

9:09 a.m.

Thursday, June 6, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to call this session of the Electoral Boundaries Commission meeting here in Wetaskiwin more or less to order. I want to thank you very much for coming out this morning. The agenda, as I have it, is some opening comments and the introduction of the members. Then Mr. Hillaby and Mr. Brian Austrom of the county of Camrose; Norm Mayer, the mayor of Camrose; then Larry Majeski from the county of Leduc; Curtis Vesely, Wetaskiwin-Camrose PC Association; Garry Dearing, reeve of the county of Wetaskiwin; Rob Snider; and LeRoy Johnson, MLA: that's the group of presenters. If anyone else who is not part of those groups here feels the urge to make a concise, to-the-point presentation, the chair has been known to make that possible.

I want to welcome you and to say thank you very much for coming today. This is the conclusion of the second week of our hearings across the province. We started in Calgary last Monday, then in Olds and Red Deer Tuesday, Edmonton last Wednesday. I think we had 27 presentations in Edmonton. Then Monday of this week we were in St. Paul and Wainwright. On Tuesday we were in Drumheller and Medicine Hat. Yesterday we were in Lethbridge, and today we're here. We're going to take a break for a couple of weeks, and then the last week of the month we're in Westlock, Edson, Slave Lake, Fort McMurray, and then Peace River and Grande Prairie. That will bring us to the end of the month. Then very shortly after that the commission is going to get together and come to some conclusions, because we want to have an interim report ready for people to see early in September. From September until December people can look at that, and then there will be an opportunity for a second round of hearings in those areas where there's considerable concern.

Under the Electoral Boundaries Commission legislation after every two elections a commission like this is set up to look at the electoral boundaries in the province. The legislation is quite explicit that we use the last Canadian census figures. The last Canadian census was done in 2001. It's very recent. There's a provision to add numbers from some First Nations reserves where they don't take part in the census.

The legislation also says that the head of the government will appoint two members to the commission, and the Leader of the Opposition in consultation will appoint two people to the panel. The legislation also says that the chairman will be either a judge or the head of an academic institution or the Ethics Commissioner or the Auditor General. I'm not quite sure how come it's the Ethics Commissioner's turn this time, but that's the way it worked out.

The legislation also says that there shall be 83 seats. So to do the math, very simply you take the last population of 2.98 million, divide that by 83, and you get very close to 35,951 per constituency. Now, obviously, you're not going to have those numbers exact. The legislation has two other provisions, though. One is that it allows for a 25 percent variance up or down. The last commission in its recommendations had all the variances within 15 percent with the exception of one riding, and I believe that was 16. That would be a target for us I think.

Another feature of the legislation, though, says that there can be up to four ridings where the variance can be 50 percent. When you were looking at the maps over there, you perhaps noticed the riding of Athabasca-Wabasca, which is the northeast corner of the province, excluding the city of Fort McMurray, and Lesser Slave Lake, which is the riding adjacent to it. Presently there are only two ridings in Alberta where they've exercised that 50 percent variance.

The legislation says that after the commission is established, we have one year to do our report. We were established in March. We've had a number of meetings just with the commission members being briefed on the law. We have people from Alberta Finance here today. They've taken the most recent StatsCan population information on a per district basis, so once we conclude our hearings, we'll be able to move boundaries a bit this way and that way so that we get within the ranges that the legislation has mandated us to do. The legislation says that we have to have our work done within one year. There will be an interim report in September, and then we'll be back across the province in December or January and have a final report in the Speaker's hands next March. It's then up to the Legislature after that.

Seven years ago when this process was followed, the Legislature basically accepted the recommendation of the commission, and those became the boundaries for the election that followed. It's obviously this chairman's hope that the Legislature will find the recommendations this time around reasonably acceptable and that they'll move on those. The plan would be that those new boundaries will be the boundaries for the next provincial election, which I guess could be in 2004, 2005, or 2006.

In a nutshell, ladies and gentlemen, that's what we're about. We have not drawn any lines. We wanted to complete these hearings. We will have completed all the province with the exception of the northern part of the province, and we're doing that later in the month, so following today, we will be starting to come together with some conclusions, trying to carry out our mandate.

We have a number of people making presentations, and what we would ask them to do is to take up to 10 minutes to give us their presentation. Certainly feel free to read the presentation that you've given us or to summarize it for us, however you want. Then we'll have, I'm sure, some questions and comments from my colleagues.

That leads me into introducing my colleagues. To my far right is Mayor Ernie Patterson from the town of Claresholm. Ernie has been the mayor of Claresholm for some 33 years, and he's also vice-president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. I see some gentlemen smiling back there, Ernie. I'm not sure if they're smiling about you or the people in Claresholm, but we'll leave that there. Next to Ernie is Glen Clegg. Glen formerly was a member of the Assembly for the Dunvegan area. That's the Fairview-Spirit River area. Glen, you were a member for 15 years; weren't you? To my left from Edmonton is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is the past president of the Alberta Teachers' Association; to my far left is Doug Graham, who is a respected, well-thought-of lawyer in the city of Calgary; and then myself, Bob Clark, the chairman. This is the commission. We look forward to hearing from you.

I'd like to ask Jim Hillaby and Brian Austrom on behalf of the county of Camrose to come forward. Good morning, gentlemen. The reason that we're a few minutes late starting this morning is because our good friends from *Hansard* were a few minutes late getting here. The things that you're saying are going to be preserved for posterity. Generally, *Hansard* is not a best-seller, but nevertheless you just should know that. Thanks very much for coming.

9:19

Mr. Hillaby: I'd like to thank the board for giving us the opportunity to speak today. It is a pleasure to be here. On behalf of the county of Camrose I'd like to present this paper on the electoral boundaries review. The council of the county of Camrose No. 22 appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the review of the electoral divisions in Alberta.

With respect to the review we agree that the commission must

carefully examine two issues: effective and fair representation for all Alberta residents, including rural Alberta, and effective and fair representation for municipal governments. We recognize the importance of maintaining an equal distribution of population in the 83 provincial electoral divisions. However, we also believe that population density, sparseness, and electoral division sizes should be taken into consideration.

The commission must carefully examine the responsibilities and the demands that will be placed on rural MLAs. While an MLA in a large urban centre will represent an area consisting of a few square miles with one city council and two school boards, a rural MLA will represent a vast area that can extend over hundreds of kilometres, with several municipal and school jurisdictions. The time required for a rural MLA to effectively represent his or her constituency is far greater than the time required in a large city. To provide effective and fair representation to rural Albertans, the population of some rural electoral divisions will be less than the urban areas.

The distribution of existing electoral divisions already has 40 MLAs representing the two major cities in Alberta, with Calgary having 21 and Edmonton having 19. When you add the representatives from other urban centres – Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, et cetera – the urban MLAs already outnumber the rural MLAs. In fact, in Edmonton and Calgary there are more electoral divisions than there are city councillors. A further increase in the number of MLAs representing Calgary and Edmonton and other major centres is not really required. The current number can more than adequately represent the interests of urban areas of the province.

We would encourage the commission to look at trading patterns and community interests when drafting the electoral boundaries. The county of Camrose is currently divided among three electoral divisions: Ponoka-Rimbey, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and Leduc. Though our three MLAs have done a marvelous job of representing our interests, we believe that the county of Camrose should ideally be in one constituency. We would propose that the Camrose riding consist of the county of Camrose and the urban centres within the county. Together these places make up a community of interests, share trading and traveling patterns, schools, and social services.

The municipalities affected are the city of Camrose with a population of 14,854, Bashaw with a population of 825, Bawlf with 362, Bittern Lake with 221, Edberg with 150, Ferintosh with 150, Hay Lakes with 346, New Norway with 292, Rosalind with 190, and the county of Camrose with 7,294, for a total of 24,684. We realize that some additional area might have to be included in the constituency to increase the population, but we find it unacceptable that the county of Camrose has to be divided into three constituencies. To provide fair representation, where possible rural municipalities should be contained within one electoral division. Our council believes that a balance must be maintained in the provincial Legislature to ensure that the interests of all Albertans are represented. We do not believe that representation from rural Alberta should be sacrificed for the sake of providing increased representation in Calgary and Edmonton.

During the past 10-plus years the council of the county of Camrose has written numerous letters and made representation to the previous electoral boundaries commission. Unfortunately, our input does not appear to have any impact on the map of electoral divisions. We hope this commission will take our input seriously and not provide a further erosion of representation from rural Alberta. Rural Albertans are entitled to fair and equitable representation in the provincial Legislature.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Jim.

Anything you'd like to add, Brian?

Mr. Austrom: Well, basically, as you and I discussed before, we know that there's legislation that dictates what you have to work with. We've had a chance to look at the map over here, and we certainly appreciate the concern that you as board members are faced with. But at the same time, having said that, there's also a need in our opinion, from our council and many of our representatives in the rural area, to not erode that representation further. You know, we've seen over the years what's happening, and unfortunately the growth is occurring in the urban centres. We challenge you to look at a map that maybe has a bit larger population in the urban centres and keep some of the smaller ones under the population. We know you can't have more than four that are at the 50 percent, but I do believe that that variance allows you to design a map that's going to maintain some of that representation so that our MLAs in rural Alberta, who have many municipalities in a spread-out area, can provide us with effective representation. We don't believe that the cities need more.

The Chair: I'm very surprised at that view. I thought that when you started out, you were going to wonder about the sanity of the five of us for taking on this job.

Mr. Austrom: I have to empathize with you, you know. You have a challenge in front of you.

The Chair: Bauni, do you want to start?

Ms Mackay: In your submission you say that you recognize that perhaps just using the county of Camrose and the city of Camrose won't be a large enough constituency, but you would see adding areas. What areas would you add?

Mr. Hillaby: Our natural trading area is more to the east, and our natural flow of traffic, our highway systems, are set up mostly going to the east.

Ms Mackay: So would that include some towns?

Mr. Hillaby: Yes, it would.

Ms Mackay: Just so that I've got this in my mind, what would be the names?

Mr. Austrom: Basically, the county of Flagstaff, with the towns and villages in it, amounts to 10,000 people. We haven't discussed that with them though.

The Chair: Where are they now?

Mr. Austrom: In Wainwright. The natural trading area for that community is coming through to Camrose.

The Chair: One of the suggestions that we heard when we were in Edmonton was that some of the people from I think it was the county of Leduc – and I'm not sure they'd discussed it with you either. The point was made that there is a part of the county of Camrose which is in the Leduc constituency, and they were quite keen about giving that back to LeRoy. Wasn't that the gist of it?

Mr. Hillaby: That area naturally flows into Camrose.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for coming. This is very helpful to us in trying to determine what we have to do.

Just a little preamble before I ask my question, Mr. Chair. We have Calgary-Shaw, with 85,000 people in it. Of course, our job is compounded by the fact that the Legislature has said that there'll be 83, so our main thing is to try and avoid a court challenge. We don't know where that will come from, so we have to not only follow the requirements we've set out – I don't mean to disappoint you with this, but even if we took in the county of Flagstaff, we probably still would be a bit below. My question to you is: in addition to that, what other area would you consider, if we have to? This is a hypothetical question.

Mr. Hillaby: I would think that something to the east or northeast or southeast in there that kind of naturally flows into our trading area would be the natural choice. But if you're talking about Calgary and whatnot, if you look at your centre districts in Calgary, they are shrinking, whereas your outlying areas are growing. You would just have to move your boundaries in the city.

The Chair: It's your turn, Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, gentlemen. I want to follow up on Bauni. Bauni made the statement that it makes it easier for us. I'm not too sure if she's right there. When you bring in a proposal for 24,000, I'm not too sure if that makes it easier for us. I hope I'm not mistaken, but I believe that when we look at this, Wetaskiwin is now in this riding, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and it does make the numbers pretty good. I think it's around 34,611. You know, the legislation will not allow us to – we've had several of these before. I mean, we can obviously make a nice neat little constituency, but it doesn't really follow the legislation. Secondly, we'd have to have 125 constituencies in Alberta if we're going to be at all fair. I think Ernie did ask the questions in your brief here. There has to be some expansion to that – there's just no other way for it – and I think you did mention the county of Flagstaff. Is that what you said?

9:29

Mr. Hillaby: Yeah.

Mr. Clegg: I'm not too sure. Have you got any numbers?

Mr. Austrom: Ten thousand. They have Killam, Sedgewick. There are about 10 smaller communities. Their total population is about 10,000, and they're also part of the same school board as the county of Camrose. The county of Beaver is also in that too. There are approximately 10,000 people within their boundaries. It might be slightly less than that.

Mr. Clegg: My final question. Wetaskiwin is in with Camrose now. Is there a problem with that?

Mr. Austrom: The reality of our county – and we're not the city of Camrose; we're the county of Camrose.

Mr. Clegg: I understand that.

The Chair: The mayor is next.

Mr. Austrom: We're not complaining about being with them. We're actually asking to put all of our county with them. Right now our county is divided into three constituencies. Within our county we have seven of our own electoral divisions. Two of those, divisions 6 and 7 on the north side, are part of the Leduc constituency. Three of them, divisions 1, 2, and 3 in the south part

of our county, are at the very end of Ponoka-Rimbey. Although Albert Klapstein and Halvar Jonson have done a wonderful job of representing us, have been very good MLAs, we have three MLAs dividing up a population of 7,000 people.

Although you say that we're with Wetaskiwin – Garry Dearing is here from the county of Wetaskiwin, and we work on a lot of committees with them – our interests are divided amongst three areas and three MLAs. So when we're trying to work on things, we're just a small portion, a very small population of the Leduc constituency. We're a very small population of a constituency, Ponoka-Rimbey, that runs from our east boundary all the way out past Rimbey to the west boundary of the county of Ponoka. We're sort of on the end of those, and we're saying that we should be perhaps back in one constituency. In the days when we had Ken Rostad, we still had two. We had Don Getty as part of ours down in the Stettler one, but we've been getting divided up, and we're saying: well, let's bring it back together.

Mr. Clegg: So no wonder the county of Wetaskiwin gets everything. They've got three MLAs working for them. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Austrom: Well, in the county of Camrose we have three MLAs. That is not always a disadvantage. But the county of Wetaskiwin also, I think, has three MLAs.

Mr. Clegg: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: I think we should move on.
Mr. Graham.

Mr. Graham: The great advantage of having smart people on the panel is that they ask all your questions, so I don't have any further questions to ask. All my concerns have been asked.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Gentlemen, thank you very much. We will certainly keep very much in our minds your representation. I'm sure that in the next commission, when that time rolls around again, I won't be involved, but I'll look forward to reading your assessment as to how well we did compared to the last commission.

Mr. Austrom: Thank you.

Mr. Hillaby: Thank you for giving us the opportunity.

The Chair: I'd like to call on His Worship the mayor of Camrose. Your Worship, thank you very much for being with us this morning. You heard my opening remarks, and I'm not going to go through that again. We look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Mayer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, commission members. I have handed out a presentation letter and also a map of what we are suggesting as a possible amendment to the electoral boundaries. An observation I made while I was listening to the county of Camrose is that while we probably should have found time to get together to do this presentation or to do some consultation, we did not. Yet it's rather interesting that a number of suggestions are very similar between the county's presentation and our own.

Before I get into a little more trouble here, I should introduce our city manager, Gary Gibeault, who has joined me to answer all the tough questions.

I think that if you have that handout, you will note that a lot of the comments being made are also our concerns. We haven't any, I

guess, bad vibes about Wetaskiwin being part of our constituency, but I think the constituency should consist of the majority of people with common areas: trading areas, common areas of relationship back and forth between the various councils and the counties themselves. Wetaskiwin and Millet are great people, but they are not our trading partners, and I think we would like to see this expansion to the east, as we're showing here. We're suggesting, again, basically that we think it should include the county of Camrose, although on the south end you will note that we do have the line across which excludes a portion of the county of Camrose, namely Bashaw, again respecting that most of their day-to-day business is probably more in common with places like Stettler or Lacombe, Ponoka, that area. We tried to round it out. Now, the numbers of people that we are proposing to bring into this would probably put us in the area of some 31,000 to 32,000 people with the expansion to the east and the northeast, which, as I say, is basically a trading area for the city of Camrose.

I can appreciate the difficulty of your task in trying to fit in the extra number of individuals in the province of Alberta that occur in the major centres, and I also appreciate that your legislation ties your hands to some extent, but maybe it's time that the legislation was also looked at. Maybe we should not try to arrive at an even split of individuals in a constituency to the detriment of rural Alberta. I think it was pointed out earlier that an individual who is representing a constituency in Calgary or Edmonton can probably do so with a lot less effort than someone in rural Alberta because of the terrain and the distances that they have to cover. Again, in the various areas, in Calgary or in Edmonton, I think there is some commonality probably between the areas in the various sections of the city, and maybe that population should be up to 50,000 or 60,000 or 70,000 to be handled by one MLA as opposed to try to average it out and wind up taking MLA representation out of the rural part of the province. I think rural Alberta is as important to the province of Alberta as any other constituencies, and I guess I would like to see it reviewed and protected on that basis if at all possible.

We do make some comments in our submission outlining, as I say, the areas and acknowledging that we probably are not reaching the ideal numbers, but again I think that's something that has to be weighted in favour of: what is fair representation as opposed to just the mathematics of the population?

9:39

I sympathize with the county of Camrose in that while they've had good MLAs, you're dealing with a group where your common interests are not the same. I guess that what we would like to recommend and see happen is that consideration be given to the expansion of the constituency to the east, to what is a common trading area. The school division takes in the majority of the areas we're suggesting here again as a common boundary. The regional district for the hospitals, East Central No. 7, takes in a larger area than that, but again it moves to the east and then to the northeast from Camrose. Again we have the common service factor that is to the benefit of the individuals in those areas. So we would appreciate your consideration along those lines. As I say, we're not saying that we shouldn't have the southern portion of the county of Camrose in some other constituency. I guess I'm just respecting their trading area as I'm saying that we would like you to respect the trading area for the county and the city of Camrose going east as opposed to necessarily the south.

I think that probably covers most of the comments. As I say, I appreciate that you do have your hands tied to some extent with the legislation. I don't know whether it's in the mandate for this commission or not, but maybe something that has to be looked at in the future is that if we're not increasing the numbers – and I'm not

advocating that as far as MLAs are concerned. I think we have to possibly increase the population that an MLA in the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton may be responsible for as opposed to what the rural MLAs do because of the challenges they have in covering their territory. Having said that, Wetaskiwin at one stage I think was part going north to Leduc, and I think those areas again have a lot in common. Where their presentation will come from I don't know, but that would seem to me to be a common trading area basis to give some consideration to.

I thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.
Gary?

Mr. Gibeault: No. I have nothing further to add at this time.

The Chair: Even though I introduced you?

Mr. Gibeault: Yeah.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you. Thank you for the presentation. It's certainly helpful. First, I want to remark that we've heard that both in rural and in urban, that the trading patterns or community – you know, there is a commonality both in urban and rural, so we certainly take that comment under advisement.

I just wonder when I look at the old map and I look at the proposed electoral division – and maybe you don't want to answer – why we have got all of these little crooks. You know, we've heard in several places that people have a difficult time, especially when the boundaries are changed, to know where they're voting. When I look at this map, I see that it looks like a mile here and half a mile there. For the proposed electoral division are there some natural boundaries? I don't understand that.

Mr. Mayer: Sure. When you're saying "little crooks," we're not talking about the MLAs here now. We're talking about the road designs, right?

Mr. Clegg: The modern ones, yeah.

Mr. Mayer: I couldn't resist.

The Chair: Well, we're not talking about mayors either.

Mr. Mayer: Well, we sure hope not. Or reeves.

What we've tried to do there basically is follow a highway or a main divisional road, and that's the significance of where they cut off. They're following boundaries that are distinguishable from existing maps at this stage.

Mr. Gibeault: They're also following the boundaries that the current . . .

The Chair: Municipal?

Mr. Gibeault: No. These divisions like 48, 47, 51. We didn't take any liberties in changing the boundaries that you already have, and I don't know what the significance of those little areas is. It could be straightened out for sure. We have no objection to that. There is a correction line through Camrose on highway 26 that jogs everything about a quarter of a mile, but other than that, no, it could be straightened out considerably more than this.

Mr. Clegg: Yeah. We've heard it lots of times, and if you can get a straight border when they go to vote, it's easier for them to decide where they should be voting, especially when you change the boundaries all the time.

Thank you.

Mr. Graham: Your Worship, I've been through your city a few times on hockey junkets, and it always strikes me as one of the most beautiful and prosperous communities in the province. I think you're very lucky to live there.

I have two questions. I have a general question and a specific question. I'll ask you the specific question first. If we included this little jog at the bottom including Bashaw, how many people would that add to your constituency roughly?

Mr. Mayer: My best guess there – and I may turn to Jim or Brian for a little help – is that I think we'd be talking about a thousand people possibly.

Mr. Austrom: Probably closer to 1,500. Bashaw has 800 people.

Mr. Mayer: Okay. So roughly 1,500 people there.

Mr. Graham: All right.

The more general question I have is this. As Bob has indicated, we spent the last few days going through the eastern part of the province down through Wainwright and Chinook and so forth, and of course we've heard the representations with respect to the difficulty of representation of rural MLAs versus urban MLAs, but my question is this: in your mind is there a distinction between a constituency such as yours with a reasonably large size and prosperous community in the centre and one like, for instance, Chinook or Lesser Slave Lake, which are not as blessed as yours? If so, what would that distinction be, and would it be – well, is there a distinction, and what is it, with respect to effective representation?

Mr. Mayer: Again I'm not privileged to have the figures for those particular areas, but I guess what we're looking at is a compact block of trading area which an MLA could cover probably on the outside of an hour and a half drive, say, from Camrose.

Now, as far as the people in Chinook or other locations, it may be a requirement for that MLA to have to spend three hours in the car, but again that is the area where you have to evaluate the criteria of population. Maybe we've only got 10,000 or 12,000 people in a constituency that should have the same representation as we have. Our situation is probably getting closer to what I was suggesting about the major centre in that an MLA in this area could handle it fairly well for that roughly 30,000-plus people, yet an MLA in Calgary or Edmonton could handle double that. While we're talking about two times the number of people, we're probably not talking about double the job, because again I think you have a lot of similar interest people in the various areas, and I think they could probably look after it there. So I guess I would rather personally see the numbers increased in the major centres, and I would like to see people like those in Chinook have their fair representation even if they only have 10,000 or 12,000 people or whatever it might be in what's a logical service area.

Mr. Graham: So what I'm hearing you say, if I'm correct, is that it's harder in a place like Chinook than Camrose, but you think the cities are easier to represent than a place like Camrose, and you're somewhere in the middle. Is that what I hear you saying?

Mr. Mayer: Yes. That would be where I'm coming from on that. Again I think you have the ability to service more people because of

proximity. That would be where I come from on that.

The Chair: If I could just follow that up, just a certain amount of blue skying it here, Your Worship. Edmonton might be amongst the easiest places to represent from just because of proximity, and then the corridor and Calgary might be kind of a second phase and then – and I think Doug was referring to this – places where you have a city and the area around it might be kind of level 3. I hear you saying, then, that the Wainwrights of the world or the Chinooks of the world or . . .

Mr. Clegg: Dunvegan.

The Chair: Well, we won't go there.

Mr. Mayer: No. We have to give them fair representation as well.

The Chair: Yes, but that would kind of be the fourth, if I can say, level. You're agreeing that that would obviously be the toughest because they don't have the city services that government departments would have and so on.

9:49

Mr. Mayer: That's right. But because of that, I don't think they should be deprived of having someone in that area. If we are going to service the major centres by doing a switch of MLA representation, then obviously the rural areas are the ones who are going to suffer. Those are going to be the areas that will be expanded to meet this magic number of population, and the MLAs will have a whole lot more territory to cover, whereas I'm suggesting that maybe we take it a twist the other way and let them have the ability of having fewer numbers in a constituency of that nature but still having representation.

The Chair: You sparked another question from Mr. Graham.

Mr. Graham: I just have one follow-up, and this may be either for you or your manager. Are you aware of what your population growth rate is or has been in Camrose?

Mr. Gibeault: Yes. We've averaged 2.2 percent over the last three years, which is basically on our historical average. We historically have averaged about 2 percent over the last 40 years. It has some highs and lows in that period, but the last three years have been pretty good to us at 2.2. We've had some very good growth in Camrose of late.

The Chair: When one is going to a Kodiak game, all you have to do is watch what's happening on the west side of the city; don't you?

Mr. Gibeault: Yeah.

Ms Mackay: Maybe you said this, but the part that's in the pink line but isn't in the blue line, in all that part – Ryley, Holden, Viking, and all that. Have you conferred with them? Is this something that they would like to do too?

Mr. Mayer: No, we have not conferred with anyone. As I indicated at the beginning, we have not even sat down and discussed it with the county council as such. I did run it by the reeve. At the time we probably had both our presentations prepared, and like I was saying, I think it's coincidental maybe that that's the feeling of that district, that area, that that's the areas we should have. So we haven't run it by them, but again I think the people in Killam, Viking, Holden, Ryley have more things in common with Camrose as trading partners than they do up in the Vegreville area or the

Lloydminster area, as the case may be.

Mr. Gibeault: Or Wainwright.

Mr. Mayer: Or Wainwright. Yeah. It's totally out of my boundary, but I guess Wainwright and Lloydminster in my mind would have more in common as a combined situation for a constituency realignment as I feel probably Wetaskiwin, Millet, and Leduc do, but I can't speak for their feelings. They may be totally opposed to that type of idea, but I think the common bonds are there in those areas.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for coming this morning. I appreciate the detail you've given us here. In your remarks, Your Worship, you indicated, as your predecessors in their presentation, this problem of representation in the large cities and then in the rural areas. Of course, one of the basic concepts we're faced with is getting close to one person, one vote or some kind of parity or equitable closeness to that. If we get too far away from that, then of course that's where we're subject to court challenge. Doug has some court cases you might want to look at if you are interested in it. So this is a problem.

One of the submissions that we heard – I guess it was from Mr. Jack Horner in Drumheller – indicated that the city of Calgary is probably going to continue to grow, 856,000 people now, and Edmonton is going to grow. This urban/rural situation is going to keep on getting worse, yet we have this one person, one vote concept, which is a basic, fundamental part of democracy. So he had suggested that maybe we need to take – and you've alluded to it – another whole look at how we can protect or enable rural areas to be represented. One of the suggestions was the concept of a second House, maybe elected by proportional representation or something of that nature, because this is going to get worse as the years go by and we're faced with this. Any thoughts on that, Your Worship?

Mr. Mayer: I guess right off the top of my head I would not be opposed. It becomes representation, and I think it would depend on the manner in which this was developed and set up. I guess you may be looking at an MLA and maybe a deputy MLA type of idea, that would have contact for the individuals to be able to get their representation directly to the government. So I would not be opposed to probably looking at something like that, because I agree with you: the cities are going to get larger, and the rural areas are going to get smaller. While it's a choice of lifestyle by a lot of these people, it doesn't mean that they should be deprived of having the opportunity of access to the government.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Your Worship. We do appreciate very much your taking the time to be with us this morning and for your frankness. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mayer: I thank you very much also.

Thanks for your great comments, Mr. Graham. It is a fantastic city.

The Chair: I'm very pleased to welcome Mr. Larry Majeski from the county of Leduc. We look forward to your comments, Larry, and I hope you look forward to our questions. Thanks very much for coming.

Mr. Majeski: Thank you very much. Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the commission. I'm here to make the presentation on behalf of Leduc county council. Our reeve, Ed Chubocha, and members of council have other meeting commitments this morning

so extend their regrets at being unable to attend.

Leduc county is located within two Alberta electoral divisions, being No. 50, Drayton Valley-Calmar, and No. 60, Leduc. We wish to highlight the following points, firstly specific to Leduc county. Geographically Leduc county is a large municipality of over 2,600 square kilometres or, for those metrically challenged, a little over a thousand square miles.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Majeski: Leduc county is very diverse, and representation by two MLAs enables residents with common interests and specific issues to be represented by an MLA who better understands their particular issues. Leduc county council has had very positive experiences working with two MLAs on various countywide issues with all ratepayers being well served. Both Alberta electoral divisions 50 and 60 are within the acceptable population range. Leduc county council therefore supports the existing electoral boundaries.

Moving to concerns about the future of rural Alberta, I have a number of specific points that council wishes to relay. Rural constituencies must have effective representation. The right to vote means the right to effective representation. Without effective representation the right to vote can be rendered meaningless. Alberta citizens have a right to an accessible MLA. If constituencies in the less populated areas of the province were to be forced into a rep-by-population scheme, they would have to be of such a vast size that the local MLA's ability to effectively meet the needs of his or her constituents would be severely compromised. As a result, not only would the number of rural representatives be drastically reduced but the quality of that representation as well.

Rural ridings lack the media and other resources available to urban ridings. Rural voters therefore need more information and assistance directly from their MLA. Rural voters are less transient than urban voters are. They are more likely to know their MLA and are therefore more comfortable with contacting and making more demands of the MLA. Rural MLAs have greater logistical barriers to overcome than do their urban counterparts. Basic infrastructure, snow removal, communication lines, local road maintenance, et cetera, are more problematic in rural areas and can be a significant impediment to rural MLAs in the day-to-day conduct of their business.

9:59

Due to their size rural ridings often include several municipal jurisdictions. This means that rural MLAs may have to serve multiple school boards, health authorities, and so forth. This requires a greater commitment of time and resources to constituency affairs than urban MLAs are required to make.

Agriculture remains a vital component of Alberta's economy. A strong rural voice is needed to promote and protect the interests of the agricultural sector. Alberta's economy continues to be heavily dependent on natural resource 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 rural infrastructure, environmental concerns, and other concerns. The wide diversity of geographic, economic, and demographic differences from region to region requires that all areas of the province be well represented in the Legislative Assembly.

In conclusion, Leduc county council would like to encourage members of the commission to recommend to the province that the existing boundaries for electoral divisions 50 and 60 remain as they are, that the existing names for the electoral divisions of Drayton Valley-Calmar and Leduc remain the same, and that the commission,

when determining the electoral divisions within Alberta, consider the geographic size of each constituency, which clearly affects the ability of MLAs to maintain meaningful contact with constituents to ensure that there is effective representation from rural Alberta.

Thank you on behalf of Leduc county council for the opportunity to present to the commission.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Larry. I'm sure, without looking, that Mr. Patterson will have a question for you. Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for this presentation.

You're bordering on the south side of Edmonton. I'm just wondering what your reaction would be if we were to say to you – and this is a hypothetical question – that one or more of the Edmonton constituencies were to come out into Leduc county. Well, I know what you're hoping for here. I just wanted to ask what your reaction would be to that. It might not come out very far but, say, a portion.

The Chair: I note the enthusiasm.

Mr. Majeski: That's a very perhaps awkward question for me to look at, but I know there are areas – now, it may be the other way around, perhaps Leduc constituency considering going the other way, and not very far I might say. There are portions, strips of the southern portion of Edmonton, that are still of sort of a rural nature. They've not yet been developed, that kind of a thing. So I'm not sure about a strong mix of an urban, intensified development stretching into the rural area. I don't know how well that would be for common interest there.

Mr. Patterson: If I might, Mr. Chair. Just following up on your suggestion of going the other way, could you elaborate a little bit more about Leduc county going north into the city? You said that there's some area that's not developed there.

Mr. Majeski: Yeah. There are undeveloped portions along the south boundary of the common border that we do share with Edmonton that are by and large agricultural or country residential in nature yet.

Mr. Patterson: Do they have many people living in that area?

Mr. Majeski: I don't have a number. It's a strip of an area that used to be part of Strathcona county a number of years ago.

Mr. Patterson: Oh, I see. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg?

Mr. Clegg: No questions. Thank you for the presentation.

Mr. Graham: I have a query for you. I don't have a proper map in front of me, and even if I did, I probably wouldn't know the answer. When I've been through your area and driven through the areas adjacent to it, I note that out to the east there seems to be quite an industrial area of Leduc proper and that it seems to be developing and growing like crazy: a lot of machine shops and that sort of thing. Is that in your county, or is that in Edmonton or in the city of Leduc? What is it?

Mr. Majeski: Leduc county. I'll maybe take a moment to brag. Leduc county is home to one of the largest industrial parks in

western Canada at least, if not in Canada, and that's the Nisku Industrial Park.

Mr. Graham: Right.

Mr. Majeski: That area is within the county, and we have somewhere nearing probably 500 businesses that are within there. It is in and of itself a fairly large urbanized-type area. There's not a population there, but it does require a lot of attention and interest. An MLA would certainly have some issues there to consider as well.

Mr. Graham: So the Nisku Industrial Park is part of your county.

Mr. Majeski: That's correct.

We're home to the International Airport as well. There are some 3,000-plus workers there plus the travel activity through that airport.

Mr. Graham: You can answer this or not answer it. In your mind does the fact that you've got the International Airport and this large industrial park in your county give you some commonality of interest or trading pattern with Edmonton?

Mr. Majeski: I take it more so that we're probably more of a subregion. We have a total of 10 other urban municipalities within our county. We do share common boundaries with seven others as well, including Edmonton.

Mr. Graham: Thank you for clarifying that for me.

Mr. Majeski: It's a little different; yeah.

The Chair: Bauni?

Ms Mackay: No. That's fine. Thanks.

Mr. Patterson: Just one more question if I might, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: We hear a lot about the Edmonton regional governance concept. I'm just wondering if the county of Leduc is involved in that in any way and what your feelings are about that. We have the city of Edmonton and then the surrounding municipalities, so I guess the first question . . .

The Chair: The only question.

Mr. Patterson: Is Leduc involved in that?

Mr. Majeski: No. We are a member of the Alberta Capital Region Alliance.

Mr. Patterson: Yes; right. That's what I'm referring to.

Mr. Majeski: Yes, we are.

Mr. Patterson: Do you see that changing the whole concept of more involvement and interaction between the municipalities than currently occurs, or is it just kind of a nice place to go and talk?

Mr. Majeski: Well, I think it offers a forum for good communication between municipalities across the capital region. There are 21 or 22 members of that alliance. It gives them an opportunity from the promotional aspect of economic development

for the region, the larger area, you know, when talking of global promotion, sharing information from services between municipalities and amongst municipalities. There are activities such as that that are occurring.

There was one other point that I wanted to respond to regarding the industrial park further to Mr. Graham's question. I think Nisku is a park that generally has within it a large component that services the energy patch, so it deals more with activities provincially and internationally. You have several companies there dealing internationally out of Nisku now. The other component is generally agriculture based, so I think it's somewhat of a bit of a different spin-off.

The Chair: Just following along on Mr. Patterson's question. One of the difficulties we're grappling with is: what do we do with adjacent areas like St. Albert and Sherwood Park? Calgary, wisely or unwisely, depending upon your point of view, got those areas into the city years ago. We have these two areas right adjacent to Edmonton. Would it be fair to say that there's been a distinct lack of enthusiasm for areas adjacent to the city being included in Edmonton constituencies? That's from some of the areas where we've asked it. What's your take on that?

Mr. Majeski: I guess people have chosen to reside where they do because of whatever particular reasons. You know, it's a lifestyle or whatever. I guess if they weren't there, might there be something that would replace them if they were consolidated? Would those people necessarily be happy to be in and form part of a larger sector? There is some reason why they have made the choice that they have over the years. We have a lot of people living in the rural part, on farms and on acreages, that move there because of the particular lifestyle.

10:09

The Chair: On that happy note I guess you can see the difficulty of our challenge; can't you?

Mr. Majeski: I understand.

The Chair: Thank you very, very much for your presentation, Larry. We appreciate it very much.

I'd like to now ask the Wetaskiwin-Camrose PC Association to make their presentation. I'd like to welcome Mr. Curtis Vesely to make a presentation to us. Curtis, you've been here and you heard what we're trying to do, what we're up to. Once you've finished, then we're going to take a short break. That's not meant to speed you up. It's just to let the other people know what we're going to do. They'll sit here and listen with rapt attention as they know they're going to get a coffee after you've finished. Okay. Curtis, if you would, please.

Mr. Vesely: Well, first of all, I'd like to say good morning to the chair and to the rest of the panel as well. On this boundary review I'm making this presentation on behalf of the Wetaskiwin-Camrose PC Association.

With myself as president of this riding association, we, being the directors, discussed this boundary review at our last directors' meeting here in April. We discussed being in existence since the last boundary changes in 1992. As history has noted, prior to 1992 Wetaskiwin and Millet were in part of the Leduc corridor in that constituency, and the balance of our eastern area of Wetaskiwin-Camrose was together. Camrose was in their own separate riding. We have been working well together as an association since that time, since 1992 and since the 1993 election. Good representation

has been essential to any success of an association. There have been good volunteers from the whole riding, and likewise there had been prior as well. We don't believe that there has been any misrepresentation of any part of this present riding. There may always be a difference of opinion, but every area has tried to be treated fairly.

We have three centres in this riding, being the cities of Camrose, Wetaskiwin, and the town of Millet, with populations that make up nearly 70 percent of the population in this riding. The rural folks make up the balance of this population of 34,000. Since the 1993 election there has always been a commitment to have two constituency offices available to the public in this riding, which has also worked out. We try to have that work out well.

According to the list of the 2001 population census the riding of Wetaskiwin-Camrose falls in place, and being average is a good place to be. Our variance is under 3.7 percent of the average of the 35,950 population figure per riding that is required. We may not be the perfect riding, but our view is that we would choose to stay the same in this review. We are not requesting a major change, so we don't require the divorce papers yet.

Now, if we were to put into the equation the variance and the probabilities of an increase in population for this province in the next 10 years, we would choose to have our boundaries expanded in size totally. As we the riding fall into the highway 2 corridor, we see that the population increase in this riding is inevitable, and it has been increasing as time has gone on here. Whether folks are coming to this area for employment or retirement, we don't see a negative impact on the population base here, so it will always be increasing.

That's basically all we have to say at the present time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, nothing specific. Thanks, Curtis for your remarks. We're always happy when somebody else is happy. It makes our job easier. Certainly, you know, there's always the domino effect, especially in the cities. When you move one boundary, then there's an effect, and it's no different in rural Alberta. Certainly we do appreciate your submission, and we hope we can satisfy everybody in Alberta.

Mr. Vesely: Well, as the riding association has been in existence since 1993, since the '93 election, we have been working together. There is no serious split amongst us. We're happy at the present time with our existence.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: No question at this point. Thank you very much.

Mr. Graham: I wasn't quite clear, and maybe I just missed it. Did you say that if your boundaries were moved in a certain direction, it should be a certain direction? I'm sorry; I just missed that part.

Mr. Vesely: No. We didn't ask for a specific direction. We'd said that we would like to see it increased in size totally, but as far as a specific direction, we haven't recommended that at all, no. Any which way would be quite all right for us.

Mr. Graham: Okay.

Ms Mackay: I don't have any questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Well, Curtis, thank you very much, and I

appreciate your submission.

We'll now take a break for coffee. Next we'll have Mr. Garry Dearing, the reeve of the county of Wetaskiwin.

[The commission adjourned from 10:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.]

The Chair: Mr. Dearing and I were farming over there for a few minutes during the coffee break. Garry, welcome. We look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Dearing: Thank you and good morning, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, committee members. On behalf of the county of Wetaskiwin I would like to take this opportunity to offer our council's comments on the issue of effective representation and electoral boundaries. I would like to commend the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission on undertaking these consultations to provide Albertans the opportunity to contribute to the review process.

I would like to express that the county of Wetaskiwin is grateful for the excellent representation that rural Alberta has traditionally received through our elected representatives in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. For most of Alberta's history rural citizens have been well represented, not only within the ranks of MLAs but also within the provincial cabinet. This representation has served to ensure that the government programs and priorities have been generally responsive to rural needs as well as to those of our urban neighbours.

Unfortunately, as Alberta's population has gradually concentrated more and more in urban areas, the number of rural representatives within the Legislative Assembly has slowly declined. This has not only reduced the ability of rural members to influence government policy due to the sheer numerical superiority of urban representatives, but it may also be starting to hinder the effectiveness of individual rural MLAs. Many rural MLAs are facing increasing challenges in representing constituencies which approach a geographic size of simply unmanageable magnitude. In other cases rural MLAs must represent constituencies with a dozen or more local government bodies and/or communities, often with conflicting needs and priorities. We are greatly concerned that many rural MLAs may have reached the limits of their effectiveness and simply cannot continue to effectively represent rural interests should the size of rural constituencies continue to increase.

We believe that the single most important function of any elected representative, whether at the provincial, federal, or municipal level, is to represent the priorities and needs of those who elected them. In order to carry out this function, elected representatives need to know what their constituents want and what their concerns are. It is only through face-to-face meetings that elected representatives can truly hear the concerns and passions of their constituents and be reminded that these concerns arise from living, breathing people, not from faceless phone numbers or e-mail addresses. It is only through face-to-face contact that electors will be able to truly feel that they have been heard, represented, respected, and that their government recognizes and respects their needs and priorities as individual citizens. In our view the continued trend towards larger and larger rural constituencies is creating a situation where rural MLAs cannot possibly maintain meaningful face-to-face contact with most constituents. Thus, we run the risk of a political system in which the large majority of rural residents feel alienated from their elected representatives.

The principle of effective representation provides all citizens with a meaningful voice in government. It recognizes that citizens in less populated areas also have the right to participate in discussions of democratic governments. Basing representation simply on population figures could effectively alienate citizens residing outside

of major population areas. We are aware that population must be a factor in the design of any system of electoral boundaries. However, we wish to note that effective representation is based on the following key points. The right to vote means the right to effective representation. Without effective representation the right to vote can be rendered meaningless.

Alberta citizens have a right to an accessible MLA. If constituencies in less populated areas of the province were to be forced into a rep-by-pop scheme, they would have to be of such a vast size that the local MLA's ability to effectively meet the needs of his or her constituents would be severely compromised. As a result, not only would the number of rural representatives be drastically reduced but the quality of that representation as well.

Rural ridings lack the media and other resources available to urban ridings. Rural voters need more information and assistance directly from their MLAs. Rural voters are less transient than urban voters are. They are more likely to know their MLA and are therefore more comfortable with contacting and making more demands on their MLA.

Rural MLAs have greater logistical barriers to overcome than do their urban counterparts. Basic infrastructure, snow removal, communication lines, local road maintenance, et cetera, are more problematic in rural areas and can be a significant impediment to rural MLAs in the day-to-day conduct of their business. Due to their size, rural ridings often include several municipal jurisdictions. This means that rural MLAs may have to serve multiple school boards, health authorities, et cetera. This requires a greater commitment of time and resources to constituency affairs than urban MLAs are required to make.

Agriculture remains a vital component of Alberta's economy. A strong rural voice is needed to promote and protect the interests of the agriculture sector. Alberta's economy continues to be heavily dependent on natural resource 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 rural infrastructure, environmental concerns, et cetera.

The wide diversity of geographic, economic, and demographic differences from region to region requires that all areas of the province be well represented in the Legislative Assembly. In designing electoral boundaries to achieve the goal of effective representation, we request that the following nonpopulation factors be considered: geographic size of the constituency, which clearly affects the ability of MLAs to maintain meaningful face-to-face contact with their constituents; distance of the community from the Legislative Assembly, given that the time required to travel to and from the Legislature reduces the time available for the MLA to meet with the constituents; number of local governments, school boards, and other community organizations within the constituency, given that each organization represents an important segment of the constituency's population with often different interests, and each has a need for regular contact with the local MLA. Designing electoral boundaries to follow municipal boundaries is one way of easing this challenge to a certain extent. Distance of a community from other major centres. Remote communities represent a unique set of challenges and priorities and often require individual representation. To simply amalgamate these communities into one huge constituency with the nearest available centre may effectively disenfranchise such communities.

We have a number of concerns with the present electoral boundaries in this area, and we will describe these objections later. However, these objections do not justify the expense and dislocation of yet another boundary adjustment. There have been several boundary adjustments in the past five elections. Every time this happens, the municipalities, school boards, health authorities, and all

the other local agencies that interact with the government have to build new relationships with new MLAs, who in turn have to learn about new areas and new issues. We believe that this is inefficient and a wasteful use of taxpayers' dollars. We have learned to work with the present boundaries and have developed relationships with our present MLAs. In the interest of cost savings we are prepared to continue with the present boundaries with some minor adjustments.

It is important to have municipal boundaries the same as riding boundaries because municipalities, school boards, health authorities, and other groups confer constantly with MLAs about secondary road priorities, school building programs, the role of hospitals and health centres, seniors' homes, the assessment system, and a whole range of other services which are paid for by the government but administered locally and regionally. These discussions are complicated by the number of participants. Imagine the conflicting pressures on the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey, whose constituents live in three separate school divisions, or how difficult it is for the county of Wetaskiwin to convince its three MLAs about secondary road priorities. It is extremely challenging to arrange a meeting with three MLAs, and of course the MLAs have divided loyalties as they also represent other municipalities. For this reason it is imperative that rural Alberta have constituency boundaries that respect municipal boundaries.

However, it is often not enough just to respect municipal boundaries. Increasingly government services are being provided on a regional basis. Regional health and school authorities are the best known. There is also an increasing number of voluntary intermunicipal service agencies being set up to provide assessment services, children's services, library services, and planning advice to member municipalities. As much as possible constituency boundaries should be coterminous with these regional authorities. If electoral boundaries in the Wetaskiwin area must be redrawn, we request that new boundaries maintain the Drayton Valley-Calmar boundary and include the small southeast Ponoka-Rimbey area of our county with the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. This is illustrated on the attached map.

10:40

The Chair: How many people would be involved there?

Mr. Dearing: A couple hundred. Not a large population.

In closing, I want to again stress the importance of this issue to rural Albertans.

The Chair: We don't have a map; do we?

Mr. Dearing: You're supposed to.

The Chair: Was there a map, Doug?

Mr. Olthof: I don't have a map.

Mr. Dearing: I can leave you mine.

The Chair: Just give Doug one, and he can get copies made for us. Thanks very much. Sorry to interrupt you.

Mr. Dearing: In closing, I would again stress the importance of this issue to rural Albertans. Unlike their urban counterparts rural Albertans rely on their MLAs for a wide variety of services and information. In urban centres there may be multiple sources of information on government programs and services and numerous agencies which can be the primary point of contact for any or all government-related inquiries or concerns. Rural Albertans expect

and require reasonable access to their elected representatives, and we welcome the government of Alberta's stated commitment to ensuring that this access is maintained.

We repeat that although the present constituency boundaries are not perfect and in some places violate the commission's guidelines, we believe that the cost and dislocation of new boundaries would outweigh the benefits of changing them. We recommend only one small change at this time. However, if the commission does see fit to redraw boundaries, we ask that municipal and other service boundaries be followed to the greatest possible extent.

We also recommend that electoral boundaries be reviewed not after every election but every 10 years after the Canada census figures are available. With this review based on the 2001 census figures, the next review should be made after the 2011 census is available.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments on this critical issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Garry. I should tell you that the suggestion of doing this every 10 years has been made to us before. It seems to make a lot of sense. The last commission dealt with figures that were three or four years old and just exacerbated the problem. On one hand, we have to use those figures, yet the figures were out as much as they were.

Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Garry, for the presentation. Being a rural MLA for 15 years, there's not too much in this that I can disagree with. I have one question however, and it's been brought up before. If we were to recommend – and it would only be a recommendation because that's not our mandate – that rural MLAs have more help, do you think that would help represent a rural riding?

Mr. Dearing: I guess you'd have to maybe define what you mean by "help."

Mr. Clegg: Well, instead of having one or two offices, have two offices and maybe have an EA or something in the offices.

Mr. Dearing: Speaking for our county, I feel that we have excellent representation through LeRoy, and we have lots of contact also with Tony if needed. We don't have a problem contacting them, and they seem to make time for us.

I guess our concern is that we're losing our rural MLAs quite fast lately. As we were talking earlier about agriculture programs and stuff, the way this year is turning out, we may need help again. It's not turning into a very good year, with the second year of a drought in most areas, and these types of programs are going to be hard for a few rural MLAs to get through with their urban counterparts, I think.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you, Garry.

The Chair: Bauni?

Ms Mackay: I don't have anything.

The Chair: Ernie?

Mr. Patterson: No, Mr. Chair. I just want to say thank you very much for your submission. Also, thank you for recognizing that we may end up having to make some changes and for your suggestions there.

Mr. Dearing: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Garry, might I say that the comments you make on page 4 about doing all we can to keep the boundaries coterminous with municipalities or counties and health regions – it seems to me that the most stable boundaries, if I can go out on a limb, are the municipal boundaries and the school boundaries, because we all hear that hospital boundaries may change, and children’s authorities are kind of trying to tie theirs to the hospital boundaries. Thanks for that comment. That’s a good observation.

Mr. Dearing: I can maybe leave you my presentation then, and there’s a map attached on the back.

The Chair: We’ve got them now.

Mr. Dearing: Sorry about that. I thought you had those earlier.

The Chair: Not a problem. Thanks very much.

The next presenter is Mr. Rob Snider. Rob, who are we going to be joined by?

Mr. Snider: Bettyann. She’s representing our local REA.

The Chair: Okay. Rob came up to me at the break and wanted to know if he could say a few words, and I said: as long as you can keep your few words under 10 minutes, we’d look forward to that.

Rob and Bettyann, thank you very much.

Mr. Snider: Well, I appreciate that the government of Alberta is giving us this chance.

The Chair: It’s the Legislature that’s doing this.

Mr. Snider: Oh, it’s the Legislature?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Snider: Of Alberta?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Snider: My concern is the same as everybody else’s: our constituencies are too large for the MLA to service. The Ponoka-Rimbey constituency is a long constituency going east and west. We are closer to Camrose. Myself, when I need information, I phone LeRoy because he seems to be our more local MLA, and we’ve gotten a good response from LeRoy. Halvar is so far away that it’s just about impossible for him to service our area. The Ponoka-Rimbey constituency extends all the way out to the Rosalind area. It’s just a narrow, long strip, and if there are changes, I would like to see us, the whole Camrose county, in the same constituency as Camrose is, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, because that’s our centre. That’s where our MLA – LeRoy is not really my MLA, but that’s where we would like to be represented, right there.

I think that Wetaskiwin county had a good submission there when they said that you should follow the county borders. It would help a lot. Camrose county is being divided into two constituencies, and that makes it very awkward.

The Chair: What was the particular community that you lived in?

Mr. Snider: New Norway.

The Chair: Any Obergs still there?

Mr. Snider: No, I don’t think so.

The Chair: A neighbour of mine was a Ross Oberg who grew up in New Norway.

Mr. Snider: I don’t think so.

The Chair: Okay.

So you’d like New Norway moved into Wetaskiwin-Camrose and out of Ponoka-Rimbey.

Mr. Snider: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Skagen: I’m actually here for two interests’ sake. I’m here representing the Battle River REA – REA stands for Rural Electrification Association – and one of our ongoing commitments is to be a strong advocate for the rural members, ensuring that their voice is heard. I would just like to reiterate that rural Albertans should have and have had effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. That is vital to rural Alberta: ensuring that our voice is heard.

My second interest is as a resident of the New Norway community. While I can appreciate the challenge that you have before you, I would also ask that you look at it as an opportunity to help maintain the viability of rural Alberta. The urban centres are growing. That is factual. However, the urban centres depend on the rural communities for strength. In many cities the industrial areas would not be there if it were not for the rural communities, the rural farmers. So I would ask that you look at it as an opportunity to make sure that rural Albertans have effective representation and to maintain the viability of rural Albertans. Our rural communities are a treasure and need to be maintained. They do not need any help in dissipating their voice.

Now, I understand that the population of Alberta is 2.9 million, and if you divide that by your 83, you’re looking at around 35,000.

The Chair: Thirty-six thousand.

10:50

Mrs. Skagen: Thirty-six thousand.

Now, where Calgary-Shaw does have 83,000, Camrose-Wetaskiwin has 34,000 roughly, and Ponoka-Rimbey has 31,000, it’s far more difficult for the MLAs in the rural areas to represent these people because of the distance they have to travel. Perhaps there should be a change in the legislation in these rules where it’s different from urban to rural.

The Chair: If I could just stop you there for just one second, there’s a lot of sympathy at this table for what you’re saying, but the Bill of Rights for Canada – Mr. Graham is far better at explaining this than I. Would you give us a two-minute dissertation, Doug?

Mr. Graham: Well, right. The rule is effective representation, so you don’t have to have a concern about that, and it has been subject to cases that have gone up to the Supreme Court of Canada. The decision was made that it is not strict rep by pop, that other factors can be taken into consideration, and we are taking those factors into consideration.

However, the two factors that are weighed if you look at the law the way it is – and I think it makes sense – are that every elector has

the right not to have their vote unduly diluted and every elector has the right to have the votes of other people diluted but not unduly. So there lies the tension point, and where that line is exactly is something that we're going to have to decide based on real, concrete factors in your constituency.

I hope that helps you.

The Chair: The only reason I asked is that it isn't only the Alberta legislation, because under the Bill of Rights even if it's Alberta legislation someone can challenge it. So quite honestly we're not very keen about doing a report and then having the darn thing challenged up to the Supreme Court. The ruling was made by Madam Justice McLachlin, who now is Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who, as I think most know, was born in Pincher Creek, Alberta.

So that's kind of the other side of the dilemma that we have, Bettyann. Sorry for interrupting you.

Mrs. Skagen: No. That's okay.

So with that I would agree, then, that for our rural MLAs, although they do provide good representation, I think it is far more difficult for them to reach the rural communities than it is for an urban MLA, and I would hope that that would be taken into consideration.

As well, I think the trading interests need to be considered. I am not suggesting any boundaries, although I can give you an example. The village of New Norway and part of Bawlf are in the Ponoka-Rimbey constituency, and although Halvar Jonson is very good, we do our trading in Camrose.

The Chair: Another bit of money.

Mrs. Skagen: Our sports are in Camrose, you see, and I'd just like you to consider that as well.

The Chair: Okay. Any questions of Bettyann or Rob?

Mr. Patterson: No. Just thank you.

The Chair: Rob, you're an example of coming to a session like this and you get a chance to just come up and tell us what you really think, you and Bettyann.

Thank you very, very much. Appreciate it.

Mr. Snider: Thanks for giving us your time.

Mrs. Skagen: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now for the man who we've been hearing all these good things about, LeRoy Johnson. That's quite an act, LeRoy.

Mr. Clegg: Have we made out a lot of cheques yet?

The Chair: LeRoy, thank you very much for coming.

He indicated to me that he didn't have a formal presentation, but I encouraged him to give us a bit of his advice. So within the constraints I mentioned to everybody else, LeRoy, we look forward to hearing your observations.

Mr. Johnson: Well, thank you very much. First of all, I'd like to say welcome to the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. It's great to have you here, and it's particularly good to have my former colleague Glen Clegg here. Whenever I visited up there, I was reminded that it was God's country of the north. This is God's

country of central Alberta then perhaps. Whatever, it's good to have all of you here. I'm attending this hearing mainly because I wanted to listen to see what my constituents were saying, in particular the municipalities, but I do have a few comments that I would like to make.

In reading your mandate, I think you have a very good mandate. I think it's well stated. As I look at the history of representation in Canada, I think there's a parallel between what has happened federally and what you're facing provincially. As I look at the history, I notice such things as a senatorial clause, I notice such things as Confederation compromise, and just those terms mean a lot. Mr. Patterson asked somebody a question about a second House. You realize that there's a need for senatorial thinking here, and that is thinking beyond representation by population. That's what we've been struggling with ever since 1867 in this country, so I certainly appreciate what you must be going through. I appreciate that so much concern that's being raised really centres around that very thing: representation by population, but representation by something beyond population. That's why we have a Senate I guess. In response to that comment, Mr. Patterson, I would certainly like to think about that more. I expect that we're too small to have a Senate in Alberta, and therefore we have to incorporate the advantages of a Senate into the representation that we have.

I refer to some of the comments that were made, particularly by the counties of Wetaskiwin and Camrose and Leduc. I heard such things as they like face-to-face representation. If I could speak as an MLA for a while, that means that as an MLA we want to make contact with as many groups and people in our constituency as possible. It's obvious that when we have more municipalities, more regional health authorities, more school boards, it just means that our time is split up more, so it's very, very difficult. I would like to underscore the comments that have been made that there have to be considerations other than just the number of people. The number of organizations and the sparsity are also very important.

In that regard when I hear things like one MLA is representing rural Alberta and another MLA is representing urban Alberta, I would like to say that I'm representing 'rurban' Alberta. I have two cities and I have a lot of rural Alberta here; that is, agricultural Alberta. Now, I know that we usually refer to all of Alberta other than Edmonton and Calgary as rural Alberta, but I think there is such a thing as 'rurban' Alberta because most of my people are in cities here. So I think it is possible to represent both rural and urban Alberta as an MLA, and when I hear that one MLA can only represent urban Alberta or another MLA only represent rural Alberta, I don't really like to hear that, because I think that we as MLAs are here to form a government from Alberta. It is not a case of one side that is urban and another side that is rural coming to a table and fighting things out to see who has the greatest vote in the end. I should have a mind-set so that I have a good concept of what Alberta is like. That means I should have made up my mind what is good for Alberta, and that means both rural and urban.

Now, if I'm going to do that, I have to be in contact with all of Alberta. So if I have many organizations that I have to be in contact with in my constituency and then also as an MLA have to be in contact with all of Alberta to know what's going on, that's a pretty horrendous job. I think it's important that the rural areas not be too large so that we do not have too many groups to represent because the more we have to represent, the narrower we would tend to be in our thinking that's in relation to the rest of Alberta, and I don't think that's good.

11:00

I have tried to have as many MLAs from around Alberta as

possible come to functions in this constituency so they get to know what's going on, and I have tried to go to other parts of Alberta as much as possible too, because I believe that is what will make a good MLA: somebody who is informed about both rural and urban Alberta. So I don't consider this as an adversarial thing, rural versus urban. We have to get away from that, and we have to think total Alberta. That means that MLAs have to be informed, and to be informed, I think that our constituencies should not be too large. So that's one point I did want to make that I feel is very important.

Now, in relation to this particular constituency, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, I can see you going two ways on this. Either there are going to be radical changes or there are going to be very minor changes. As I look around this constituency, I see a neighbouring constituency with a deviation of minus 21.7, another one of minus 14.1, another one of minus 22.3, another one of minus 19.6, and the only one that's plus is Leduc, at plus 3.9. So I can't see how you're going to be adding a lot to my constituency without affecting the neighbouring constituencies in an adverse way. Now, I know that what happens is that you have a domino effect, and maybe you have to look beyond or maybe there are changes that would allow more people to come into our constituency, and I would welcome that. I would welcome minor changes because I think, as has been pointed out by the county of Camrose and the counties of Wetaskiwin and Leduc, we should try to make the boundaries as coterminous as possible in terms of municipalities and counties so that we avoid splitting up as much as possible.

So if there are minor changes, then I'm quite happy to see this constituency stay the way it is. I think there is an advantage to staying the same from the point of view that an MLA gets to know his constituency well. There are many projects that take several years to work on, as you know, Mr. Clegg, and it takes years to reach a conclusion, so there are advantages to consistency. If there are going to be major changes, then I would certainly encourage you to look at some of the things that have been discussed, such as Camrose being the centre of a constituency, Wetaskiwin of another, and so on, but I won't get into that. I don't know just what you might have in mind as far as that is concerned, but in general I'm quite happy. In this constituency I think it's going reasonably well, but I would have no objection to minor changes if that's the case, and if you choose to go the major way, well, then I guess I would be happy to look at those as well.

The Chair: Thank you, LeRoy.
Any questions or comments?

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, LeRoy. It was great to have you up in Dunvegan and specifically Fairview. I did mention that it was God's country, and you can be God the second. I don't have any problem with that.

I certainly appreciate your remarks. You know, not all people give the same kinds of comments as you, because it seems to me that you could be flexible. It's very difficult for this commission when people say, well, they'd just draw out 25,000 people, and say: well, this is what we want. Obviously, LeRoy, you know that just isn't going to work, and you have the domino effect.

Thanks a million, LeRoy, for coming. It's great to see you again.

The Chair: Bauni, and then Mr. Patterson.

Ms Mackay: I have two questions. I appreciated your comments about an MLA having a provincial perspective. Would you say that it was equally important for the city MLAs to be able to get out into the countryside and become familiar with the rural issues?

Mr. Johnson: Most definitely, and I'm happy to say that many of my colleagues are very happy to do that.

Ms Mackay: But the size of their constituency and issues in their constituency should then be a factor in making sure that they, too, have the time to be able to do that.

Then the other one is: to what extent does communication technology – talking about e-mails, faxes, teleconferencing, and that – play a role in you performing your duties as a MLA in terms of your constituents? I mean, obviously you use it in terms of your legislative office, but in terms of the constituency does it make it easier? Do you use it?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I think so. More people are using e-mail all the time, and that's important. But as was pointed out earlier by Mr. Snider and others, there is such a thing as people liking personal contact, face-to-face contact. I know that presents a bit of an issue for me sometimes, particularly in the east end, because so many of the surrounding areas do trade in Camrose. So they come into Camrose, they come into my office, and they have questions about this and that. It creates a little bit of a problem, because I like to give good service, but really I'm not their MLA.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you, LeRoy. I just have to tell you that in Medicine Hat my friend Glen here was surprised that I had a few friends down there, so he's been counting the number of friends I have. I regard you as a friend, so I just want you to record that, please.

I found your reaction to the idea of a second House – it sounded like you might consider it. I'd just point out that in Montana, which has a population now – they've lost their second congressman; they've gone down in population. They've still got their two Senators, and they do have a second House, which is the Montana Senate, based on geographic representation. Of course, I know the problem we've got here. Everybody says, in a lot of the submissions that have been made to us, "Reduce the number of MLAs; we've got too many." In fact, I would say that probably the majority of the written submissions say that. But when we stop and think that another boundary commission will take place probably 10 or 11 years from now and the city of Calgary then will probably be somewhere well in excess of a million people, this is going to keep on getting worse. You know, not that I'm particularly in favour of more government, but we're going to have to do something to meet the court challenges and to do this.

I know, Mr. Chair, that isn't a question, but I hope you'll forgive me.

The Chair: I was just getting to that point.

Doug.

Mr. Graham: I don't have a question or a comment. A cheer might be in order though, because I thought that your perspective and your comments were amongst the best that we've heard. They were broad and thought-provoking and, you know, almost inspiring. As I say, I felt like standing up and cheering at the end. Your perspective on us all being Albertans and that we all have to look at the interests of all Albertans I thought was particularly good. I just wanted to relate that to you and commend you.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you.

The Chair: LeRoy, thank you very much. I certainly agree with the comments that were made. I should say to the good folks that are here that I first met LeRoy when he was with what is now Augustana University College, and he was the person who started the Viking cup hockey tournament years and years ago. That was my first association with LeRoy, and it's been a very pleasant association. You made us proud when you made the comments about how we're all Albertans, because that's important to keep in mind.

Thank you very much, LeRoy.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Olthof, anyone else to make a presentation?

Mr. Olthof: That's all, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. This session then is adjourned until the commission meets in Westlock in the last week of this month. Thank you very much.

[The commission adjourned at 11:09 a.m.]