drop the variance from plus/minus 25 percent down to plus/minus 20 percent. That, I think, was a Westlock brief.

The makeup of the Electoral Boundaries Commission: that we have the commission chaired by a judge, that the Chief Electoral Officer be on the commission, and that we have members from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. That was interesting as well. We've had other representation given to us on the makeup of the commission, because that is part of our mandate, and we've had it here again today in Barrhead.

Then we were asked to maintain the identity of the Barrhead constituency. We were reminded, as we have been on numerous other occasions, that Alberta is championing the cause of a Triple E Senate and that based on our desire for equality, the same principle should apply in terms of our own provincial Legislature: that our representation should be on an equal basis between urban and rural Alberta.

Then we were reminded of the federal government's grandfather clause. That is a clause which, I guess, would be similar to the brief presented by the mayor of Edmonton when she said, "Well, we don't want any rural ridings to disappear, but we want more seats in Calgary and Edmonton; therefore, increase the House to 101." It's also important to point out that in the federal system, while they do use the plus/minus 25 percent formula, they make exception for the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. As you know, the Northwest Territories has two seats; the Yukon has one. You could put those two territories together and they wouldn't justify one seat if you were applying the same principle on a nationwide basis. But an exception has been made, and we haven't seen that challenged in the courts by anyone yet.

Then we were asked – and I think this is really a good way to end – not to allow political bipartisanship to interfere with our judgment; that we should make our final decision on fundamental values. That's something I'm sure we'll all be reminding ourselves and one another of as we get into the difficult process. A very important way to end.

So I'd like to conclude by saying how much we appreciate your coming out today and sharing your thoughts and ideas with us. As I've indicated earlier and at other meetings, some people ask, "Well, gosh, aren't you hearing the same thing over and over again?" And yes, there is a certain amount of repetition. Of course there is; that's understandable. But at each and every meeting we've learned at least one new thing; something's been presented in a different way, we've got a new twist on an idea, or maybe a totally new concept that had not been presented before. So anyone who doubts the value of the hearing process, my own personal belief in it at least – this is the first time I've been involved in a select special committee – is that I certainly feel good about the fact that we've gone into urban Alberta and rural Alberta to get input and ideas from our citizens. So thanks for your help.

[The committee adjourned at 12:21 p.m.]