

2:05 p.m.

Tuesday, May 28, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

**The Chair:** Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I told this story this morning, and I think I'll tell it again. You've perhaps heard the story of the minister who prepared all week for his sermon and got to church Sunday morning and only one person turned up. He thought as he was on the pulpit: should I tell him everything I had planned to tell, or should I not? He decided: well, I think I should tell everything. So he did. And he asked this rancher as he was leaving, "What did you think of my sermon?" And the rancher said, "You know, when I go to feed the cows and only one turns up, I don't give them the full load."

We're very grateful that you're here. Thank you very much. We're under no illusion that the results of this commission are going to be what you call best sellers, but they certainly do have an impact on constituencies and the way that communities are represented. So thank you very much for coming.

I'd just like to take a few minutes and give you just a little bit of background and say that this commission is established under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. After every two elections in Alberta under the law there is a review of constituencies in the province. The legislation says that there will be 83 seats. The legislation also says that we use the last 10-year census, which on this occasion is the 2001 census. The population that we're using is 2,983,000, and if you divide that by 83, I think you get a figure of about 35,951. For the sake of rounding off, 36,000 is kind of the average you're looking at.

Now, the legislation does allow for variances of up to 25 percent more or 25 percent less. The last commission was headed by Mr. Justice Ed Wachowich. Their recommendations were really that there be only one riding, other than the two special ridings, where there was more than a 15 percent variance, and that one riding was 16 percent.

Another part of the legislation is that there can be up to four special ridings. If you were looking at the maps over there, you've seen the two ridings in northeastern Alberta. Those were the two special ridings of Athabasca-Wabasca and Lesser Slave Lake. There is provision for four special ridings, and in those special ridings the variance can be up to 50 percent. Where there are going to be significant variances or where there are special ridings, the commission has to give reasons, and what we do has to be consistent with the legislation but also consistent with court cases that have gone on before, which give us pretty strict guidance. If we get much past 15 percent up or down – I'd almost say 10 percent up or down – you have to have very good reasons for doing that or the recommendations may be struck down by the courts.

Some of you will recall that in the early 1990s there was a period of time when Alberta had about three commissions like this in the course of about three years, and that resulted in the legislation that I refer to, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which was the basis for the last redistribution.

Under the legislation the commission is also set up with two people recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and two people recommended by the Leader of the Opposition after consultation. Then they have four choices for chairman. It's a member of the judiciary, a head of an academic institution, the Auditor General, or the Ethics Commissioner. I guess it's the Ethics Commissioner's turn this time, and that's how I came to be the chairman. I should just say that before I took this on, I did talk to the Leader of the Opposition, and he urged me to take this on. I think it would have been difficult to take it on not having the support from hopefully all sides at least to start with.

We're very ably assisted by, to my right, Mr. Ernie Patterson. Ernie is the longtime mayor of Claresholm, and I think I can quietly say that he's also the vice-president of the AUMA. To my immediate right is Glen Clegg. Glen was the member of the Legislature for Dunvegan, the Spirit River-Fairview area, for a number of years, formerly a reeve and municipal councillor in that area also. To my immediate left is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is a former president of the Alberta Teachers' Association. To my far left is Doug Graham. Doug is a respected lawyer from the city of Calgary.

The five of us are the panel. We're in our first week of getting around the province. We were in Calgary yesterday, in central Alberta today, Edmonton tomorrow. Then next week we go from St. Paul to Wainwright to Drumheller to Medicine Hat to Lethbridge to Wetaskiwin by air, I might say. Then later on in the month of June we take a swing from Westlock to Edson to Slave Lake to Fort McMurray to Grande Prairie to Peace River. Following that, which will be by the end of June, then we have to get our heads together and come to some firm conclusions, because we will be releasing a report through the Speaker in the early part of September. I urge you to have a look at that report, and then we're going to be asking for reactions from people across the province. We'll be coming off our second set of hearings in those areas where there are questions or concerns sometime in December or early January because we have to have the final report in the hands of the Speaker in early March.

So hopefully that gives you an idea of the broad, general framework of the commission. It sets out the criteria that we use as far as population numbers are concerned, also the makeup of the panel. We're really delighted to have you with us here this afternoon, and according to my list here, the first presenter is the mayor of Lacombe.

The format we'll use is quite open and laid back. We'll ask the presenter, in this case His Worship, to make a presentation to us, and then there'll be questions and answers I'm sure, Your Worship. There may even be comments from the members of the panel. So without any further ado, Your Worship, thank you very much for coming.

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, thank you very much for having me here. It is a pleasure to be here. It is an important issue facing Albertans as our population continues to grow, and it gives us, the council of Lacombe, an opportunity to voice our opinion. On behalf of the council of the town of Lacombe I am pleased to have the opportunity to make our presentation to the commission on this very important matter of ensuring equitable provincial electoral representation while most effectively representing our community's interests.

Currently the town of Lacombe lies within the Lacombe-Stettler electoral division. This constituency was created for the 1993 election by combining much of the areas of the previously separate Lacombe and Stettler constituencies into a single riding. The general configuration of the riding was subsequently confirmed in the previous electoral boundaries review in 1996.

We well understand that in order to meet the obligations and fulfill the spirit of equality of representation in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it will be necessary to change the distribution of seats to reflect the increasing proportion of population in the urban areas of the province. In this sense we use the term "urban" to refer to those constituencies associated with the province's cities and "rural" to refer to the remaining constituencies, notwithstanding the fact that there are urban municipalities such as ourselves included in these rural constituencies.

In our presentation we will suggest to you that rural constituencies have unique representational characteristics and demands and that

the divisions with populations below the average can be defended. In our own case we believe that the circumstances of our community have now changed such that a constituency aligned north to south along highway 2 to include the Ponoka area would better represent the interests of our community.

In our view each rural constituency faces a common set of specific characteristics, and we believe that it is incumbent upon the commission to give overall recognition to these characteristics and to the special circumstances and demands that members of the Legislature face in representing these areas. Beyond the obvious challenge of effectively representing a geographically large area, MLAs must deal with a multitude of community interests. Those representing urban ridings have a much smaller area and, we would contend, less diversity in terms of issues faced and interests to be heard and represented. Urban members need only interact with one municipal council, one chamber of commerce, one health region, one or two school boards, and a variety of community and special interest groups. Rural members, however, have to interrelate with up to a dozen municipal councils, two or three health care regions, a number of school boards, and a variety of community groups from each of the distinct community areas within the constituency.

2:15

There are economies of scale that exist for urban members, as they can often address their entire constituency area in single, common activities and events. They are able to set up constituency offices that will effectively serve those whom they represent. Rural members, on the other hand, must attend separate events in each of the community areas throughout. More than one constituency office is often needed, and even then they are not within easy reach of large numbers of the population. Urban representatives either live within commuting distance of the Legislature or a quick airbus ride. Rural representatives are often several hours away by car or plane.

To observe strict equal representation by population will in fact penalize rural representation. Rural members must spend more time and energy on constituency work or in travel. This leaves less time in Edmonton and at the Legislature, potentially decreasing the amount of influence and access that can be developed and reducing the opportunities for intervention on behalf of constituents. These realities justify rural divisions having a population of at least 8 to 10 percent lower than the provincial average while the urban ridings have populations greater than the provincial average.

The present Lacombe-Stettler constituency is aligned in an east/west manner with the highway 2 corridor communities of Lacombe and Blackfalds on one side and Stettler and the eastern plain areas on the other. There is a great diversity in the electoral division with the western areas facing rapid population growth and strong economic activity while the eastern area is characterized by even to slightly negative population growth and economic activity.

We find that Lacombe has little common interest with the Stettler region some 90 kilometres away. Instead, our interests align more commonly north and south with Blackfalds and Ponoka and the areas around these towns within the highway 2 corridor. Population growth has been significant in the area with the town of Lacombe for example growing 12.7 percent over the 1996 to 2001 period compared to 10.3 percent for the province as a whole over the same period. Blackfalds has grown a substantial 52 percent over the same period. For this area common issues include the pressure of population growth including infrastructure development, urban expansion, competing land use issues, nonagricultural use of agricultural land, and the rapid intensification of agricultural production. These common interests will often be best addressed through common efforts. In a current example water supply issues have prompted the towns of Lacombe, Ponoka, and Blackfalds to work together to develop a regional water supply system which will also serve areas of the Lacombe and Ponoka counties between the

towns.

Regional co-operation and co-ordinated efforts with the government of Alberta will become increasingly important in providing the most effective solutions to the issues facing us. We believe that combining these areas into a single constituency will allow an MLA to provide representation to an area with less diverse issues and facilitate the development of effective partnerships among the municipalities with the provincial government.

An initial thought might be to make a new Lacombe-Ponoka constituency boundary coterminous with the combined boundaries of Lacombe and Ponoka counties. However, the population would be nearly 45,000, well above the provincial average at the upper accepted variance limit identified by the commission. Given the challenges and demands in representing a rural constituency, such an electoral division would simply be too large a population to be represented effectively. As well, a constituency comprising the two counties would draw in the far western and eastern areas of both rural municipalities, which would have interests more closely aligned with the areas further to the west and east respectively.

Instead, we would see the most effective configuration of the new constituency as one which would include the towns of Lacombe, Ponoka, Blackfalds, Bentley, and the central portions of the Lacombe and Ponoka counties bound generally on the east by range 24 west of the 4th and on the west by range 1 west of the 5th. The population of this area is estimated to be approximately 31,000 people, well within the accepted population range. Our council believes that such a Lacombe-Ponoka constituency oriented to the highway 2 corridor and characterized by strong economic activity and growing population would provide the most effective representation for our community.

If a north/south constituency orientation is not possible, then our second choice would be for the retention of the present constituency boundaries. The Lacombe-Stettler riding at a 2001 population of 32,530 is only 9 and a half percent below the population average of 35,951. This proportionate variation has remained virtually unchanged in a decade, where in 1991 the constituency population was 10 percent below the provincial average at that time. While the east end population growth has been less than the population average, the constituency population as a whole, when the faster growing west side is included, will likely continue to remain at an approximate variation of 10 percent for the next number of years.

We would absolutely oppose any proposal which would include Lacombe within a riding that includes the city of Red Deer. The interests and issues of the city are significantly different from those of the rural areas. While we are working with the city on the regional supply of water and otherwise share a number of issues in common with other central Alberta communities and while over time additional regional alignments with this city will likely develop, the interests and issues of Lacombe are not necessarily those of Red Deer. With a population of nearly 10,000 people the town of Lacombe is one of Alberta's largest and fastest growing towns. We are a community significant enough to warrant inclusion in a riding where our interests will be addressed and well represented. This will not occur if we are included in a Red Deer dominated riding.

In summary, we have argued that fashioning an electoral map with all divisions of equal population ignores the realities of representing rural constituencies and would put these rural areas at a competitive representational disadvantage. We believe that the population of rural ridings should be lower than the urban ones. As well, we believe that our circumstances have changed and that a new constituency configured on a north/south alignment along the highway 2 corridor to include the Lacombe and Ponoka areas would unify a region with more common interests and provide more effective representation than the current, east/west-oriented Lacombe-Stettler constituency.

I thank you for your time this afternoon and welcome any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Your Worship. One of the neat parts of what you've given us is a firm proposal. It's been our experience, certainly yesterday – that's not being critical of what we heard yesterday, but some people weren't very precise. They pointed out the problem but didn't help with some solutions. You certainly have done that, and we appreciate that very much.

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, just ask us, and we'll solve a lot of problems if you wish.

**The Chair:** No kidding. Well, we may be back to see you. Okay. Mr. Clegg.

**Mr. Clegg:** Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. I can certainly see the point of your proposal. Of course, when we get down to drawing boundaries, we can make some wonderful constituencies, but what does it do beyond that? So it's very good to have this kind of information, and your numbers are all in here if you combine along highway 2, you know, take in Ponoka and Lacombe. Certainly, I totally agree with you that your interests are absolutely in common with each other. So thanks for the presentation.

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**Mr. Graham:** I'd echo Mr. Clegg. I think you've done an excellent job, and we really appreciate the proposals. The question I have – and it is a question. I don't understand the repercussions of this exactly, but it seems to me that proposal 1 would be to take out Stettler and put in Ponoka. Are they about the same size cities? Because the numbers seem to be roughly similar when you do that.

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, they are, let's say, roughly similar, but the interests and the economic traffic are certainly on a north/south corridor.

**Mr. Graham:** Yeah, I understand that. One of the things which will concern us – and I think Mr. Clegg has alluded to this, and obviously we haven't made up our mind – is what this does to the rest of the province. A concern I have – and I don't have the answer, but it would have to be looked at – is that if you start moving everything up a north/south axis on the Calgary/Edmonton corridor, does that then exacerbate the problems further east? When you take out these fast-growing population centres to the west, then these eastern sections, which are sparsely populated and seem to have dropping populations, have even worse problems perhaps going forward. You know, that's a concern for us.

**Mr. McQuesten:** I realize that, and that's why we have identified three situations. The first one is what we prefer, the second is I guess what we could live with, and we would be aghast if something like the third proceeded. It represents the thoughts of council. It indicates that the council of the municipality of the town of Lacombe has seriously looked at the issue, has looked at the demographics, has looked at the similarities, has looked at the disparities, and has come up with a written proposal. Obviously, the first proposal is something that we feel very strongly would be of benefit to us. I mean, obviously you have to look at the input from other groups, and we understand that. In light of that, if the status quo is good for other groups – and I don't want to be catty here or whatever, but if to date you haven't had, let's say, well-thought-out proposals or a large number of people, possibly you would give more weight to the presentations of those of us who have taken this

seriously.

**Mr. Graham:** I understand. It is an excellent presentation, and thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Bauni?

**Ms Mackay:** Yes. Thank you. I think this will be very helpful to us. I do have a question related to the counties. If I understand you correctly, your first preference would be to have Ponoka and Lacombe and then the core of each county, but the periphery of those counties would go to other constituencies. I'm kind of surprised by that. Wouldn't some of those people that are living on the edge of the county prefer to stay?

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, just looking at the whole issue which has been brought up here, it's that they would have more in common. The eastern part of our constituency would have more in common with Stettler in regards to their economic interests and what they're doing, but if we took in the whole of both counties, we would be way above the number of – I don't want to call them constituents, because they all don't vote – people within those areas. It'd be about 45,000.

**Ms Mackay:** Yeah. I understand why you've done it. I'm just curious as to whether those people who live in these two counties and live in that part of those counties would be happy with that decision. I mean, have you checked?

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, this is a proposal from the town of Lacombe, so this is what we feel is best for us and the people within close proximity to us.

**Ms Mackay:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. McQuesten:** That's a fair question, but I'm not giving you a fair answer obviously, and I'm not going to.

**The Chair:** It's called skirting; isn't it?

**Mr. McQuesten:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** It's like the fellow says. It's question period; it isn't answer period.

Just following along the line that Bauni asked, would you care to express any preference as to the east side or the west side? I'm quite intrigued by your idea of putting the two counties together, and I understand your point, that you have 45,000 people so you have to back off on one side. You may want to plead the fifth here and not express whether to go to the west side of the counties or the east side and take more off one or the other side. Is there any merit in that? Have you thought about that, or don't you want to?

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, I don't think that within our presentation guidelines we'd want to. We've looked at including Bentley, which is to our west. We have I'll just even call it a large trading partnership and a lot of goings-on between the two communities. So it is that central core that has the commonalities.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that. Mr. Patterson?

**Mr. Patterson:** Yes. Your Worship, have you talked with Blackfalds and Ponoka about this proposal?

**Mr. McQuesten:** No.

**Mr. Patterson:** Okay.

I guess the second question is: have you talked to the two counties about it?

**Mr. McQuesten:** No. As I said, this is a presentation from the municipal council of the town of Lacombe. This is our position.

**Mr. Patterson:** Okay.

The other thing, Mr. Chair, if I might. I know that you are discussing a new water line. Are there other additional things happening in the way of trade or trading patterns and so on that would cause you to think this way? Can you elaborate a little bit more on that?

**Mr. McQuesten:** Well, we're talking about the water, but we're also starting to do preliminary discussions on a sewer system. You know, the interlinking economic viabilities of being linked with water and sewer just has a commonality for the whole region, depending on how far that goes. As I said, there is a natural trading corridor going from Lacombe down to Red Deer, from Ponoka to Red Deer. We get a lot of shoppers within Lacombe that are from the county of Ponoka that come in, so it is around that highway 2 corridor, and that's basically what we're addressing.

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Chair, I'd just like to thank the mayor for making such a precise presentation. Thank you.

**The Chair:** On behalf of my colleagues and the panel thank you very much. I trust you'll look forward to our deliberations in September, and I know you'll let us know if you feel we haven't been able to fulfill your expectations.

**Mr. McQuesten:** I thank you very much for the opportunity. If you ever want further input, just let me know, and I'll gladly comply. Thank you.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that. Thanks very much.

The next presenter is Mr. Harlan C. Hulleman, and Mr. Hulleman is from Red Deer. Ms Mackay, he asked me if I ever was a teacher. I said: yes, I was, but you were much more and so was Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Hulleman, we're in your hands.

**Mr. Hulleman:** Mr. Chairman, members of the commission – incidentally, my initials are on the hospital if you ever forget my name. Among other things I'm the founding editor of a 600-page history of north Red Deer and also the project manager of the walking tour for north Red Deer. I've thought a reasonable amount about the relationship of north Red Deer and south Red Deer and where it fits into central Alberta. As Mr. Clark said, he is a teacher and a few others of you are. So am I, and as you know, once a teacher always a teacher, so I would like to give you a history lesson.

**The Chair:** Just as long as it's to the point, that's great.

**Mr. Hulleman:** Right. Incidentally, what I propose is nothing revolutionary. It is just a bit of evolution. The history lesson is very short. From 1911 to 1947 the Red Deer area consisted of two municipalities. Red Deer was located south of the river, and the village of North Red Deer was located north of the river. In 1947 they were amalgamated. So when in 1984 the Chief Electoral

Officer proposed to split the area into two ridings, Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, it made good sense. In the process he borrowed some territory in the south to fill out the numbers in the north. The boundary is now Ross Street, and what I would like to propose to you is that the boundary be made a natural boundary, the Red Deer River.

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**The Chair:** So that would add more people to Red Deer-South; wouldn't it?

**Mr. Hulleman:** Yes, and I have a proposal as to how to deal with the numbers here.

In my opinion natural boundaries are preferable. Right now in another historical walking tour it shows that Woodlea and Waskasoo are a part of the Red Deer-North riding, but quite a few historic residences date back to Red Deer before amalgamation. Moving those subdivisions into Red Deer-South makes historical sense. The area north of the river, as south of the river too, has grown now to a city within a city of 25,000. In fact, it's about 26,000. There is a sense of community north of the river, partially due to the fact that it has a history of its own and its own walking tour booklet.

Of course, you need to look at balancing populations, so we recommend that you add one of Red Deer's northern bedroom communities, such as Blackfalds or Sylvan Lake, to the Red Deer-North riding. Most Blackfalds citizens and for that matter also Sylvan Lake citizens work in Red Deer, and a growing number attend school in Red Deer too. The net effect would be a more homogeneous riding, to use an educational term, and it also might help you in dealing with the decreasing ratio of rural to urban populations.

That is the extent of my presentation, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** That was a good history lesson and a very straightforward suggestion, and that's what we need. Thank you very much.

Mr. Patterson.

**Mr. Patterson:** Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'm somewhat familiar with the area. I'm trying to remember how far it is from the north boundary of Red Deer to Blackfalds. Is it about 10 kilometres?

**Mr. Hulleman:** Yeah. I worked for 25 years at Lacombe composite high school, and I lived in part of Red Deer-North, so I've taken the trip numerous times. It used to take me 19 minutes to get from home to school. Blackfalds is right in the centre, so about 10 minutes, depending on traffic conditions.

**Mr. Patterson:** Do you think that the people in Blackfalds or the rural area would be happy going into Red Deer-North? Any idea of that at all?

**Mr. Hulleman:** Well, I certainly know a fair number of people in Blackfalds and surrounding areas because it used to be a feeder school. That may change because, you know, nowadays you're not compelled to attend a school within your geographic area. That's why I suspect there's a fair number going to Lindsay Thurber, more so than, say, 10 years ago. I think many people in Blackfalds and area, whether it's citizens of Blackfalds or the area surrounding – since Blackfalds doesn't have too many facilities, it totally depends on Red Deer, whether it's for shopping, work, or education. For instance, I've somewhat kept track of the population of Lacombe composite high school, and the fact that it has not grown despite the

fact, as my predecessor said, that Lacombe itself has grown enormously shows that a growing number of people that used to go to Lacombe composite don't go there anymore. In effect, talking about schools, there is now a separate district for Catholic students who go to school in Red Deer.

**Mr. Clegg:** I'd like to thank you for the presentation. I see that you've got, you know, that you wouldn't be against "such as Blackfalds," but then you've got in brackets "or Sylvan Lake." Have you done any numbers? Sylvan Lake, if I remember rightly the last time I was there, is a pretty big place, and it's quite a few miles out. Wouldn't the population increase dramatically, or have you done any figures on that?

**Mr. Hulleman:** Yeah, and in fact the reason I put it in brackets is that it would be my second-choice suggestion type of thing. What you will have to do is play with numbers and equalize. So, for instance, if the proposal that preceded me was accepted, then my proposal would slightly affect yours. You'll have to do a lot of juggling, and dealing with the decreasing ratio of the rural population I guess is your biggest challenge.

**The Chair:** A challenge, yes.

**Mr. Hulleman:** So by putting, say, Blackfalds into Red Deer-North and then by a bit more juggling, I guess you could reduce the rural seats by one or two or whatever number.

**The Chair:** Just refresh my memory, one of you gentlemen. The county of Lacombe's southern boundary is where?

**Mr. McQuesten:** The river.

**The Chair:** It's the river; is it?

**Mr. McQuesten:** We have a burgeoning, a growing school population. We have a new school in Blackfalds, a new school in Lacombe on the books, and their high school is expected in the next two years to be at over a hundred percent capacity.

**The Chair:** Okay. Any more questions?

**Mr. Graham:** Mr. Hulleman, I just wanted to know. You've estimated the population of north Red Deer to be 25,000. Is that accurate?

**Mr. Hulleman:** In fact, I looked at last year's census. I've been keeping copies of the census for a long, long time. I haven't had time to analyze the new census, but I know it's up by at least a thousand. So 25,000 is not a guess; it is.

**Mr. Graham:** Okay. So then the concern that that gives me is that if the population of Red Deer is 68,000, that puts south Red Deer pretty high; doesn't it? It's way above what it should be, it seems to me. It's just a comment I have.

**Mr. Hulleman:** I have kept track of the ratio of north and south of the river, and way back it used to be 25 percent. It has been as high as 40 percent, and it's now approximately 35.

**Mr. Graham:** Thank you.

**Ms Mackay:** I think that my questions have been answered. I'm just concerned about numbers also, but I think I have a picture now.

**The Chair:** I think what you've done for us is to remind us once again that however we cut the two seats in Red Deer, we may very well have to end up going one way or another outside the city to get enough population to get up to the 36,000 plus. We may have to find that population someplace. I take it that your suggestion is that we look to Blackfalds, and I take it that the mayor of Lacombe's proposition is: don't look north of the Red Deer River in the county of Lacombe. I'm not going to satisfy both of you.

**Mr. Hulleman:** Incidentally, I see the northern boundary of Red Deer as becoming the bank of the river. Not tomorrow, but it will come.

2:45

**The Chair:** Any other questions, colleagues? Okay.

Well, Mr. Hulleman, thank you very much for the history lesson, the good suggestions. Enjoyed your presentation. Thank you very much.

I'd now like to ask Elsie Brewin to make a presentation. Following Elsie's presentation, we'll take a short break, and then we'll go on from there.

Elsie, I'd like to welcome you on behalf of my colleagues. I believe you were here when I introduced them. I notice that you're the returning officer for the Lacombe-Stettler constituency. If you have any complaints about Alberta's existing Chief Electoral Officer, please speak to us privately after. He's our chauffeur, and we don't want him to be thinking of other things. Elsie, I say that because last night in Calgary some person late in the day – it was in the evening, quite late in the evening – made comments about how, despite the best works of the Chief Electoral Officer, the people couldn't get to the right poll at the right time, and poor Mr. Fjeldheim has been trying to explain that to us, with little success.

Please go forward, Elsie. Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Brewin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I must tell you that my first election was in 1997, and it was a difficult one. Brian was not the Chief Electoral Officer then. The election after that was a lot easier. It may have had to do with the weather.

**The Chair:** You were sitting beside Brian down there; weren't you?

**Mrs. Brewin:** Okay. The Lacombe-Stettler constituency includes approximately two-thirds of the county of Lacombe and all of the county of Stettler, and that's the way it has been for the last two elections where I served as the returning officer. I would like to see that changed.

Lacombe-Stettler constituency served a population of 25,500 in the 1997 election. The 2001 federal census puts the population of the county of Lacombe, including all towns, villages, and hamlets, at 29,000 persons. I propose that the county of Lacombe become its own constituency. The county of Stettler has had little growth in the federal census from '96 to 2001, while the county of Lacombe has had considerable growth. I feel that including the entire county of Lacombe would serve the electorate more effectively. Our west boundary is difficult for voters to recognize and to accept. It would be much easier to determine where the voter lived if we could ask, "Do you live within the county of Lacombe?" as opposed to "Do you live east or west of range road 28-3, and do you live north or south of township road 4-1?" Keep in mind that not all country roads are signed nor are all crossroads, and not all the people who live in rural Alberta are farmers. Some of them are city folk, and they just live a mile and a half south of the greenhouse.

When the voter is confident in the answer and therefore gives us accurate information, it eliminates errors, confusion, and frustration. This would make enumeration and confirmation much easier. It would also make election day voting easier for the electorate, especially in stormy weather. It would also free up some of my time that is spent trying to assuage the electors to the reasons for the boundary decision. Since these people live within the county, they have reason to come into Lacombe for business, medical, school, shopping, and recreation. Therefore, stopping at our election office in Lacombe to pick up special ballots to register new voters or to get voters' information is convenient for the elector. I try very hard to accommodate the needs of the electors in the county of Stettler, but Lacombe is not in their trading path. Therefore, it is more inconvenient for the residents of the county of Stettler than it is for the residents of the county of Lacombe. I feel that it is very important to consider trading patterns, school districts, medical facilities, and natural boundaries when creating constituencies. The county of Lacombe being its own constituency would make the returning officer's job easier and make more effective use of their time. All training sessions for either enumeration or election could be held in one central location as opposed to traveling to another venue because of the distance that the employees must travel.

All election employees would work under a similar environment; for example, when the weather is bad and we need to plow roads – we need to do it in the entire constituency – or all the problems that arise out of school closures on election day. These are some of the experiences that I had in the 1997 election in the southern part of the county of Stettler. Because of the distance involved, the solution becomes more complicated.

The trading patterns in this area are north and south as opposed to east and west. So if we need something in the county of Stettler, the quickest way to get it there is to jump in the car and drive out there. Regardless of how well organized I am, I have found myself delivering something out to the county of Stettler. It takes time away from my other duties, and it costs money.

I realize that for many rural constituencies the distance is always vast, and the complications and the expense to the taxpayer cannot be eliminated or minimized for there is no alternative. In our constituency I do see an alternative. I believe that if the county of Lacombe could become a constituency, in doing so it would serve the elector more effectively. The municipalities within the county of Lacombe are growing and will continue to grow because it is in the Edmonton/Calgary corridor. This proposed constituency would have clearly defined, well-recognized boundaries on all its sides. This proposal would allow the voters a greater level of convenience in the election process.

Thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much, Elsie. I would like to ask a couple of questions. One, the figure that we'd be looking at would be 29,000?

**Mrs. Brewin:** That's right.

**The Chair:** If I were to say to you, Elsie: how could we get that up to 36,000 . . .

**Mrs. Brewin:** Include the county of Ponoka.

**The Chair:** Okay. Do you have any idea what portion of it would get us up to, let's say, 36,000, 38,000?

**Mrs. Brewin:** The county of Ponoka is an elongated county, and it sort of overlaps the north edge of the county of Stettler. If we

were to sort of run a boundary line – there are a couple of highways that run north and south through the county of Ponoka that are well recognized by all the people. You could cut it off at those highways so long as it's a well-recognized boundary. The trading pattern for the people in the east part of the country would be to Stettler or Camrose as opposed to Ponoka or Lacombe. So, yes, you could include a portion that is directly above the county of Lacombe.

**The Chair:** And that would include Ponoka?

**Mrs. Brewin:** That would include Ponoka.

**The Chair:** You're such a fountain of figures. Let me ask one more question. Can you give me a ballpark figure as to the population of the county of Stettler?

**Mrs. Brewin:** I believe it's 11,400. That's maybe changed 150 from the '96 census to the 2001.

**The Chair:** The reason I ask you that is because if you just look at the map over there, you see the challenge we have in the eastern side of the province, and that's one of the appealing aspects of your suggestion.

**Mrs. Brewin:** The county of Stettler people tend to have a lot more in common rurally and agriculturally. Their business would be with Camrose, Castor, Coronation, Hanna, that whole east country. It's dry land. So their concerns, their representation, their needs would be similar to those of the people farther east rather than the people along the corridor.

2:55

**The Chair:** One last little request. Would you put together a map of what you were talking about in the Ponoka area and run it across to Brian so we can have a look at that?

**Mrs. Brewin:** Certainly. I can do that. I have included the maps at the back of your proposal. It does not include the county of Ponoka, but certainly I can put together what I would like to see.

**The Chair:** That'll be helpful.

**Mrs. Brewin:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you for your suggestions. The only comment I'd make is that I don't believe there's any way we could stay with 29,000 people when we have a constituency in Calgary with 82,000 people in it, which we heard quite a bit about last night. So this is one of the real problems we face in trying to cope with going from a constituency of 82,000 people and growing and then looking at your proposal. But as you suggested to the chair, if we included Ponoka in it, then it would make it more practical. Just a comment, Mr. Chair.

**Mrs. Brewin:** It certainly would, and it would be far more convenient for the elector. Those are their trading patterns. The people living in the county of Ponoka would have reason apart from the election process to come to Lacombe or the county of Lacombe, passing through on their way to Red Deer, whereas the people in the county of Stettler have absolutely no reason to come through the county of Lacombe. Even if they're going to Red Deer, there's a far more direct route that bypasses the county of Lacombe.

**Ms Mackay:** Did you give us the number if you include the part of

Ponoka that you thought you would include?

**Mrs. Brewin:** No. I don't have that. I'm sorry.

**Ms Mackay:** That's all. I just wanted the number.

**Mr. Graham:** I just think this is very informative and excellent and thank you very much.

**Mr. Clegg:** I'd just like to say thank you for the information.

**The Chair:** And you're forgiven for your comments on the Chief Electoral Officer.

**Mrs. Brewin:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Okay. We'll take a five-minute break, and then we look forward to hearing Helen.

[The commission adjourned from 2:58 p.m. to 3:08 p.m.]

**The Chair:** Okay, ladies and gentlemen. Helen Posti is going to make a presentation to us. Helen, you've been here since the start. You understand the way we do things. We're looking forward to your presentation. Have at us, please.

**Ms Posti:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the commission. I would like to say that I really appreciate the fact that I'm able to speak here today. I've been on a holiday in Vancouver, and I haven't got the paperwork all done, so I will fax it tomorrow. We'll have no trouble remembering the fax number because the last four numbers of your fax number for this, 2900, are the same as the town of Eckville.

I have to tell you that I'm wearing one hat here today. I am the president of the Rocky Mountain House constituency, and I am having a few mixed feelings here listening to the county of Lacombe because I'm also the mayor of Eckville, and I reside in the town of Eckville, which is at the far side of Lacombe county. We border the county of Red Deer, and we border Clearwater county, and we always feel that our trading area is from Rocky to Red Deer.

But all things like that aside, I realize that your job is going to be a hard one, and when you look at trading areas or natural boundaries or all the other issues that are there, it really comes down to the numbers. What I have here today is very short and sweet, because we know that the courts have ruled that there must be effective representation. In a province like Alberta this creates some variances in both size and population in order that the people can be treated fairly and effectively.

In general, we support the rule of the 25 percent variance of the mean. However, in order for people to have reasonable access to their MLA, we believe that the idea of having four constituencies with a variance in population up to 40 percent below the mean is very reasonable, and we do support that as a constituency. The geographic area of these is still very large.

We also believe that no constituency should go beyond 25 percent above the mean in population. We would urge you to look at Calgary and Edmonton first. We feel that if you have a population of 20 percent to 25 percent above the mean in all of these constituencies, you may not have to do a lot outside of the cities except for the neighbouring constituencies of these two cities. Yes, there would be some tinkering and moving things around in other fast growing areas. As an example, the three rural constituencies around Calgary would need adjustment in order to get under the plus 25 percent of the mean. It would appear that these adjustments

could be made in the neighbouring constituencies. The concept we are proposing is rural 20 percent to 25 percent below the mean and urban 20 percent to 25 percent above the mean. This, we believe, would achieve effective representation by balancing off size with population.

I have to tell you that at our table when we talked, we didn't feel any great concern like we did at the last review of the boundaries that there might be the loss of a rural MLA. I have a feeling that a lot of people feel that way, and that's why you don't have a lot of turnout. I just want to express that concern.

We really need to keep the balance of the number of rural MLAs to the number of urban. Being considered an urban person – we do really see ourselves, as Mayor Bill said, as being rural, or as the new saying goes, we're 'rurban.' But we do have some differences, and as a constituency president I have found that we have differences even within our own constituency, and I think that's unavoidable. We try to move our meetings around to address the transportation issues that come within the larger constituencies.

I still think that you do have problems with that larger constituency because everybody expects their MLA to be at an event. They can't always be there. They have to juggle that. On the same token, for people to go somewhere and be somewhere – there is some onus on the person: you have to go.

There is going to be no easy answer. No one will be pleased with the outcome a hundred percent. There are always going to be the losers and the winners, but we feel that the constituencies as they are right now are on the whole basically pretty good.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much. Short, succinct, and to the point.

Who has the first comment or question?

**Mr. Clegg:** Yes. I have a comment. Helen, thank you for your presentation. Your comment that urban should be 20 to 25 percent above and rural 20 to 25 percent below – I like that comment. The only problem is that we have to justify those figures. I'm just going to use a prime example. If you're next to Edmonton, we could not justify them being 15 or 20 percent below, but if they were 400 miles away – you have to have justification to make that 20 or 25 percent. You just can't do it, so we have to really look at this. I mean, we just can't say: well, we're going to use 20 or 15 or 25 percent. There has to be justification to do these things, you know, and there are rules and regulations governing us in what we can use and what we can't. I mean, we can say that we can use 25 percent above or below, but we can't do it right across the province. That just will not fly.

I like your comment on trade. You know, every community has trade with somebody else. Ideally we would have no municipalities cut in half or cut in a third. To get the numbers, in many cases this will happen, although I'm sure all members will try very, very hard not to cut a municipality in half or in a third. As you can understand, we will have to do some of that because the numbers just won't work out. But when we cut in half, we will certainly take a look at the trading area. Your comments are very well taken.

Would you like to comment on my comments? You know, we just can't use figures picked out of our mind.

**Ms Posti:** Can I ask you a question?

**Mr. Clegg:** Absolutely.

**Ms Posti:** Who would it be that could lobby for a change in this variance of 25 percent? Where would this grassroots participation start from?

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Chair, if I might comment on this a bit. I just finished reading the book on electoral commissions across Canada. It is a very interesting book. It analyzes all of the court cases across Canada and what's happened in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and of course the Alberta cases and outlines what happened in Ontario. In speaking in support of what my colleague has said, our problem – and I think our chair said this at the very beginning too – is that we've got to do this in such a way that we hope it won't be challenged; that is, that somebody won't take it to court. Now, if somebody does take it to court, we have to have justification of why we did what we did.

Some of the factors that we're looking at – you mentioned some of them. Of course, there's the geography, trading areas. The population of course is number one. In the cities we're looking at community associations. So we have to put all of these factors together. The legislation requires us to look at the distance from the Legislature as another factor. When we do make the final report, it has to be acceptable to the members of the Legislature, I guess, but it also has to withstand a court challenge, Mr. Chair, if you didn't mind my saying that.

I found this book very interesting, because in Saskatchewan their legislation has said a 5 percent variance. In the Alberta case Justice McLachlin is the one that gave the 25 percent either way, but there has to be justifications for it.

Our difficulties are – what shall we say? When I first agreed to serve on this commission, I didn't think maybe that it would be quite so problematic, but the more we hear and the more we get into this, the more problematic it is.

3:18

**The Chair:** Helen, I try to say to people that there are four ingredients to what we can do. One, we have to interpret the Alberta legislation as it is today, and it sits at 25 percent. Number two, we have to be conscious of the federal and provincial court decisions, because under the Bill of Rights people are guaranteed the right to vote and equality in that. My good friend to my left here, the lawyer, Doug, can put this far more succinctly than I, but as I understand it, basically the Supreme Court has said that you have to give reasons. It seems that you can kind of go to about 15 percent variance without too much difficulty, but after that it certainly runs the risk of being seriously challenged.

Now, Doug, would you straighten me out, please?

**Mr. Graham:** I don't think I need to straighten people out. The reason I've been so quiet here quite frankly is that I've become quite irritated by my rural people at the end of the table here being lawyers. I mean, what do you need me here for?

**The Chair:** Well, let's get a legal opinion then.

**Mr. Graham:** Basically, they stated it about perfectly. I think what has to be understood is that the legislation provides for up to 25 percent variance up and down. That doesn't mean that people have a licence to do that as they wish. It means that that is the absolute limit. The base that you start from is, of course, that everybody's vote is equal. The court then goes on to say: "But we also recognize that Canada is a big country. There are considerations that apply. There may be countervailing factors that should be taken into consideration." This doctrine of effective representation came from Beverley McLachlin, who by the way was a very intelligent lady from Pincher Creek and is now the Chief Justice of Canada. She basically invented this doctrine, but it's based on justifying a variation.

You asked the question: who would we go to lobby? I think

that perhaps, with respect, the better question would be that if you want to make, you know, a proposal as to why a certain constituency should be below a certain number and others should be above, the thing to look at is reasons for that. I would draw your attention, for instance, to the last boundaries commission report, which was very, very well done. They set up a matrix of factors which they would consider, such things as distance from the capital, density of population, number of municipal boards or school boards within the area, number of Indian or Metis settlements within the area, things that affect the ability of an MLA to effectively represent the constituent. So if you want to make a further submission – and we certainly welcome it – I would be thinking in those terms. Those are the arguments you should be making: why is it more difficult for your particular MLA to represent the area than some other MLA from another area?

I might add, being sort of a big bad lawyer from Calgary, that I was exceptionally proud of what occurred in Calgary yesterday. We sat all day, and the citizens of Calgary I thought were very, very generous in their views and for the most part recognized this doctrine of effective representation and recognized that the constituencies in, for instance, Calgary could be larger and that they wouldn't have a problem with that. You know, to give you some comfort, I don't think you should leave this room thinking that the people in Calgary – we visit Edmonton tomorrow; we haven't heard from them – are pounding the drums and saying: we need six or seven more seats because we all have to be equal. In fact, it was the opposite. There was a real generosity of spirit and a recognition that other parts of Alberta may have problems being effectively represented and certainly a willingness to adopt that view. So I would just leave you with that. I think that you've got to look for reasons and then present us with those reasons.

**Ms Posti:** Well, thank you. I didn't mean to make it sound like we thought that Calgary and Edmonton felt that they needed more but that representation by population does create that. Thank you.

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Chair, I'd just like to commend my learned friend, legal counsel, on his very learned presentation.

**The Chair:** You're doing well, Ernie. Let's stop.

Okay. Helen, you were going to put that together. Take a few days. If you could get something in to us in 10 days, that would be great. Consider the advice that you got and build on that.

**Ms Posti:** Thank you. You'll probably get one from the town, too, because they have two councillors here too.

**The Chair:** Okay. Great. Thanks very much.

On my list I next have Melvin Butler. Mr. Butler, sir.

**Mr. Butler:** Easy with the sir, Bob.

**The Chair:** Mr. Butler and I go back more years than he'd like to admit.

**Mr. Butler:** Yeah, and we're not going to tell on one another either.

**The Chair:** No, we're not. I've always known him to be a man of few words but very direct words.

**Mr. Butler:** Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to present here today. Some of you that were here when the judge was here last time know where I stand on this issue. I'm not representing a constituency,



although I live in the constituency of Rocky Mountain House, that Helen represents, but I have some real concerns. I think it's time that Alberta got modern. Why in today's world, with downsizing of government, do we come out and say that we need 83 representatives? When everything is happening, let's downsize.

We all know – I don't care how big the constituency is or how dense it is – there's only a very small group of people that are even concerned about government. There are a lot of people in the constituency that don't even know who their MLA is or his phone number. They don't care. They may bitch around the coffee table, but that's as far as it goes. There's another group that's always active, and they will access their MLA or their bureaucracy, regardless of where it is, if they've got an issue. If they don't like their MLA, they'll go to another one, and they will get to the top of the pile.

I don't think this cut-and-paste system that you people are involved in – and you have your orders how to do it. I think it's done. We need – and I've heard it here today – effective representation. Maybe we only need 40 MLAs in this province today. You go to a conference and you sit there: well, we'll e-mail you. I mean, communication today is nothing, and effective communication is so easy, so fast if you want to do it.

I have a concern – and I was glad that Doug brought it up – that if we don't get effective representation, I can see that maybe not this time but the next time all we're going to have is Calgary and Edmonton representing Alberta. We all sit around here now and we all have coffee and we say: those rotten bastards in the east. We don't have Ontario and we don't have Quebec. We don't have a say out here, and that's exactly what you're going to get in the rural community. We're not going to have a say in what happens. I'm sorry to say that I don't understand the situations in downtown Calgary or downtown Red Deer, and I'll damn well bet that they don't understand the feelings in the muskeg and the lumber in the west country. So if I've got to come to Red Deer to talk to my MLA and he's somebody that's a jungle person, of the city, we're on the wrong wavelength right off the bat. I would far sooner have a great big constituency, like Mike Cardinal has got in the north. At least if I get to him, he understands. If I'm talking about cutting trees, he understands what I'm talking about.

**The Chair:** You're really talking about a consistent community of interest in the constituency then.

**Mr. Butler:** That's all it needs. We need an interest so that when we're sitting around the table, we know what we're talking about: small towns, rural people. We're not interested in the city's things. They come out there, and they don't know conservation, they don't know farming in 90 percent of the cases, so we've got nothing in common to talk about.

A good example. You'll see a lot of city people – and I'm not downgrading them – drive along the trunk road out there. “There mustn't be enough elk out there, people. We didn't see any, so we'd better cut the cows out of there so the elk will grow more.” Well, now you're going to sit down with a person like that and reason? No, it isn't going to happen.

But the biggest thing I think: I don't know why the government is so stuck with their self-interest that they've got to keep the same number of MLAs. I really believe that we need to downsize and get modern.

3:28

**The Chair:** Well, just on that point, I don't want to belabour it, but the law . . .

**Mr. Butler:** I know it does, and that's why I'm here, Bob, presenting it, because I knew nowhere else to present it. I've talked to Ty. He doesn't like my suggestion. I think it's time we threw the old thing out and got modern.

**The Chair:** What do you think is a reasonable number?

**Mr. Butler:** Half of what we've got now.

We were talking about it over here. And this is going to the city, because out here – I mean, with farming, I don't care how big the constituency is. But why couldn't we in the city have a number of MLAs that represented the towers downtown, another group that represented – I don't know what you'd call it – the older communities like Haysboro in Calgary, and then a group that represented the urbanites outside? They've got common problems, and I don't see that they need the numbers. Maybe one or two downtown representing a common interest and that's all they do.

That's all I've got to say. I knew it was outside of you guys' jurisdiction, but I feel very strongly about it, that it's time to modernize this thing and empty the towers in Edmonton.

**The Chair:** I can assure you that there will be mention in our report about the representation we've received to cut down the number of MLAs. In the written submissions we've already got, Melvin, there's a lot of that in there, and we certainly will include that in our report.

**Mr. Butler:** Well, I know it was, but last time it died, so I guess all you do is keep hammering and hope sooner or later somebody listens.

**The Chair:** Well, that's absolutely fair ball.

Any questions?

**Mr. Clegg:** Just a quick follow-up to what our chairman said. As you have already said, we are the wrong people to go to. I said this in Calgary yesterday. Nobody will say: “I'm no good. I think I'll quit because we've got too many MLAs.” I've never seen a company do that. If you're working for Shell or Imperial Oil, you don't go to work and say: “Well, I'm just no good. You've got too many people here. I'm going home. I'm making \$70,000 a year, but I'm going home because, well, I'm just no good here. You've got too many of them.” Nobody will do that, and nobody will do that once they're elected. The only way you're going to get that changed – yes, as the chairman says, we can make a note. It won't be in the report, but we'll be making note of what we've heard. That's what we're supposed to report, what we heard. But you and everybody in Alberta, you can e-mail every MLA in the province, and sooner or later – I was in government for 15 years, and it takes about 10 years to get anything done.

So the fact is, you start, but if you're the only one that's going to do it, forget it. You're wasting your time. But if you get enough people, then the government is going to start listening. You don't get it changed overnight, but you get it changed over a period of time. That's how you do it. I'll tell you, when you're elected as an MLA, you're not going to be around there beating the bushes and saying: “Well, I'm just no good. We've got too many guys here.” That isn't going to happen unless it comes from the people of Alberta.

**Mr. Butler:** Yeah, I realize that. I guess what really concerns me is when you deal with the towers in Calgary. I mean, it was – what? - 10 years ago that Petro-Canada had basically two or three towers they owned that were full of Petro-Can people. Today one tower is

maybe a quarter full. Industry has done it. Government has sat on their ass and they're not doing it, and I don't see any indication that they're about to do it. I mean, we went through this the last time. Okay, nothing's been said. Our MLA hasn't said bugger all. There hasn't been a commission come out and ask Albertans. Now you people are going around cutting the thing up again. I mean, when are we going to start this discussion with Alberta people that says, "Hey, you know, we should change our system"? As a government, when are we going to change it? The sandstone towers in Edmonton to the ordinary person haven't changed one bit. They've told everybody else, "You should downsize; you should modernize; you should do whatever," but they are closeted behind those mahogany doors up there, and that bothers me.

**The Chair:** I can see that. I appreciate that, but Glen is right. This is a decision that has to be made by the MLAs.

**Mr. Butler:** I wish there would be a commission of Alberta government people that would come out, with Ralph sitting where you're sitting, and we could tell them that, but there's no way for the ordinary citizen like myself to tell them.

**The Chair:** Okay. Any other questions or comments?

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Chair, I'd just like to re-emphasize that we've had a lot of written submissions on what you've said, and yesterday we got quite a few oral submissions saying somewhat the same thing. The chair has said that we will include a summary in our report of this, and that's the best we can do.

**Mr. Butler:** I realize that, Ernie. Pat Nelson and I have sat and drank whiskey and talked about this, and she said: "Mel, it's damn ridiculous. It takes me five minutes to drive across your constituency, and it takes Shirley McClellan half a day." But she says that they're not going to change it till people push, and that's exactly what you guys are saying.

**The Chair:** And you're pushing.

**Mr. Butler:** Well, I'm trying to.

**The Chair:** Any further questions?

**Mr. Graham:** I just want to make sure I understand what you've said, Melvin, because I've made notes here. One is to downsize the number of MLAs. Secondly, communication is very easy; if you want to get off your rear end, you can communicate if you want.

**Mr. Butler:** I guess this is a good example. Here we're supposedly doing something that affects all of Alberta, and look what we got here for people. That is the interest that people have in Alberta government.

**Mr. Graham:** Third is that what's more important than size of the constituency is the commonality of interest within the people there.

**Mr. Butler:** I think that's been brought up several times today.

**Mr. Graham:** Fourth is that there ought to be another commission set up to deal with this issue.

**Mr. Butler:** Well, something. I mean, let's get at it. I think we're antiquated.

**The Chair:** Okay. Anyone else have anything?

Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

Doug, are there any more presenters?

**Mr. Olthof:** Dale Barr, mayor of Rimbey.

**The Chair:** Dale, can we take five minutes? I have to make a telephone call to my office in Edmonton. We'll take a five-minute break, and then you're on, Dale. Okay?

[The commission adjourned from 3:36 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.]

**The Chair:** Dale, thank you very much for your patience. We'll look forward to hearing from you.

**Mr. Barr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and board.

**The Chair:** You were here when I introduced the board members?

**Mr. Barr:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Good.

**Mr. Barr:** My name is Dale Barr. I'm the mayor for the town of Rimbey. I'd come as a participant to hear the activities of the review. Subsequently I have a presentation to make. I will forward it in writing after this meeting.

I'm a little concerned about where the direction of this discussion has been going today because, in essence, this is all about representation, and that is the only thing that we're doing. We're not dealing with trade barriers. We're not dealing with water issues. We're not dealing with any of those specific needs from one municipality to another or to grow boundaries, shrink boundaries, or such. It's simply about representation. The cities currently have an advantage in that area already.

In response to Mr. Graham's comment on why we feel that there's not a balance of power and how we could explain that, it's very simple. The provincial government is run by caucus, by a priorities committee, and by Premier Ralph Klein himself. That's where the decision-making happens. We have representation in the House, and it's by the members themselves. All communities work within those members. It's certainly a benefit to all areas, and we can see the need by population, but it also demands on the time and the change that's happening within that constituency itself. If there's no radical change, there's very little interaction that's required within the provincial government itself.

Large cities, as I said earlier, have a key advantage already. This has been represented most recently in the budget changes to the transportation grants. Not days after the budget was released, the mayors of the large cities have a direct meeting with the Premier, have a meeting with caucus, and the budget is changed. When was the last time you saw a representation from a rural Alberta constituency make a direct change in the budget?

We need to have balance between the cities and the rurals. This balance for the province is essential in making all areas grow. Although Alberta is a growth economy right now, each area has specific needs and changes to the particular area they're in, whether it's through economic development or through adverse conditions in farming. Similar concerns, as mentioned before, should be taken into consideration. This only makes sense. If you have an area with like concerns, you have like representation in the House.

We need to revamp how city representation is done. If it needs to have a legislative change in order to accommodate this, then we should step forward with that. This issue is simply going to come back in four years, when the commission comes to realign the seats

again. We have growth in our two major centres. That growth will continue. This problem will not go away. It should not be at the detriment of the rural communities around the cities losing representation for the growth that's happening in the large centres.

Unfortunately, with the guidelines that are set out for this commission, it looks like a setup to increase representation for the cities of Alberta in the House. I would hope that this is not the direction the commission is looking to go, but if you look at strictly the numbers and the Calgary-Shaw area, we can see how it's easy to derive that as a highlight within the issue. I would comment that it's simply one of the issues that has to be dealt with, not the highest priority.

I wish Ken Greenwell had been here today to hear about his community. He's the mayor of Ponoka, and it's interesting how other communities around them are looking at growth and changing the border lines. I again would caution the commission to not look at changing the borders in the rural areas, especially the corridor where growth is happening. We're currently in the Ponoka-Rimbey riding with a minus 14 percent critique set on our community. This 31,000 people is short of what's required, but it's not substantial. The growth along this corridor area has been increasing, and I would suggest that by the time the commission meets again to review this, the numbers would be up to the break-even point. Lacombe is also sitting at 32,500, which is only 9 and a half percent off what the required population is. I do not feel that these two areas specifically necessarily need major change. The population is growing, and it will fulfill those areas.

Most municipal councils are working well within their districts, but this is not about working well with partners. It's working with the province of Alberta. I caution on a north/south boundary idea along the highway 2 corridor. Ponoka-Lacombe, it's all about water issues and how to lobby the government. These issues should be dealt with in a separate manner directly with the province. My own feelings are to have two representatives working with the government. It has a stronger position than to have one MLA with the same concern going there.

The effects on the balance of the province would be a domino effect. By changing the main population core areas, it would open up the whole province to a major shift in the constituency outlines. This is not required. Simply, we have to deal with the issues of the major growth in Edmonton and Calgary. Larger municipalities want to grow by expanding and so do small centres. Alberta is in a growth situation and will be for the next number of years. The cities have problems with this growth, not the other constituencies within Alberta as much.

With that I'd like to thank the commission for some time to put forward my comments.

**The Chair:** Good. What you're going to do Dale is you're going to get back to us and tell us what you've told us and maybe even embellish it somewhat?

**Mr. Barr:** I'll submit this in writing to the commission from the town of Rimbey council.

**The Chair:** Okay. Great.

**Ms Mackay:** I just want to clarify. I think that what you're saying – and I want to make sure that this is what you mean – is that in spite of the fact that the census shows that Alberta is becoming an increasingly urbanized province and that the populations really are centring more and more in Edmonton and Calgary, the commission should ignore that in order to make sure that the rural representation maintains the status quo. Is that essentially . . .

**Mr. Barr:** No. Actually, I'm saying that you should deal with it. That issue is coming forward every time there is a review on the constituencies, and if legislative change needs to be put in place to make that happen, it should happen. This is not a new problem. This happened the last time we looked at the boundaries. The growth in those areas is going to continue to draw members away from the rural areas, which doesn't solve the problem.

**Ms Mackay:** But you're not saying that we should be cutting any rural constituencies; or are you? That's what I'm not clear on. Where do you stand on it?

**Mr. Barr:** In my opinion, the rural constituencies have a weak enough representation in the House already. The cities have a very, very strong position not only in members but also in direct contact with the Premier and the caucus and the power of the mayors of those municipalities.

**Ms Mackay:** But if we add seats to the cities, we have to take seats from someplace else because that number 83 is there.

**Mr. Barr:** Change the legislation to represent a number of members from Edmonton and Calgary simply, not by population but a number of members.

**Ms Mackay:** But you realize that this commission can't do that. We have to deal with the existing legislation.

**Mr. Barr:** I realize that this commission can make a recommendation to the government on a change of legislation to deal with the population issues in Edmonton and Calgary.

**Ms Mackay:** Okay. I understand now what you're saying.

**Mr. Patterson:** Mayor Barr, we've heard these presentations today about changes in constituencies. Did I understand you to say that there haven't been any consultations, say, with Ponoka-Rimbey about these proposed changes?

3:55

**Mr. Barr:** Absolutely not.

**Mr. Patterson:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Any other questions or comments?

**Mr. Graham:** Just a clarification. Did I understand you to say that you are not in favour of this north/south alignment, that you are more in favour of an east/west alignment of the ridings in central Alberta?

**Mr. Barr:** That's sort of a double-edged sword when you ask the question that way. We're pleased with the alignment of the constituencies right now. In my opinion, in our direct area – and I can only talk for the county of Ponoka, because that's all I'd want to represent without talking to the other members – I truly believe the issue is more with dealing with the cities' growth and the number of representatives they need in that area to do the job that's required for the province. I think we're just catching ourselves in a double backflip by turning around and just assigning it to population again when we already know that the two major players, Edmonton and Calgary, have the balance of power with representation of MLAs and with the power of the mayors and the population directly with the province. That's what the MLAs are supposed to be

representing, the people in the province, and unfortunately by their strength they completely overshadow the rural areas.

**Mr. Graham:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay. Any other questions or comments?

Dale, thank you very much. We'll look forward to your getting that to us. I appreciate your coming today. I took it initially that you weren't going to make an oral presentation to us. I'm glad you changed your mind. It's much better to look someone in the eye than it is to read the paper. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Barr:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** This concludes the presentations here at Red Deer. Doug, is that accurate?

**Mr. Olthof:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** Okay. This part of the commission's work is done in Red Deer, and we'll reconvene in Edmonton tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. Thank you very much.

[The commission adjourned at 3:56 p.m.]