

7:00 p.m.

Monday, June 3, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bob Clark, and I'm the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Thank you very much for turning out this evening. I'd like to make just a few opening comments, and then we'll hear a number of presentations. According to Doug Olthof we're booked up till about 8:30, so we look forward to hearing your remarks.

Under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act after every two elections boundaries are looked at in the province of Alberta. Under the legislation this is done by a committee headed by either a member of the judiciary, a head of an academic institution, the Auditor General, or the Ethics Commissioner. I guess for some reason it was the Ethics Commissioner's turn to be the chairman this time, and that's why I'm the chairman.

Two people are recommended by the Executive Council, and two people are recommended by the Leader of the Opposition after the Leader of the Opposition has consulted. I am really fortunate – and I don't say that just because my colleagues are here – in the four very excellent people that are on the commission with me. To my right is Ernie Patterson. Ernie is the mayor of Claresholm. He's been the mayor of Claresholm for some 33 years, and we won't comment about the folks in Claresholm. To my right is Glen Clegg. Glen was formerly a member of the Legislature for the Dunvegan riding, which is the Fairview-Spirit River area. To my immediate left is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is from Edmonton, and she used to be the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association. To my far left is Mr. Doug Graham, a prominent lawyer from the city of Calgary. These are the five people who have been appointed.

The legislation is quite specific in a number of areas. First of all, it says that there will be 83 seats. It also says that we are to use the 2001 Stats Canada census as the basis. If you take the Stats Canada 2001 figure of 2.98 million and you divide that by 83, the result of that is something like 35,951, almost 36,000. So ideally you'd have 83 constituencies with that number of people. Obviously that's not possible. The legislation also says that there can be up to a 25 percent variance, plus or minus, from the 36,000. The last commission recommended in all cases that the variance be not more than 15 percent with one exception, and that was 16 percent, I believe.

The legislation also calls for up to four constituencies which can be special constituencies. Those are constituencies where the variance can be up to 50 percent. There have to be some very unique features there. There can't be any community over 4,000 in that kind of a district. The constituency must border on another province or possibly the American state of Montana. There are a number of examples that those four constituencies must keep in mind. Obviously, the big one is sparsity of population. In Alberta today there are two such ridings. If you have a chance to look at the map when we take a break later on, the two ridings are in the northeast corner of the province. One is the riding of Athabasca-Wabasca, and that riding does not include the city of Fort McMurray. The other special riding is the riding of Lesser Slave Lake. As of the last redistribution, done eight years ago, those were the two special ridings.

The time frame we're operating in, ladies and gentlemen, is that we want to have our interim report out in your hands in the early part of September so that you can have a chance to look at that and give us your best advice. After we've given that to you, then the committee is slated to have a second round of hearings, either in early December or very early January, in communities where there was a lot of interest or a lot of concern expressed. Under the

legislation we have to have our report finished to be in the Speaker's hands by early in March of next year. Then once it goes to the Speaker's hands, it's in the hands of the Members of the Legislative Assembly. Of course, as chairman I'm somewhat envious of the last commission because when the last commission, chaired by Mr. Justice Ed Wachowich, made their recommendations, they went to the Legislative Assembly and the report was pretty well accepted as presented. So as chairman this time, my goal obviously would be to try and have that kind of success again.

The commission has met a number of times already. We met with the former chairman. We met with people at Alberta Finance who've got the Stats Canada information on their computers, so we can say, "If we move the boundary 10 miles this way, what's the effect?" or "In the city if you go six blocks this way, what's the effect as far as population numbers are concerned?"

We started last week in Calgary, and then we had meetings in Olds and Red Deer. Then we had 27 presentations made to us in Edmonton last Wednesday. We started in St. Paul this morning, and I believe there were eight presentations made to us. We're here this evening, and we're flying on to Drumheller after tonight. We're in Drumheller tomorrow morning, and we're in Medicine Hat tomorrow night. The next day we're in Lethbridge, the next day after that we're in Wetaskiwin, and then we're taking a bit of a break. Then we're having a tour of northern Alberta, going from Westlock to Edson to Slave Lake to Fort McMurray and then Peace River and Grande Prairie. That'll finish right around the end of June. Right after that, the commission will be getting together and coming to some conclusions and then having the interim report available, as I've indicated, in the early part of September.

I hope that gives you a bit of an idea of the time frame, what we're up against. The legislation and the court cases that are relevant to this issue have really said that if there's going to be significant variance, we have to give significant reasons. The last commission did that. If you want copies of the last report, just let Doug Olthof know at the back, and he can get copies of the interim or the final report.

I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize Doug Griffiths here tonight, who I have watched with considerable interest because I sat in the Legislature for 21 years. I happen to have been a schoolteacher and a farmer. You're following in good footsteps, but you're following. It's nice to see you here, and we look forward to hearing from you and your constituents here this evening and from other constituencies too.

The approach we'd like to take is to ask you to come and speak to us in the vicinity of 10 minutes. My colleagues, I'm sure, will have some questions for you. We're not in the business of getting involved in arguments. We are in discussions, not arguments. As I said, we have I believe six or seven presentations this evening, and about halfway through we'll take a break.

So without any further ado I'd like to ask Mr. Bob Brass, the reeve, to come forward and make his presentation.

Mr. Barss: My last name is Barss.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I've insulted the reeve already. My apologies.

Mr. Barss: That's quite all right. I have been called a lot worse, believe me.

The Chair: And you're not alone. Before we finish this job, that's going to happen to us too. We're under no illusion.

We're very grateful you're here tonight, and we look forward to hearing your presentation.

Mr. Barss: Thank you.

Good evening and thank you for giving Albertans the opportunity to give their opinion on this very important issue. We at the MD of Wainwright also thank you for giving us the opportunity to do the same.

Rural Albertans are very much concerned over the possible redistribution of our electoral boundaries because of the substantial population shifts within our province. We feel that the legislation must take into account geographic size, local government representation, common community interest, and population sparsity in order for rural Alberta to have effective representation. We in rural Alberta do not wish to lose our voice around the province's election table.

While all MLAs are faced with many of the same concerns, one of the biggest problems in rural Alberta is the size of our rural constituencies. Many urban MLAs can cover their constituencies by walking or riding a bike in a relatively short time frame. This enables them to address issues quickly and efficiently. It may take a rural MLA one or two days to drive across their constituency in order to deal with concerns on a personal basis. Issues therefore may not be addressed as quickly and efficiently due to distance. As well, since rural ridings often include several municipal jurisdictions, it means that rural MLAs may have to serve multiple school boards, health authorities, and local authorities. This requires a greater commitment of time and resources to constituency affairs than urban MLAs are required to make. Increasing the size of a constituency would only compound problems facing rural MLAs.

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Many of the urban issues are the same or at least very similar. Rural issues can be very complex with the additional issues of agriculture and associated concerns that come with it. Weather, weed control, and in our area gophers and grasshoppers are just a few of the many issues facing rural MLAs today. Rural voters are less transient than urban voters. They are more likely to know their MLA and therefore are more comfortable with contacting and making more demands on their MLA.

While it is time that the electoral issue be discussed, it is also time for a new approach to be taken to deal with equal representation when considering changes to the electoral division boundaries. As we see it, a new solution would have to take into consideration a combination of representation by area, geographical features, common community interest and community organization, and the sparsity and the density of population. There may have to be a certain number of designated rural seats to overcome this major shift in population. Rural Albertans need to be assured that an effective voice is heard. By decreasing the number of rural constituencies, it will take away our rights as Albertans to ensure that our voice is heard. Rural Albertans must have fair and equal representation in the Legislative Assembly. Distance from the community to the Legislative Assembly would also have to be taken into consideration given that the time required to travel to and from the Legislature reduces the time available for the MLA to meet with constituents.

Alberta's economy continues to be heavily dependent on natural resources both through development and extraction. This activity takes place primarily in rural areas, and a strong rural voice is needed to make certain that proper attention is paid to the use of our rural infrastructure and to environmental concerns. As rural Albertans provide our province with agriculture exports, they must be treated with the same MLA representation as urban Albertans. The government of Alberta must ensure that the backbone of this province does not erode because of the lack of representation, or our economic or agricultural future will start to unravel. This must not happen.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present our views. It is our hope that the issues that we have proposed will help with your deliberation. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Bob. Generally speaking, my colleagues are not bashful in making comments or having questions. Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very, very much for coming and making the presentation. When we look at the constituency of Wainwright, we see that you are minus 19.6 percent in the little brochure that we sent out. I guess that the chair is going to call me to order here in a minute, because I was supposed to ask a question. We're limited to the 83, and one of the things that we have to do – and our chair has alluded to this already – is come up with a decision that will withstand a court challenge. So I guess I may as well get right down to the heart of this. If we were to look at your constituency and we have to increase the size of your constituency, recognizing all these factors you've mentioned here, in what direction or how should we do it? I'm not saying that it has to be a big increase, but there may have to be some.

Mr. Barss: Well, I think that with the size we are, I'm not exactly sure how you would make our constituency bigger. I think that would defeat some of the purpose of why we're here. We've got to have equal representation, and making ours bigger in size will not help that process.

Mr. Patterson: Well, to get to the place where we can defend this or withstand a court challenge, we don't have to have all the constituencies equal, but they have to come within a percentage range. So what I'm asking is: thinking about your trading areas and natural patterns of travel and so on, in what direction could we go to find another few thousand people, for example?

Mr. Barss: Well, I think that if it's on a percentage – with the last commission we were, as you've mentioned, at 18 or 19 percent. Can we somehow move to that 25 percent from, say, the top and below? That may overcome some of these issues. I think that if we could go back to the 25 percent between the highs and the lows, that may help us with our number of rural seats in Alberta.

The Chair: I think what he's asking bluntly is: are there any population centres reasonably close either north or east?

Mr. Barss: South.

The Chair: To the south?

Mr. Barss: Yeah. There are no big centres close to us that would really make a difference in our population size.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Yes. Thank you, Bob, for this wonderful brief. How long does it take for your MLA to drive from here to Edmonton?

Mr. Barss: I would think about two and a half hours.

Mr. Clegg: Two and a half?

Mr. Barss: Yeah, something like that from Wainwright.

Mr. Clegg: Like Ernie was saying – and you know the rules, and

you said it – we can stay within 25, but we can't just say: well, somebody can be 25. The chairman also said that we have to justify it. So that's why I'm asking the question. Certainly, being a rural MLA, very rural, much like here and maybe more so, I know the increasing work, but we just can't all of a sudden say: well, everybody's going to be 25 just because they're rural.

The distance from the Legislature certainly to me is one factor. Every week that's five hours of your MLA's time that's pretty well wasted, I guess would be the word. Have you got any statistics on how many jurisdictions the MLA from Wainwright – we might get that later tonight, you know, how many municipalities, school boards, hospital boards.

Mr. Barss: No.

Mr. Clegg: We might get that later tonight.

Those would be my remarks. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. Doug Graham.

Mr. Graham: Thank you. Just so that you're aware, Mr. Barss, the factors that you've listed on page 2 of your brief – geographical features, community of interests, sparsity and density, and so forth – are indeed factors which were considered by the last commission. There are other factors which were considered as well, and we will be considering those factors. So that should give you some comfort.

However, what some of my co-panelists have asked you and what would be very helpful to us and to you would be if we could get past this generality. I mean, yes, we're going to consider these factors, but we need specifics. We need to know how many school boards, how many hospital boards, how many municipalities. What are the factors in concrete terms which cause your MLA problems? That's what we have to know. We're well aware of these general factors and indeed will be considering them, but we can only consider them in a concrete fashion if we know the facts. Therefore, if we don't get it here tonight, my request to you would be: if you could get us that information in more concrete terms later, that would be helpful.

Mr. Barss: Yes, we can do some work on that and supplement the submission with the numbers that you guys are looking for.

The Chair: It would be tremendously helpful.

Mr. Barss: Okay.

The Chair: Perhaps depending on who else makes presentations tonight – we'll work together on that. There's no sense reinventing the wheel; is there?

Mr. Barss: Yeah, that's right. I'm sure we can gather that information for you and get that information to you.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Well, thank you very much. I know it's a difficult challenge to come before us, but you've set the basis, and I think it's really important if you can get us that information now. That would really be very, very helpful to us. Thank you very much.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Don Whittaker, the deputy reeve. Mr. Whittaker and I go back a few more years than either one of us would like to admit, so we'll simply leave that there. We're pleased you're here tonight, and we look forward to hearing your submission to us.

7:20

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. My name is Don Whittaker. I'm the deputy reeve of the county of Vermilion River. I think that Reeve Barss got ahold of a copy of our submission as well, but I think that's an indication of the concerns in rural Alberta.

The Chair: Please don't worry about repeating it.

Mr. Whittaker: No problem. Thank you for this opportunity to bring forth representation of our thoughts and our preferences regarding electoral boundaries. It's appropriate that the boundary review is an automatic process that's enshrined in provincial legislation and that the citizens, organizations, and municipalities have an opportunity to identify shifts in demographics and social and economic changes that will impact the ability of an MLA to provide effective representation. I think that the key in the whole part of what we're presenting tonight is effective representation.

We recognize that the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission has been directed to consider the following issues in making recommendations for changes to electoral division boundaries: sparsity and density of population, common community interests and community organizations, existing municipal and community boundaries, and geographic features, including roads. The council of the county of Vermilion River No. 24 agrees with and endorses the mandate of the commission but wishes to propose to the 2002-2003 commission and future electoral boundaries commissions that broader criteria be used and be mandated and evaluated to determine an MLA's ability to provide effective representation and thus determine the appropriate electoral boundaries. MLAs should have adequate time and support which would allow them to do their job well as well as have a personal life.

This evening we'd like to present five areas which we feel need to be emphasized in determining effective representation. First of all is the shift in demographics and provincial growth. Alberta has experienced phenomenal growth over the past 30 years. In 1971 the population of Alberta was 1.6 million, with 475,000 of those being school-age children. Today Alberta's population has surpassed the 3 million mark, with only 575,000 being of school age. There has been a doubling of the population within 30 years but a significant decrease in the ratio of school-age children as a portion of the total population.

The government of Alberta, in recognizing the aging population, initiated two studies and subsequent reports: the Broda report, *Aging Together: Planning for the Future*, for the Department of Health and Wellness; and the Kryczka report, *Impact of Aging Albertans*, for the Seniors ministry. Both reports deal extensively with an aging population and the shift of baby boomers from the workplace to retirement. We also know that if it were not for immigration from other provinces and internationally, Alberta would be experiencing zero growth. We raise these few points to emphasize not only the tremendous growth but also the tremendous shift in expectations and desires of today's population in that they are expecting free services and access to government and MLAs. As well, there is a philosophical, ideological, cultural, spiritual shift of values. All these changes mean a greater need for access to government, with the MLA often providing the doorway. We as municipalities can attest to these expectations, as we experience these same shifts.

The second point is the rural versus urban. Another shift in the demographics of Alberta has been the shift in the choice of residency to urban, high-traffic transportation corridors, away from the more rural areas. Over the past 30 years the number of electoral divisions has increased largely due to the increase in urban population. Concern for rural Alberta is the declining voice of rural Albertans,

the home of agriculture, one of Alberta's major industries, oil and gas production and exploration, as well as many other Alberta industries – forestry, tourism, electricity generation – in which Alberta's growth and position for the future has been slowly eroded. We believe that there are some strong advocates for rural Alberta, but there is an increasing number of electors and even bureaucrats in the provincial government who do not understand the important contribution that has been made and will continue to be made in the development of the strength of the province as a whole by rural Alberta.

In the larger urban municipalities the number of MLAs is very similar to the number of elected municipal representatives. It is not the intent to discredit that other role that is provided by the urban centres and the contribution that they have made in making Alberta a great place to learn and live. You'll notice that that's also the county of Vermilion River's motto. Based on the current population and variance information provided by this commission, we see that there are already exceptions to the plus or minus 25 percent variation rule based on distance and sparsity of population. It is our desire to present a case for looking at a change in criteria being used to determine electoral boundaries for this and future commissions.

In urban constituencies MLAs are able to drive across their constituencies in a matter of minutes, making productive use of their time. In many instances the issues are of a common nature. The constituents have direct access to government services and support. In urban areas MLAs would deal with one municipality, possibly two school boards, one RHA, as well as the local issues of community organizations. This I admit might be a biased rural perspective, and I do acknowledge that there is a larger population being served.

In contrast, rural MLAs have to deal with multiple municipalities, all the separate councils, all the separate agendas and priorities. For the most part boundaries for the provincial electoral divisions, school boards, and regional health authorities are contiguous. However, distances are great, and the rural MLA has to spend a great deal of time traveling from Edmonton to the constituency. They must also travel extensively within the constituency. The nature of rural people is to be more politically aware and an expectation to have input into the governance of the province, basically bending the MLA's ear. Enormous demands on the MLA's time are placed for meetings with various governance organizations, community groups, as well as parades, social functions, anniversaries, birthdays, all of which are considered part of an MLA's regular duties. These expectations and duties require additional time by the MLA, which may take away from their ability to provide effective representation.

The third point is the rural issues. Issues in rural Alberta vary greatly with the various industries and their interrelationships. Agriculture has unique concerns, as do oil and gas and forestry. All of them operate in a global market with global pressures being forced upon them, changing how they do their business through a tough global environment. MLAs are required to be on top of these issues as they are brought forward.

The fourth point is that government services and support have been withdrawn from the rural areas, thus impacting inquiries and workloads of MLAs. Industrial activity and its increased presence in rural Alberta has led to more injury incidents involving workers and WCB claims and inquiries. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has also been downsized, withdrawing services from rural Alberta, consequently frustrating producers who are looking for help from various government programs and ending up having to access their MLA. We have seen the centralization of many services in rural Alberta, and consequently the average citizen does not have the same access as an urban citizen. Regulation to

support legislation is also increasing at an alarming rate and is becoming a concern for rural Alberta. Although the regulation is often well intended, the enforcement of such regulations results in conflict, and often the MLA is asked to become an advocate for an impacted citizen or corporation. Confined feeding operations, environmental issues, oil and gas, water and drainage issues are just some of the areas in which we are experiencing new regulations.

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As for the county of Vermilion River we are part of the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency and recognize the expected presence and the workload of not only the current MLAs but of the past MLAs as well. The county of Vermilion River is blessed with a great diversity of human and natural resources. Traditionally an agricultural community, oil and gas production has played a major influence in the past 50 years on the county's development. The Husky refinery, the biprovincial upgrader, and access to North American pipelines have allowed the energy sector, especially heavy oil production and refining, to establish itself in the marketplace. Heavy oil reserves are extensive, and with increased recovery technology the industry should be a stable contributor to the region. The very nature of heavy oil requires an extensive support industry, creating jobs and economic activity.

The increased activity, however, does have a downside in that conflict arises as activity intensifies and moves into new areas. Often the conflicts are brought to the MLA, who then directs the complaints to the appropriate government department. The county of Vermilion River agricultural community has traditionally been a sure crop area, but with the drought over the past 10 years in certain areas of the county and more generalized in the past three years pressures on the producers have increased significantly.

The county's agricultural community is a mixed industry and has provided stability in times of volatile market cycles. In the past year the lack of moisture resulted in short crops and feed shortages. The nature of the agriculture industry is more traditional, although farm units are getting larger and the number of intensive livestock operations remain relatively low to that of other regions. Available water supply is of an urgent concern, and that's for a large portion of our county which relies on surface runoff for domestic water consumption.

The demographics of the county remain relatively stable, although we have an aging population. According to East Central regional health authority No. 7 our region has the highest number of seniors as a percentage of total population in Alberta at 14 percent.

The county borders the western Saskatchewan border on its eastern boundary in the city of Lloydminster, and I've listed the communities with their populations and at the bottom I think highlighted that there are roughly 15,000 people in the rural areas, including the villages and the county, plus another 22,000 people in the city of Lloydminster. For the county the population is 7,043, and the total land base is 5,518 square kilometres.

All communities provide services to county residents, and our existence is mutually beneficial with our relationships continually being our focus. As individuals and as regions we continue to seek advice and support from our MLA on multiple issues. Within each community there are many organizations who voluntarily support social, recreational, fraternal, and religious programs, all of whom access assistance from the MLAs at times.

The sixth point I guess is sort of the mandate review. As we look at your mandate as a commission and the criteria given to you to re-examine, we suggest that for this and future commissions the criteria be re-evaluated. Without providing any support data or public process, we would suggest perhaps that other criteria could be considered. Effective representation is the key phrase that should be

considered and the criteria used to determine electoral divisions, which may more accurately reflect the access and availability to government.

Questions and information that need to be examined in developing new criteria might include some of the following: demographics, age and gender, employment statistics, economic development, number of organizations within a region, municipalities, school boards, health authorities, volunteer organizations, crime rates, availability and access to government programs and services, remoteness, and social and economic demographics. These plus many others should be used as a measure of activity within each electoral division and the ability of the MLA to effectively represent their constituency. These criteria could be used in a weighted formula to reflect consistency throughout the province.

In summary, we have discussed the uniqueness of rural Alberta, the activity of rural Alberta, and the contribution made by rural Alberta to the province. In trying to present a flavour of this activity, we're attempting to demonstrate the critical and essential role that each rural MLA has in their constituency as well as their other legislative duties. We want to emphasize the need for not only a strong rural voice in the Legislature but also an adequate number, which would reflect the contribution and activity made by rural Alberta to the province as a whole, and that rural Alberta's position will not be compromised in the future.

As a county we recognize that the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency does fall within the accepted plus or minus 25 percent population variance—I believe we're right on 15 percent—and agree that the boundaries should be contiguous where possible with schools, municipal children's services, and regional health authorities. We support and suggest that the existing electoral boundaries for the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency remain as they are currently.

Finally, without increasing the number of electoral divisions, the term "effective representation" needs to be seriously considered with any MLA's ability to be effective as well as maintaining a personal life. Instead of increasing the number of urban divisions at the expense of rural divisions, we would also suggest that additional support be given to the MLAs to assist them in both their legislative and constituency obligations.

On behalf of the reeve and council and residents of the county of Vermilion River thank you for providing us this opportunity to make this presentation.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very much, Don. Like your previous presentation made by the reeve, an excellent presentation. Any questions from my colleagues?

Ms Mackay: Well, thank you for your very thorough presentation and for recognizing the need to include some demographic criteria in making decisions about changing boundaries if it's necessary.

I'm just curious. You indicated a very good case for keeping Vermilion-Lloydminster the way it is, and you are at minus 15 percent from the average. That's what the 2001 statistics show. But are you saying, then, that in spite of the fact that the urban population has grown so tremendously, the urban seats should remain the same number in order to keep the same number of rural seats? We can't go over the 83, so what's the solution?

Mr. Whittaker: Well, I think that's why we suggested the additional support, to ensure that it be given to MLAs. Certainly urban MLAs do have a larger population to serve, and with adequate support within their offices I think they can provide that service. The rural case is just logistics, the travel and the enormity of the number of organizations that they have to talk with, and again it's

support in their own constituency office and support in their legislative office to enable them to not only meet the needs in their home communities but also their obligations in the Legislature.

Ms Mackay: But to keep the number of rural seats is what you're saying.

Mr. Whittaker: For a rural Albertan I think that's key. That's the key point that we would like to make.

Ms Mackay: In the cities, then, how does a constituency like Calgary-Shaw with 80,000 people continue to operate?

7:40

Mr. Whittaker: Well, again, give the MLA the support that they need if you're not going to increase the number of MLAs, and I'm certainly not recommending that. In the urban areas there are just about as many elected MLAs as there are elected municipal councillors. Access to government, the distance factor, and access to the programs—it's just that much more accessible, in my opinion, in urban areas as compared to the rural areas.

Ms Mackay: Well, I just want to make one comment if that's okay. When you throw in the demographics, you're going to find, I think, that that gives even more of an argument for having more MLAs from the cities, because when you're looking at the things that you've talked about, it's to a much greater degree in the cities because the cities are magnets for those people who need special help, et cetera, et cetera, for whatever reason, whether it's increasing age or increasing illness or whatever. I like seeing those arguments there. I'm not sure that rural people would necessarily benefit from putting those in.

The Chair: As you can see, Don, we're going to have a little discussion at our committee.

Mr. Whittaker: I appreciate those comments, and I agree that that's where a lot of the high-risk, high-needs individuals end up, in the urban areas. Access in the rural areas is the problem. So many times we're having to travel an hour to receive a service, whether it's a health need, a mental health need, or counseling. We just don't have that access to service, and those are often the things that fall on an MLA's lap. Where do I go? How can I receive that service? I appreciate what you're saying as well. Thank you.

Ms Mackay: Thank you for your answers.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg and then Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Don, for the wonderful presentation. Certainly I'm very interested in rural Alberta, but again I'm going to ask the same question as I did of Bob. Because we've got to justify any decision we make—and I know you gave it to us for the county of Vermilion River, but we need it for the whole... When I look at who's presenting tonight, maybe it'll come yet tonight, but we'd be very interested in how many municipalities, school boards representatives, and villages, the whole bit for the whole county. I'm just asking you: would you make sure that somebody gets that information to us?

Mr. Whittaker: Certainly we will. That's something that we should have included, and we didn't. We'll make sure you get it.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, one of the points that you are really

making here, which actually I think in all of the presentations that we've heard is probably the first time it's really been emphasized, is the withdrawing of government services from rural Alberta. We've seen this happen with the agricultural offices. It has taken place or is taking place right now. One of the points that you're making here that I hear – and I want you to comment on this a bit further – is you're saying that if at least we cannot – what should we say? – leave the constituencies as they are, then we must look at the aspect of effective representation. As we take away people who are able to provide services, then more falls on the MLA. So I hear you saying that this commission needs to look at this aspect of effective representation. Let me cite an example and see what your reaction to this is. If there are two large centres in a large rural constituency, maybe there's a need for two MLA offices. Just wondering what your thoughts are, and I'm just giving you an example. You can disagree with me.

Mr. Whittaker: We've been there and done that. Basically when someone wants to talk to an MLA, they do it in the quickest way possible, usually by picking up the phone, but there's the personal contact, and often the MLA doesn't have the time to do that. He needs someone there to have an ear for him to take the message back for the MLA. The second office is probably extra overhead versus a second person or another person to help them in their duties.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that. So you're really saying maybe not another physical office but maybe more staff. Like, with the agricultural offices going down and other services going down, then more staff in that office to help that MLA.

Mr. Whittaker: What we find is that even from the municipal side, with the withdrawal of agricultural programs and the people, our agricultural field men are now being accessed much more for their information, so instead of having to go to one office as an MLA or as a producer, an MLA may have to go to two or three municipal offices to get that same kind of data.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

Mr. Graham: You've made a very effective case for not changing the borders of your constituency, and I note the variance is minus 15 percent, which isn't, it strikes me, massive, but you have to understand as well that your constituency may be affected by others around it. Therefore my question is: if for some reason we do have to move a boundary, what would be your preference? What would make sense, if you wish to answer this question, if for external reasons we have to move a boundary?

Mr. Whittaker: That's a difficult one to answer, especially with Reeve Barss being our southern neighbour. It's interesting that you ask that question. I guess we're looking for no change. When you look around us, there's population to the south and to the west, and then it becomes very sparse to the north. That just worsens the case for the other constituencies. I recognize the battle that you're in. As Reeve Barss says, I think a move to the 25 percent variance needs to happen in rural Alberta to maintain a rural voice for Albertans.

The Chair: Two questions, Don. I took your comment about withdrawal of government services to say that when you're considering the question of effective representation, remember that it's more difficult for an MLA to give his constituents effective representation as government removes its services from the region. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Whittaker: I'm sorry. It's harder for him?

The Chair: It's harder. Yes. So it's more of a challenge for an MLA to effectively represent his constituents as government withdraws its services from any region.

Mr. Whittaker: Yes. Added to that is the fact that he probably has more inquiries coming through his office.

The Chair: The second one that I jotted down dealt with your comment about WCB claims. Can you substantiate that? And I'm not doubting it.

Mr. Whittaker: Yeah. I know our MLA's office can do that. What we find with the heavy oil industry is that the number of claims is substantial and the inquiries in his office are often: where do I go for help? It's maybe not real time consuming, but they need to be directed, because you don't want frustrated Albertans out there.

The Chair: Okay.

Just one last question. You talked about the drought for the past 10 years. My family farms north of Calgary and were awfully dry last year, but we really have nothing more to complain about than that. I know that it's been very difficult here, but has it actually been 10 years, Don?

7:50

Mr. Whittaker: In portions of our municipality, yes. In the eastern portions as you get towards Saskatchewan, the rains seem to stop there. In the last three years it's been much more generalized, and the range of yields has varied across the municipality, but last year was probably the worst year we've had, and the outlook for this year is even worse. Because of our soils and the types of geological formations, that type of thing, groundwater is very hard to find and we rely heavily on surface water. There's just been no runoff, limited snowfall. If we could have some of the snow from Peace River, we'd be in great shape.

Mr. Clegg: No, no. Calgary. We haven't got anything.

The Chair: My colleague tells me that they have the same kind of situation up there as far as a greater need for surface water.

Well, I'd like to thank you and your colleague from the south on behalf of my colleagues for compelling presentations. Certainly you don't make our job any easier, but thank you just the same.

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's now my pleasure to welcome His Worship Mayor Herb Rock from the town of Coronation. Kind of getting off the topic, I remember when I first came into the Legislature. Marion Kelts was the member for your area, and he was my seatmate. He rather led me around for a period of time, and I recall going out to Coronation and playing in some baseball tournaments. You had a bloody good brand of baseball out there at that time. Mind you, that was more than a few years ago too.

Herb, thank you very much. We look forward to hearing you.

Mr. Rock: Thank you on behalf of the town of Coronation for being able to present this to the commission. Thank you for giving me the privilege of making a submission to you tonight. It is always a pleasure to know that as citizens we have the right to talk directly to our government on matters that are important not only to us as

community leaders but to all citizens.

The item discussed here tonight is of a very important nature to us in this area of Alberta. We are a sparsely populated area with limited industrial, commercial, and agricultural possibilities. We are not growing in terms of population. We are losing provincial offices as well as commercial entities to larger centres in the interest of centralization and consolidation. The more this happens, the more people we continue to lose. The farms and ranches in the area are becoming larger, again forcing people to leave for the larger centres in the province.

Because of this movement of people, the government must again look to redistribution of the seats in the Legislative Assembly either as a redistribution or additional seats in the Legislature. Does it need to be a question of either/or? This constituency and a large number of other rural constituencies in the province are losing population. This constituency and again a large number of rural constituencies are large contributors to the provincial treasury by way of oil royalties. In fact, I don't think that there are any urban constituencies that are contributors in this fashion. While I'm not saying that one type of revenue is better than any other type of revenue, it is quite apparent that oil royalty revenue is probably cheaper to collect than any other type of revenue received by the government. Therefore, while we do not have any population clout, we do have some revenue-generating clout. Can these two areas of interest not be considered equal? Could not the geographical size of the constituency be another factor?

At the present rate in the near future the Legislature will represent nothing but urban area. Rural Alberta has presently lost most of its voice. It has not only lost most of its voice, but it has also lost most of its hospitals, its government offices, agricultural offices, its industrial capacity, and other areas that are very important to rural Alberta.

When the first Alberta Legislature was elected in 1905, there was a total of 25 seats in Alberta, and at that time it had a population of approximately 190,000 people. The number of seats has increased to 83, half of which are in Edmonton and Calgary. The population is now 3 million. The question now becomes: is one urban vote equivalent to one rural vote? I dare to suggest that a rural vote should have more weight than an urban vote. Urban people do not stay in urban areas, but they use rural areas for vacationing, for traveling through, for picnicking, and for subsidizing their urban lifestyle. Government uses rural areas for generating revenues. Urban areas use their population clout to force government to their will: if you don't do as we say, we'll elect someone else. Someone else is never far away.

Rural areas need the extra clout to counter some of the urban proposals, which are never to the rural areas' advantage. When rural people need special medical attention, they must go to urban areas. This holds not only for medical reasons but also for education, commercial, entertainment, government, and a host of other reasons. As a case in point, welfare recipients have moved to urban areas to be very close to their caseworkers. It removes the person from the support that they can get from communities and relatives to the impersonal situations prevalent in an urban area and becomes more expensive for the government.

Another facet that distributes rural dollars is the large number of extraprovincial people that are coming to urban Alberta and getting services that rural people can only dream of. I should mention that a majority of rural Albertans have been here for generations. Is it any wonder that we feel shortchanged? Maybe if we had more or better-informed legislative members, this would not happen. I'm only scratching the surface area. Set up a special commission to hear the rural segment of the Alberta population so that the government can hear all of our issues.

In closing, I want to thank you for listening. Please act upon some if not all of the above. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Herb. A rather – can I put it? – to-the-point presentation.

Mr. Rock: To the point. Yeah.

The Chair: And there's nothing wrong with being frank and to the point.

Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Your Worship. You're making a point here that, as I am interpreting it – and I'd like to see if I'm interpreting it correctly – maybe the commission should have had the right to have more MLAs, above the 83. That's what I hear you saying. Under the act that we have to work with, we are limited to the 83. Am I hearing you saying that?

Mr. Rock: You're hearing that right, yeah. The thing is that our constituency is so large. The traveling time for one MLA is just about impossible, you know. We do have representation. Great. But it's a large, large area for ours.

Mr. Patterson: Okay.

The Chair: Sorry. We're just clarifying here. It's Wainwright constituency you're talking about.

Mr. Rock: That's right. Sorry.

The Chair: No. That's not your fault at all.

Mr. Patterson: I guess you understand that the commission is limited in what it can do. If the government had said that there were fewer MLAs or more MLAs, probably our work would have been much easier.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clegg: I have no questions. It's very direct and to the point, and certainly many of your points I do agree with. I want to make sure that you keep in mind that this is a nonpolitical group, and our job is to just distribute the electors, no mention of any government whatsoever. The Supreme Court has told us what the rules will be, and the provincial government has told us how many MLAs, 83. So we're in a tight little bind there. But very good and right to the point, and I like it.

The Chair: I took from what you're saying, Herb, that you really were substantiating the point made by the presentation from Vermilion River. As services are withdrawn, then it's that much more difficult for an MLA; an MLA has to take more time to deal with those issues. So when we grapple with this question of effective representation and how we will balance that – and in the last report that was done, there was a matrix, where they took into consideration those things that were really MLA responsibilities and those things that dealt with effective representation and tried to weight those. We're in the process right now of trying to work on that matrix again, which took into consideration those kinds of factors. The former commission used some of those kinds of factors, then, for the rationale or the reasoning to say: yes, we're suggesting that this constituency may be 14 percent below the quotient kind of thing for this reason, this reason, this reason. We're in the process

of having that work done for us right now. On the other hand, some ridings were 14, 15 percent above, and a similar kind of rationale was used to justify that.

8:00

Mr. Graham: Just to reiterate, Your Worship, I think it would be very helpful to us if we had concrete details of why it's more difficult. I understand the general matters, and we've had these points made to us on many occasions and are quite aware of them, but when we come down to look at your constituency, we have to have more specific details of why it's more difficult for a particular MLA to effectively represent that constituency. So any details that you could provide us with, you know, that are more specific – and you can certainly do that later because we're going to be awhile on this – would be very helpful.

The Chair: If I could just follow up on that, Herb. That speaks to the point of this matrix. Where we're going to have significant variations, we have to be specific and say that there are seven hamlets, three municipalities, and one of this and five of these, that kind of thing, or that services have been withdrawn in this area, so that we have that information available for each constituency. I know it's tough when we're at a regional meeting like tonight, but perhaps you along with your MLA and Bob could help us put that together for the Wainwright constituency, because we are going to need that information, whatever our decision is, and it'll help us come to decisions and then justify those decisions too.

Mr. Rock: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other comments? Thank you very much on behalf of my colleagues, Herb.

Ladies and gentlemen, we'll now take a 10-minute break. The next presenter on my list is Wayne Richardson. Mr. Olthof, there are two presenters after that. Who are they?

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Clark Steele and Mr. Doug Griffiths.

The Chair: Okay. So we'll have three more presentations.

[The commission adjourned from 8:02 p.m. to 8:21 p.m.]

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, I'm pleased to ask Mr. Wayne Richardson, the reeve of the county of Paintearth, to speak to us. Wayne, I've been asked – when you're speaking, if you'd pull that microphone fairly close to you so that they can better pick up your words to us. Thank you very much, Wayne.

Mr. Richardson: Thank you very much, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you. I'll perhaps try to give you some slightly different ideas than what you've been hearing. It might be entertaining if nothing else.

I guess that one man, one vote is basically what we've been talking about. That's been a principle that Canada has employed for the last hundred and some number of years, without stopping to count it, and the province of Alberta of course has done the same. I guess, as was touched upon by perhaps one or two of the other speakers, Alberta has changed a lot over the last 90 years. If you go back to the way the province was, say, in the '20s or the '30s, the population was much more evenly dispersed. The concentration of people in the cities was comparatively low, and perhaps even more importantly the homogeneity, if you will, of the population was a good deal greater. Most of the people in towns and cities at that time had a very direct connection to a rural background, so they

really understood rural Alberta, rural Canada, whatever.

That, I would suggest, is certainly not the case today. We have two huge concentrations of population. Our rural areas have severely depopulated in the last 30 years in particular. We've become a province, I guess, of very distinct regions, and to a large extent that has been aided and abetted by the province. You know, we speak of the capital region. We have regional health authorities. We have school divisions. These were creations of the province to a fair extent, yet I honestly don't believe the light has gone on in the Leg. in terms of what that means. When you have distinct regions, I think you need a way of representing them in some manner other than one man, one vote.

The mechanism that of course has gained a certain amount of credibility around the world is that of the senate. I really think that that is what we need, a provincial senate, to more adequately represent these types of regions that we have created within this province. Obviously, a senate is not something that we're going to achieve in this go-round, so while I think that would be a worthwhile discussion for us to have provincially, we have to live in the here and now and see what we can do with the Legislature as it now exists.

I guess that as a rural Albertan what I really would like to have is a thoroughly educated group of MLAs. I'm not trying to demean any of you who are MLAs.

The Chair: Or who have been.

Mr. Richardson: Or who have been or who may wish to be.

Perhaps let me just give you an idea of what my thinking is. As a rural Albertan I guess I am satisfied that I am adequately represented as long as I can convince myself that absolutely all of the MLAs have a full understanding of the sort of regional problems that exist across the province. The mechanism that we have now, I guess, is just that the MLAs talk to one another in caucus and in other manners, and the rural MLAs try to educate the urban MLAs and vice versa about their problems, but I'm not certain that that's a totally effective way to do it.

Let me suggest a couple of other ways by which we might obtain – oh, sorry. First of all, I guess I didn't give you my exact definition of an educated MLA. For me an educated MLA would be an individual who has earned a living in both rural and urban areas for a period of at least, say, five years in each setting. An individual of that type, I believe, would have a very thorough understanding of the problems of both rural and urban Alberta.

Of three potential ways perhaps to use the existing Legislature system and develop some of the merits of what a senate system might give us but superimpose it upon the Legislature, the first is sort of what I would consider the theoretical ideal. First of all, we need a fixed, four-year electoral term. I don't think that's a difficult thing to achieve. The Association of MDs and Counties passed a resolution calling for same about a year ago.

The Chair: They now have that in B.C.

Mr. Richardson: Yes, they do. Exactly. That would be the first thing we would need. Then a new MLA elected under that system would serve his own constituency for the first year in the same manner that he does now, but on day 1 of year 2 an urban MLA moves out into a rural constituency and serves that constituency for the next two years without any interference from the elected MLA. Then vice versa: the rural MLA goes into the city and serves an urban constituency. On day 1 of year 4, back home for that last year. A term or two under that would, I submit, give us MLAs who would be very thoroughly versed in both rural and urban problems, and I suspect that all Albertans would be better served by the government

that would result from that. But that's, as I say, sort of a theoretical ideal, and maybe we can go to something that might cost a little bit less and achieve a portion of the same result.

Rural Alberta has very much resisted the idea of mixed urban/rural ridings – that's been sort of a no-no in any previous redistributions that have taken place – but perhaps the time has come to rethink that. What if one were to construct pie-shaped ridings around, say, Edmonton and Calgary and construct them in such a manner that those ridings had 50 percent urban population and 50 percent rural or small-town population. First of all, it would mean that the MLA who would represent such a riding had an equal chance of coming from either the rural or the urban setting. It would also entail that the MLA sitting there would darn well have to very effectively represent both halves of his riding or he wouldn't be there very long. So there would be some incentive there, I think. That could perhaps provide a larger group of MLAs who have a very good knowledge of both urban and rural problems. Don't think for a minute that I'm only suggesting that it's urban MLAs who do not understand rural problems, because I know it goes both ways. It wouldn't hurt a good number of rural MLAs to visit the Mustard Seed or something like that. Our Premier may have done that.

The Chair: Next item.

Mr. Richardson: You mean, you don't want good political comments?

Anyway, that was number 2. I guess the third one would be a different variant upon that same idea, and that would be to construct a constituency which would consist of two geographical parts located some distance from one another. Make a constituency which had, for the sake of argument, 20,000 people within Calgary or Edmonton and match that with an area out in the country someplace that had 20,000 people and in fact set him up with two constituency offices and make him, again, serve both halves. In that situation you would have to have comparatively equal portions of population for it to work and work well.

So maybe those ideas will entertain you a bit and give you something extra to think about. That's the sum of my thoughts. Thank you for the opportunity to present them.

The Chair: Well, I think that, yes, they entertained us, but more than that, there's some interesting food for thought.

Ernie.

8:31

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you very much. To me you have given us one of the most unique presentations that we've heard, and I think we're now up to close to a hundred presentations. We've asked the question in Calgary and in Edmonton because we have some large constituencies on the edge of both cities. The answer we got back from the rural people is: no, we don't want to be part of a city riding. I think you've got the same kind of an answer from the city. So I like your suggestions, because I think that if we could do this and could justify it, as my friend Doug over here keeps saying, I think maybe we could go quite a ways to solving some of our problems. If we could do that around the cities, then it might spread population out farther. I want to thank you for thinking – oh, I hate that term – out of the box, so to speak, putting forth a different idea.

The other thing. I have to agree with you on the fixed terms. I'll stop there, Mr. Chair. I know that I haven't asked a question.

The Chair: Wayne, if you found a question in there, would you like to respond to what Ernie said?

Mr. Richardson: I didn't find too much of a question, but if he can formulate one.

Mr. Patterson: Well, do you think the people in your area would buy an idea of this nature? I guess the question is: how far are you from Edmonton?

Mr. Richardson: Oh, sorry. I'm within this Wainwright constituency.

Mr. Patterson: Oh, you're within it. That's right. Within Wainwright. Okay. That's right, yes.

Mr. Richardson: It takes me basically an hour to get up to my local constituency office here.

Mr. Patterson: Right. But how would the people in your constituency – I'm trying to save myself here – buy the idea of, say, 20,000 people in Edmonton and 20,000 people here?

Mr. Richardson: I don't honestly know. I sort of wrote this – well, Bob and Don and Fritz I guess have heard part of this presentation at our last AAMD and C convention, but for the rest of it I sort of winged it; I wrote it in my head as I came here today. So it hasn't been presented. It hasn't even been in total presented to my own council, so don't take it, please, as official council position.

Mr. Clegg: Well, Wayne, I was just starting to draw the borders here of this new constituency. I thought it was the best idea since sliced bread came along. It's ironic that you're not the first one that's mentioned it to me. We've never heard it in the hearings before, but one person in my town came to me and suggested exactly that, that you could represent 20,000 in rural Alberta and 20,000 in urban. I think I mentioned it to one of the members, and they thought that I'd come from Mars. Certainly it's exciting to hear somebody else's point of view, and I can see it absolutely working. It's just too bad Alberta wasn't made round, and it would work a hundred percent.

The Chair: Did you get a question out of that one?

Ms Mackay: I'm wondering: to what degree were your ideas motivated by a recognition of the imbalance of the value of the vote when you give large rural constituencies an MLA as compared to a largely populated . . . Okay, let's just get this straight here. Large area, small population in rural Alberta; small area, large population in urban. You would have urban people say that their vote isn't worth as much as the vote of somebody living in rural Alberta. Are your ideas motivated by a sensitivity to that being an issue?

Mr. Richardson: I believe basically in one man, one vote, but I also believe in the effective representation idea which others have mentioned and which, if you perhaps were to refer to the comments I made at the previous electoral boundaries submission – I can't remember really what I said, but I know I said something about them. I want to see both urban and rural interests equally well represented, and that's the basis behind my ideas. I want to see that. I do not like to see the degree to which rural Alberta has become depopulated, and I do I guess in my heart feel that a large number of city residents do not understand rural problems perhaps as well as rural residents understand city problems. But having said that, I have also met city MLAs who I know have a pretty darn good understanding of rural problems. I just would like to see really, as I said, a fully well-educated group of MLAs who were thoroughly

versed in both. Then I believe the province would have the best government possible; so would the country, could we get to that situation.

A provincial senate would be one way to go, but I'm not certain that that is the best way. I think maybe some of these split ridings, if they were done properly, would be probably the best we could achieve. It would be a more expensive provincial government, but I think the benefits would outweigh the cost. I really do. I mean, I sit on county council. I see some of the proposed legislation that comes across. We do have an opportunity to review it, for which I thank the province. They frequently put totally unrealistic deadlines upon getting comments on some of those things, but it is nice to have the opportunity. Even so, I am never totally certain, I guess, that rural interests are always as well looked after as they should be but, by and large, not bad. I give the government full credit.

Ms Mackay: And just one more question. Would you have to be old to be on the Alberta senate too?

Mr. Richardson: Well, I would hope not. He's no older than I am or you.

The Chair: Oh, it's your turn, Bauni.

Ms Mackay: Like it's not enough I have Glen Clegg?

Mr. Clegg: You've made a good man of me.

The Chair: On that note . . .

Mr. Graham: I'm not even going to try to top these comments.

The Chair: The last commission I think made some small moves in that direction, not with Edmonton and Calgary though, Wayne; with Grande Prairie. Grande Prairie is divided down Main Street kind of thing, and they go Grande Prairie-Wapiti on the west side and – I forget the other one now.

Mr. Richardson: East and west or whatever. I can't remember either, but I know you're right.

The Chair: Grande Prairie-Smoky I believe it is.

When we get there, it will be interesting to see how that works, because it's a small step in that direction. We have had some representation that we should spread Red Deer out, Red Deer divided down Gaetz Avenue and just to the city boundaries though. It's a neat suggestion you've made. Thank you very much.

On behalf of my colleagues we appreciate your presentation, your humour, and your candour. You were able to outdo Glen Clegg, and that's no small accomplishment.

Mr. Richardson: Thank you. I hope to have an opportunity to come back after I've seen the results of your deliberations, and I'll probably make some more comments.

The Chair: Somehow I'm sure that's right.

I'd like to introduce to the members of the panel Mr. Clark Steele. Clark lives just outside of Wainwright. He said he's making a presentation on his own behalf, and I notice he spells his first name properly.

Clark, please go ahead.

8:41

Mr. Steele: Well, I'm like you: you've got two first names; I've

got two last names. My name, Clark, was from my grandmother's side, and they took the "e" off.

Good evening, panel. I'm pleased to be able to present my own opinions. Now, in the two cities by rough calculation Calgary has about 480 square miles and 20 members. Each member represents about 24 square miles of area. Edmonton is about 363, 370 square miles. There they have 19 MLAs, and they represent about 19 square miles. Then you go to Slave Lake/Wabasca – that's one of the constituencies that is in the special areas type – and they've got about 282,000 square miles. Well, when people are out exercising, they'll run farther than the outside area of the urban constituencies. So there's no way that you can get equal representation with the population.

But my idea is: let's use land base times population. Now, if we use something similar to – in every township there are 36 blocks. There aren't quite 36 residents on a city block, but there would be more than 36 in an apartment block. So if a high-rise was 15 stories high, it would be the equivalent of 15 blocks. Work something like that out to try and give better representation. I don't know how it could be worked out. I'm not that sharp with numbers and such, but there's somebody that could figure that out.

Another point is that the rural areas supply an enormous tax base. The only thing is that a lot of that tax is collected through city corporate offices, and it is shown as being a city revenue, not a rural revenue. So in that light, the rural is paying more taxes and the urbans are actually getting more benefit from that because of the location where the cheque comes from.

Another point. This spring when the provincial government was going to take away the allotment of the fuel tax, the Edmonton and Calgary mayors got together. They walked into the Premier's office, and in about 36 hours there was a complete flip-flop. Now, those two people had more clout than 39 MLAs. There's something wrong there. If that's the case, that the two mayors in the two large centres have that much clout, maybe we should have something like having the MDs and counties send their reeves, and they have a meeting, say, four times a year with the provincial government and get back to the grass roots, the rural people, and get the rural problems onto the table. It would be something like the gentleman before me saying a senate. This would be a form of senate, but it would be elected people from the rural representing the people from the provincial government. Now, I don't know if it's feasible, but I think it could be.

That's about the few points that I do have from my own personal point of view.

The Chair: Great, Clark. Thank you very much. Any questions or comments? I'd even permit comments.

Mr. Patterson: Well, with that invitation, Mr. Chair, short comments. I think it's an interesting point that you have just made here, that the mayors of the two large cities within 24, 36 hours could accomplish that. But I'd still like to ask you the question, then, coming back – you're aware that we have to act within the limits of the act which is set out here. Do you have any thoughts on how we could sell this to a court of law? We have to get fairly close and justify why we've done it on a population basis, getting as close as we can to one person, one vote. Where we vary from it, we have to justify it. Have you any thoughts on that, Mr. Steele?

Mr. Steele: Well, that is why I was bringing in the area of the constituency. Whether it be 30 miles square or 630 miles square, combining those two numbers would give us a number that would be fair and equitable, I believe, that we could work around. I know that it would limit – the vote of the city people may only be .9 compared

to a rural vote. I know that it'll be hard to sell.

At the same time, the work of the city MLA in my opinion – they'll get 20 phone calls and maybe 19 of them will be on the same plane. The MLA will only have to look that question up once and go from there and send out the letters. Whereas in the rural areas, in this area here we have somebody down in the Bodo area, which is just on the edge of the special areas, and his problem is completely different than the person that is over in the northwest corner, where our reeve lives. He's just south of Mannville. So there are 80 to 90 miles across there, and the problems are completely different.

The Chair: Clark, I would only say this. One of the submissions that we had from one of the MLAs was that there were 22 different languages spoken in that member's constituency. People from that riding all tend to live in family units, and then as they kind of move along, they move to another riding several constituencies away. That kind of was a second landing pod, if I can put it that way. Then they kind of move out from there.

I'm not telling you that to try and spice your argument. I'm just simply saying that I think we all have to be careful. The challenges the city MLAs have aren't always as simple as they might appear on the surface. I come from rural Alberta, but I kind of have to concede in my saner moments, too, that some of the problems they have, you know, a high number of mental health cases in a downtown Calgary or Edmonton area – those kinds of issues make it difficult to represent. That's not to take away from your argument. I just wanted to make that point.

Mr. Steele: Yes, I can understand that, but on the reverse side of it, when we ended up with our large health boards, in somebody's infinite wisdom they made most of the large offices in northern Alberta within 50 miles of Edmonton. There is no office in Lloydminster, Vermilion, Wainwright. We answer to Camrose. When that happened, the people followed those jobs, and that also took our population away. So somebody in their infinite wisdom really missed the boat. They should have had these offices in the centre of these constituencies where they were going to have these RHA boards.

The same with the school boards. They were pulled out. Provost lost their board. Vermilion lost their board. Wainwright was fortunate enough to hold their board. But doing that took people from Vermilion-Lloydminster, where they are short. Provost is in this constituency, but it still affected their community.

8:51

The Chair: Shall we call that a draw?

Mr. Steele: I guess so.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Thank you very much, Clark, for your comments. They're very much appreciated. Thank you very much.

Mr. Steele: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mr. Doug Griffiths. Welcome, Doug. You've seen the procedure we're using. We can really say that you're the newest MLA in Alberta; can't we? We look forward to hearing your comments, and I'm sure we'll have some things we'll want you to follow up on.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. First I'd like to say welcome to the best constituency in Alberta. I honestly believe that. I've traveled the whole thing.

Secondly, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your acknowledgment at

the beginning. I know that our political careers are somewhat related, you being the youngest MLA at the time that you ran, actually the youngest ever.

The Chair: Well, let's not go back that far, please.

Mr. Clegg: That was in the 1800s.

The Chair: Thank you.
Carry on.

Mr. Griffiths: All right. I had a lot to say tonight, and I know the time limits are tight, so I'll try and be brief. I do have a general list of the different communities and organizations in the constituency. I have a written submission that gives them detailed and specific, but it's not quite done yet. I've been running around to 30 different communities in the riding, and it really taxes my time.

The Chair: If you can get that to us, be sure you get it to us by the last week of this month, Doug. That would be extremely helpful.

Mr. Griffiths: Absolutely. I will give you a rundown though. There are 30 communities in this constituency. That means 30 councils, whether they're village councils or town councils. There are two MDs, two county councils, three school boards, 30 some odd schools. I didn't count them up yet. You mentioned 22 different languages being spoken in one riding in the city. Sometimes when you go see 30 communities, you realize that they're all speaking a different language too, so that's equally challenging. Hundreds of community groups in each of those communities: 4-H clubs, charities, community organizations, churches, libraries. I mean, they literally add up to hundreds. There's a lot to represent.

Now, I guess a lot of the things I was going to say about rural issues will be a repeat tonight. Essentially rural ridings are interested in the same things as city ridings: health care, education, infrastructure. But they're also concerned about other issues that are particularly unique to rural Alberta: agriculture issues, rural development, which is really an issue right now, small business trying to adapt to being in an isolated community sometimes and trying to prosper when populations are declining. Then local issues in each of those 30 communities. I'm sorry; I had to write these notes because I never had time to write them on a sheet of paper, representing 30 communities, you know. I'm going to keep emphasizing that point.

One of the best ways to hear concerns, being a new MLA, in a constituency is not necessarily to wait for constituents to phone your office but to go visit them in coffee shops and to stop by local businesses. Even if you have five times more businesses to represent and visit, when you're in 24 square city blocks, it's much easier to get around and see them than it is to travel an hour and a half from Wainwright here to where I live in Castor or from Daysland down to Provost to get through those coffee shops, to stop and see people and shake hands and get out to the community events. I believe that has to be a factor when we're looking at quality representation, effective representation, not just equal representation.

I had a few questions that came up before that I wanted to comment on, and then I'll let you ask me whatever questions you want. First, I guess the United States became the United States when they revolted against Great Britain, and one of their rallying cries was: no taxation without representation. It's been mentioned a couple of times this evening already, but it's very important to consider the revenue generated out of rural Alberta, the resources that are taken and the tax dollars that are collected, when you look at the representation. I mean, it started a revolution in the United

States. So in a lot of ways when resources are taken out and revenue is taken out and in many circumstances with the loss of ag offices and a lot of government services, rural Alberta feels ignored. If the expansion of rural ridings continues and their numbers decrease, it's just going to further cause rural people to feel alienated from the government that represents them. That has to be an important factor.

In Australia they've made it mandatory that people vote, and many other countries are talking about it. We see the voter turnout decreasing all the time because of the apathy of voters. The apathy amongst the rural population is going to increase at an exponential rate, not only for the abandonment that they feel, if we continue to expand the ridings and make them feel like they have less and less of a voice in what decisions are being made by the provincial government. I believe that needs to be a factor.

If you examine our riding, there are many centres like Castor and Coronation that I believe have been in three different ridings in the last 15 or 18 years. That also serves to alienate the people in that area from their MLA and from the government. So I think another factor has to be consistency. Whatever plan you guys make, whatever redistribution you do, I really hope that you consider a long-term solution, not for the next five years or eight years but more towards the next 20 years. Look at trends and conditions and try and come up with something that's long term so that people can get attached to their MLA and know who they're talking to.

One of the suggestions that I had was that when you examine a lot of the city ridings in Edmonton and Calgary, especially the centre core, you notice that many of them haven't changed in 10, 15, 20 years. The population becomes very stagnant and levels off. You'll see, if you review the maps, that many of them are approaching that zero mark, that perfect divide. They're plus 5 percent or minus 5 percent. I would suggest that since the populations aren't going to change significantly and since plus or minus 25 percent is acceptable, or 15 percent, what about adjusting those city ridings and expanding them to bring them to the 15 or 20 percent plus critical level, since they won't change anymore, and leaving them at that? Then you can rezone within the city without having to affect the rural ridings too much, and that would last for quite a while.

Now I guess I will let you ask me a lot of questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Well done.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks, Doug. We look forward to all the information that you're going to give us. Your first comment was that you have the best constituency in the province. I guess you can claim that now. I claimed it for 15 years in Dunvegan, and I guess Hector doesn't want that slogan, so you can have it now. I'm not too sure if I agree with you, but I'll still give you that slogan.

Thanks for the presentation, Doug. I look forward to all your different municipalities and towns and villages in your constituency. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Mr. Chair. Because I come from a rural area, I can relate to how important it is and how actually easy it is to go out and meet people. I mean, you have to travel.

You talk about the central city ridings. MLAs tell us that there may be 800 people in an apartment block, and they can't get in to even knock on the doors at election time. I'm just pointing this out, the contrast and the problems, and our chair has mentioned all the different languages. So in some of the central ridings some of the MLAs have made very strong representations saying: "Okay. Here it is; here's the apartment block. There are 800 to a thousand people in it, but you can't get in the door to even contact them." I just

wonder if you have thought about that at all in the contrast. I know that you've just been recently elected. Congratulations. But have you thought about kind of the other side of the coin? In a rural riding, you know, you can walk down the street and people say hello and so on. In the inner city if you say hello to some people, sometimes they wonder what you're up to. Any comment on that?

9:01

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. I understand that. I think that's perhaps part of the culture of the city in some respects. I do understand that, but I think you can get around things like that by visiting local coffee shops and holding meetings. Regardless of whether you're in the city or the country, if people don't want to see you, they're not going to see you. So when you get out into the community, I understand there are challenges, but I don't believe they're so significant that they can't be overcome. I mean, you can hold open houses, you can hold meetings and invite people, and the ones that want to come will come. If you have to travel between 30 different communities, if you see one every weekend, it still takes almost an entire year to see them, and that's a challenge that I think is much more difficult to overcome.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms Mackay: Well, I guess we could argue the rural/urban thing, but I won't. I'm interested in your comments about the rural alienation, because you might be interested in knowing that the urban alienation is at least as strong based on exactly that idea. It was interesting. When we had the hearings in Edmonton and Calgary, the presentations there were totally – I mean, absolutely there wasn't one that wasn't very charitable in terms of understanding the rural situation. They really do. Although Calgary needs more seats and Edmonton would like to keep the 19 they have, they certainly were very sympathetic to the need to recognize the unique difficulties with rural Alberta. So I guess I'd just be interested in your response to this whole concept of urban alienation based on feeling perhaps that they, too, do not have the voice they would like to have in the Legislature relative to their rural cousins.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, that's interesting. That's the first I've heard of it. Discussing this commission and its decisions with other MLAs, both urban and rural, I've heard many rural MLAs talk about the alienation that's felt by rural Alberta at times. I've never heard an urban MLA ever mention that. I'm not saying that it's not true; I'm just saying that I've never heard it. I understand that could be very true. I think there's a general tendency for all voters to start to feel a little bit alienated – that's why we see our voter turnout down a bit – but I do believe, not from personal experience in talking to people in the city but in talking to the MLAs that represent them, that the rural alienation is a much more significant factor.

I would like to add that I've had quite a few city MLAs that have agreed with me. I used this quote during the campaign: tear down your cities and watch them grow up bigger and stronger than they ever were, but tear down your rural communities and your farms and watch your cities crumble. I've had a lot of MLAs from the urban centres tell me that that's exactly right and that it's time we put some focus on rural Alberta and rural development and extend the rural advantage from that highway 2 corridor out to rural Alberta as well or this Alberta advantage won't last very long. That's coming from urban MLAs that have agreed with me. So that's where I have established my arguments.

Ms Mackay: Yeah, and I don't think there's any question about that at all. We have a major problem in this province because of the

increasing urbanization and what that means to the changing culture of the province. I'm just not – well, we won't get into what I think, because it doesn't matter what I think at this point.

Also, I'd just like one more reaction, and if this is unfair, just don't bother answering. As an MLA you represent this area, but you make decisions that affect the whole province. That's perhaps what a former speaker was indicating when he was talking about the need for all MLAs to have a good understanding of both urban and rural. So I guess the teacher in me says that I hope you make sure that you become educated on the urban situation as well.

Mr. Griffiths: I lived in Edmonton for five years, in Red Deer for three years. I have two university degrees. I've spent a lot of time in the city. When I do make decisions, I do have in the front of my mind rural issues, but I also have in the back of my mind what's good for all of Alberta, because I do understand a lot of urban issues. I mean, I spend now half of my time in Edmonton. A lot of people in the city are so far removed, by generations, from the farm that I don't think a lot of urban voters have in the back of their mind how this is going to impact farmers or ranchers or the small community out there that they've never been to, but people from those small communities who go to shop in Edmonton or go to West Edmonton Mall do have some concept of the city. That's why I think that the representation for rural Alberta has to be so strongly considered for the good of Alberta and that we need strong rural MLAs and strong rural representation and that we don't need to lose any more rural MLAs, for the good of all Alberta, not just rural Alberta.

The Chair: On that note, that was a very good speech. It sounded like you were just off the campaign trail. No, no; I wouldn't say that. Thank you very much, Doug. We appreciate it.

One last presenter, Mr. Fritz Crone. Mr. Crone came to me at the coffee break and indicated to me that he'd like to just say a few words. I won't hold you to that, Fritz, but thank you very much. Will you please speak right up and tell us what you're about.

Mr. Crone: Fritz Crone. I'm reeve of the MD of Provost. Hello, panel. I wasn't made aware that we were to make presentations, and for that I apologize. I don't have much to add or anything to add. I would just like to go on record as endorsing the presentation made by the MD of Wainwright, by Mr. Bob Barss. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Crone: One other comment I'd like to make to you is that you were down to the gas co-op in Provost, where I met you 20-some years ago.

The Chair: I don't like where this is going.

Mr. Crone: No, this is fine. I'd just like you to know that our co-op is doing very well.

The Chair: I like that better.

Mr. Crone: It wasn't good when you were there.

The Chair: But it's better now. That's great. That's good.

Mr. Crone: So that was all I had to comment on, everything that I had. Distance is the big issue in this constituency. We are part of the Wainwright constituency, so that to me is the biggest issue: for the MLA to get around to the people.

With that, that's all I have. Thank you.

The Chair: Fritz, we'll report that you endorsed the presentation made by the good reeve.

Any questions of Fritz?

Mr. Crone: Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Fritz.

Okay. This concludes this session of the hearings. We will reconvene tomorrow morning in Drumheller at 10 o'clock.

To the good folks in Wainwright, thank you very, very much for your forthrightness, your frankness, and quite candidly some new ideas that are going to force us to go back and do some serious thinking. Thank you very much. Good evening.

[The commission adjourned at 9:09 p.m.]

