

9:17 a.m.

Tuesday, June 25, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: [Introductory remarks not recorded] . . . Is it Athabasca, Mr. Kowalski? Swan Hills?

Mr. Kowalski: Well, actually, Mr. Chairman, you are still in southern Alberta. The geographic centre of the province of Alberta is roughly 80 kilometres to the west of here and a little bit to the north, and it's midway between Alberta's second oldest community, Fort Assiniboine, and Canada's first centenary town, Swan Hills, which was created on January 1, 1967.

The Chair: On that note, Mr. Kowalski, you're on.

Mr. Kowalski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and the members. I've provided a written brief for you. There are copies that I have circulated to you, and there will be additional copies provided to anyone else who would like one.

May I take this opportunity to welcome the chairman and members of Alberta's Electoral Boundaries Commission to Westlock and to the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock. The task before you is not an easy one. May I wish you both the utmost of success and the utmost of wisdom. Because of the time allotted, I'll be brief in my remarks.

I've had the privilege of successfully being a candidate in seven provincial elections in several different types of ridings. Electoral redistribution is not unknown to the people living in this part of Alberta. Change has been more the norm than the status quo. Some residents of the current electoral division have lived and have exercised their democratic prerogative in four different electoral divisions since the 1960s.

In its decision of October 24, 1994 the Court of Appeal of Alberta wrote the following when recommending review of the makeup of Alberta's electoral divisions.

That review must identify communities, in every sense of the word.

It must look in depth at social history as well as demography and geography.

As a result of the major changes made to electoral divisions in this part of Alberta prior to the 1997 general election, it is my emphatic opinion that the current constituency boundaries of the electoral division known as Barrhead-Westlock better meet the intent of current Alberta electoral legislation and the intent of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms than any of the previous electoral divisions drawn for this area.

The current boundary for Barrhead-Westlock reflects the area's history. The makeup of the current constituency reflects the traditional community. The citizens who live here share a common social history. Indeed, since the days of early settlement the demographic makeup has not changed significantly. The current boundaries better reflect the municipal boundary configuration and the transportation and social infrastructure than most of the past. The current boundaries are clear, understandable, and describe the community better than at any time in the past.

In its report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in January of 1996, the then Electoral Boundaries Commission of Alberta reviewed a number of variables in determining a matrix for an overall ranking of Alberta's electoral divisions. The constituency of Barrhead-Westlock received an overall difficulty ranking of 44, midway between the 18 assigned Edmonton-Roper and the 68 assigned Athabasca-Wabasca. The current constituency received a difficulty of representation rating of 8 for area in square kilometres, 11,537. That's a significant area. Some people who are here today

who are going to be presenting themselves before your commission have already traveled over 100 kilometres this morning to come here; they are well within the east/westerly divisions of the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock. It received a ranking of 5 for population – and the figure you utilized at that time was 25,723 – a ranking of 9 for population density – it was low, at about 2.3 per square kilometre – a ranking of 3 for number of households; a ranking of 5 for unincorporated communities, 14; a ranking of 4 for number of appointed bodies, 12; and a ranking of 8 for primary and secondary highways and kilometres, at 794. The distance from the Legislature ranking was 2.

I would suggest that little will change in this difficulty matrix rating should the current commission choose to do such a procedure in 2002. While the current population of the constituency may be slightly less than the acceptable range suggested by the 2002-2003 commission, other difficulty of representation factors must play a significant role in the final determinations evaluating an opportunity for effective representation. Should the current Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission choose to visit and revise the boundaries of the present constituency known as Barrhead-Westlock, I sincerely hope that it will consider the changes that have occurred in the past three constituency redistributions. The current riding is the result of a gradual and steady change that the 1994 Court of Appeal decision makes mention of.

I believe that the current boundaries of the riding known as Barrhead-Westlock meet all of the tests of the various questions that the members of Alberta's Electoral Boundaries Commission 2002-2003 will put before themselves. Should the commission disagree and should the commission determine that additional population must be added, then all community of interest arguments logically lead to constituency boundary expansion to either an easterly or a southerly direction. Impacts would then occur to either one or two adjoining constituencies, and the commission would have to determine the degree of impact that would be acceptable.

Thank you for this opportunity. I'd be pleased to clarify anything that I've said. May I also wish the commission the wisdom that is required as it faces this most difficult of tasks. Thank you.

9:27

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Kowalski. I really appreciate the fact that you have given some indication of which direction we should go if we have to make changes. Because I'm not as familiar with this area as others, is there a community that you're talking about here when you're talking about going easterly or southerly? Just so I can pinpoint it in my mind.

Mr. Kowalski: Well, Mr. Patterson, that's probably the most difficult question that you'll have to ask of a Member of the Legislative Assembly, because there are only 83 of us and we do have a synergy among us regardless of the political background. The rating/robbing kind of thing I'm sure is not one thing that any one of the 83 elected people would want to deal with.

If you take a look at the map, the reason the suggestion is made that it has to be either easterly or southerly is a result of reality. To the north of the basic boundaries of the current constituency of Barrhead-Westlock there is a buffer zone of approximately 40 miles of forest that is uninhabited as you get towards Lesser Slave Lake and Slave Lake. If you go to the west of the current boundaries, which are about 20 miles to the west of the town of Swan Hills, there is a buffer zone of nearly 80 to 100 kilometres of wilderness forest

where there is no population. So from just a reality point of view one could even move Lesser Slave Lake down 40 miles, but it wouldn't pick up one person. One could move some other ones towards Barrhead-Westlock from Grande Prairie, and it wouldn't pick up one person in 60 to 80 miles. That is pure wilderness. That is pure forest.

One of the three traditional constituencies that I've had the pleasure of representing in the past included the eastern portion of the area of the county of Lac Ste. Anne. That was then revised, and in the last electoral redistribution that area was moved into Whitecourt-St. Anne and this area to the easterly direction was moved in. That was an area that was traditional to it, the area that goes basically right down to Onoway, but it's in the eastern portion of the county of Lac Ste. Anne. The other area where there certainly is an approximate community of interest with us would be the area towards the county of Thorhild on the easterly side.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Ken. Ernie kind of asked my question, but do you see any problem [not recorded].

Mr. Kowalski: Well, we do have such examples, I do believe, in the province already. The city of Grande Prairie as a municipality is divided in half.

The bottom line would probably be no, but there would have to be some defensible argument for doing that, because of the confusion. If we have done everything that we have done in the past, by following the other suggestions made by previous electoral reviews and the courts that basically say to try and identify communities of interest, then traditionally in Alberta municipal boundaries are part of that community of interest, and in this area it's gone beyond that. Not only do we have municipal boundaries that tend to be contiguous with the electoral boundary, but the major service entities such as the Pembina Hills school area and the Aspen health authority include those municipalities within their boundaries for the most part. There's a great deal of similarity with it. As an example, tomorrow in Fort Assiniboine all of the municipalities currently part of the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock and a couple of others to the east will be signing an economic development agreement. It's the relationship of the boundaries that provides the synergy for them working together. It's either an east/west pattern here or a southerly pattern where people go. People do not go to the north of here. They move toward Edmonton.

Ms Mackay: Further to the comments that you made about the east/west pattern of trade and transportation, to what extent would you say the trading community involves Edmonton?

Mr. Kowalski: Edmonton is the magnet for anyone who lives in the part of Alberta north of Edmonton. Now, it's a magnet for some things but not all things. It's a magnet for major professional sports. There's no Edmonton Oilers in Westlock or Barrhead or Grande Prairie, so obviously it's that. It's an escape, a periodic escape, and for some health services, but a lot of this is now decentralized out in the part of Alberta where we would live, regardless of whether or not it's in this area or some other rural constituency. It's just a normal place to go because all highways basically lead there. In the same way, though, you could ask that question and say: well, to what extent is Calgary then the magnet for anybody north of Calgary? There are more people from Edmonton going to Calgary I think than there are people from Calgary going to Edmonton in the same way that more people just because of the size of Edmonton would move

in that direction. But there's nothing that Edmonton actually can provide the people who live north of Edmonton that the people north of Edmonton cannot get other than professional sports.

The Chair: Doug.

Mr. Graham: I don't have any questions. I thought it was an excellent presentation, and I really want to thank you. It's very clear, very brief, very helpful.

Mr. Kowalski: Thank you.

The Chair: On that note, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good luck and drive carefully, please.

Mr. Kowalski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the members, the submissions that you'll hear today are from very dedicated, determined, honest, hardworking people who really believe in the process that this is all about.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kowalski: Have a good day.

The Chair: I'd like to introduce you to Brian Fjeldheim. Brian is Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer. Brian, if you would stand up at the back, please. Brian and his office are helping us in this whole process. To my right here is Doug Olthof. Doug is the person who's organizing things on the ground. Who's the next presenter, Doug?

Mr. Olthof: Mrs. Dallas Stevens.

The Chair: Mrs. Dallas Stevens from the town of Swan Hills. If you want to bring anybody else up with you from Swan Hills, that's great, Dallas.

Mrs. Stevens: They all do their own.

Thank you very much. I, too, thank you for the opportunity to speak today and beg your tolerance, because although mine isn't, I think, quite as important, I do have a meeting that started about 10 minutes ago in Barrhead.

The Chair: We'll make it short.

Mrs. Stevens: So if there are questions, I can answer a few but I won't be able to stay long. But there are lots of Swan Hillians here that can answer for me I'm sure.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dallas.

Mrs. Stevens: The town of Swan Hills strongly encourages the provincial government to leave the present electoral boundaries, particularly the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, as presently outlined. If the electoral boundaries were to be altered, communities such as Swan Hills will suffer significantly. Not only will diminished representation result from a larger area of constituency; the inherent rural versus urban differences, problems, and needs would realize a backward step for Swan Hills and all other rural and smaller municipalities. The shift in balance of urban/rural representation will create the situation whereby rural concerns will no longer be fairly addressed. Our goal in Swan Hills of remaining a stable, viable community would be seriously jeopardized. This in turn will negatively affect the region's industries and services.

The question has been raised as to which riding we do and should

naturally lean toward. Are there logical reasons for staying within the Barrhead-Westlock constituency or for looking in a northward direction to Slave Lake or even another direction? The following parameters must be considered in answering these questions.

Schooling. The regional school system is tied to Barrhead and Westlock; that's the Pembina Hills regional school division. Some high school students along with other of our special-needs students receive their education through the Barrhead schools. That is to say that they are bused each school day to the appropriate school in Barrhead. School administration, superintendency, and school psychologists are provided through the educational regional division centred in Barrhead.

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Hospitals. Swan Hills is part of the Aspen regional health authority and its administration in Westlock. We have direct association with Barrhead for the nursing home, Hillcrest seniors' foundation, the auxiliary hospital, as well as the Keir Care Centre. Our people have family links as well as medical links with these Barrhead facilities and the regional hospital and health system. Our emergency assistance agreement includes Barrhead.

Shopping. The population of Swan Hills has traveled through Barrhead and either stopped there or carried on into Edmonton ever since the town's inception. Barrhead continues to remain the main shopping venue outside of the Swan Hills business sector for the majority of our people. This is confirmed by a recent detailed questionnaire and study undertaken this year. The traffic into Swan Hills has primarily come and still does come through Barrhead. The natural flow comes from the Edmonton population centre into Swan Hills. Our people from Swan Hills drive south. It is the absolute exception for them to go north unless they go camping and fishing at Slave Lake. Considerable numbers of people commute daily to Swan Hills from the Barrhead, Fort Assiniboine, and Westlock areas for employment. I counted today between Fort Assiniboine and Swan Hills over 50 cars heading into town to work there.

The Chair: Are there people that go to Whitecourt?

Mrs. Stevens: Some; not a lot. Mostly Whitecourt comes into Swan Hills, but there are some.

The various human service agencies in Swan Hills are serviced from the area administrative offices in Westlock and Barrhead. Example: social services, mental health, AADAC, and victim services, just to note a few. Future service needs and interest expressed by other organizations are being negotiated such that they, too, with all likelihood will be from the Barrhead staff, such as the public health nurse. Mr. Kowalski mentioned this Growth committee agreement that's about to be signed tomorrow. We are served from Slave Lake by only one agency; namely, the federal employment insurance. With that, people from Swan Hills have to drive north to Slave Lake for service on a totally irregular and greater distance travel path basis.

There are many families in Swan Hills who are from the Fort Assiniboine-Barrhead area. They have moved up here to work in the oil patch, with families still remaining on various farms in the Barrhead area. There are far more of the Barrhead area people in Swan Hills than from any other town within a hundred-mile radius around us. People from Swan Hills that retire typically retire in the Barrhead area because of family relations, and their elderly have usually entered into the Keir Care Centre or the Hillcrest care facilities. However, Swan Hills' population is gradually aging—you can tell by myself—and we are seeing an interest in people retiring in the community. Some have even come back to Swan Hills for retirement purposes.

Although shopping and trade matters have already been addressed,

it's important to note that we also have a larger trading area for heavy equipment and other big items. Barrhead tends to be a strong place of choice when service needs cannot be met locally. Swan Hills over the years has contributed many hundreds of thousands of dollars into the Barrhead area and vice versa.

Since the election of Ken Kowalski to the Barrhead-Westlock riding, we have seen a significant increase in public-type projects; for example, a new hospital, the opening of the Grizzly Trail as a major highway from north to south, the finishing, paving, and upgrading of highway 32 from Whitecourt, and valued contributions to our community recreation and cultural facilities and other various projects within the town of Swan Hills.

Swan Hills, like Barrhead, is in the Yellowhead federal riding. We are the northernmost point in that riding. It would make sense then for the provincial and federal constituencies to be contiguous.

In conclusion, we again take the opportunity to register our firm position to remain in the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. It's frustrating to us, to say the least, that we have been reiterating our interests and position to the province. This same study was conducted I believe in 1986, '89, '92, and '95 at great length and expense. The matter we believed was decided. We suggest that to address this again within a decade of time is an expensive and unnecessary exercise. Please leave us as previously determined, progressing well and very happy to be within the Barrhead-Westlock constituency.

Thank you.

The Chair: I don't think you left much doubt as to what you want to happen.

Mrs. Stevens: Exactly.

The Chair: I recall people from Swan Hills always having that ability to tell you what they really thought, and you haven't let me down.

Mrs. Stevens: Yes, we do have that reputation, and you get to hear from about four more of us today.

The Chair: Any questions?

Mr. Graham: You've made yourself perfectly clear: you want to stay within this constituency.

Mrs. Stevens: Oh, we do so.

Mr. Graham: And you've done a very good job of justifying it. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Stevens: Thank you.

The Chair: On to your next meeting. Thank you very much. Drive carefully.

I'd now like to ask Garry Wetsch, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert PC Association, and whoever else you'd like to bring along with you. I should introduce Mr. Doug Horner, the MLA for that constituency. Welcome, Garry, and we look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Wetsch: Good morning. Thank you.

The Chair: Doug, good to see you.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Clark.

Mr. Wetsch: We're just a short drive from here. I'm advised by our constituency that a written submission was submitted last week.

The Chair: In Edmonton two weeks ago.

Mr. Horner: I believe it was sent in.

The Chair: It was sent in. Okay.

Mr. Wetsch: I did not bring copies, but I can leave my editorialized one with you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Wetsch: Firstly, on behalf of our constituency I'd like to thank you for the opportunity of making these comments and presentations. When this opportunity was given to our constituency, we had the opportunity at a couple of meetings to understand the guidelines and principles and factors that the commission is dealing with, particularly on the population issue and on the community issue.

Our riding is indeed unique, and we think we're a very effective constituency. I say that having lived and worked in the constituency for 30 years. Many of us scratched our heads when this constituency was created some time ago because part of St. Albert was put in with Spruce Grove, Parkland, and Sturgeon, but we're pleased to say that the decision that was made at the last adjustment has proven to be very effective, and some benefits have come out of it that we'd like to address.

While the constituency consists of the city of Spruce Grove, the northwest part of St. Albert, and portions of Sturgeon county and Parkland county, one can realize immediately that we represent a very diverse and unique group of interests, from farmers and agricultural people to industrial parks and to a very bad term referred to as bedroom communities, whatever that is. Notwithstanding the diverse interests over the last years there are some homogeneous links that have developed. We presently enjoy a population of 36,628, which is 1.9 percent above the average. Based on our history and the efforts done by the constituency and the municipal governments and other things, we are an effective constituency, and we strongly advocate that the status quo be maintained. In coming to that, we have sought the opinions of other groups who support that. Notwithstanding what may appear to be an awkward constituency because of St. Albert, we think there is a lot of benefit in maintaining the status quo.

In considering that, these factors come to mind. The first of course is that we are only 1.9 percent above the provincial average, and we have received the benefit of how important the average is in history. We are one of six constituencies that are within a plus or minus of 2 percent of the provincial average, so to some extent we could say that change for the sake of change makes no sense in our area based on population. That's important to us because many of us in the community and community leaders have worked really hard to unify the constituency, and we think that any change in this would not be beneficial.

Interestingly enough, one of the other things that our group has come up with is something called the 'rurban' constituency, which is a combination of rural and urban. I can't take credit for that title; I'm not sure where it came from. When it came up it brought, which was interesting, to the Edmonton region, a very dynamic region, the interests of rural people and urban people, and many of us believe that distinction is fast disappearing in our area because of the attitudes of the counties in terms of acreages and other developments. But there are a lot of positive challenges in such

areas, and recently at the minisummit that Doug held and the constituency held in preparation for the Future Summit, one of the themes that came up was the importance of preserving constituencies in areas where urban and rural people do exchange ideas and do meet and get to understand each other. One of the examples in the city of St. Albert is the farmers' market, which draws 9,000 people on a Saturday afternoon from all over, and I think sometimes it's important in our province that we do have the opportunity of people getting to know each other from various walks of life.

9:47

We understand that there are other examples of 'rurban' constituencies such as Stony Plain, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Leduc, Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. One of the other things is that this allows our member for the constituency to meet all these groups and I think understand what will be a very important issue in the Edmonton region: co-operation as we deal with an exploding population. In our constituency we will see growth. The city of Spruce Grove will enjoy it and acreage developments and also the northwest corner of St. Albert. So when this commission revisits this issue, you will see I suggest above the 1.9 percent average, but it's controlled growth because both the communities enjoy very good planning.

One of the other factors in this thing is something called the greater Edmonton competitive strategy, which was supported some years ago by many levels of government. I'm proud to be a steward of that strategy, and in my time one of the things I was asked to do was to understand the importance of regionalism. I think our constituency is demonstrating an effective regional approach. Under the leadership of the constituency and the MLA we recently have had our first regional meeting of economic development people from all municipalities within our constituency plus the private sector. That meeting demonstrated and has continued to demonstrate that we are approaching the Edmonton region as our own region and will continue to do so. We have plans for other minisummits in our constituency on other issues and thus are laying a foundation for the constituency.

The other factor interestingly enough is that we've discovered that despite what appeared initially, despite our differences, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and the county have a lot of common community interests. One of them of course is transportation. To understand greater Edmonton is to understand the issue that goes on right now, which is the northwest sector and the importance of common approaches to transportation issues. The city of St. Albert is facing a west bypass issue. Whatever happens there will affect Spruce Grove and Parkland county and Sturgeon county. It will affect the entire northwest corridor. That is an issue presently before us, and we think the constituency will play a great role in that; therefore, the importance of maintaining the unification of the constituency. The area has enjoyed co-operation on utility matters and industrial parks in the past, and we think there's a common factor.

The other benefit is to continue to promote our approach to the challenges of living next door to the city of Edmonton, dealing not only with economic development but health issues and, even though I don't like the expression, the role of bedroom communities. Again, Edmonton is unique because of the number of independent municipalities, and I think regionalism is an objective in the stated policy of the province.

The discussion that led to our position was lengthy. We had several meetings, and I guess we came away with this summary. Change for the sake of change makes no sense to us. We think we are within the population guidelines. We think we are within the idea that we are a community. It's taken us years, as we were a new constituency. We have discovered and are building common bonds. We think those will be strengthened. We think that as a unified

constituency that maintains the status quo, we can play a role in the greater Edmonton region. We suggest that any change based on population would also not take into account our growth rate, which I think will get us above the 1.9. The constituency, while it's new, having been formed in '93, has done a lot to unify itself. It's, as I say, a dynamic constituency. We have a lot of community involvement, a lot of service clubs. A member of Rotary in the St. Albert Rotary meets with the Spruce Grove Rotary. There's co-operation.

To change these boundaries even slightly we suggest would lead to more confusion and uncertainty within our riding. Why do we say that? Again, while I work in Spruce Grove, I live in the northwest part of St. Albert. As we found at the last election, many people in St. Albert did not understand what constituency they were in and maybe scratched their heads and said: what do you mean there's a part of St. Albert not in this constituency? A great amount of effort was done prior to that election, during that election, and continues to be done, including maintaining a constituency presence in St. Albert. We think that any change in the St. Albert boundaries will just add confusion to those folks, plus there is a very good working relationship with Mary O'Neill's constituency, representing that. We think that is not to be overlooked. So if there were any temptation of moving it a street or so, we strongly suggest that that would be counterproductive to the efforts.

In conclusion, we strongly advocate on behalf of ourselves and people we've talked to that the status quo be maintained. The close proximity of our population to the provincial average, the many common community interests, the goal of minimizing voter confusion in a relatively new riding – and probably the greatest benefit is the balanced, pragmatic, and effective approach that the various municipalities and groups enjoy in a very unique and dynamic constituency at a time when I think the province has to deal with the relationship of rural and urban interests. Those are our comments.

Doug.

Mr. Horner: I'm open for questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ken and Doug. Sorry. Garry and Doug.

Mr. Wetsch: If I could meet the president of the United States, I would like to be Ken.

The Chair: I'm going to leave that one alone.
Who has the first question? Ernie.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, yes. Thank you very much for your submission. Just a brief comment. I appreciate your talking about the 'rurban.' I've attended your farmers' market, and there is a perfect example of rural and urban coming together. It's just amazing.

Thank you.

Ms Mackay: I also appreciate your comments about rural and urban. You made the comment several times about bedroom communities and the need for, you know, this communication between rural and urban. You live and work in the shadow of a big city, and I would guess that a fair amount of the transportation, economic, and social activity of your constituency involves the city of Edmonton, so I'll ask this question. I think I know the answer. How would you feel about any part of your constituency being put into an Edmonton constituency?

Mr. Wetsch: I'll answer that with an example. Some years ago I was an alderman in the city of St. Albert, and some foolish city of Edmonton alderman thought about annexation. Every so often when people forget our history outside the city of Edmonton, it's almost a positive benefit. We are strong, individual communities. It is unfortunate that it has evolved that we are dependent on the city for economic development, and the transportation issue is serious. But when you work, as we have done when we've had time, for 30 years with service clubs, chambers in Spruce Grove and St. Albert, we are proudly independent. I think that as Dick Plain said at the 25th anniversary of the city of St. Albert, we are the oldest unfortified community in the province of Alberta, with all due respect to Fort Edmonton.

Mr. Horner: And if I might add to that. As the MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert I'm allowed to sit on the Capital region caucus, which gives me a pretty good feel for what is happening in the city area. But as Garry has mentioned, it is a fiercely independent group of communities which I represent, not just Spruce Grove and St. Albert but also Sturgeon county and Parkland county. So while there is the element of the 'rurban' combining to the city, I think adding that area would probably not be as positive as you might think, because you're adding another factor into it that is kind of foreign to what these other communities are doing.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Two quick questions. What other members outside Edmonton sit on that caucus?

Mr. Horner: We're quite a large group now. It wasn't before, but it is now.

The Chair: No editorial comments. Just answer the question.

Mr. Horner: Nothing editorial there.

Rob Loughheed, Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Stony Plain, myself.

The Chair: So all the surrounding communities.

Mr. Horner: All of the surrounding area, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay.

Could you get a copy of the greater Edmonton planning strategy you talked about, Garry?

Mr. Wetsch: Yes.

The Chair: Could you get us a copy?

Mr. Wetsch: I'll make sure.

The Chair: Just get it to the office. That would be helpful.

Mr. Wetsch: Certainly.

9:57

The Chair: Any other questions or comments? Thank you very much, gentlemen. Thanks, Doug.

Now, I'd like to ask part of the pride of Swan Hills, Ann and Ken Nagel . . .

Mr. Olthof: Actually, Bob, it's Brad Watson.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Brad Watson and then the Nagels. Okay. You're on, sir.

Mr. Watson: Thank you.

The Chair: We appreciate your coming very much, Brad.

Mr. Watson: I appreciate the opportunity to take part in this. My presentation is somewhat plagiarized from that of the deputy mayor. Somehow as the town manager that presentation found itself on my computer. As a matter of expediency I'll cover some additional items, but I have submitted the others as a part of my presentation as well because they are fundamental to our presentation and our rationale for being here today. My family and myself strongly encourage your organization to leave the present electoral boundaries, particularly the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, as presently outlined.

One area that was not included in the deputy mayor's is an extended flat rate telephone exchange area. As the Telus Corporation went through this similar analysis that you're doing, we have been included in a telephone exchange area that includes Fort Assiniboine, and their projected plans will be to further eccentric circles to the south, not to the north. Emergency assistance agreements are in place with communities in the south, not the north. Bedroom communities have been talked about, schooling, hospitals, retail/commercial.

Transportation. The town of Swan Hills is very actively involved in highway 33, known as the Grizzly Trail, one of the relatively few named highways in the province. We participate in and are responsible for signage and maintenance on this trail system. Highway 33 commences at the Gunn intersection of highway 43 and extends north through Barrhead and the town of Swan Hills until it intersects highway 2. Barrhead and Swan Hills are the only two towns that this highway goes through. It is an important corridor to those that commute to and from Swan Hills. The deputy mayor had counted over 50 vehicles. I did the same. As I have occasion to go to Edmonton and leave at 5:30, 6 o'clock in the morning, it's always of intrigue to me to note the in excess of 100 vehicles that I meet coming to Swan Hills.

Human services was touched on, population ties. Moving on into influence. In the present riding there are three towns – Barrhead, Westlock, Swan Hills – together with hamlets and rural population. In the Slave Lake riding there are two towns, both larger than us, together with several villages and a number of First Nation reserves. Our influence in and benefit from a northern riding would be considerably and unquestionably less than we currently enjoy in the Barrhead-Westlock constituency.

The communities to the north offer us lip-service interest for our population count and membership association fees when these are of benefit to them. However, most of the communities and organizations there make it exceptionally and very succinctly evident that the real and particularly public-oriented association is definitely not of their interest. An example offered is where the town of Swan Hills was invited to participate in an economic development alliance there, and as our elected officials participated, no group wanted to have Swan Hillians within their group. When the inquiry was made, it was in relation to the stigma that Swan Hills has from its special waste treatment centre. The parties felt very openly that that would interfere with them.

To the contrary, the communities to the south – Barrhead, Westlock, and the communities to the east and south – have invited us and were very aggressive in having us participate in an economic development consortium that you'll hear more about today in other presentations, the acronym for which is Growth alliance. As the

deputy mayor said, we're going to a meeting tomorrow to sign and seal the formal agreement.

Some quick facts on electoral boundaries. Rural ridings require special consideration due to the large geographic areas involved, transportation barriers, and widely varying industrial and cultural demographics. The basis of the democratic process of one person, one vote, although it would be realistic, certainly would create a total disparity for us as rural people and our constituencies. The 65,000 average square kilometre area of this constituency creates the fundamental geographic challenges that are inherent with all of the outer rural constituencies; that is to say, distances to be traveled when dealing with constituents and other jurisdictional electoral matters.

I'm confident that you have gained a significantly better appreciation for this as you've taken occasion to drive to these hearings, and I trust that you have driven so that you can more fully appreciate and understand this basic factor that could otherwise be very easily overlooked as you undertake your mandate to keep jurisdictions on a fair and equitable basis. In the somewhat homework that I've done on this, the paper that was sent out, and playing with the population of the metropolitan areas, I submit that those could be more easily divided up. The division of the Calgary population: from the numbers that were released on the paper, dividing those by the number of current constituencies creates a population basis that would be totally consistent with the number requirements. How realistic that is rests with you and your mandate.

Rural/urban cultural differences are also a part of the dichotomy that exists. I submit the property ownership and stability of residency, wherein a greater percentage of rural people own their own homes than in the cities, where the percentage is higher for renting. Statistics will back that up, the rural being substantiated by less transient people with an agricultural background.

I have a poster that my staff have in one of the rooms: don't just knock what's bad; suggest something better. I have looked at the maps, trying to put myself in your position and look at perhaps the previous boundaries of the Barrhead-Westlock area being looked at again, as well as the Pembina Hills regional school division as a boundary or the additional eastern or southern communities being incorporated.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Brad. I must be very candid with you and say that we did fly in, and we're flying on to Edson. I just didn't want to leave a wrong impression there. But I must say that I've driven to Swan Hills an awful lot of times myself when I was on the waste management corporation and also chairman of the board, so I know what you're talking about when you talk about the drive up and back.

Who has the first question? Are there any questions or comments?

10:07

Mr. Patterson: I find it very interesting that you are one of the few who have made comment about possibly a second House to take into recognition the problem of representation of rural ridings. When we were down south next to Montana, which of course has a two-House system, some of those people suggested it also. I guess you allude to it here. Do you really think that this might be one way of ensuring that rural areas have representation? This is going to get worse as time goes on in Alberta. In point 7 you talk about this. Are you just kind of alluding to it, or do you really think that?

Mr. Watson: There's an element of both. I allude to it, but I also recognize that there has to be a pragmatic basis to that.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you. It seems to have worked well in places like Montana with a large area and sparse population.

Mr. Clegg: Just to comment more, I'm very familiar with the area, too, because representing Dunvegan for 15 years, I drove three or four hours before I got to Swan Hills. I used to travel through Whitecourt, Swan Hills, Westlock: everywhere. You get tired of traveling. I do understand that from Swan Hills there's very little traffic going north and that you have not a lot in common. That wasn't in your presentation here, but it's been in several presentations.

You know, I wish I had been on the 1995 commission because seemingly everybody said what a great job they did. I can remember, being an MLA, that I didn't hear those same remarks when the commission first reported. It seems like you do get used to working with people. We've heard this comment many times: "Leave us alone. We're very happy. We've learned to work together."

Thanks for your presentation.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Brad. We appreciate it.

Mr. Watson: Thank you.

The Chair: I'd like now to ask Ann and Ken Nagel, then I'll have Mr. Barnes, then the representatives of the Stony Plain PC Association, and then we will take a break.

These are the good folks from Swan Hills that I've known for some time. Welcome. I look forward to your presentation.

Mrs. Nagel: We'd like to thank you for having us. We've taken a different approach on this submission.

The Chair: Not a problem.

Mr. Nagel: We're actually here representing just the average citizen of Swan Hills. We've been in Swan Hills for a number of years, 34 to be exact. We've made our home there and intend to continue doing so. We're both seniors in that town. We indicate that we're councillors – Ann is a councillor, and I'm a school trustee – only to indicate that we are elected to represent those people in Swan Hills.

As you know, Swan Hills is fairly isolated. Just to indicate that, we put some mileages out there. We're 100 kilometres northwest of Barrhead, 140 kilometres southwest of Slave Lake, and 80 kilometres north of Whitecourt. We have a very small town that has no trading area at all. So we feel we're still isolated even though we have paved roads now, which we sure do appreciate. People still tend to follow traditional traveling, which historically has been to the communities to the south. A large number of our workforce in Swan Hills for both the oil field and the waste plant have roots in Barrhead-Westlock and for those reasons have family left here that they come and visit. It's been very convenient for them, if they need to visit their local constituency office, to have it in the south.

As indicated by pretty near all the presenters so far, we are in the educational partnership with Barrhead and Westlock in the formation of the Pembina Hills regional school division, and in addition to that, we still have some students going to school in Barrhead. Many of our agencies that service Swan Hills have similar boundaries to the existing constituency: Aspen health authority, the Pembina Hills regional division, the children's services authority, and the mental health authority. They're not identical but similar and cover the same geographic area approximately.

In keeping with good political consideration, I want to just deal with the situation of the waste plant, and then I will turn it over to my wife, Ann, to give her the last word, which is always important. We've been married for 43 years.

The current MLA was instrumental in the placement of the waste plant in Swan Hills. We do feel a threat to slice Swan Hills off the top of the jurisdiction or maybe do other things because the residents to the north of us oppose the plant. Bob, you will remember that. They still do. They still lobby to have it closed. It's paramount to the town of Swan Hills and to the community that the plant remain open. That goes without saying. I mean it's a vital part of our community now. The community supports it, and it supports the community. So it would be politically impossible for an MLA from the northern area to represent Swan Hills in any appropriate way. So I want you to think about that when you look at the situation and what should be done with Barrhead-Westlock.

With that, I'll do like I said and turn it over to Ann to finish off. It will be brief. I do appreciate seeing you again, Bob.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ann.

Mrs. Nagel: Yes. We feel that representation by population alone is not equitable. Sparsity and distance have to be a factor, and we feel that no matter how many times they change the electoral boundaries, they will never be equal in population.

Then the issue of Calgary. I understand that they're wanting more ridings; they have a population of approximately 879,000 in 21 electoral divisions. If Calgary adjusted their boundaries as Edmonton has, each riding would be approximately 41,000 population, still under the recommended maximum of 44,939. The current split, 39 rural and 44 urban, seems fair and should be maintained.

Now the recommendations we've made for the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. Maintain the boundaries as they are; we have been well represented. If necessary to increase the population, the constituency would do so by moving the boundary east to highway 63 and north to the Athabasca-Wabasca riding boundary and south to township 59 or by moving the riding south into the Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert riding, just west of range road 27 and township 56.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Ann. Thanks, Ken, very much.

Any questions or comments from my colleagues?

Mr. Graham: I just have a comment. I think your presentation was excellent. If there's a lack of questions from me, it's because you've made your point so clearly and others have as well, and this member particularly understands the points that have been made.

Mrs. Nagel: Thank you.

The Chair: Notice how he says "this member" and then looks at the rest of us.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to say that I do appreciate the specific recommendations. As you have already indicated, it's going to be a tough job, so when we do hear some specific recommendations, it is helpful. Thank you.

The Chair: Just one last comment. I notice in the presentations from the good folks from Swan Hills that no one has talked about the

desirability of moving west and being included in the Whitecourt-St. Anne riding, so I take it that no one is very wildly enthusiastic about that. We haven't discussed any of this.

Mr. Nagel: I could comment on that if you wish. Some of our workforce in Swan Hills, quite a number of them, do live in Whitecourt, and there is some traveling back and forth, but where it comes close is the historical factor that took place when Swan Hills was developed. The only road in was from Barrhead and Fort Assiniboine. People came in and went out that way for years and years, and that historically still works. There are some going to the Whitecourt area.

10:17

Mrs. Nagel: The people that come towards Swan Hills from Whitecourt do not come right to Swan Hills. The gas plants are 30 kilometres south of us, and that is their place of employment. They don't come to Swan Hills.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks again, Ann, very much.

Mr. Nagel: Thank you for listening to us.

The Chair: Good. Pleased you came.

Mr. Barnes, please be seated. Thank you for your patience. We look forward to hearing your comments.

Mr. Barnes: Good morning to you too, Mr. Chairman, and the rest of your stalwart panel members. Actually, I'm here kind of by accident. I got this notice of the review of the boundaries, and I wrote in asking for further information. Back came an envelope with maps and an appointment time, so here I am. I thought I might as well do a bit of work on it, because you people have my sympathy with the job you're trying to do. You're working like with a stack of dominos: you pull one out here, and several more follow. That's why I've done a little bit of scouting on the map, with apologies to Dave Broda over there, whose area we are talking about invading, but we've also made a provision for him to expand too. So I'll just put on my specs here and see what we can see.

My primary concern was to try to increase the population base of the Barrhead-Westlock riding. The people that have spoken here already have covered very well and very effectively the reasons why we would prefer to see it stay the same, and there's no use belabouring the subject. It's currently rated as being 30 percent below average, and I'd like to bring it up to something a little closer to par. If you have your maps handy, I would suggest that the southern boundary of Barrhead-Westlock be made a straight line along the 15th baseline until it's intersecting with highway 2.

The Chair: That's near what community?

Mr. Barnes: It borders on Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

This would leave the little block that presently juts into township 56 to be absorbed by Whitecourt-St. Anne, which is just slightly below average at present, and would cut off the top of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, which is presently slightly above average, and absorb this area into Barrhead-Westlock. Highway 2 would form the eastern boundary of Barrhead-Westlock to the point where it intersects the present boundary, which would then continue as at present.

A further suggestion would be that where the present boundary between Barrhead-Westlock and Redwater intersects with highway 18, this boundary be extended east along highway 18 from this point to the intersection of highways 18 and 63, the Fort McMurray highway, and north along this highway to its intersection with the

present Redwater/Athabasca-Wabasca boundary. This would place the village of Thorhild, which shares a natural trading area with Westlock, in the Barrhead-Westlock constituency and go a long way toward balancing the population averages.

As for compensating Redwater, which is already a little below average, for the loss of this northwest corner of its territory, perhaps some of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, which is above the average, could be added to it or the north end of Edmonton-Manning, which is substantially above the average. Certainly Edmonton-Manning is part of metropolitan Edmonton, but the north end of this area is still largely rural. Do municipal and electoral boundaries necessarily have to be contiguous? Does it make any less sense for a suburban area to be included in a rural riding than for the rural components of the area to be included in an urban riding?

That's more or less the gist of what I was bringing to you.

This has no bearing on your commission or the provincial boundaries, but just as a point of interest, I do some work with Dave Chatters in the Athabasca federal riding, and speaking of the comparison between the sizes of the ridings and that, Westlock town here in the southern end of the riding is closer to the American border than it is to the north end of the riding; believe that or not. That just shows what some of these guys are up against.

Anyway, that's my presentation. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks, Dave.

Any comments or questions? Glen.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you for the presentation. You know, it's always good to get alternatives. As we've heard today, most of the people in Barrhead-Westlock are very happy, but sometimes we have to move boundaries, so these are good alternatives that you've come up with, knowing the area myself. Thank you very much.

Mr. Barnes: Well, I was trying to save you a little bit of headache in there.

The Chair: We can use the help.

Any idea how many people would be involved in the suggestions you have, Dave?

Mr. Barnes: I've got the list with the town population, but it would be a very rough guess: probably 1,000.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to say that I made note of your idea here of a kind of 'rurban' constituency when you're talking about Redwater, and I find that very interesting. Thank you.

Mr. Graham: I just want to thank you very much. You've done a lot of work. These sort of very practical, concrete suggestions are always very helpful.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Barnes.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thanks, folks, and good luck.

The Chair: Thank you.

Representatives from the Stony Plain PC Association.

Mr. Hakes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Russell Hakes.

The Chair: I'd like to welcome Russell Hakes, Stony Plain PC Association. We look forward to your comments, Russell. Have at us, please.

Mr. Hakes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to you and your fellow commissioners. I bring the apologies of our MLA, Stan Woloshyn. He is not attending the G-8 conference. However, he is attending some meetings I believe in the southern part of the province, and he does send his apologies for not being able to be in attendance.

I may wander a little bit from the written submission because there is some editorializing that I would like to do. In the Stony Plain constituency we don't envy you and your commission in terms of what you have to do. You have to make some decisions which could have a profound effect on communities, on other towns, and having been through two of the changes in our own constituency since 1989, we understand the difficulties that communities go through when changes are being made.

I was privileged to be able to come to Alberta in 1987, and I have voted in three different constituencies. Thankfully, I think your predecessors, the previous commission on electoral boundaries, did an outstanding job and actually formed a very cohesive and excellently represented constituency boundary.

We are unique insofar as we are a rural riding yet we have a very strong urban component. Similar to Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, a lot of our constituents travel to Edmonton to work. However, if you are ever going east as they're coming back from Edmonton, you can almost hear the sigh of relief as they come back to a community which they enjoy and a community which has a quality of life that I think makes us very unique.

The very nature of our boundaries is interesting. They do follow very, very closely both natural and municipal boundaries. As the brief will attest to, in the southern part of the constituency we are bordered by the North Saskatchewan River, in the west by the Pembina River, in the north by the municipal counties of Lac St. Anne and Sturgeon, and we do abut for part of our eastern boundary the city of Edmonton corporate limits. In effect we are within Parkland county. That basically is our border, and it fits very nicely from a population point of view. The commission will note that we are about 4.3 percent above the required average population. We're one of 19 constituencies that do that.

10:27

We have a very unique constituency, as I've said. It is a very well-balanced mix of both residential and industrial development. We have the town of Stony Plain, the villages of Wabamun, Seba Beach, Spring Lake, and the hamlet of Entwistle. We have acreage homes. We have agricultural operations which include crops, cattle, hogs, and chickens. We also have two First Nation reserves, the Enoch reserve and the Paul band reserve. On the industrial side we have two of the province's largest electrical generating stations, Sundance and Keephills on Lake Wabamun. We have the Atcheson industrial park, which is just west of Edmonton. We have the Fording coal mining operation and many light commercial manufacturers and businesses. We firmly believe that it is essential for the integrity of this very well-integrated and diverse community that this in fact be maintained.

If the commission sees us in terms of our proximity to Edmonton and that it might be a great idea to shave off a little bit of the Stony Plain constituency to Edmonton, we feel that this would create a real imbalance of legislative representation and could do irreparable

harm to the community as a whole. We are unique. We are not part of Edmonton, although Edmonton is well served by the constituents of Stony Plain.

We also have a very well developed infrastructure in terms of roads and highways: obviously, the Yellowhead highway, which basically goes right through the middle of the constituency; secondary highways; township and range roads. We believe that this helps to serve the constituents in terms of their legislative representation.

We have asked people within the constituency to add their names rather than coming forward to make many presentations to you. We've added their names and their telephone numbers in a list as the addendum. Now, this is just a representative number of people who have indicated their willingness to stand up and indicate the status quo of the constituency. They include the mayors of Parkland county, of Wabamun, and of Stony Plain. We have reeves. We have councillors. We have, obviously, the MLA for Stony Plain. We have individual constituents who have allowed their names to stand. We have the trustees of the Parkland school division.

In summary, I would really urge the commission to consider the status quo of the Stony Plain constituency. We have found our constituency after the last boundaries commission to be a very cohesive unit, one that is well served, well represented, and one that includes a microcosm, we believe, of Alberta and its uniqueness in terms of the residents and the willingness of the residents to maintain the status quo.

So, Mr. Chairman, fellow commissioners, thank you very much indeed for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Russell. You've left no doubt as to what you want done. I think this is the first time we've had a presentation with a list of people like this saying to give them a call: we support what is being put forward.

Mr. Hakes: Thank you. There are more if the commission wishes, if they run out of the current names.

The Chair: No. I think this will be enough.

Ms Mackay: Well, as I look at this list, I see you have my brother's name on it.

Mr. Hakes: Oh, yes. Well, that was not planned, Bauni. That was not meant to impress.

Ms Mackay: Right. Anyway, I have some questions as a person who resides in Edmonton who grew up in Stony Plain. You make the comment about the quality of life in Stony Plain being so much better than Edmonton and that people like going back to their homes, and I agree with you. I think that's really true. Do you think the fact, though, that the quality of life in Edmonton maybe isn't as good as it is in the surrounding area would have some unique challenges for the people who represent the citizens of Edmonton? Can you see any connection, then, between governance and the unique problems that perhaps a large city has which would actually motivate people to work there but to leave it when it's time to, you know, go home and live their lives?

Mr. Hakes: Well, Bauni, I can't speak to the quality of life in Edmonton because I have never lived there. I have lived in the metropolitan area of Winnipeg, which has some similarities to Edmonton. So it would be wrong for me to say that there is not a good quality of life. I'm sure there is. I used to work in Edmonton, for over 10 years.

However, nearly 39,000 people elected to live in the Stony Plain constituency. Having been involved in that community, having met the people, having traveled the constituency with the MLA, there is a sense of chauvinism, if you like. They feel very proud of their community. They like the open spaces. They like the undulating countryside. They like the forests. They like the agricultural environment. They come to the constituency to live as a matter of desire rather than of necessity. The fact that they work in Edmonton – and I think other presenters alluded to the magnet that Edmonton has in terms of employment, in terms of entertainment, in terms of sports, which will always be there. However, we believe that shaving off part of the constituency will really cause irreparable harm to the people and the enjoyment that they have and also the function of the constituency within its present boundaries, with its municipal and its natural boundaries.

Ms Mackay: Thank you. There's one other thing. You said something to the effect that Edmonton is well served by the constituents of Stony Plain. Would you say that the constituents of Stony Plain are well served by living this close to Edmonton?

Mr. Hakes: You put me on the spot there, Bauni. I may have been a little facetious when I said that. I know that the constituents in the Stony Plain area and the area around the southeast corner obviously get a great deal of benefit from working in Edmonton. That's their employment; that's where their money comes from. However, the desire to live in the types of communities that we have in the Stony Plain constituency – I can only really re-emphasize that they're there because they want this type of life. They don't want to live in an urban area in the west end of Edmonton or the south part of Edmonton. They want to live in the type of environment that the constituency of Stony Plain provides to them.

Ms Mackay: Okay.

The Chair: Ernie.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Mr. Chair. I've had a former mayor of Onoway – I believe they are in Whitecourt-St. Anne – emphasize to me every time he sees me that they would like to be in your constituency. His point has always been about trading areas. If that were to happen, is there any part of your area that could be changed without affecting the natural boundaries?

Mr. Hakes: I think we do have a suggestion, and it is not contained within the brief because we did not want to be presumptive and do the job of the commission. It's tough enough as it is. However, if you look to the north of the constituency and you look at the Pembina River, which is already a natural boundary in the west, and continue that north to Sangudo and then again in an easterly direction, we would see a natural movement in the north of the constituency. The south does not make any sense because it means having to cross the river, and that in itself is a very great barrier obviously, because there's only one bridge and that's at Devon.

So we see probably, if anything, a more northerly expansion of the constituency. If that's the decision of the commission, we would be very comfortable with that. Obviously, a lot of people come to Stony Plain from that northern part to shop, to enjoy, and also to take in the hockey team in Stony Plain, semiprofessionals.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, if I might. Would that include Onoway?

Mr. Hakes: It would include Onoway, so you can tell them there

that we would be very happy to embrace them.

Mr. Patterson: I'm sure that as *Hansard* records this, if he ever reads it, he will know that I have followed up on his request.

10:37

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Thank you very much, Russell. We appreciate your presentation.

Mr. Hakes: Thank you very much. Any time.

The Chair: We'll now take a 10-minute break. Then when we return, we'll have the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, followed by Mr. Nagel, then the mayor of Barrhead, the reeve of the county of Barrhead, the mayor of Westlock, the reeve of the county of Westlock, and Kristina White to conclude.

[The commission adjourned from 10:37 a.m. to 10:52 a.m.]

The Chair: Before we hear the presentation from the Association of Urban Municipalities, Ernie Patterson, who's the vice-president of the organization, wants to make a statement of fact. Then, Ernie, will you also introduce the two gentlemen?

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you have mentioned, I'm vice-president representing towns in AUMA. In order to ensure that I was not in a conflict of interest, I absented myself from all of the discussions that have taken place at the executive of the board of AUMA, and I have not seen this presentation; I do not know what's in it. I thought I should just make that statement for the record so that people didn't think I was sitting on both sides of this issue.

So I think I'm okay this morning, Mr. Chair, and very happy to be able to introduce to you and members of the commission and to representatives here Mayor George Rogers, who is mayor of the city of Leduc, who is completing his first year as president of AUMA, and Mr. John McGowan, our executive director, who has served interestingly enough as a former Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and now is working for us on the other side of things. Don't ask these gentlemen anything about me, because they might tell you some things that I don't want you to know.

The Chair: Your Worship.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, members of the panel. We're very pleased to be here today. As Ernie mentioned, I'm joined by Mr. John McGowan, our executive director. I will make the presentation, and then John and I will be available to answer some of your questions after. I want to assure you, following Mayor Patterson's comments, that, yes, we do keep him in the dark as much as possible at the AUMA. He was definitely kept in the dark on this particular presentation.

The Chair: We'll be talking to you about how you do that.

Mr. Rogers: Well, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission, you've got a copy of our presentation in front of you. I'm just going to speak to this. I'll try not to read it word for word. It's a Power-Point presentation, but of course we're going to speak to it today. Then, as I mentioned, we'll be available for some questions. We've titled our presentation More Than Boundaries, and basically what we're saying of course is that we believe that there's a lot more to the issue of effective representation, more than just lines on the map.

Who is AUMA? Just quickly to remind you, as the association representing urban municipalities in Alberta, we represent some 287

regular members from the smallest summer village right up to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. Our efforts are two-pronged. We are of course advocates on behalf of our members to the provincial government and to some extent the national government as well. I sit as a member of the board of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as well as the president of the AUMA.

Also, we provide a number of services to our members. Particularly, one of the most noted is our insurance program. We have provided a program of liability and property coverage for our members for many years, and certainly we were instrumental in helping our members make it through the tough insurance markets that we saw in the '80s. Again we're back in a situation right now where we're seeing some very hard insurance markets, particularly since the events of Walkerton and 9-11 of last year.

The underlying issue, we believe, in this discussion is: what is an effective democracy? We feel that it's very important to ensure that there's political transparency in government and obviously a voice for all citizens. We feel that effective public services should be provided efficiently and in so doing promote the health and well-being of our citizens and of course to create a favourable climate for stable economic growth and, very importantly, to ensure accountability and that there's clarity about the link between responsibility and resources. You might be familiar with a discussion going on right now. We talk about roles, responsibilities, and resources. That's an AUMA initiative as well as a council that's been formed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, on which I sit as a member along with the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary and the president of the AAMD and C, trying to untangle the whole bundle of roles and responsibilities between the two levels of government and ultimately the resources of how we fund the delivery of those bundles of services.

The AUMA position. We believe that although democracy in Alberta is very healthy, the analogy is that like a plant it needs constant attention in order to remain vibrant and productive. It's very necessary to change the boundaries to achieve the plus or minus 25 percent goal and obviously to address the very, very active urban growth that we have seen in the province, particularly in the last five years or so. Also, we believe that any adjustment needs to respect natural community and legal municipal boundaries. The commission needs to make recommendations beyond boundaries to effect effective representation.

We would recommend some options. Certainly boundaries are important but, again, different types of boundaries. Effective representation particularly in our two large cities, Edmonton and Calgary – community leagues are a very important part of life in those large centres, and we believe that part of the effective representation would have electoral boundaries respect the community league boundaries and obviously still within that plus or minus 25 percent variance. It's very important to take into account population growth projections. As you look again particularly at our larger centres, there's some very explosive growth in areas, and I think that as we make changes today, these changes should essentially live, so to speak, into the future as we anticipate the growth in some of these areas. It's very, very easy. The plans are already approved in many of these cases, and in a lot of cases the construction is moving ahead at a very brisk pace, so certainly it's not hard to figure out where the next major growth is going to be in some of these cities.

We believe that where possible we should have a minimum amount of urban/rural ridings. If you take for example a piece of Calgary maybe where you would have a representative representing a portion of Calgary combined with a portion of the rural, we just feel that that makes for a very awkward situation.

For the most part no constituencies would split municipalities.

I'm not here making a presentation on behalf of my area in particular, but I would give just one example. The city of Leduc and a portion of the county of Leduc form the Leduc constituency. About halfway through the middle of the county of Leduc starts the boundary for the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency. If you speak to our local MLA for Leduc, he'll tell you that a good chunk of the calls that he gets at his office are from people from Calmar, who naturally think that because they're within the boundary of the county of Leduc, the Leduc MLA represents them. Now, I don't know how the MLA for Calmar and west feels about that, but that's just one example that I'm very familiar with.

Voter parity should be of prime importance in areas of plus 35 percent, and again I mention some of those high-growth areas: Calgary-Shaw, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Nose Creek, and Calgary-Foothills, as examples.

Just some thoughts in terms of naming the future provincial electoral divisions. We believe that the idea of looking at some new names might be after some former Premiers, Lieutenant Governors, and, heaven forbid, maybe even some mayors as we would consider naming any new constituencies or after some former citizens who have rendered outstanding service to a given area. Of course, our First Nations – we believe it's certainly very fitting that aboriginal names would be considered as well. Founders and pioneers. Think also in the process, Mr. Chairman, that where possible ridings not be duplicated, that you would have the same name for a federal and a provincial constituency. Where two or more constituencies are partly combined, then obviously the name of the new constituency that has the greatest number would then retain the old name to provide some consistency.

When we talk about more than boundaries – you are quite familiar with the term nowadays “thinking outside the box” – well, we think obviously in this context that we should think outside the boundary. We thought that some of the focus of our presentation would be some key factors in how MLAs communicate with their constituents. Obviously, there are a number of factors that are crucial: the physical size, how far an MLA has to drive, the population size, how dense the population is or how spread out across a large area, and more important today, particularly with the changing mosaic of our province, is the diversity of the population. The key message here is that there's a lot more to this than geography.

11:02

Again, talking about distance and diversity, when you look at distance and diversity, on the distance side obviously travel is a major consideration, communication links, isolated community groups. When you take some of our more northern communities, you know, you've got problems with roads: ice roads, no ice roads, how you get in and out, how you physically reach these people. Time is certainly a factor whether you're dealing with distance or diversity, obviously the time that an MLA would have to deal with and interact with the constituents. Understanding: we see that cuts across both ways. There's culture, in one case aboriginal, of course a significant portion of our population, maybe not so much in number but certainly the significance of the aboriginal contingent of our population and the history.

In larger urban centres you have the diversity of cultures, many cultures. You take Mill Woods, for example, on the southeast corner of Edmonton. You have a southeast Asian community, for example, two or three different communities. To the uneducated, one would look at this group of people and think that you're dealing with one group, but in a lot of cases you're dealing with two or three different groups from south Asia congregated in one area.

On the diversity side again, communication links, how you communicate with people; the homeless, for example. Who communicates with the homeless? How do you get a message to

these people? How do you hear their voices? Obviously, again on the diversity scale is language. How are we accounting for dealing with people in different languages where you have high concentrations of particular ethnic groups? In many cases the common language is not the English language or French or other official language. It's the language of the mother tongue of these people.

We think it would be a very good idea to develop a communication and education plan for each MLA, again just helping them to develop a plan of how to communicate, when and what to communicate, and where to communicate, taking into account the audience that they're trying to reach. What is the most effective way to get the message out, recognizing that it's two-way? The Legislature has a message to get out to the constituents, and obviously they need to get feedback from the constituents, again a number of groups, individuals, organizations, business, et cetera.

We think an MLA committee in each constituency should be representative of the region. Again, the idea there is two-way communication. We think it'd be a very good idea if there were some way that this might be – I don't know if "institutionalize" is the word; maybe that's an overused term. MLAs would meet with municipal councils on a biannual basis and community organizations on an annual basis – and this is as a minimum – just so that there is some formal mechanism, that there is this ongoing communication. I talked earlier about roles and responsibilities. It's very important that the communication is both ways, these groups and councils recognizing the role and the responsibilities of the MLA and going the other way as well.

Town hall meetings: we think these would be a really good idea, a way of letting people know on a more regular basis who the MLA is, where you can come out and see your MLA. A lot of people are intimidated by government offices. While the idea of stepping into a government office may be quite normal for many of us in this room, a lot of people are very intimidated by structures. The Legislature, the municipal office, the MLA's office: these aren't always places that many people feel comfortable going to. So we think: let's take government to the people.

Web sites and the development of the Supernet and so on. Obviously, in today's world we think web sites should certainly be encouraged, that MLAs would communicate with their constituents by way of their own web sites. Again, part of that communication would be informing the constituents as to what the role of the MLA is, what are the core services, management plans, and the MLA's ability to meet the expectations of the public.

We think e-government obviously is a very powerful tool that we have today to communicate with the public and that the government should continue more initiatives in this area. We think part of this, as well, is to address the multicultural language needs of MLAs to effectively represent constituents. Having more staff on hand that would help the MLA to communicate with the various multicultural groups in their constituency would be helpful.

In an effort to maintain the commitment to consult with citizens, we think maybe traveling committees might be a good idea. Summits: this government has used summits, we think, quite successfully to tackle a number of issues, and we've seen some of the results that have come out of that that the government has implemented. We think this might be another tool that might be used on a smaller scale at the local level to get the message out and get that feedback.

Stakeholder input. Basically, the message here is that the MLA should have sufficient resources to effectively carry out their responsibilities. We feel that effective elected representation equals trust, and we've just listed here what we think are obviously the key elements of what that trust is: professionalism, accountability, the

ability to listen, keeping promises, very important. Keeping promises at the local level carries back to a caucus and on to the leadership and the government or the opposition, wherever your MLA might be. Knowledge of the issues and being accessible are very important.

In understanding empowerment we believe the government needs to reduce the demands on an MLA by establishing frameworks that empower and create direct accountability, again having your public know exactly what the role of the MLA is, what they do and what you expect from them in terms of being accountable for those decisions to the constituency. Accountable councils and boards, municipal councils, school boards, and hospital boards – we talked about roles and responsibilities earlier. The MLA has a bundle of responsibilities. Local elected bodies – municipal councils, school boards, hospital boards, or regional health boards as they are today – have their own responsibilities, and it's very important that we not muddle the two, that the MLA knows his or her responsibility and so do the local elected bodies.

Democratic governments, we feel it's very important to point out, are not just numbers. Continuing to develop more effective representatives is really what is critical for Alberta's future, and that's how we view this process. We believe that this is certainly a timely process, and ultimately what we expect and believe you will deliver at the end of this process is just that: much more effective representation for our province.

Mr. Chairman, that's our presentation, and we'll be available to answer some questions.

11:12

The Chair: Thank you very much, Your Worship.

Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, George and John. This is a wonderful brief, and Ernie didn't have to tell me that he had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Rogers: You could tell.

Mr. Clegg: I can tell by the quality of this brief.

I do have one question, though. As we go around the province, every constituency says that they're going to have population growth, and I guess we all believe in that, but we are obliged to follow the census. Now, if we start projecting growth, then we've got a bigger job than we've got to do already. I don't think any of us could or should as a committee try and project, because everyone says that there's going to be growth. I can't agree with them all, because there's not going to be equal growth. I see that you think we should take into account population growth. Can't you see lots of problems for us if we try and do that?

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Chairman, through to Mr. Clegg, I appreciate your point, and I hear where you're coming from in terms of working with the census numbers, but I think it's very important that – there's a variance that's enshrined in legislation, and that's part of why we're doing this review today, to see how well we're living within those variances. But the reality is that we've got some very explosive growth going on in this province right now, and in many cases it's diagrammed. It's not just that it might happen. It's on the ground, the services are in, the lots are marked out, the houses have been paid for, and they're going to be delivered nine months from now. The point we're trying to make here is that it would be a shame a year from now, when these subdivisions are full of people, in some cases 2,000, 3,000 people in a very small area, that this wasn't taken into account in any way. So what you end up with is an MLA that we know – it's not just a question of if, we know –

within probably 18 months is going to be looking after another 5,000, 10,000 people when we could have made some kind of an adjustment for it.

I leave that with you for some thought. I know what you're saying in terms of working with the hard numbers, but where we can clearly see, not just based on supposition but the fact that it's planned and laid out, that it's going to happen, I think there should be some adjustment made to reflect that.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

Ms Mackay: Thank you for your presentation. Edmonton is one of your members; right?

Mr. Rogers: Absolutely.

Ms Mackay: Now, you don't have to answer this, but I'm going to ask you a very direct question. Does your association have any position on the importance of Edmonton retaining its 19 seats?

Mr. Rogers: Well, I guess I have to be careful. No, we don't have a specific position. I think our position has to be encapsulated around the principles that we've raised. How that comes out at the end of your process, based on your recommendations after digesting all of what's come before you, then we'll have to live with those results. Certainly I couldn't sit here and say, "Yes, I would be in favour of Edmonton losing a seat," but I believe that if the principles that we propose here form a good basis for your decision, then Edmonton will be effectively represented at the end of the process. How that might look remains to be seen.

The Chair: That was very well done, sir.

Mr. Patterson, do you want to try and follow that?

Mr. Patterson: No. I think, Mr. Chair, I won't ask any questions or make any comments because of my unique position. Thanks.

Mr. Graham: If I could just encapsulate, Your Worship – and I thought your presentation was very interesting, I might say effective. It seems to me that this is what you're saying. Effective representation is not just numbers and boundaries. To be effective, an MLA must understand his function, the constituencies must understand the function of the MLA, and the MLA must be given the resources to deal with those functions. Is that about what you're saying?

Mr. Rogers: Absolutely. I couldn't have said it better, Mr. Graham. Thank you.

Mr. Graham: Then I have your point. Thank you.

The Chair: Can I add to that and say that if my memory is accurate – and it isn't always – I believe you're the first people to come forward and talk in terms of the issues of multilanguage challenges that MLAs have. At one of the first meetings we had, one of the members in the city of Edmonton told us they had something like 21 different languages spoken in that constituency. With that background, George, and when you talk about funding MLAs' offices so that they'd be able to meet some of those kinds of challenges, you're saying: don't be afraid to recommend some resources to enable that person to do a better job given the language challenge.

Mr. Rogers: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. I think it would be a

shame if your process did not recommend some concrete measures to address those issues. As this province grows, we are becoming more and more of a multicultural society, and it's very important that no one be disenfranchised at the end of this process. I just can't emphasize enough how important it is that MLAs are able to communicate effectively with their constituents and, more importantly, that those people who feel that they're hurt have a way of getting their desires expressed to their MLA.

Also, not only particularly to the multicultural aspect but just for the fact of accessibility of that MLA to the citizens, I think we really have to take a long hard look at – again, you talked about the resources – what resources are provided to an MLA to run a local office. Again, this is not a criticism, but I think of my MLA's local office. I believe it's open three days a week, and it's run with about a person and a half. I think the question has to be raised: if that's what is typical across this province, are those offices open and available enough to the average citizen that needs to find out what his MLA is doing, what the government is doing, that needs to get his voice heard in government? Are those types of hours and that amount of manpower enough? Yes, we're all certainly very conscientious about budgets and deficits in this province, and I would never make a presentation that would suggest that this province should ever get itself back into the fiscal mess that we were in some years ago, but I think that we have to step back and take a really good, hard look at what it means to represent a group of people, 50,000 people or what have you, whose views an MLA is representing in the House and be responsible for delivering a government service as a government representative. If that office is not accessible to people when they need it, if the personnel are not there that can answer questions from the public, is that MLA in that office of enough effect in that community?

The Chair: You mentioned areas in Edmonton. You'd also likely include in there the east and northeast part of Calgary, which is very significant.

Mr. Rogers: Oh, absolutely. Again, too, there are other opportunities. Personnel is obviously important, office hours. We talked about some of these electronic tools. We have tools nowadays. Many people work some really weird hours these days. You know, if they're like me, sometimes it's 1 o'clock in the morning when I'm reading my e-mail or checking up on something. So we need to beef up those other avenues as well, where it's the only time that people have to look into something or find out what's going on. So there are a lot of sides to this. The key word is resources, adequate resources. We must equip our MLAs with adequate resources to deliver what they were elected to do.

The Chair: Okay. On that note, George and John, thank you very much for a very interesting presentation, one that's going to cause Glen to have more gray hair.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I must credit John and his staff for a lot of the work.

11:22

The Chair: We've come to expect nothing less from John. Thanks, John. We've known John a long time. Thank you.

Pembina Hills school division. Laurie, welcome.

Ms Hodge: Thank you.

The Chair: I see you have a familiar character along with you.

Ms Hodge: His wife isn't here, so I take care of him when she's gone.

The Chair: Okay. A big challenge. Carry on.

Mr. Nagel: Obviously, Bob and I have known each other for a while.

The Chair: Laurie, we look forward to your presentation or Ken's.

Mr. Nagel: I'll start out with the historical part of our presentation, first of all indicating somewhat the makeup of our board. Our board is made up of three trustees from Westlock and area, three trustees from Barrhead and area, and one trustee from Swan Hills. I am the trustee from Swan Hills, and Laurie is an elected trustee from Westlock.

With that, I'll go into our historical background. We came into existence in January '95 as three school systems – the Westlock school division, the county of Barrhead, and the Swan Hills school district – voluntarily uniting to form the Pembina Hills regional school division. The voluntary nature of the union has helped lay the groundwork for a spirit of co-operation that exists today, and I want to just elaborate on that a little bit. Our administration staff have an association whereby the principals of our schools are co-operating together. Over the years there's been a long history of competition between Barrhead and Westlock. At this point we see our principals working together and not working against each other. If there is a competition, it's a friendly one. That was particularly noted at the last administration meeting. If there is any bickering back and forth, it's usually between large schools and small schools, and the whole idea of the Barrhead/Westlock/Swan Hills identity has kind of amalgamated into the regional process. I just thought I wanted to expound on that. Being from the outside and looking at two large communities, that's what I see as a trustee from Swan Hills.

Pembina Hills delivers services to a number of woodland counties. In the interest of time I'll not go into all the counties and villages that we incorporate, except to say that we include the village of Clyde. We also provide educational services for the village of Vimy, which has been absent here by some, so I just wanted to note that. We have 15 community-based schools, two Hutterite colony schools, and two outreach centres, one in Barrhead and one in Westlock.

In addition to that, in 1997 Pembina Hills became the operating authority for the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, formerly known as Alberta Correspondence School. It moved to Barrhead in 1983 and was renamed the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. It continues to serve alternative learning methods to students in Alberta and the Northwest Territories in Canada and indeed internationally. It is a very growing concern in terms of the number of students it serves and the co-operation that it's had with other school districts throughout the province of Alberta.

That brings us to the Grizzly regional economic alliance, Growth, as we like to fondly call it. You might ask what Pembina Hills as a school division is doing in economic development, and I would just simply say that since 1995 with regionalizing we have lost 2 percent per year of student enrollment. That brings us to about 15 percent as it sits right now. As a board we decided that we needed to do something about that if we could, not just to stem the tide but to turn the tide. So we brought together all of the municipal cohorts, partners in municipal government, into one room to start talking about regional economic development.

With that, I'll turn it over to Laurie, who is actually an expert at this, being a former economic development officer.

The Chair: Laurie.

Ms Hodge: Thank you. Thank you, Ken. I kind of blush at the word "expert." Certainly not. I don't think there is such a thing as an expert in economic development.

The purpose of Ken's and my visit here was – it's worth noting that it was so important to our board that we're actually late for a regular board meeting to make this presentation or support the written presentation that you have.

Another gentleman in the room indicated that he had voted in three different constituencies since he's lived in Alberta. I have likewise, living in Westlock, voted in three different constituencies. Mr. Clegg mentioned that in 1995 he thought they'd done a good job. Frankly, 1992 was a very good job as well. We joined the Barrhead constituency and became the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, and what happened was a fairly seamless move for us. We are sister communities with Barrhead. Certainly our interests are very much the same, and we embrace the association with Swan Hills. The introduction of the Pembina Hills regional division echoed the constituency boundaries or vice versa – my history kind of eludes me right now – but what it has become is a very positive and beneficial working community between all of the players in Pembina Hills, in Barrhead, Westlock, and Swan Hills.

Ken talked about Growth a little bit, and actually a number of people have talked about it. The Growth initiative came into existence in April of 2001. There are a number of local authorities that are represented, including some outside authorities. What's interesting is that the inception of the Growth initiative included the local authorities that are currently part of Pembina Hills. It has grown to include the county of Thorhild and the village of Thorhild. So they have recognized that their interests are better served with the members of the Growth team in this constituency with respect to economic development initiatives.

What has evolved is a community of communities in this constituency. I think it's very important to recognize that. Recognizing that our population is declining, evidenced by the declining school enrollment, we of course hope to stem that tide, recognizing that that is a long-term and very lengthy process in some of our rural areas. We want to maintain the status quo; there is absolutely no doubt about it around our board table and in discussions that we have. We are very happy in this constituency with our neighbours in Barrhead and Swan Hills.

However, we understand that that may not be a workable solution, so our recommendation therefore is that a provincial electoral constituency be created within the borders of the Grizzly regional economic alliance, or the Growth initiative. That border extends beyond the current Pembina Hills regional school division to include Thorhild county and the village of Thorhild. The rationales are indicated in our written submission, and they have to do with a number of things that you've also heard this morning: trading areas, natural community linkages. The interesting thing that maybe isn't emphasized sufficiently is the agriculture community and how it tends to centralize in the Barrhead and Westlock region from outside of the immediate areas. Thorhild farmers and Thorhild people and communities west actually do come to Westlock for those particular services. I belong to an agricultural research organization whose boundaries extend from Yellowhead county all the way east beyond Thorhild and south including Parkland county. It's very interesting when you have these kinds of discussions with some of the farmers in those areas about which communities serve them. So our rationale again is the natural trading areas, not necessarily associated with highways but the community linkages and natural trading areas in those communities. Also, our rationale includes partnerships and communications. Our boundaries, though not coterminous with the

Aspen regional health authority, are within the Aspen regional health authority, and we have a wonderful working relationship with that authority. Likewise, the Sakaw-Askiy children's services is included. We are included in their boundaries. The issue of dealing with one MLA cannot be minimized and certainly can't be trivialized.

11:32

I guess our last statement of rationale includes an acceptable range of population. We understand that we are currently below the acceptable range. The inclusion of the county and village of Thorhild, with a combined population of just under 3,600, would place us just over the minimum acceptable range at around 29,000.

Concluding, a key strength of the Growth region is commonality and commitment to rural Alberta. The region currently represented as the Barrhead-Westlock constituency is a community of communities. With the inception of Growth the community has grown to include our neighbours to the east in Thorhild. With the current population shift in this province it is important that the rural voice remain viable. It is our belief that this region will ensure that the strength of rural Alberta is maintained for our future generations. It was with this foresight that members of Growth quickly saw the advantages of a regional economic development alliance within its current boundaries.

It is our hope that the commission considers the physical distances of rural ridings when reviewing the existing provincial constituency sizes. Basing ridings solely on population without considering sparsity and distances would result in unequal representation and would not reflect the strength and history of this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Laurie. Thanks, Ken. Could I throw a fly in the ointment? What about the county of Athabasca? What are the relationships tradingwise that way?

Ms Hodge: Interestingly enough, when I first moved to Westlock, we were part of the Athabasca constituency, and I did live for a time in Athabasca.

The Chair: Westlock was and Barrhead wasn't as I recall, if my memory is accurate.

Ms Hodge: Barrhead wasn't; right. The Athabasca contingent I guess tends to come west on highway 2 and then go south toward Edmonton.

The Chair: At the Clyde corner?

Ms Hodge: At the Clyde corner. Exactly. There is less an association with Athabasca than there is with the western side of the constituency. It's an interesting anomaly, but that's the state of affairs.

The Chair: So do I conclude that you're saying that there is more trade back and forth with the good folks in Thorhild than the good folks in Athabasca?

Ms Hodge: Absolutely. Certainly the rural residents, the county residents. The village – I hesitate to respond to that, but certainly the county. I deal with a number of the county residents daily, and we know how they trade.

The Chair: Questions or comments, anyone?

Mr. Patterson: Just, Mr. Chair, that I appreciate the specific

recommendations.

The Chair: I really am quite impressed with what you've done on the polling of this whole group. I think it's a neat initiative and the first time that I've heard of it. Perhaps I, unlike Ernie, wasn't in on the previous presentations, so I'm in the dark.

Ms Hodge: Well, I won't take credit for it. I was elected at the last election, and actually that was part of the reason why I ran, because I thought it was such a tremendous initiative that a school division that had no vested interest in this, certainly no tax interest, no revenue interest, would actually be the driving force of such an initiative.

The Chair: I suspect there may be opportunities when you can be a pretty honest broker in that kind of situation. Thank you very, very much. We appreciate it.

Ms Hodge: Thank you.

The Chair: Doug.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Schulz.

The Chair: Your Worship, thank you very much for being here today. I know that we're running a bit behind time; I apologize. You've been here for some time. You've heard the quality of the presentations. Certainly the commission has had the benefit of the kind of straightforward advice we've received, so we look forward to your direction to us.

Mr. Schulz: Well, it's a pleasure to be here. Hearing all the speeches, I wondered how I could maybe lighten it up and be a little bit different so that you remember mine, so I thought I would sing it.

The Chair: Just record it, and we'll play it later.

Mr. Schulz: Unfortunately, I did not bring my music, so I will not sing it.

The Chair: No, you won't.

Mr. Schulz: I see we're off to a good start then.

On behalf of the town of Barrhead we realize the seriousness of the issue. I was not making light of that at all, just a little humour to lighten my nervousness. I would like to read our presentation because it is not just my idea. It's from our town council, it's from our town, and it's how we all believe collectively. We've all invested in this and in this presentation, so at this point I'd like to just read what we have.

The history of the Barrhead-Westlock constituency is not one of borders but one of people. For many years we have shared the same interests, likes, dislikes, concerns, and resources, both human and natural. In short, we are a family. We share workforces, provincial and federal services. We trade in the same area and have been represented by the same person for many years. As Speaker of the House our MLA, the Hon. Ken Kowalski, has represented our large geographical area with pride and dedication second to none. He knows us well and has an excellent awareness of and commitment to our needs.

The Barrhead-Westlock constituency is a model which needs to be encouraged and fostered, not dismembered. The Barrhead-Westlock constituency is an economically successful constituency. Our transportation, commercial, school, and municipal patterns of

interaction have created an area of economic stability and growth where alliances have taken root and taken advantage of the provincial mandate to rationalize resources and put provincial and taxpayers' dollars to use; for example, social housing. Our children go to schools within the same education district. Our commercial health care needs are also met in a centralized manner, with special services made increasingly available within a reasonable driving distance.

Barrhead and Westlock have always been a natural fit. The addition of Swan Hills has strengthened the area's access to new sources of community and economic development and made it even better; for example, the Grizzly regional economic alliance society, or Growth, a combination of Swan Hills, Woodlands, Barrhead, Westlock, and Thorhild working well together. Services like Pembina Hills school division and Aspen health authority use our electoral boundaries as a guide to their boundaries.

To help strengthen the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, we must look to the borders that you have defined. Our business and cultural areas go much farther, including in the south Rich Valley, Busby, Alberta Beach, and Onoway. Residents of this area constantly migrate toward Barrhead-Westlock to shop, trade, and use our health, recreation, and cultural facilities. To the east the Thorhild area has the same trends and needs that are looked after by our constituency. By adding these two areas to our existing borders, it would enhance our communities and not adversely affect the sizes of the constituencies they come from. Most importantly, because these areas are a part of our trading region, no animosity or hard feelings would result because of this natural union. Therefore, I see this as a benefit to all parties if there is a need for realignment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Taking it as sung, it was well done.

Mr. Schulz: Thank you.

The Chair: Any comments?

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, Alberta Beach used to be a summer village, but I believe that now it's become a regular village. It's actually got quite a size of population.

Mr. Schulz: I don't know the actual size.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. You see, then, coming this way instead of more toward the Edmonton way?

Mr. Schulz: Actually, there is a trend now with Cherhill and Sangudo and Alberta Beach and especially Busby, that area, and Rich Valley to be coming back toward Barrhead. I've noticed that in my business, and we've noticed actually quite a trend. As a matter of fact, we just had a Chamber of Commerce passport to go shopping, and Barrhead was encouraged with a \$5,000 prize. It was hugely successful, and we have known a large increase in the people from that area coming toward the north now, where it used to be just always southern migration. It's changing.

11:42

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

The Chair: Okay. Your Worship, thank you very much.

Mr. Schulz: Thank you for your time.

The Chair: We appreciate it.

The reeve of the county of Barrhead.

Mr. Miller: And my deputy reeve.

The Chair: And your deputy reeve and whoever else you want to bring.

Mr. Miller: I have three other councillors, and I've got a manager here too.

The Chair: If you want to bring them up, you're welcome to.

Mr. Miller: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. It's still morning.

The Chair: It's still morning. We're doing better than you thought we were going to; aren't we?

Mr. Miller: Yes, but you're getting close today.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Miller: Okay. I'll probably be quite brief and hopefully to the point. I am pleased to address the commission today on behalf of the county of Barrhead No. 11. Of course, you know my name is Lawrence Miller. I'm the current reeve of the county, and Bill Lee is the deputy reeve of the county.

Our council is aware of the population in Barrhead-Westlock constituency and how it exceeds the allowable variance. What to do? Well, we think we know what you should do.

The Chair: Good man.

Mr. Miller: What we want to see is this constituency continue as it includes the rural municipalities of Barrhead, Westlock, plus several towns, villages, and hamlets. The present boundary surrounds an area of Alberta with common community interests and reflects the local trade and business patterns that have been alluded to before.

Within the education service the Pembina Hills regional school division has a service area that overlaps closely our present Barrhead-Westlock constituency. Having coterminous boundaries with other agencies helps to create identity and clarification for both residents and elected representatives.

The residents of our constituency have a strong agricultural background and are generally like-minded on many issues. For example, a new economic initiative labeled Growth, the Grizzly regional economic alliance, which was mentioned before, has recently been started by the communities of Swan Hills, Woodlands, Barrhead, Westlock, and Thorhild seeking opportunities for sustainable and diversified economic development for the region.

We seem to work well together, want to continue to have an effective representation from our rural communities, and are really advocating no change: the bottom line.

The Chair: Our bottom line is that unfortunately we're going to have to get some more people in your constituency or Mr. Kowalski may suffer the same fate the former Speaker did, and that was that his constituency was wiped out.

Mr. Miller: Hopefully that doesn't happen.

The Chair: No. Really that's what happened in the former Speaker's constituency of Drumheller, so that's why it's really important that you're giving us the kind of concrete advice you're giving us today so we can work with you. Sorry, Lawrence, for the

interruption.

Mr. Miller: Well, I'll just respond by saying that the province should be like family. You can't always be equal, but be fair.

The Chair: We think 30 percent is stretching it.

Mr. Miller: Hey, we're farmers, and we're farther and farther apart now and it's getting more so. Who's going to represent us in the Legislature? Who's going to look after rural or agricultural issues? It's scary for us. I hope you'll realize that.

Anyway, our present constituency is physically large enough and presents a challenge for the MLA to maintain regular contact with all the local governments and numerous community associations. Our agricultural community continues to contribute, and we see it as a vital component of Alberta's economy. As a significant region of this dynamic province we expect to retain our electoral division and to be recognized and fairly represented in the provincial Legislature.

Again, on behalf of the county of Barrhead we thank you for allowing us to express our views.

The Chair: Lawrence, if we added the part that you're recommending here, any idea – or perhaps your administrator could tell us – about how many people that would add to the constituency?

Mr. Miller: I'm not sure. Well, who are you talking about? Thorhild or east or south?

The Chair: Yeah, Thorhild.

Mr. Miller: I think Thorhild was mentioned as about – what? – 2,800 or something.

The Chair: That was it.

Mr. Miller: Or 3,500? I'm just not sure.

I've got my deputy here. Maybe he wants to add something.

The Chair: Please do, Bill.

Mr. Lee: I'm a farmer too, involved in agriculture, and because we're so good at agriculture, this is why we have this problem. It used to be that agriculture was labour intensive. You had hired men and family farms and everything else, and now we've gotten very efficient. We've gotten modern – lots of machinery, lots of high-tech stuff – and we've freed up a lot of people that now can live in the cities and have a high quality of life and a high standard of life and cheap food thanks to what we're doing. We've got to be represented somewhere, because if you look back in history, if the farmer loses out, everybody loses out. We've had many great civilizations die as soon as the farm disappears.

The Chair: I grew up on a dairy farm myself. I remember very well when the power went off. I hear you. We've heard this numerous times across the province. Mr. Clegg farms also, so it's not lost on us, I can assure you.

Mr. Lee: I'd like to add one other thing, though. We in this community have a low crime rate, and I think we have a low crime rate because we have a sense of community. The people here feel they belong here and want to be here and are proud of their community.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the representation. I grew

up on a farm also, so I can't disagree with anything you're saying, but we also have another consideration that our commission has to take into consideration, and that is all of the precedents that have been set by the courts. We can't ignore those, because otherwise if we do, our recommendations will be thrown out.

I don't know whether you've had the opportunity or not to look at these, but Doug will have some out at the table. There's a document which summarizes some of the court decisions. Just for interest, it puts us, you know, really behind the eight ball, because we don't want to get into the situation where we give a report and then it's all thrown out. So if I might say that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Mr. Graham: Well, I have a comment. I just want to assure you, Mr. Miller, and you, Mr. Lee, that we do understand your concerns, and we'll certainly be looking at those concerns. I think everybody on this panel has a rural background. My grandparents homesteaded in this province, as did Bauni Mackay's. So we fully understand your concerns, and we understand the history of the province, and they are going to be taken into consideration.

I understand what you've said between the lines to be very similar to what your very able member, Mr. Kowalski, has said, which is that you'd prefer to stay the way you are, but if you have to move, you'd prefer to move south or take on parts in the south and east. Is that roughly where you're coming from?

Mr. Miller: Our council doesn't say that. We haven't said specifically east and south but whatever will work in, I guess. Whatever's best.

Mr. Lee: You want to bring in like-minded people to keep that sense of community, the trading community and that kind of thing.

Mr. Graham: Yeah, and that would be Thorhild and Onoway to the south and so forth. Is that what I'm hearing you saying?

Mr. Lee: It's one of the possibilities. I guess you guys will decide that.

The Chair: We're here to get the best advice we can, Bill.

Mr. Lee: You talked about the courts and everything else. You know, we didn't commit a crime here, and we just don't want to feel as if we have.

The Chair: And I guess we don't want to write a report that's going to end up in the court and have to do this all over again too.

Mr. Lee: True. True.

Mr. Miller: Anyhow, we trust that we will have a favourable outcome to this process.

The Chair: We'll do our best for you.

Mr. Miller: Thank you.

11:52

The Chair: Thanks very much.

The mayor of Westlock. Her Worship is one of the hosts of the Speaker's Cup yearly golf tournament, which I've played in unsuccessfully, and Westlock has the distinction of being the home of a young professional golfer, Brett Burgeson, who is the pro at my home course in Carstairs. Brett was selected three years ago as the

outstanding pro in the province. So, Shirley, with that bit of a commercial introduction give us your best advice, please.

Mr. Graham: Well, if I might say, Mr. Chair, your being unsuccessful at a golf tournament is not a particularly distinguishing feature that I would remember.

The Chair: No. I was thinking more of the pro coming from Westlock.

Ms Morie: I think they do have fun at the Speaker's Cup.

The Chair: You're right.

Ms Morie: I would like to thank you all for having the opportunity to present the views of the town of Westlock, and this submission is presented by the town of Westlock. Ideally, we are in favour of leaving the Barrhead-Westlock electoral division as it is. That is our ideal but recognizing that there probably have to be some changes.

The town of Westlock is in the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, and we're approximately 85 kilometres north of Edmonton, not a tremendous distance by geographical standards but a huge distance in the sorts of lives that we live and how we earn our living in contrast to that of urban areas. While we think that the province may have admirable intentions in creating an absolute equal electoral division by population, it is not very practical and will not ultimately lead to better representation. There are more reasons to leave the boundaries as they are than there are to change, not the least of which is the commonality of interests, livelihood, geography, history, and the fact that there are numerous successful partnerships at work which follow the existing boundaries. A change of boundaries would lead to our community not being properly represented and would not be taking our interests as a region into account.

The present electoral boundaries divided the province into 83 electoral divisions. The population for the province has significantly increased in the urban centres, while small and rural areas are continuing to decrease. Barrhead-Westlock is no different in this regard than other rural communities. Prior to the last boundary change the town of Westlock was in the Sturgeon riding with the towns of Legal and Morinville, and I would just like to remind the commission that because of that split the town of Westlock almost lost their hospital that had been here for almost a hundred years.

Not so long ago the administration of the town and county as well as the other communities within our constituency worked extremely hard at forging partnerships and associations that are yielding economic benefit now and for the future. One of these examples is a regional economic group that we refer to as Growth, and I don't know how many times you've heard of it. The Growth group is working within the Barrhead-Westlock constituency and with the town of Thorhild to create more jobs and attract more business. The town of Westlock also enjoys a similar synchronicity with the Pembina Hills regional division and Aspen health. Tawatinaw Community Futures has also been very beneficial in the start-up of several new business ventures. Untold man-hours, both volunteer and paid, have gone into these alliances. We feel that it would be unnecessarily injurious and expensive should our boundaries change again so soon after the last one, and I think it was, as the Pembina Hills representative said, in 1992. Before that, we were in the Athabasca region, and because we're sort of at the bottom of the boot, I do not think that we were very well represented.

Any significant change to the constituency base would penalize our rural constituents in favour of those in our urban centres. This will create a mirror of the problem with the federal electoral

divisions that Albertans are so vocal about. The rural ridings will be underrepresented, and all decisions will be made in the urban centres thus alienating rural Albertans.

The town of Westlock feels that any change in our boundaries would cause an unnecessary disruption economically and politically and injure our growing sense of belonging to the larger community. This is the first time that Westlock feels that it is actually in the right constituency, part of a larger group with similar interests, and we feel that the community is well represented by our current MLA. So we are really afraid that perhaps the Barrhead-Westlock constituency will be cut down the middle and we will be floating somewhere else, either north or east or south, but we really do feel that we belong where we are now.

The Chair: That's straight and to the point, Shirley. Thank you very much.

Any comments or questions from my colleagues?

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for your presentation. You've heard the others, so my question to you is: what would be your reaction if we did add in the county of Thorhild, the village of Thorhild?

Ms Morie: My reaction would be very good, because it is an actual trading pattern. We do service the county of Thorhild and the village of Thorhild. I might add that Busby to the south of us also is serviced completely by Westlock, and I do not believe that that is in our constituency. So altogether we might be looking at 4,500 to 5,500 people.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Your Worship.

Ms Morie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very, very much. I appreciate it.

Mr. Tomlinson, the reeve of the county of Westlock. Mr. Tomlinson, if there's some truth in the saying that they save the best to the last, you're amongst the best along with the mayor who just spoke. So thanks very much for coming, and we look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Tomlinson: Thank you for letting us bring this before you. The council of Westlock county wishes to once again express its opinions respecting the provincial electoral boundaries review currently being conducted and the potential shift in representation in favour of urban Alberta. While it is recognized that representation by population is an important principle, it should not be the only factor considered in reviewing constituency boundaries. Consideration should also be given to social, economic, cultural, and geographic factors. In addition, consideration should be given to the concept of effective representation. Electoral boundaries that are manipulated in order to accommodate numbers may very well result in diminishing access due to a number of factors, such as distance, et cetera.

Rural MLAs have many different municipal councils, special purpose boards, community groups, and special interest groups, unlike an urban MLA who may only have one council, et cetera, within his or her electoral district to deal with. Rural Alberta has a character and lifestyle unique from that of urban Alberta, and in fact each rural community is unique unto itself with regard to ethnic backgrounds, goals, objectives, and aspirations. Given the size of many rural constituencies, rural MLAs are being put in the position of having to choose on certain issues which group in their constituency they support to the detriment of another group; for example, one community over another or one municipality over

another. Should the outcome of the review result in an increase in rural constituency sizes and a decrease in rural representation, there would most assuredly be a decrease in the rural standard of living over time as well as a negative impact on the rural character and social fabric.

In an economy that is so reliant on agriculture and natural resources, both of which are rural based, it is imperative that an equitable balance of representation be maintained. With all due respect, as an example, an urban-oriented perspective without benefit of the rural grassroots presence could result in decisions for a short-term economic advantage to the detriment of environmental and long-term economic advantages. Conversely, economic advantage could be lost in light of the possible inaccurate environmental considerations.

12:02

Because of the size of rural constituencies rural MLAs already find it difficult to visit remote areas and parts of their respective constituencies in order to gather constituents' opinions and obtain a feel for the grassroots' attitude on current issues. Any increase in rural constituency sizes would only serve to augment and accentuate the difficulty. An urban MLA may very easily be able to cross his or her jurisdiction in an hour or so, while a rural MLA may take a day or more. Access to legislative representatives is a very important factor to also be considered. The opinion of the council for Westlock county is that the interests of all Albertans would be best served by maintaining the current rural/urban relationship in terms of representation.

Locally, the communities contained within Barrhead-Westlock share a common social and economic background, making the area a logical and rational unit for MLA representation. The area is predominantly agriculture based, thereby giving the residents a strong community of interest at all associated levels. Additionally, it has common school jurisdictional boundaries within the Pembina Hills regional school division, the health authority boundaries of Aspen regional health, and the recently formed regional economic development alliance, locally known as Growth. These and other similar community-binding factors and initiatives have effectively drawn the communities together and given them a definable identity. Changing the boundaries by simply drawing lines on the map without considering the implications at all other levels would be destructive in nature.

The communities of Barrhead and Westlock have acquired and developed through hard work and as a result of innate commonalities an essential principle of democracy and a strong community of interest that needs to be preserved. A significant constituency change for Westlock-Barrhead from the current model would have a short-term and long-term impact that would not be in the best interest of the constituency nor its residents. The Barrhead-Westlock area has been subject to somewhat radical changes in provincial electoral boundaries in the past. The people would appreciate and expect some degree of consideration in allowing the area to experience the stability that has been established with the current constituency configuration. As such, the maintenance of the existing constituency model is imperative for the area. If modification is ultimately deemed necessary, it is suggested that the additional population and area be added to the constituency preferably from whichever area would complement the community of interests already contained therein.

This opinion is respectfully submitted for your consideration.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Don. If I could take just a moment to reminisce, I recall when Westlock and Barrhead were separate constituencies and when Doc Horner represented Barrhead before Ken. I can go back as far as – some of you might remember when

Bob Jorgenson was the member for Westlock, followed by Carl Muller, and Frank Appleby came after that. I know that you've been – tossed about may not be a fair comment, but you've been hither and yon anyway. So I really appreciate that comment, Don.

Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's always good to have age on your side when it comes to history, and certainly our chairman has that. We younger people haven't got that same background. Certainly being from rural Alberta and on council for 19 years, I like it when rural people know exactly what they want. They don't always get what they want, but they know what they want anyway. Certainly I respect the brief. Like the chairman said earlier, you can bet that this committee will do the best job that they can do, and everybody in Alberta will be happy.

Mr. Tomlinson: Thank you. Right on.

The Chair: On that note, are there any other questions?

Can I say then to you, Don, and to all the good folks of Barrhead-Westlock and the neighbouring constituencies, our friends from Swan Hills who are here and others, a very sincere thanks for your presentations. You've given us a lot to think about. We knew that this was going to be a full morning, and when we looked at the map, we saw what the implications are for this riding. I took poor Mr. Miller on there. I didn't mean to be unjustly blunt, but that's part of the challenge that we face.

Your comments this morning have been extremely helpful, and we're very grateful. Our interim report will be out in early September. We hope we're not back here because you'll be satisfied with all we've done. Thank you very much.

This part of the commission's work is adjourned until Edson later on this afternoon.

[The commission adjourned at 12:09 p.m.]

