

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

[10:05 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm pleased to declare the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries meeting being held here in Wainwright officially open. With that, a warm welcome to all of you who have come out today.

I'm going to introduce the members of the committee along with the host MLA and the neighbouring MLA. We do have a short presentation to give you in advance. The process that we try to follow is to keep the meetings as informal as possible. There are two main purposes: first of all, we want to share information with you, but more importantly we would like to get from you your ideas, your thoughts on the whole process.

If anyone has trouble hearing, if I can see a hand up, then that will give us the signal. All right, we will attempt to speak a little louder.

I'm going to introduce the members of the committee at this point. Starting on my immediate right, Mike Cardinal. Mike is the Conservative MLA for the constituency of Athabasca-Lac La Biche. This is Mike's first term in the Assembly. Next to Mike is also a first-term member, Frank Bruseker. Frank is a Liberal member of the Assembly, represents the constituency of Calgary-North West. Seated next to Frank is Pat Black. Pat is a Progressive Conservative member, represents the constituency of Calgary-Foothills. This is Pat's first term in the Assembly as well. On my immediate left is Tom Sigurdson. Tom represents the constituency of Edmonton-Belmont. He's a New Democratic member. This is Tom's second term in the Assembly. Tom served with the late Grant Notley, and Mr. Notley was involved in an Electoral Boundaries Commission, so Tom did have that experience in the past.

At the far end of the table is Mr. Pat Ledgerwood. Pat is the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. We persuaded Pat to join us on the committee. He brings a wealth of experience not only from the Alberta scene but also in his capacity as a member of the most recent federal Electoral Boundaries Commission which worked in the province of Alberta.

We also have with us Bob Pritchard. Bob is at the very end. He's the senior administrator. He is the gentleman you spoke with if you phoned in or whom you corresponded with, in all likelihood.

Ted Edwards registered you at the door. One of the reasons we ask you to indicate your name and address is so that we can send you a copy of the report once we have finished our work. We've been doing that throughout the province.

As well we have Paula and Doug with us from *Hansard*, and they're part of our team. As indicated, there is a written transcript of not only this hearing but all the hearings, and that is available to the public.

We're very pleased today to have with us as our host your MLA, Mr. Butch Fischer. In all cases where we've traveled across the province, we've invited the host MLA to come forward and participate. Butch, you may have some wrap-up remarks you want to make. We're also pleased to have a neighbouring MLA, Dr. Steve West. We were in Viking in Steve's constituency. We're pleased to have you with us today.

I'm now going to ask Pat Ledgerwood to briefly give us the background as to why we're here. It stems from a British Columbia court case, and once that's been done, we'll proceed with a second presentation.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Ladies and gentlemen, at this time there would normally be a commission

sitting rather than this committee in that the legislation requires that an electoral boundaries review take place after every second general election. We had a review in 1983-84, which established the boundaries that were used at the 1986 general election and the 1989 general election. So normally the commission would have just about completed their work at this stage. However, the B.C. decision had such ramifications that this committee was formed and is receiving input from interested Albertans.

The situation in British Columbia was that their lowest electoral division had just over 5,500 population; their largest had just over 68,000. This discrepancy was such that the government appointed a commission headed by Justice Fisher. This commission was appointed in April of 1987, and the justice tabled his report in the Legislature in December of 1988. It basically had three points: eliminate the dual-member ridings in British Columbia, which doesn't impact on us; increase the number of MLAs from 69 to 75, which doesn't impact on us; and he determined that each voter should have equal weight. He based this on the Charter and also on the basis of many other jurisdictions. What they determined was that they would take the 75 seats, divide it by the total population of British Columbia, establish an average, and all electoral divisions must fall within plus or minus 25 percent of that average.

The report wasn't actioned fast enough in the eyes of a Professor Dixon and his associates, so they took the case to court. The case was heard before the chief justice of the superior court of B.C., Madam Chief Justice McLachlin, and that's why you'll hear it referred to as the McLachlin decision. The part we're interested in is that she said that the average plus or minus 25 percent was reasonable for an electoral division. There was no appeal to this decision. The government still didn't react, so Professor Dixon and his associates went to court again, wanted the B.C. government to do something. The Meredith decision basically supported the McLachlin decision but also said a couple of things that are worth while: that the courts are not to govern – the courts could not dissolve the Legislature and act as a government – the courts were not there to legislate.

The B.C. government as a result of this decision formed a commission in 1989. They basically adopted the Fisher commission report with minor amendments. The key point was that the boundaries that were established all had a population within plus or minus 25 percent of the mean. Those boundaries came into effect in January of this year, and the next B.C. election will be fought using those new boundaries for their 75 electoral divisions.

In the case of Alberta we use the plus or minus 25 percent for urban ridings. We have no minimum or maximum in the books for rural ridings. So that's the situation we have currently. This committee will make recommendations on such items as the composition of the commission and the redistribution rules.

Are there any questions?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Pat.

Tom, would you like to lead us through the slides, please?

MR. SIGURDSON: Sure. Can everybody see that from the back? We don't have to dim any lights? The lights are dimmed.

The first transparency that's on the screen at the minute is an alphabetical list of all the constituencies in our province and their voter population beside them. You'll note that the Cardston constituency has a footnote, and that's to indicate that the Blood Indian Band, which is wholly situated in the con-

stituency of Cardston, chose not to participate in the electoral process and therefore didn't participate in the enumeration. There are an estimated 1,800 missing voters for that constituency, so Cardston is somewhat skewed in its voter number.

The next slide is again of all 83 constituencies. This time they are listed in numerical order according to voter population, the largest being Edmonton-Whitemud at 31,000-plus and the lowest being Cardston at just over 8,000 voters in that constituency. Again, as you heard, the McLachlin decision in British Columbia suggested that plus or minus 25 percent off the average would be an acceptable number. If you take all the voters in Alberta, add them up, you get approximately one and a half million. Divide that by the 83 constituencies and you get an average of 18,685. Add 25 percent to that and you get 23,300. Subtract 25 percent and you get approximately 14,000 voters. So that's the range that is acceptable according to the justice.

Returning to the list of constituencies and their electoral numbers, you will see that we have highlighted those constituencies that are over 25 percent above the average. Those are highlighted in green, and those constituencies highlighted in pink are under the 25 percent average. Putting that onto a map of our province, you can see that we've got a good chunk of the province that's coloured in pink. There are two dots on there that are coloured in green; that's the city of Medicine Hat and the city of St. Albert.

Just to run you through some of the urban centres, Calgary has nine constituencies that have a voter population 25 percent above the average; Edmonton has eight constituencies that are above. Lethbridge is right smack-dab in the middle with no problem, but Medicine Hat has the fourth highest voter population in Alberta.

These are the two Red Deer constituencies. In the 1983-84 redistribution Red Deer was one constituency. The legislation demanded that Red Deer become two constituencies, but when you divided the city of Red Deer in half, there wasn't really a sufficient number of voters to justify two constituencies. So what happened in this particular case is that — the brown line outlined on this transparency shows the city boundary of Red Deer — the commission in 1983-84 went into the county of Red Deer and found sufficient population to put them into the constituencies of Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, to then justify two constituencies.

The city of St. Albert: again a bit of a problem with its growing population.

This map is showing constituencies that have voter populations that are 35 percent below the average, and you can see that there are a good number of constituencies. This map shows those constituencies, all in southern Alberta, that have a voter population 50 percent below the average.

You can see that we were supposed to be out here last June. The legislative session went on through June into July. We rescheduled a number of meetings. Today is the 39th and final public meeting for this committee. So here we are in Wainwright.

Those blue dots indicate where in Alberta this committee has gone to listen to Albertans' concerns on this matter. What we've tried to do is make sure we've had hearings in those areas that might be affected most. So, again, what we've done: here is the location of the hearings, and you can see that the map shows the constituencies that are under 35 percent of average voter population.

One of the questions that first came up was: what happens if you take total population instead of having just voter population? There are a number of people that choose not to

participate or are not allowed to participate in the electoral process. We have religious communities that may not participate and therefore may not be on the voters list; the Blood Indians in the Cardston example; we spend billions of dollars every year on education for young people under the age of 18. Members of the Legislature once they're elected represent students; they represent landed immigrants; they represent those people that chose not to participate in the electoral process. Those people live in constituencies. So if we were to take the total population of our province and consider that to be a factor, we get some rather different figures, as you'll see in a minute. We add all of those together and get an average of approximately 28,000 voters per constituency. Using the McLachlin decision and having a variance of plus or minus 25 percent, we have a high end of 35,000 and a low end of 21,000.

If you recall, Cardston was the lowest at 8,105 when we just used the enumeration figure. While Cardston doesn't come out of the low end, you can see that it has moved up really quite significantly into, I guess, the upper third of the pack of those low-end constituencies. So it does make a good deal of difference in terms of total population per constituency. If we put that onto the map of the province, you can see that we now have two other constituencies that are coloured in green that are designated rural constituencies by the legislation. Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray are now above the average plus 25 percent. Calgary goes from having had nine constituencies that were over the 25 percent variance to only having seven. It's been reduced by two. Edmonton goes from having eight constituencies just using voter population to seven constituencies that are above the 25 percent. Under the map of the province you'll see that this again indicates those constituencies that are 35 percent below the average. If we only use the enumeration base, we have 16 constituencies. Using total population we reduce that to 12. Here's where you can really see a difference. We had five constituencies that were 50 percent below average using the enumeration figures. Using a total population figure we reduce that to one constituency.

The committee has traveled extensively throughout the province. We've also traveled to three other provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. The reason we did that is our western sister provinces have all undergone recently electoral boundary redistribution and changes to their electoral law, and we wanted to find out what was going on in those jurisdictions. It's assisted this committee greatly.

Prior to undertaking round two of our tour around the province we had had 29 meetings. This is meeting 39. You saw the list from August 14. That's where we've been since, from August 14 through to today. The other hearings are located on the transparency. We've had well over 700 people attend our meetings. I'm sure that the number of presenters must be somewhere near 350 now. Total written submissions: we haven't got a final tally because you've got until the end of the month to get written submissions in to the committee, but we're expecting somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 125, 130.

If there are any questions, I'd be pleased to answer them.

MR. COLEMAN: Norm Coleman speaking. A question in relation to the population figures you just had up: did the hearing in B.C. mention anything about the law regarding enumeration or population figures? Which one should be used?

MR. SIGURDSON: It's not clear. There's no Charter challenge on that. Some provinces are using population; some are using enumeration.

I think Pat can answer that question. He had the information last night.

MR. LEDGERWOOD: British Columbia uses population. Saskatchewan uses electors. Manitoba uses population.

MR. SIGURDSON: And we currently use electors.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Okay. I think we're ready to proceed, then, with the actual presentations. We have by my count six presenters. The process that we follow: we'd ask each presenter to limit himself or herself to no more than 10 minutes. If you do have a lengthy brief, we will read it into the *Hansard*. We also are keeping track of all the briefs by computer so that we can pull out the most important point made, the second most important point. We can also pull out how many of the briefs have mentioned geography as a factor which should be considered and so on, so the committee will be able to do that when it sits down to actually write its report.

I think we're ready to proceed with our presenters, Bob.

MR. PRITCHARD: Would Wayne Green and Milton Lakevold come forward, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Milton, would you like to proceed first, please?

MR. LAKEVOLD: Mr. Chairman, members of the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Wainwright Progressive Conservative Constituency Association, I would like to present their concerns for your consideration. We are a large, sparsely populated constituency which is made up of two municipalities, parts of two other counties, 10 towns and villages, plus several hamlets. This covers an area of 5,400 square miles. We have a population of 10,800 voting members, which means we only have two voting people per square mile.

The electoral boundaries were expanded a few years ago, at that time increasing the difficulty of keeping in touch with all areas. Our MLA Butch Fischer's workload includes the concerns of 14 councils, 10 urban and four rural; four hospital boards; two health units; four main school boards and several smaller ones; two colleges; social services; several recreation boards; agricultural societies and organizations. The list goes on. There are concerns in agriculture and industry that also require consultation with him. It is difficult for him to schedule time for all the things he is associated with now. Rural MLAs not only have to schedule a meeting time but must allow for much greater travel time, resulting in less contacts made in the same time as an urban MLA. This is one reason we are opposed to any further expansion of our boundaries.

We do not have the option of the blended urban/rural formula as we do not have a large urban centre nearby. To meet the 25 percent requirement, you can appreciate the workload which would be required if you look at all the surrounding areas.

Representation by population will not work well unless you have an effective Senate or a second governing body to represent the region. It is inconsistent to suggest that Alberta deserves equal representation in Ottawa if we do not also accept that sparsely populated areas receive equal representation in Edmonton. We are already disadvantaged by our numbers and size.

The provincial economy continues to rely on all oil and gas revenues. Our area has been one of the most active in the province over the last years. Agriculture has been under severe pressure, so strong rural representation is required to speak out for these rural industries which from the revenue generated help to fund a lot of the urban centres.

We believe that availability and accessibility should be taken into consideration in your formula. We should have equal access to communication with the Legislative Assembly. If we do not have fair representation for rural areas, it could mean urban strangulation of our voice for the outlying areas. There are geographic, social, moral, and economic issues that also need to be addressed when setting boundaries. We trust that responsible decisions using common sense will prevail. We hope that the committee will make provisions for amendments before finalization.

Thank you for allowing us to participate in this complex and important issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Milton. Any questions from the committee? Tom and then Frank.

MR. SIGURDSON: When you talk about not increasing the boundary size in rural constituencies, are you concerned about the ratio of 42 urban constituencies and 41 rural constituencies? If you don't want to increase the boundary size, would you mind increasing the number of representatives that other areas might want?

MR. LAKEVOLD: We would like to see it stay as it is, but that's, I guess, not our decision. We would like to see the 42-41 stay as is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anything else, Tom?

MR. SIGURDSON: No, that's fine.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thanks for your presentation, Milton. Just one question. I heard you expressing a concern regarding regional representation. Are you advocating the creation of a Senate in Alberta?

MR. LAKEVOLD: No, but we feel that we should leave our constituencies as they are and we will have the representation we need and not create another governing body.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. Just to follow up, then, if you look at the map that we had up there before, there is, even amongst the rural areas, quite a discrepancy in terms of size and in terms of population. How should we address those kinds of discrepancies even just amongst the rural constituencies?

MR. LAKEVOLD: I didn't quite . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, are you saying we should just leave this as it is completely and not make any changes at all?

MR. LAKEVOLD: That's what we'd like to see.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Pat.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Milton, in your presentation you alluded to the concept of Triple E Senate and regional representation. I'm wondering: because our task is to come up with something that is constitutionally sound, are you suggesting then, sir, that we should be looking at a mechanism that would deal with rural ridings and a mechanism that would deal with the urban ridings separately, one from the other?

MR. LAKEVOLD: I can't quite hear you, I guess.

MRS. BLACK: I'm sorry. Are you suggesting that we have two mechanisms, one to deal with the rural ridings and one to deal with the urban ridings but separate from one another? A formula for each?

MR. LAKEVOLD: No. I think we would like to see it remain as it is. We don't need anything different. I think you can understand that with the area they have to cover and the amount of work that our rural MLAs have, we need all of the rural MLAs that we do have. I know that the urban have more population. You know, B.C. is a lot different geographically than Alberta. Their populations are in clusters in valleys and what have you. They aren't populated all over, so they're close to their people. I think it would be a lot different situation than it is in Alberta.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.
Anyone else? Mike.

MR. CARDINAL: One area I caught here that I thought was very interesting: part of your presentation indicates that a commonsense approach should be taken in designing a system for Albertans. Could you be a bit more specific as to what areas this would cover? Is it related to a quality of life equal for all Albertans? Would that be a general . . .

MR. LAKEVOLD: Common sense will prevail. I think we hope that our MLAs will use common sense when they do address this situation. We know that it's a hard thing to come up with, and we just hope that whatever comes out of it will be fair to the rural people as well as the urban.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Milton.

Any last questions? Okay, we'll move on then. Wayne, please.

MR. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. panel members, ladies and gentlemen, I haven't really spent the time on this that I might have, as I found out last night at 10 o'clock I was going to present this brief. However, our reeve and administrator have written up something here very appropriate. I'll just read that to you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is on behalf of . . .

MR. GREEN: The MD of Wainwright.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. GREEN: The council of the municipal district of Wainwright is extremely concerned over the proposed changes to the electoral division boundaries in the province of Alberta. While we can see that representation by population has considerable merit where areas being represented are similarly

structured, we feel that complete areas of rural Alberta could lose any voice in provincial affairs if the local MLA faces the impossible task of serving a larger constituency. For example, Butch Fischer presently represents an area which covers 5,400 square miles – some of this may be repetitious – 10 towns and villages, two MDs, two counties, four hospital boards, four school boards, two health units, and two colleges. He is also expected to deal with concerns regarding recreation and social services and the multitude of group and individual petitions for assistance that are brought to his attention.

Granted, the same concerns exist in large urban centres, but with the population concentrated in a much smaller area, MLAs are able to contact a large number of people with little travel time involved. It would seem reasonable to assume that many residents of an urban jurisdiction would face similar issues, whereas in a rural constituency widely separated districts may require the MLA's assistance to deal with a situation unique to that particular location. Urban residents usually have access to a number of alternatives when they require assistance, whereas in rural Alberta the MLA is often considered the only viable link between grass roots and the provincial government.

If electoral boundaries are revised, it would appear that a number of rural constituencies would disappear. This in effect would mean that fewer MLAs are familiar with rural issues, and the balance of power will undoubtedly be with the more heavily populated areas. We feel very strongly that the Alberta farmer plays a very important role in the economy of the province as a whole and that their rights to a fair representation must not be downgraded.

Respectfully submitted by Wayne Green on behalf of the municipal district of Wainwright.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Wayne.
Questions? Pat first and then Tom.

MRS. BLACK: Wayne, thank you for your presentation. One of the things that is in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is that all Canadians are given equal representation. We've all, I think, made an assumption that that means one vote per person. I guess my question to you is a philosophical one. Could you give me your idea of what your definition is of representation?

MR. GREEN: Well, I guess myself, I would say that I would rather see more MLAs added to the urban areas than to water down the rural areas. That may not be directly answering your question. But I see that if, for instance, there's 2,000 or 3,000 rural voters mixed in with an urban area of 20,000, then their vote is not going to be considered very seriously. I guess that's what I would like to see: their vote still count.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Wayne, could you repeat the last part, about having a vote seriously? You talked about numbers, and I just want to try . . . Could you just repeat the last part of your last statement?

MR. GREEN: Well, that I would hate to see an area with 2,000 or 3,000 rural residents combined with an area – well, a portion of a city or something. Then the rural vote wouldn't really be a concern.

MR. SIGURDSON: Okay. I appreciate that.

When you said that you would increase the number of urban constituencies rather than water down rural representation, you're not as concerned about changing the ratio of 42 to 41. At least, correct me if I'm wrong. You would rather see more urban MLAs rather than decreasing the number of rural MLAs?

MR. GREEN: Well, yes. I really think it would be nice if it was left the way it was, but I realize that's not likely to happen. So therefore, yes, I would rather see you add more MLAs in the urban areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just to be clear, then the preference is to leave it as it is, but if that's not possible, don't take away from the rural areas; add some seats to the urban. Is that correct?

MR. GREEN: Right.

MR. SIGURDSON: What about changing some of the boundaries that are currently in rural Alberta? As we saw on the map, we've got a constituency in the south, Pincher Creek-Crowsnest, that's under 10,000, with the population mainly along Highway 3, and Peace River, in the north, that's over 15,000, with a population that's mainly along Highway 2. Do you think there's room in all of this to change the boundaries of those rural constituencies to try and find some kind of an average in that grouping?

MR. GREEN: Well, I don't know just how you would do that, unless you were going to add an urban area to them to increase their numbers.

MR. SIGURDSON: No, what I'm suggesting is that if you've got 15,000 here and 10,000 next door, in this particular instance would you take some of the people, say, out of here and move them into other constituencies? Or would you leave all of the constituencies as they are?

MR. GREEN: Yes. If you're talking two rural constituencies, I can see moving the boundaries to equalize them; certainly.

Something further here. Like we mentioned, the number of municipalities, the number of towns: I believe that when the MLA has to deal with all of the councils, hospital boards, and one thing and another, that is a major part of his job, whereas in an urban area there may be a number of MLAs to deal with one council. Certainly I think it's not fair to get too many of them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Any other questions? Thanks, Wayne.

MR. GREEN: Thank you. I'd like to thank you for the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before Bob calls up the next two presenters, I do notice a former colleague sitting in your midst. It's really good to see Charlie Stewart back. Good to see you.

MR. PRITCHARD: If we could have the next two presenters come up, please: Roger Lehr and Norm Coleman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Proceed, please, Your Worship.

MR. LEHR: Mr. Chairman Bob, hon. Dr. Steve, MLA Butch, committee members, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief presented by myself, and it is not, I would like to make clear, a

brief presented by the town of Wainwright. It's to the Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries; chairman, Bob Bogle.

Mr. Chairman, I present this brief out of concern with regard to the changing of the electoral boundaries and my fears of the negative impact it will have on all of rural Alberta. It is my opinion that the boundaries of the provincial constituencies should not be changed simply to reflect the number of constituents or population alone. There are a number of offsetting factors that should and must be considered.

Rural MLAs have in all constituencies more than one municipal or county council to deal with. In Wainwright our MLA has three municipal councils, 21 councillors who require his attention and time. City MLAs have one or none. The rural MLA has many town and village councils to deal with. In Wainwright our MLA has 10 town and village councils with a total of 45 mayors and councillors. The city MLA has one city council and probably two councillors to deal with. These towns and villages have many boards, such as the FCSS board. Our MLA has two FCSS boards. I'm corrected on that; I understand he deals with four now. Our MLA has three hospitals boards - I understand that again he has four. There are numerous school boards, recreation boards, police commissions, agriculture and fair boards, youth groups, church groups, library and museum boards, health units, fire departments, senior citizen drop-in centres and lodges, farm organizations, district agriculturalists, handicapped or disabled associations, funded agencies, and on and on.

You'll like this one: I believe rural Alberta is a distinct society and must be considered as such. Perhaps we can no longer function together under one elected government and should look at a city government and a rural government, with the tax base remaining in their respective areas.

I believe that a councillor in the village of Czar is entitled to the same access to his or her MLA as is a councillor in the city of Edmonton. We in rural Alberta already share our MLAs with many other councils. In view of the many miles our MLAs must travel to keep appointments and make meetings with various groups through the constituency, I strongly feel that they should be entitled to an executive assistant to share the tremendous workload which rural MLAs carry today.

To base constituency boundaries on population alone is to go directly against what our province is saying to the federal government with regard to the senatorial changes we would like to see implemented. We are saying to Ottawa that we cannot continue to elect or appoint Senators by population alone. So why should we go to population alone in determining our provincial constituency boundaries? This is totally hypocritical, and we cannot have it both ways. Just because a court in British Columbia has declared that this is the way to go does not say that we have to follow suit. In my opinion, that decision should be appealed to a higher court. Let us look at our own province and not be influenced by a panel of judges in a totally different province.

I have also some concerns with this committee being an impartial group. My fears are reaffirmed by an article published in the Rocky Mountain House paper which refers to Liberal MLA Frank Bruseker headlined, "Liberal MLA predicts loss of six rural seats in redistribution." I quote from the article, which is attached and forms a part of this brief.

Bruseker told the members the Tories like having the larger numbers of rural seats. "Every seat lost" through redistribution, "is one Tory seat lost."

It is my opinion that this member should resign from the committee. I feel strongly that this committee should be disbanded, as there are probably biased opinions both ways, and that an independent, unbiased committee be struck to investigate this very important issue.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions or comments? Yes. Go ahead, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: Roger, thank you for your brief. I think I should respond, first of all, to the last part. I'm sure you've had the experience yourself, Roger, of being quoted in the newspaper and only a part of it gets in. When I had the interview with Brian Mazza, who wrote the article – and I'm sure he'd be delighted at the distribution this article is getting – the preface was that if the 25 percent rule was instituted in the province, this would happen. I stand by that, because if the 25 percent rule that was implemented in British Columbia was put into place in Alberta, the result would be, as you have pointed out, a shifting of seats. Now, that may reflect an impartiality; I would think it reflects a rational and reasoned approach to the fact that that's what would happen.

So in terms of your opinion that I should resign from the committee, I will not. I feel there's a job to be done. I see tremendous inequities between rural constituencies to rural constituencies, urban to urban, and urban to rural. I believe there's a job to be done, and I'm prepared to stay on and stick with it. So although I respect your opinion, I disagree with it.

So my question for you. In reading through your brief, you have listed a number of concerns that you have that are very legitimate concerns. I guess my question really is . . . You've suggested two forms of government; I'm wondering if you could expand more on your urban government/rural government concept, because we've never heard this before. How would you envision this to work? Would it be based in Edmonton as we now have, or how would this come about?

MR. LEHR: Well, I hardly think, Frank, that if we had a rural government, it would be based in Edmonton. However, I think you must appreciate that there are vastly different concerns and issues between rural and urban Alberta. My suggestion is that in order to deal with them properly, perhaps we should be governed by two different bodies.

MR. BRUSEKER: How would you address the inequities, though, that I pointed out before on the map of Alberta in the current constituencies that we have? I'm sure you've seen that there is quite a discrepancy both in terms of areas of even rural constituencies to other rural and discrepancies between population centres. How would you redress that kind of a concern?

MR. LEHR: I'm sure, Frank, that if we were to have a rural government, there would then be redistribution within those boundaries of rural Alberta, and they could be made quite equitable. I'm also sure that those of us that live in remote rural Alberta live here for a reason: because we enjoy the life-style. And I'm sure those people who live in the concrete jungle enjoy the same thing. They have many things which we don't; we think we have offsets. So I don't think that's a big problem.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: On that point, Roger, some previous presenters have suggested that we use two averages, one average for urban Alberta and one average for rural Alberta, and then have some leeway for both. If I'm summing up the discussion you and Frank have been having, that's where you're coming from?

MR. LEHR: That may be an alternative to look at, Mr. Chairman, although I am very, very against changing, you might say, the balance of power from being almost equal at present. I think it's vitally important that that stay close to equal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.
Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you. Your Worship, do you believe in the principle of majority rule?

MR. LEHR: Yes.

MR. SIGURDSON: So if you've got 60 percent of Albertans living in an urban setting with only 50 percent of the seats, does that qualify as majority rule?

MR. LEHR: Would you like to refer that to the national government, and are you pleased with the type of government we have in central Canada at present?

MR. SIGURDSON: Sir, I'm not wanting to refer that to the national government. I'm not a member of a federal committee; I'm a member of a provincial committee. So I'm asking you. You said that you believed in the principle of majority rule.

MR. LEHR: Absolutely.

MR. SIGURDSON: Then I put to you: would 50 percent of the seats representing 60 percent of the population qualify as majority rule?

MR. LEHR: Yes, it would, but . . . Pardon me; 50 percent of the seats . . .

MR. SIGURDSON: . . . representing 60 percent of the population.

MR. LEHR: No, it doesn't. But, on the other hand, as you know, as our electoral system works, Dr. Steve West may go in with a majority of some 8,000. However, that 8,000 votes is not carried over to Mr. Fischer, who only lost by 2,000 votes, to give them, the Progressive Conservative Party, a majority. That's called a popular vote, sir, and there is a difference.

MR. SIGURDSON: Well, I could cite, just for information purposes, the case in Saskatchewan where the governing party received fewer votes than the opposition party.

MR. LEHR: That's exactly what I just explained.

MR. SIGURDSON: And again what happened was that there were more seats in the rural part of that province that gave the governing party the majority government.

MR. LEHR: Again, I think it goes down to a choice of where you choose to live. Perhaps your vote in rural Alberta has more

impact than your vote in urban Alberta. I don't think there's any question about that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Again for the record, from our very first provincial election in 1905 up until the last redistribution, there has been an accepted practice in Alberta, as is the case in most jurisdictions, that you weight the rural vote vis-à-vis an urban vote and give a little more weight to the rural vote. That was done to take into account geography and the number of municipalities and so on. So in the past we generally followed the rule of thumb that four rural votes equate to seven urban votes, and if you're looking at redistributions which have occurred in the past, you can see a correlation with those figures. Our challenge now is with the British Columbia court case, and as was pointed out in one of the briefs, it was not appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada by the British Columbia government. As a committee we are not blindly following what was done in British Columbia or what was done in Manitoba or anyplace else. We're trying to find an Alberta solution to an Alberta situation, but we are still cognizant of the Charter of Rights and its implications for us. But in terms of the historical background in Alberta, you can fix on seven urban votes equating to four rural votes.

Any other questions for Roger? Yes, Pat.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Roger, would you be in favour, as was suggested at some of our other hearings, that possibly in the situation, say, around Medicine Hat, where the riding is too large for one riding and will have to be either split or expanded, moving some of that into a rural setting, having a riding, say, where 25 percent of it is made up of an urban component and 75 percent made up of a rural component?

MR. LEHR: I don't think so, Pat, because you're almost referring to the wagon wheel effect which I don't have a lot of faith in because it becomes heavily weighted in one particular area. As you know, the difficulty of getting people out to vote for whatever reason in Canada - we don't seem to respect this right to vote that we have. I think a strong issue in a heavily populated area could give a good voter turnout and not necessarily an indication of the entire constituency's feelings on a certain issue. I really maintain that there is a very great difference between city and rural issues and concerns.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Thanks very much, Roger.

MR. LEHR: Thank you very much, and thanks for coming out and spending the time with us. We appreciate it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Norm.

MR. COLEMAN: Chairman Bob, Butch, other board members, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation. I'm here on behalf of the Wainwright & District Chamber of Commerce.

The local chamber of commerce wishes to discourage the possibility of any increase in spending and wishes to encourage cutbacks in government spending. We are concerned that should more seats be established, there will be increased costs related to the additional MLAs. In reviewing the boundaries, we ask that you recognize that rural and urban centres have individual and different needs. We would not be in favour of any system that would jeopardize the distinct concerns of

municipalities in rural Alberta. We must have a protective mechanism to ensure that the highly populated urban centres do not have the ability to unduly overpower the sparsely populated rural constituencies. As you are aware, this is the very issue of our national Senate concerns, and we feel strongly that the national concerns are applicable to our provincial electoral boundaries. We wish to point out that the present system allows a great deal of power to the urban centres as the urban constituencies have common concerns provincially; therefore they can lobby together and have a strong and large impact. However, rural communities have diverse interests and are often in competition with each other. This weakens their effectiveness as a group and makes it difficult to include several large rural areas together in an electoral boundary.

It has been said that the goal of any elected body must be to give the people within this jurisdiction the best and fairest representation possible. The method by which this is achieved must take into consideration that large geographic areas with sparse populations require special attention. If we use the suggested 25 percent factor, can we still maintain the ratio of rural and urban divisions? We request that any changes made in the provincial electoral boundaries enable the urban and rural centres to co-exist as equals. We question whether the 25 percent factor system adequately recognizes the different needs of the urban and rural centres without some special consideration of the unique needs of rural Alberta.

We regret that we do not have a viable alternative to our present system, and we recognize the difficulty of your task. We request that if a consensus cannot be reached on an alternative system, the boundaries remain as they are until such time as an acceptable revision is proposed.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Norm.

Questions? I have Frank and then Tom.

MR. BRUSEKER: Norm, thanks for your presentation. I'm just looking at the last part on the first page there. It requests that changes be made so "the urban and rural centres . . . co-exist as equals." Are you saying there that we should keep the current 42-41 ratio, 42 urban constituencies to 41 rural constituencies, which we presently have?

MR. COLEMAN: Yes, very briefly to answer the question, but further to that, I think we all understand and realize the problems rural Alberta and small-town Alberta are having right now. One of the concerns we have is that, for example, Butch is dealing with several towns, hospitals, and school systems. We feel that if our needs are not adequately handled in small-town Alberta, we won't be able to carry on with a hospital or a school system or our recreation facilities.

MR. BRUSEKER: So if we keep the current 42-41 split, are you then recommending that we just do some juggling amongst that current ratio to attempt to equalize things between rural and rural and urban and urban constituencies?

MR. COLEMAN: I don't know that I'm really suggesting anything. I think that's the problem.

MR. BRUSEKER: I'm just trying to clarify. Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Yes, Tom.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thanks, Norm. One of the things you are suggesting, perhaps only implicitly, is that we ignore the Charter of Rights. Whereas before we had legislation handed down that said there would be a formula – so many urban constituencies, so many rural constituencies – we have now a Charter of Rights in Canada that says certain things. One of them is that every person will have, within reasonable guidelines, equal weight at the ballot box. Are you suggesting to this committee that we ignore the Charter of Rights?

MR. COLEMAN: No. I'm suggesting that you consider the fact that when we put all our votes together, they are not equal. When we combine the urban vote possibly against the rural vote, then I don't think they are equal.

MR. SIGURDSON: That's the problem we have right now.

MR. COLEMAN: Everybody has one vote, but obviously it's sometimes to the advantage for different ridings in the city to possibly combine their vote against an issue that could affect rural Alberta.

MR. SIGURDSON: In terms of highest voter population in the province, it's Edmonton-Whitemud. They've got over 30,000 voters and one member of the Legislature. I'm going to direct your attention to the southwest corner of the province: take in Cardston, Macleod, Pincher Creek-Crowsnest. You add the total population of those three constituencies and they have approximately 30,000. When those 30,000 people in this part of the province send representatives to the Legislature there are three people in the Legislature that stand up and get to cast votes, whereas in the city of Edmonton one constituency, 30,000 people, sends one member to the Legislature. Is that equitable?

MR. COLEMAN: No. I agree. I think our concern as a small town is that if we're arguing and fighting for our survival and we've looked at an industry to come to or relocate to Wainwright, we have a popular vote of – what? – 10,000 people. For example, if that same industry was to relocate to Edmonton, I'm sure the ridings affected in the city voter-wise would outnumber our vote. I think that's really what the chamber in Wainwright is concerned about, that we don't lose whatever industry base or agricultural base we have. We can't afford to send all our people to the city.

MR. SIGURDSON: Conversely, in support of that, when I as an urban MLA look at rural depopulation, the people that are coming into the city are bringing with them all the problems I try and address. So it's going from perhaps having a claim with hail and crop insurance or farm foreclosure and financing with the local bank to having for the first time perhaps welfare, psychologists, and psychiatrists because they're now off the farm and on a different kind of system. So when you're trying to protect your interests in rural Alberta, I support that – believe me that I do – because what happens is that we're compounding problems. If we think that by acquiring power in the city of Edmonton and attracting more population – that's not going to resolve the problem out here. It sometimes creates problems in there as well, and we've got to address that. As Albertans we've got to address that. We know that we have very, very much an integrated economy.

MR. COLEMAN: The system we seem to live with today is government in our back pocket, and the way we see it, we're

fighting for dollars all the time. We don't want to have to lose whatever dollars we have now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Norm, at several of the hearings suggestions have been made that we recommit ourselves to decentralization, to encouraging not only private-sector development in rural areas but also government activities. In fact, we've had a couple of examples used pointing to Recreation and Parks with their moves in decentralization as a positive way we can help some of the smaller centres. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MR. COLEMAN: Well, we encourage whatever relocation is possible. You know, I don't know if that makes for better government, but by all means anything that can help rural Alberta I think would be open.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

Anyone else on the panel? Okay, thanks very much, Norm.

MR. LEHR: Could I ask a couple more questions, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, at the end. We'll have an opportunity, Roger, at the end for comment from everyone in the audience.

MR. PRITCHARD: Would this morning's final two presenters please come forward. Bert Newton and Bob Grayston.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Bert, would you like to proceed, please?

MR. NEWTON: Chairman Mr. Bogle, MLA members, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank the Electoral Boundaries Committee for permitting me to come and make a brief on behalf of the village of Chauvin.

I represent the village of Chauvin. The Wainwright constituency is one of the constituencies in our eastern boundary on the Saskatchewan border. Our village is only four miles from the border. At times we feel very isolated from the Legislature in Edmonton. We realize that the number of eligible voters in our constituency, which is less than 11,000, would mean our constituency could be considered for change. We feel our current area of 5,400 square miles is a large area for one MLA to serve, and it is far from being the largest area in a constituency. Large rural areas make it very difficult for our MLA, Mr. Fischer, to visit all areas of his riding. He is required to spend time away from his riding during sittings of the Legislature and for committee work. Any meetings he attends in the constituency mean many hours of traveling time. As a rural MLA he is required to deal with 10 town and village councils, two municipal districts, two counties, four hospital boards, four school boards, two health units, two colleges, and local committees too numerous to mention. We realize that perhaps the increase in the city populations in Edmonton and Calgary warrant additional members for them in the Legislature, but this should not be accomplished by reducing the number of rural members. In times of fiscal restraint more members would add to government expenses. The agricultural and oil industries are important facets of Alberta life and should be well represented in our government. We believe people who work and live in those areas are best equipped to represent their needs.

If possible, the village of Chauvin would like to see the constituencies stay as they now are. If there is a change, we

would like to see the ratio of rural/urban seats remain much the same. Population should not be the only factor considered in establishing boundaries. Geographical location, population density, and travel distance within the constituency should be considered as well.

Respectfully submitted, Bert Newton, Mayor.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Bert. Any questions for Bert?

MR. SIGURDSON: Just for clarification, you're not alone. Most everybody in the province that's come to the hearings and suggested that the numbers remain the same does so for the same reason you have: they don't want to increase the cost of government, at the elected level anyway. I'm going to ask you to pick, if you had to choose your druthers, increasing boundary size, perhaps, or increasing the number of urban MLAs. You tended to indicate that you didn't want to change the ratio too much, but that says that maybe there is a need for change in ratio. Would you rather have an increase in the number of the whole House, the total number of MLAs, as opposed to increasing the boundary size?

MR. NEWTON: No. Just spending a small time in the smallest voice of politics and seeing Mr. Butch Fischer's workload, I'd like to see him have more assistance at his level.

MR. SIGURDSON: If we were to try and assist members of the Legislature, would it be better for the member of the Legislature to have perhaps a larger constituency budget? They might be able to have two or three offices in large constituencies so that in Chauvin and up in Wainwright – I'm sorry, I don't know the geographical ends of this constituency – you could have offices where Butch, when he's not in the Legislature, might have regular office hours: Monday and Tuesday in the largest centres, in Wainwright Wednesday afternoon, and in Chauvin on Thursday or somewhere else. Friday on the golf course if there's any luck at all, eh Butch?

MR. NEWTON: We can't forget farming.

MR. SIGURDSON: Farming. Sorry.

But would it be helpful if they had, you know, toll-free telephone lines in the constituency office, more office staff?

MR. NEWTON: I think that would be something the MLAs would surely have to look at rather than me as just a speaking member of a small village.

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

Bob.

MR. GRAYSTON: Mr. Chairman, members of the select committee, Dr. West, and Butch, on behalf of the Wainwright & District Health Care Complex, I would like to thank the special committee on electoral boundaries for taking time out of their schedule to hear the concerns of the citizens of Wainwright. Being last in the line of presenters, I would like to clarify that this brief has been prepared without consultation or any written correspondence and it very much duplicates what has been presented before me.

The topic of electoral boundary changes is always a concern to the rural people of Alberta. This brief will try to emphasize the representation required for a rural MLA who may or may

not have a large population base. The rural MLA has to deal with many different towns and villages which have a similar number of organizations who demand equal time. The Wainwright constituency population numbers around 10,000 people, and the geographic area covers the following that require the MLA's time. In here I say that there are three hospitals. Connected with the hospitals – and it's possibly an error – one board represents two hospitals, an auxiliary and an active treatment. In this brief that has been counted as one; that's why that discrepancy. Thirteen towns and villages; 12 chambers of commerce and boards of trade; 900 businesses, not including farming; an endless number of requirements from the agricultural field; 52 service clubs; and a military base, a federal installation, but it still demands a fair amount of his time.

We understand that many of the urban constituencies have a larger population base, but as a rule the representatives will not be required to spend the same number of hours per capita because every town or village has a chamber of commerce, a Kinsman Club, or a school and every executive demands the MLA's time. In a larger centre you will have a Kinsman Club with 200 members but still have to deal with one executive. Here our MLA has three executives plus three times the time. I think I want to clarify that: it doesn't matter how big the executive is; he still has more of them to deal with with that number of issues.

The other area of concern is the distance the MLA has to travel to meet with his constituents. The area the constituency covers requires a representative to hold several constituency meetings throughout the zone. To make matters worse, he has to travel up to four hours from Edmonton to a meeting in the evening and back in the same night so he'll be present for the Legislature the following day.

In conclusion, our MLA's plate is full to overflowing through his commitment to his constituents. If the 25 percent factor requires enlargement of the boundaries, it will impact unfavourably on the effectiveness of the MLA's representations.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Bob. Questions?

I'm really interested in your point where you used the comparison of the Kinsman Club. It doesn't matter whether there are 200 members, as is the case in most of the city clubs – I'm a former Kinsman. Many of the smaller clubs have memberships in the 20 to 30 range. When the MLA is invited to meet with the club, you spend the same amount of time with the group because of the issues they're dealing with that affect the whole community. So the size of the club isn't the important factor; it's the number you're dealing with, and that's the point you're making in your brief.

MR. GRAYSTON: That was the point I was trying to make. Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone? Yes, Pat.

MRS. BLACK: Bob, I came in just after you started your presentation, so I'm sorry about that.

Do you think there should be an actual formula that provides a weighted average of various factors, such as what you've listed here: towns, villages, municipal councils, school boards, hospital boards – what else have we got? – trade boards, et cetera? Do you think there should be some formula established with a weighted average that would take into account certainly population and possibly size of the riding or distance, et cetera?

MR. GRAYSTON: This is a pretty hard question for me to answer, because I believe there are formulas we are looking at from the B.C. 25 plus/minus. We're looking at a new formula. I have no idea.

I presented this brief to this committee to show how full our MLA's plate was. We went through an extensive construction phase with our hospital and worked very, very closely with our MLA. Ours is not the only hospital. There's possibly an MLA in the city that doesn't even have a hospital in his riding – he doesn't know what it is – or a school. I mean, these are the things I think . . . As you say, whether it's a formula that we set up or what – I don't know. And yes, I do believe in equal representation, but I think maybe urban people and rural people – there are differences, as other presenters passed out, where you have a farmer with a large holding. I mean, he has a lot at stake with the roads that go by his place, everything, to what . . . Certainly I'm flying in the face of maybe democracy when I say it, but I think he has a bigger stake in the province than a [inaudible] with an apartment. But I do believe in equal representation. And as you say, if it's a formula, it's a formula. We should strike it, because there are different concerns. His Honour the mayor expressed that in a little bit stronger terms than I did. I saw that that raised everybody's hackles, maybe, in a couple of spots; I noticed from the balcony up there. But some of these things may be addressed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Are we sure there are no more formal briefs to be presented? Is there anyone who has not registered? By the way, we have, I believe, five people who didn't register when they came in. If you would like to receive a copy of the report once it's finished, we need your name and address. If you're content not to receive it, that's fine, but if you would like a report, please ensure that you register before you leave. So there are no more formal briefs? All right.

What we'll do now then: we'll throw it open for some general comments or questions from the audience, and I'm then going to come back for wrap-ups. Butch, I want you as the host MLA to make some comments towards the end, if you like, and then I'll conclude. So we'll go back. Are there any questions or comments that anyone in the audience would like to make? Okay, Roger.

MR. LEHR: Chairman Bob, the question was asked with regards to the Charter of Rights: the request that we should pay no attention to the Charter of Rights. The question I ask: if this committee's recommendation was the consensus of the Legislature, that we disregard the Charter of Rights, would it not be simple enough, then, to invoke the notwithstanding clause and do just that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. The notwithstanding clause pertains to sections in the Charter but not to section 1. Section 1 deals with fundamental rights of individuals, and that is not a section that the notwithstanding clause can be used on.

MR. LEHR: You're saying, then, that the fundamental rights of individuals in the voting sector are different than fundamental rights of the people in the language sector.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Roger, I'm not a lawyer. I'm merely telling you, whether it's good or bad, that the first section of the Charter of Rights cannot be overridden by the notwithstanding clause. That's been confirmed by every lawyer who's looked at it.

MR. LEHR: There are two different . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: There are different sections in the Charter. There are sections, of course, that can be overridden by provincial Legislatures. This is not one of them.

MR. LEHR: The other point I wanted to make with regard to decentralization: I think it's an absolute must, but I think we must be awfully careful with decentralization. When we decentralize, we must decentralize truly: not 30 or 50 miles from the major areas where people commute to these offices but indeed 100 miles. Because surely, with the electronic technology we have now, we could run any of these offices in rural Alberta. I think that's what you need to look at.

The final thing, and I don't mean to monopolize, but I hear so much frustration in the constituencies, when you're on the fringe of a constituency, about being bounced back and forth from one constituency to the other, not knowing who your member is, not knowing where you belong, and not knowing if anybody wants you. It's a serious, serious problem in areas such as Alliance, such as Provost. Those people really wonder where they do belong, or if they belong.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's an excellent point, Roger. This is the last of our 39 hearings, and when we were in Wetaskiwin for our hearing Monday night of this week, that message came home loud and clear from a small group of residents who live on the south side of the Hobbema reserve who shop in Wetaskiwin, whose children go to school in Wetaskiwin. At the last redistribution they were transferred from the Wetaskiwin riding into Ponoka-Rimbey, and they're very unhappy about it.

Please understand, though, the mammoth task that the electoral boundaries commission has, and Pat may want to supplement this. Their job is to take whatever guidelines they are given by the legislation – and remember it's this committee's job to recommend back to the Legislature what those guidelines should be. But if we recommend X, Y, Z, then that's in the legislation, then the commission must follow that. So they're out there trying to crunch numbers. Whether using the pre-Charter formulas or the post-Charter formulas, they're still looking at numbers, and there's that constant concern about municipal boundaries, where children go to school, trading areas for people. So it's a very valid point, and as I said, it's been brought up at different meetings, but most graphically on Monday of this week while we were in Wetaskiwin.

Pat, anything you would like to supplement on that?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The commission, when they sit, spend a lot of time receiving input from individuals from municipal governments, school boards, hospital boards, and individuals. They actually look at nine factors when they start to draw their lines. No matter where you draw the line, of course, you're going to be at the fringe of one area or another. One of the factors they take into account is: what are the current boundaries? As Mr. Bogle mentioned, community interests, trading patterns, lines of communication, and physical features are all taken into account. But no matter where you draw the line, you're going to find that somebody feels they've been discriminated against. If they'd just gone another section or two or a township or two or to the river or to the railroad – no matter where you go, there's always somebody who feels they've been discriminated against. It's a fact of life.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Steve.

DR. WEST: We're getting into a little argument here already.

I just want to thank you for allowing me to sit up here today and listen to some of the very good comments made. Personally, as a neighbouring MLA – and, Butch, I look down at you and appreciate what you do; I have it in my own constituency. I understand that if they applied the absolute of this formula to the system, there wouldn't be a Vermilion-Viking next door, because it was already suggested at another committee years ago that it be removed and absorbed into the surrounding. I would acknowledge that. I mean, we have hubs and wheels in the area, and if you applied it properly, you would lose those constituencies. I'm sure there's a sensitivity in all areas to that.

I just know that when you apply the absolute of the Charter of Rights in this country to this system – and you said it – you've made the biggest mistake of all. There should be a charter of common sense and responsibility to reality. Is it a privilege or a right to live in a democracy? We are 5,000 miles across, only 26 million people, and if you apply that to Alberta, it's just the same principle. So there must be a balance. We could get into all kinds of discussions about right and wrong, one vote/one representation, but that's not what we're talking about in the province of Alberta today; we're talking about equity and fairness based on common sense. If you apply an absolute Charter of Rights to this country and it continues the way it is, that I see it happening, then we won't have the privilege to live in a free democracy. That's what's at stake.

That's all I have to say, and now we'll get into the argument.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Last chance before I go to Butch. Yes, ma'am. Could you tell us who you are, please?

MRS. LAKEVOLD: Grace Lakevold from Provost. Pat Black, I believe her name is, indicated what would be fair – now I've forgotten the words; I get nervous, and I forget – representation. The people in the urban areas do, in a sense, have as fair representation in large numbers because their MLA can reach all these people faster than they can in a rural area. Therefore, they do have representation as far as meeting with their MLA, because in the hours it takes to travel out to the far corners of our province or the northern part of Alberta, they can have three meetings, possibly. Maybe our concern boils down to two areas. Rural against urban is where our fair representation comes in rather than numbers of votes and people.

MRS. BLACK: Just in response. At a lot of the hearings we've heard the emphasis made on rural and urban, and I think it's rather a shame, because when your representatives all get around the caucus table, we learn from one another about the different centres. I'm getting to the point where I wish we didn't have the term "rural and urban." Maybe we need the term 'rurban' that came up in the county of Strathcona, a combination, because quite often we do have the same interests and concerns.

I guess my questioning earlier – I could tell you what I'd like to do with the Charter of Rights about now, but we're being recorded, and I don't want what I think being recorded; it's not very ladylike to say what I think about it. But it does say that we are guaranteed equal representation. So when I asked you the question of what do you feel representation is, I'm asking you the question: do you think representation is rep by pop, which is an American term, really, that we've adopted, or do you feel – we've talked about Triple E Senate, which I'm a major

supporter of – it is a regional representation? Is it a representation, and what form is representation? I think it goes to a philosophical question of: what do the people feel representation is? So when you talk about urban and rural, I'm talking about the whole. I don't want to use split terms of: what do you feel representation is? We've heard about a lot of school districts, MDs and Cs, et cetera, and that's great. But you have to get that into: what is representation? Then you start from there.

I appreciate your comments, but I'd like to see us get rid of the terms "urban" and "rural," because I think it's something that – there is a misunderstanding on both sides.

MRS. LAKEVOLD: But at the same time and in the same time slot, your urban people can be represented and a greater number of people can be represented, can have their voice heard, I guess is the way I'd better put it. They aren't ending up with greater representation in Parliament, for sure, because they only have one vote, but they can be heard; a greater number of them can be heard in the same number of hours.

MRS. BLACK: That's probably true, yeah. You can have a meeting of 700 people show up.

MRS. LAKEVOLD: You can have three meetings in the time it takes a rural . . .

MRS. BLACK: Sure, and you probably are asked to attend three meetings in that time frame.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.
Yes, sir.

MR. NEWTON: Bert Newton, mayor of Chauvin.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Bert.

MR. NEWTON: You reiterated earlier that you had been to three other provinces trying to glean some information. What are Manitoba and Saskatchewan doing? Are they concerned right now with electoral boundaries?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Both Manitoba and Saskatchewan have recently gone through boundary revisions. In fact, Manitoba did theirs prior to the B.C. court case, and I think – am I right, Pat? – that Saskatchewan began prior to and ended just after the decision.

In Manitoba the variance is plus or minus 10 percent. The commission in Manitoba was made up of three members: the most senior federal judge, the president of the University of Manitoba, and the Chief Electoral Officer for the province. Now, all three of those individuals had Winnipeg as their residence. Under normal circumstances it probably would have worked out, because the person with the knowledge base was the Chief Electoral Officer. Unfortunately, he was gravely ill and did not participate as fully as he would otherwise have. One of the results of their redistribution – and remember it's the most restrictive: plus or minus 10 percent. Even though they could have redistributed all of the ridings in the province and stayed within the plus/minus 10 percent and not lost any seats or had a transfer of urban to rural, they did eliminate two rural seats – one very northerly riding and one southerly riding, both rural – and create two more seats in Winnipeg. There were a lot of concerns in the hearings which followed. I guess the bottom line

is that coming back from Winnipeg we all felt that one thing we wanted to ensure was that our commission has a mixture of urban and rural people on it, and not all from one centre, so that we don't repeat that kind of mistake.

In Saskatchewan a three-member commission chaired by a retired judge, a 92-year-old gentleman, I believe he was – just a remarkable fellow who had been a Liberal MLA in the 1940s and had never forgotten what it was like to be an MLA – went through an exhaustive process. Their rule is plus/minus 25 percent. They allow two northern ridings to go beyond that, and it's interesting to note that their urban ridings, their ridings in Saskatoon and Regina, are all in the very upper end of that range and the rural ridings are in the lower end of the range. They are now being challenged, as Pat has mentioned. There's a court challenge facing them arguing that that's really unfair.

One of the things that's been pointed out to us – and we've had probably 11 lawyers and at least 12 different opinions on what we should be doing. But one thing that seems to be constant from the lawyers is that if you're going to vary from a norm or from the mean population, justify it; give reasons for it. Don't merely go ahead and do something and assume that it's going to be all right; give your rationale and build your case. You know, the federal government operate on a plus or minus 25 percent, but they have exceptions. There are two seats in the Northwest Territories. Now, if you look at the population in the Northwest Territories, that would not justify one seat, let alone two. There's one seat in Yukon. They have four seats in Prince Edward Island because of a constitutional clause assuring P.E.I. that they won't have fewer members in the House than they do in the Senate. But we've tried to learn from the other provinces how they've handled their redistribution, looking at the implications of the Charter.

Pat or any other member, anything you'd like to add to that point?

MR. LEDGERWOOD: The Saskatchewan case, we hope, will be heard by the appeal court next month, and you may be interested in following that decision, as it could impact on this particular committee and some of the decisions that the committee makes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Anyone else?

All right, Butch, over to you for wrap-up comments as our host MLA, and then I'll conclude.

MR. FISCHER: Well, thank you very much. To start with, I'd like to thank the committee for getting down here. Even though we tried three times to have this meeting, we did finally get you down here. I know that had quite an impact on the turnout we had, because we have some areas that aren't represented today. I'm thinking of Provost and Hardisty. We did have some people there that were very concerned but couldn't get here.

I thank our people very much for taking the interest in this hearing, because it is extremely important to us. I think we all are recognizing that as these submissions have been put through. Just from what I hear at this meeting today, I think we are asking this committee to look at the fairness in the representation that we in the rural areas would like to see, and fairness in representation does not necessarily mean representation by population. We have – and I think it was touched on a time or two with our agriculture industry here – the migration of our people to the cities directly connected to our ag industry. We want as much input and representation in industry as we do by population or by region or for any other reason, and I think

there are many different ways of having fairness and representation into the government. It was brought out here quite strongly today, and I think that is one of the major things we're asking as a group here today from our Wainwright constituency: we want some fairness in other things besides representation.

With that, I just want to say thanks, everyone, for the interest you've taken, and we're going to be very interested in how our boundaries are changed. We realize they have to be at least adjusted and looked at and taken into consideration, so we'll be looking forward to that.

Thanks again, Bob, for bringing your group down here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'll try to recap the essence of the briefs we've heard today, and then I have some closing comments I'd like to make.

Milton was our leadoff presenter. He gave an overview of the constituency, mentioned the number of councils and boards that the MLA deals with, used the Senate example and suggested that we really have to be cognizant of what Alberta is promoting on the national scene and then be consistent in how we apply that to ourselves provincially. He concluded by recommending that we maintain the current 42 urban, 41 rural seats that are in our Assembly.

Wayne was second up, and again, spoke of the size of the constituency. He mentioned the ability of the MLA to get around the riding to meet with the various groups and organizations as well as individuals, and that distance is an important consideration. He recommended that we maintain the status quo; however, if we had to add seats to the cities, not to do that at the expense of the rural areas, although his preference was to maintain the status quo.

Roger was our third presenter. He asked that we not change the boundaries simply to reflect population. Again, a very strong appeal that other factors need to be considered as well. He went on to suggest that rural Alberta is a distinct society. He mentioned the Triple E Senate, again the work we're doing, and asked us to be consistent. He concluded by requesting that we maintain the status quo in terms of 42 urban, 41 rural seats.

Norm was the next presenter. Again, he recommended we maintain the current number of seats in the Assembly. I might mention that the vast majority of presenters who have talked about the size of the House have suggested that we not increase the size of the House beyond its current 83 members. There have been a few exceptions to that. I guess the most extreme would be anywhere from adding 20 seats and giving them all to the urban areas, to reducing the size of the House very substantially and, in essence, combining three rural ridings into one. So we've been across the map on recommendations, but the vast majority have hung on to maintaining the current 83. Again, Norm talked about the Triple E Senate and the implications that has for us. He mentioned that urban and rural coexistence as equals is important, and that was a different way of phrasing it.

One of the things we've heard from a number of presenters is: "Let's find a way to lessen the animosity that seems to be building on this issue between urban and rural. We're all Albertans; let's find a way to get along and work together." In fact, some of our members have said, "Let's find terms other than 'urban' and 'rural' to describe the situation." You've heard the term 'rurban,' which came out of a presentation by the county of Strathcona – Sherwood Park is the largest community in that county – while we were up in St. Albert.

Bert mentioned distance as an important factor. He went on to talk about the councils and the boards, all of which add to the workload of a member, and getting around to meet with those

councils and boards is important. He again asked that we not add more seats to the Assembly.

Bob concentrated on the Wainwright constituency, spoke of the workload the MLA has, again talked about the number of councils and boards, and used as a specific example a Kinsman Club. I picked up on that earlier, you recall. The same applies to a council. It doesn't matter whether you're dealing with a town with 4,000 people or a village with 400; when you're sitting down as the MLA to work with them, you're concentrating on their concerns. They are unique and special, and you have to work with it in that way.

Dr. Steve talked about equity and fairness and asked us to use common sense in our deliberations. Then our host MLA concluded and reminded us that this is the third time we had tried to get in. Thank goodness we were able to get in today, Mr. Mayor. As you know, we had to cancel our first trip in. I remember we were down in Hanna and phoned up and said, "There's just no way we can make it" with the weather conditions as they were. We rescheduled for June, and then the House went on much longer than we expected, so we had to postpone again. So we're finally here in late August. But I must say how pleased we are with the turnout. This is just excellent, to have this kind of interest by people from the constituency at a busy time of the year.

Butch went on to remind us that it's important that there be input in industry. That point's been raised on other occasions as well, Butch, citing as examples how if you use the marketing board system, that's skewed agriculture and tended to favour Ontario and Quebec; where we're no longer producing agriculture where it's most economical, we're now doing it in some cases where it's most political, again because of the number of votes in those particular areas. He concluded his remarks by asking that fairness prevail in this process.

Before I officially wind up the hearing, the hearing here in Wainwright and this process, I would like to go on record on behalf of the committee in expressing our thanks, first, to Pat Ledgerwood. As I mentioned at the beginning, Pat's not an official member of our committee, but, boy, has he been a good trouper. He's been with us at almost every hearing since he became involved in this part of the process. He's been inval-

able to our team in terms of his knowledge and as a resource person, and has really participated well. We know that when we sit down to actually write our report, he's going to provide the same kind strong leadership that he has to date. Pat, a special thanks to you from all members of the committee.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't thank our staff: Bob Pritchard and Ted Edwards, and also our crew from *Hansard*, Paula and Doug. For those of you who came early, you noticed that they were the first four here. We got in last night from our meeting down in Rockyford around 10:30, and they were on the road again at - what? Did you catch a 7:30 flight this morning to get here? Eight o'clock. They came out early to get set up. They'll be taking down the microphones and dismantling the equipment once we're involved in our meeting next door. They've really been supportive. They do the legwork for us, and when things go well we smile and take the credit, and when they don't go well we point fingers at the staff.

I just want you to know how much we appreciate the work that these men and women have done while we've been involved in the hearing process. Our committee's been in existence officially for just over a year. The hearing part of the process began late last year, and we've been working through. So a special thanks again.

I conclude by again thanking you for coming out. Without the input that we've received from you and literally hundreds of other Albertans, I don't know how we could tackle this problem. We know it's not easy. We know the solution won't come readily, but I want to assure you that the input we've had from hundreds of Albertans has certainly helped us. You may think you've got an understanding of Alberta and you may think you've got a corner on whether it's rural Alberta or urban Alberta, but we've all learned; there isn't one of us at this table who hasn't learned. We've learned throughout the process, and I cited examples of meetings earlier this week where we learned something new. It's come at each and every meeting. If you hadn't come out to share your ideas with us, that wouldn't have happened.

Thank you so much for being involved.

[The committee adjourned at 11:48 a.m.]

