

3:55 p.m.

Tuesday, June 25, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to welcome you to this meeting of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. This is our third week of hearings across the province. The first week we started in Calgary and up to Edmonton, the corridor. The second week we were at St. Paul, Wainwright, Drumheller, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Wetaskiwin. This week we're here. We were in Westlock this morning. We are with you good folks this afternoon. Tomorrow morning we're in Slave Lake, tomorrow night we're in Ft. McMurray, and then on Thursday we're in Grande Prairie and Peace River. That will then finish the public consultation portion of the matter that's before us.

As I'm sure all of you are aware, this commission is established as a result of Alberta's election boundaries legislation. After every two elections in Alberta it's mandatory that a commission be set up such as this. The commission will take basically one year to have hearings across the province using the most recent federal Stats Canada census figures and then make recommendations within one year to the Speaker of the Legislature. The timing this year is that our interim report will be available to the Speaker in or around the first part of September. That will then be released and made public, and then in December or January of this year and next year we will be holding a second round of hearings. Then we have to have a final report in the hands of the Speaker early in March of 2003.

Two of the members of the panel are appointed by the Leader of the Opposition after consultation, two are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and the chairman comes from a list of characters. The chairman can either be a judge or a retired judge, the head of an academic institution, the Auditor General, or the Ethics Commissioner. Unfortunately, this time you're stuck with the Ethics Commissioner.

The group that I have the honour of working with, starting on my far left, is Doug Graham. Doug is a well-respected, well-known lawyer in the city of Calgary. To my immediate left is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is from Edmonton, and she's the former president of the Alberta Teachers' Association. To my immediate right is one of Peace River's true characters, Glen Clegg. Glen was the member for the constituency of Dunvegan for some 15 years and lives in the Fairview area. The Dunvegan riding is the Fairview-Spirit River area. To my far right is the longest-standing mayor in Alberta, at least as far as I know: Ernie Patterson. Ernie has been the mayor of Claresholm for some 33 years, and Ernie comes from Claresholm, obviously, or he wouldn't be the mayor there. So this is the group that's before you.

The challenge is this, ladies and gentlemen. The legislation that we're dealing with says that there will be 83 seats and that we have to use the last federal census. The last federal census, which was done in 2001, has the population of Alberta being 2.98 million. If you divide that by 83, there's a number that comes out. It's something like 35,951. So ideally that's what we're looking at.

Now, the legislation says that there can be a variance, and under the decisions flowing from the Supreme Court, in fact redone by Madam Justice McLachlin, the key is effective representation. To have effective representation, there is provision for a variance. The legislation says up to 25 percent above or below. Now, in the last commission, that functioned about seven years ago, their variances were in the vicinity of 15 percent. I think only one constituency had more than a 15 percent variance. In other words, only one with plus 15 or minus 15 from what we would say is the 36,000. Then there's provision in the legislation for four seats that we call special ridings or special seats, where there can be a variance up to 50 percent. If

you look at the map in the back there, the two ridings that are special ridings in Alberta to date are the riding of Athabasca-Wabasca, which is the northeast corner of the province, taking out the city of Ft. McMurray, and the riding of Lesser Slave Lake. Those are two special ridings, and those are the only two special ridings that we have.

So our task here is to hear your suggestions and your advice. We're not here to argue with people; we're here to get the best possible input that we can. We have talked about what may happen in various areas across the province. We have not done that for what I would call northwestern Alberta, this part of the province, or certainly north of there, too.

If I mentioned this, I'm sorry, but we're starting on the 2nd and 3rd of July to meet in Edmonton and to start coming to conclusions, because we have to get a report written so that it can become available early in September.

Mr. Olthof, who are the first presenters?

Mr. Olthof: Mayor Moe Hamdon of Drayton Valley.

The Chair: Welcome, Moe.

Mr. Hamdon: Well, thank you.

Also with me is the town manager, Manny Deol.

The Chair: Welcome, gentlemen. I know these gentlemen from hockey woes. They come from Drayton Valley, and their Thunder are the champions of the Alberta Junior Hockey League at this time. They remind me of that every time that I see them.

Mr. Hamdon: I was going to say, "home of the provincial champs," yes, but thank you.

The Chair: Having said that, we look forward to your presentation, Moe.

Mr. Hamdon: Thank you, and on behalf of Drayton Valley, thank you for giving us the opportunity to come and express our thoughts on this. We appreciate the opportunity. Sounds like you've been quite busy doing a lot of traveling, a lot of presentations. I don't envy you your final decision on that.

The Chair: We hope you're going to help us.

Mr. Hamdon: Well, that's what we're trying to do. Hopefully some of this will help.

I guess I want to start back a little bit, since the last review and the changes in the electoral boundaries in 1996. Since then, Drayton Valley-Calmar has slowly come together as a united region, and we've done that in many areas, including economic development and tourism. We've made a lot of progress as a region, and we share many common attributes that unite us. A lot of the rural area, you know, has strong ties to agriculture as well as to oil, gas, and lumber. We're starting to feel like a community, and we don't want to lose the cohesiveness by having the electoral boundaries changed or by losing part of that.

Understanding the purpose of this and the rationale, if there are changes to be made and that need to be considered, what we'd like to suggest is the expansion of our boundaries to the north and the east. There are communities in Parkland county such as Tomahawk and Seba Beach as well as Evansburg, Wildwood, and that in the Yellowhead that are within our natural trading area. Tomahawk, for example: buses come to Drayton Valley, the schooling; it's less than a 20-minute drive. Evansburg and Seba Beach have always been

considered part of our trading area, and it sort of stands to reason that that would work.

That's seen in the business area, but it's also seen in the statistics from our community facilities as well. If you look at the numbers there, some of the stats of the users of the Omniplex itself from those areas alone: just from Yellowhead and Parkland, 5 percent. Thirteen percent within that area use our swimming pool, and 7 percent use the library. I mean, 13 percent of the total usage of our pool is from Yellowhead and Parkland. It's a significant number, taking the fact that we have the town, the municipal district, Breton, aside: 13 percent of that. We feel that it would be a natural progression to expand the Drayton Valley-Calmar boundaries to encompass these communities, and they're all located within a 40-kilometre radius of our region.

Understanding – and you clarified it just now as well – that most electoral divisions are within a plus or minus 25 percent of the average population and that the act does allow for four divisions to exceed that range where sparse populations are spread over large areas, one of our thoughts was that the number of special electoral divisions should be increased from the current level of four, which would in our opinion allow for a far more fair and effective representation in the more sparsely populated regions within the province. The access to MLAs in rural areas is severely hampered by the great distances they have to travel within the regions, whereas a constituent wanting to see his or her MLA in Edmonton and Calgary can basically walk to the member's office. So when you look at effective representation, is it representation by population, or is it the ability to have access and so on? We wanted to make sure that that was there.

4:05

Drayton Valley also is, I think, in the central area in somewhat of a unique situation. We're not located on either of the two main Alberta highways, not on highway 2 and not on highway 16. So that kind of puts us away, somewhat isolated, and because of that we've naturally become an economic regional centre for the surrounding communities. We think that that regionalism, which we have fostered over the past few years, should be maintained. One way to do that is to keep the electoral boundaries intact or in fact expand them to include part of the regional area that we service today.

We understand the rationale and the desire for the commission to add more regions to the larger metropolitan areas in Alberta, but I just want to say that it can't be done at the expense of rural communities struggling to create cohesiveness amongst the widely spread population.

That's my presentation today, Mr. Chairman. If you or anyone else on the commission have any questions for us about the presentation, I'd then be glad to answer them.

The Chair: Good. Well, thank you very much, Moe.
Ernie Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mayor Moe, thank you for your presentation and also your helpful suggestions on what we can do. You talk in here about the special electoral boundary divisions. We're allowed four under the act, and the way I read it here is that there are two special ones at the moment. Are you suggesting that those two be increased to four? Is that what you're saying? Under the act we're allowed to have four, but under the previous report there were only two. I just wanted clarification on that.

Mr. Hamdon: Okay. My understanding was that you were allowed to have four.

Mr. Patterson: Yes.

Mr. Hamdon: I thought, you know, that if there are going to be some adjustments made – if there are only two now, obviously it's not as big of an issue. But I thought that if there were four and maybe there were five or six that needed to be cut out, part of your recommendation would be to increase the number of special regions from four to maybe six or what have you, recognizing that some of those regions are so large, so sparsely populated that for an MLA to effectively represent that community has got to be tough. I mean, it's got to be a tough job not only for that but for the constituents themselves to have access to the MLA. So I just thought that if it was an area of struggle to have only four – if there are only two right now, then obviously it's not as big as I thought.

Mr. Patterson: Right. The legislation allows for four, so we can't increase that.

Mr. Hamdon: Sorry. I just assumed maybe if you needed a recommendation.

Mr. Patterson: But now you're suggesting that we should seriously consider going from two to four if it would help.

Mr. Hamdon: Yeah.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I see in your recommendation that if in fact you need to expand, because you're . . .

Mr. Hamdon: We're minus 21.7.

Mr. Clegg: . . . negative 21 or something, have you done any work to know how many people you would bring in if you took in Tomahawk and Seba Beach? I mean, we can get that information. I was just wondering for my own knowledge if you have any idea how many people.

Mr. Hamdon: We don't have an exact number, but just talking here, maybe 1,500 or 2,000. My guess is that it might be even a little bit more, you know: 2,500 to 3,000 people or just within that. That's only the smaller area that I suggested. That's taking a little bit from the Yellowhead and from Whitecourt-St. Anne. Is Stony Plain the other constituency? The Tomahawk, Seba Beach? [interjection] Yeah. So looking at part of Stony Plain, and the other part was Whitecourt-St. Anne. If there were to be other changes there, it's quite feasible as well to even expand beyond that to include a little bit more along highway 16, I think, if we're looking at needing additional numbers to bring it up. As well, at the bottom of the constituency there's sort of a little jut that comes out. I don't think that's really a population issue there, but, you know, to straighten out some of the boundaries, if that's even worth just sort of looking at that line.

The Chair: We're lucky to have Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer with us, Brian Fjeldheim. Brian, what's that little jag in the bottom part of the Drayton Valley-Calmar riding? It looks like an upside-down map of Alberta kind of thing.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Now, what that is is it goes on, I believe, the municipal district line and then it follows the river. When you talk

about Tomahawk, of course Tomahawk is about six miles north of the river, and that's the reason that line is there, because of the district boundary.

The Chair: Okay.

Bauni?

Ms Mackay: I don't have any questions. Glen asked mine.

Mr. Patterson: Glen asked mine too, but I do have a comment, and that is that this is the first time I've seen these statistics from community facilities used, and I think it's a great idea. People always come and talk to us about what community patterns are and what community interests are and that sort of thing, and other than sort of hearsay, people telling us this, this is the first piece of real hard evidence we've had of this. So I really want to compliment you on that. I think it was very smart, and I've certainly noted it. I may be asking other people about this as we go a bit down the road.

Mr. Hamdon: Well, thank you for that. A lot of the information that we had from the business community in the natural trading area is hard to quantify. Because we do track this for our joint-use purposes, it was accessible, so we thought: we have the tracking mechanism in place, let's use it. So, yeah, we felt it was important. Thank you for noticing that.

I know there was the comment about Tomahawk being on the other side of the river and sort of using a natural geographical division for the constituency, and I'm hoping that we also look beyond geography and look at the natural trends of the people themselves.

The Chair: Community of interests?

Mr. Hamdon: Yeah. Because what we're looking at is representing the people. Where is it that they go and where is their centre? Where do they get serviced? To me that is more important than the geography. I mean, geography as a distance, yes – don't get me wrong – is important, but when we're looking at boundary adjustments, that should be considered as well.

The Chair: You did say that Tomahawk youngsters go to school in Drayton.

Mr. Hamdon: I don't know so much anymore, but I know that when I was going to school, you had grade 9. All the high school came to Drayton Valley. The buses packed them up and came. I think there are still some that do come to Drayton Valley but not like it used to be. It was always that when you got into high school, all the Tomahawk kids were in Drayton Valley. It's there. People working and living. As I say, it's less than a 20-minute drive. That's the centre.

Mr. Graham: Mr. Chairman, that was going to be my follow-up question.

The Chair: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Graham: It's okay. Maybe just to clarify, there is this river here, but I gather there is good access across the river. There are good bridges and so forth, so we're not going to be isolating people down there if we're to do what you suggest.

Mr. Hamdon: Easy access.

Mr. Graham: Okay.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments?

Well, gentlemen, thank you very much. It really is important that you be here and give us your best advice, because as we said earlier, we have to come to some decisions shortly, and they're a lot easier if we have had the benefit of your advice before rather than after. So I appreciate it very much, Moe, and good to see you again, sir.

Mr. Hamdon: Thank you. We're happy with the way the constituency has been coming along and the work with the MLA and can understand an increase in it. We would be disappointed to see any loss of our constituency, so we felt it was important to come and at least make sure that that message was understood.

The Chair: Thanks very much, gentlemen.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Dale Johnson, who's president of the Whitecourt-St. Anne PC Association. You heard me give my opening remarks, so there's no need to do that again. We look forward to hearing your presentation, Dale, and then I'm sure we'll have some questions for you.

4:15

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon, panel guests as well. On behalf of the residents of the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne it is my privilege to address the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. You drove through some of the southern portions of the constituency on your way here to Edson today, and I hope that you were able to absorb the wonderful scenery along highway 16, especially between Evansburg and the eastern edge of Edson. This road and highway 43 to the north provide excellent transportation routes between the eastern and western extremities of our constituency. Access between the two is provided by a number of primary, secondary, and gravel roads that run north and south. Of course, all these roads beyond extend the limits I have described, and traveling through the constituency is not a problem. However, construction and maintenance of 827 kilometres of paved roads and 3,457 kilometres of gravel roads presents an interesting challenge at times.

Our constituency is very unusual in shape as portions of its perimeter are actually rivers. It is approximately 147 kilometres long by approximately 80 kilometres wide, which translates into an area of approximately 11,774 square kilometres. This area encompasses a considerable number of rivers and lakes that offer opportunities for participation in a wide variety of both summer and winter recreation activities both for constituents and tourists. I suppose Lac Ste. Anne is probably the most famous lake with the annual pilgrimage, which I'm sure you have seen in the paper. This is an extremely important religious event for our aboriginal constituents who reside on the Alexis Indian reserve. People come from hundreds of miles to experience the pilgrimage and often return summer after summer.

Also, during the four summer months the population in and around Lac Ste. Anne swells by approximately 20,000 people as the 13 summer villages in the area are very attractive as bedroom communities for people from the city of Edmonton and surrounding area. This influx does provide local businesses with many extra dollars, but at the same time summer village dwellers often place very high demands with regard to utilities, transportation, and infrastructure complications. These people expect these items to meet city standards and do put a lot of pressure on local authorities to provide things that virtually no government funding is allocated for. At the same time, the summer people do pay taxes here, but these dollars do not stretch very far in areas that are economically

depressed due to the lack of local industry.

We do have, though, a very diverse constituency as far as industry is concerned. The eastern areas are mainly agriculture based in the areas of grain and cereal crops. They also serve the role of providing bedroom communities for the nearby cities. As well, the middle areas are largely agriculture based with cow/calf operations and their related hay and feed crops. Throughout the entire area is a sprinkling of logging and petrochemical activities, but the western areas of the constituency are intensely populated with both industries. The town of Mayerthorpe serves the agriculture industry, while the villages of Evansburg, Sangudo, and Onoway also provide basic agriculture needs. The town of Whitecourt provides the spin-off businesses connected with forest and petrochemical industries. Both of these significant industries continue to grow, and so have Whitecourt and the surrounding area of Woodland county to the tune of approximately 6,000 people since the last boundary review. This growth has provided many new local business opportunities and has also stretched the local municipal authorities to provide the many required services. Changing times have provided many of the 13 hamlets with new people in and near the locations. Bedroom communities and commuting are now very accepted practices.

When the Member of the Legislative Assembly is presented with a constituent concern, his or her first two questions are to ask where the constituent lives and the nature of the concern. This is necessary to determine whether it's involving a provincial ministry or which of at least 40 different elected or appointed jurisdictions, including three counties, three health authorities, three school authorities, two towns, three villages, 13 hamlets, 12 summer villages, and an Indian reserve in two separate locations. Now, this would be for our MLA in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. This is what he deals with. Of course, he's expected to know all the related people as well as have a good working knowledge of each and every government department.

Good working relations have been established with all the local jurisdictions at this time within our constituency, and this is largely due to the fact that our MLA and his staff have made themselves acquainted with the assorted jurisdictions and departments. These people cannot be expected to instantly provide all the answers but are well known for partnering with constituents and whatever authority necessary to try and resolve problems with a minimum of effort. This in itself is a huge task as a population of 31,412 people often has very individual concerns that require a broad working knowledge of the many different levels of governments involved, and that growth is expected to actually be equal over the next five years. I do realize that you're going from the previous census, but I thought it might be important to know that since the last census there's been an increase of about 6,000 in population, and it's expected that over the next census period that'll be equal as well.

Hopefully, you now have a rather concise view of our constituency, but I want to also address some of the other aspects of a rural constituency. MLA attendance at a variety of important constituency level meetings means that an astute Member of the Legislative Assembly must work hard to keep informed about the background and current issues regarding each and every jurisdiction that he or she works with. Often the MLA really wants to attend a particular meeting or social function but must decline because of the travel involved. These things will easily fit into a paper schedule, but driving times involved must be accounted for and make it physically impossible to attend one or more meetings in a given day.

Personally, I'm not only a constituent but a farmer and a businessperson who is active as well in local politics. I often have the chance to travel and meet with people throughout this constituency and must say that I hear many positive comments regarding the efficiency of the local MLA. The logical conclusion is that the system in place is working just fine. Bigger is not

necessarily better, and as some of the people I've talked to on the street have told me – it's a common saying that farmers use – if it ain't broke, don't fix it. In our particular case the constituency is working well. We're within the norm that we're looking for. If there were to be one change, may I suggest that it be to try and keep it coterminous with county boundaries wherever possible.

I do appreciate the opportunity to speak here today on behalf of the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency and certainly thank you for hearing me and would entertain any questions that you may have. I may not have all the answers.

The Chair: Well, Dale, thank you very much. You did a unique job of giving us a bird's eye tour of your constituency, and that's much appreciated. To be perfectly honest, we flew, so we didn't have the opportunity to be on the ground. You're one of the first groups to make a presentation to us that kind of spent some time saying, "This is what our constituency is all about," and that's very helpful to us.

Ms Mackay: I was just going to ask: are the boundaries of the constituency coterminous with the county boundaries now, with the municipal boundaries?

Mr. Johnson: I brought that map, and I think in most cases they are. I'd have to look at the map.

The Chair: Bring it out, Dale. We're not pressed for time.

Ms Mackay: The county lines aren't on, so it's hard to say.

Mr. Johnson: No, it doesn't, and I think in this particular area they are not.

Ms Mackay: Down in here.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, exactly, and between Barrhead there's a county line that's kind of . . .

The Chair: It goes up by Swan Hills and around.

Mr. Johnson: Exactly. Big Lakes.

The Chair: Brian, can you tell us how . . .

Mr. Fjeldheim: It's pretty much coterminous. On the northern part where it joins Grande Prairie-Smoky and Whitecourt, it follows the electoral – Woodland county and the electoral division line are the same, and it comes down on the west side of the constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. It makes its own line, and then as it cuts across the southern portion, it meets up with MD 77 and then follows pretty much up the east side and follows the line of the county of Lac Ste. Anne. For quite a bit on the east side it follows the MD lines, and then as we go towards the west, it veers off.

The Chair: Dale, you heard the presentation made by the folks from Drayton.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I did.

The Chair: I'm not asking you to give me your assessment, but Tomahawk I guess is a long way from the centre of your constituency. Do you have any reaction, or is it in your constituency?

4:25

Mr. Johnson: No, Tomahawk is not.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Johnson: But Evansburg is, and the people in Evansburg are certainly happy to be in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I must apologize; I didn't ask the question: would you like to go to another?

The Chair: No. Why would you?

Mr. Johnson: Well, that's exactly why I asked: are you happy in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne? The comment is: very, very happy in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I think that where we were speaking of the boundaries would be – there is some question that maybe towards the north the boundary might change. You know, it's just hearsay, and that would be your particular recommendation. That's why I recommended it. The only thing I could really say is: keep it the same.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you. The last presentation said that a lot of people from Evansburg go to Drayton Valley. You must have the mileage. I've driven many times from Evansburg to Mayerthorpe, and I've driven south also, but do you know the difference in mileage?

Mr. Johnson: Exactly to the kilometre I don't, but they're very close to exactly the same.

Mr. Clegg: I thought they were.

Mr. Johnson: Because the highway goes through MacKay.

Mr. Clegg: Okay. One more question. I don't know even where you live, but are there a lot of people from Evansburg going into Mayerthorpe to do business and for recreation facilities and school? Is there any of that? Not school. I know there isn't.

Mr. Johnson: No, they wouldn't go to school, not from Evansburg. That information I don't have. Over half might go one way, half might go the other way, and the next time the half that went that way change and go the opposite way. I think it would be a fairly even split.

Mr. Clegg: We can get that information. I was just wondering if you had it.

Mr. Johnson: No, I don't.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: See, beyond Evansburg the boundary doesn't go very far, so basically it does the hamlet or village. A lot of times those people are as well going to Edmonton, so I'm not sure, you know, if actually we could say that they go to Drayton Valley or where. They're going to Edmonton as well. They may even be driving here. I'm not sure. Hopefully that answers your question.

Mr. Clegg: Yeah, I'm sure there are some going every direction.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah, I'm sure there are.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Dale, for your presentation. When people hear that you're on this commission and they run into

you here and there, they say: will you make sure this happens or that happens? Well, of course that isn't possible, but I've had some representation from Onoway saying: get us out of this constituency. Do you have any feelings? Have you talked to any people there that might give me a different opinion than the representation I've had?

Mr. Johnson: Yeah. I would say that Onoway – that's where I'm from actually – has been one of those areas that has had the opportunity to switch constituencies more than once. You know, right now is probably the best that the constituency has ever worked with Onoway, and I really can't attest to anything other than the fact that the MLA is trying hard and he's working both ends of the constituency. The Onoway area is high in population, and he recognizes that. I haven't on the street heard anybody other than my uncle – he's in his late 70s and said: you know, back when we should have done this. He's the only one. The majority are out there saying, you know: we're going to work with this.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, the person who said this to me wasn't in any way criticizing the MLA, and I wasn't talking to your uncle either.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Patterson: It is interesting, though, that you get these pressures.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: I guess the reason why I wanted to ask you is to make sure that just because you hear one or two people say something – and you're from Onoway yourself.

Mr. Johnson: Exactly. I do live in Onoway.

Mr. Patterson: Okay.

Mr. Johnson: If anybody is going to hear anything, it will be me.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: Because I've been there basically just about all my life, so the information gets to my ears.

Mr. Patterson: Okay.

Mr. Johnson: You know, granted I'm not discounting that you have talked to somebody and they'd like to be out.

The Chair: The part of your presentation that really surprised me is this 20,000 people in the 13 summer villages. That must cause – havoc isn't a good term – a real challenge for the municipality, for the summer villages, and for your MLA too.

Mr. Johnson: Definitely. It definitely does. During the summer months – what do you say? – when you all of a sudden add 20,000 more people in an area that's probably going around the north, south, and eastern tip of Lac Ste. Anne, which isn't very big, it adds pressures like you wouldn't believe. Alberta Beach right now has hooked up with the RCMP. They have a special constable and an RCMP hired so that in the summertime you can look after things, and of course then the summer villages are on the MLA to say: now, we need help as well. And he has done an excellent job there of bringing those people onside to work together.

The Chair: That's a part of the constituency that I had. If I knew about it, I've had memory loss.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah. Well, you know, you talk of those summer villages. We talk of just the other municipalities. Like, he has to deal with all those areas and the health boards, the school boards. Many of the constituencies, say, in the larger centres – I can use Edmonton as an example – may not deal with more than two other elected bodies.

The Chair: This is very helpful too, a list of the groups to deal with.

Bauni or Doug?

Ms Mackay: No, that's fine for now.

Mr. Graham: That's just what I wanted to clarify. This appendix, these are the 40 elected bodies that you were speaking about?

Mr. Johnson: Uh-huh.

Mr. Graham: So the one on the left is 1995, before the last redistribution?

Mr. Johnson: That's correct. What we tried to indicate there is what we had in '95 at the last boundary review and what we have today.

Mr. Graham: Okay.

Mr. Clegg: How far east of Onoway is the constituency?

Mr. Johnson: Are you familiar with the area there, Glen?

Mr. Clegg: I've been in Onoway, yes. I'm very familiar. I've driven it 200 times.

Mr. Johnson: Not quite to Calahoo. Yeah, it's not quite to Calahoo.

Mr. Clegg: Okay.

Mr. Johnson: And then we extend about half way to Barrhead, Pembina River.

Mr. Clegg: Okay.

The Chair: One further question. Any transportation or community of interest between Swan Hills and Whitecourt?

Mr. Johnson: Well, they work together, definitely.

The Chair: But not a great deal. Or do they?

4:35

Mr. Johnson: Well, industrywise I would think that they do work together. Healthwise they have their own facility and Whitecourt has its own facility. Some people that work in Swan Hills actually live in Whitecourt, some live in Barrhead, some live in Fort Assiniboine, and then they live in Swan Hills as well. I don't know whether they do; I can't answer that.

The Chair: Wouldn't be a lot of community of interest perhaps.

Mr. Johnson: No. As far as actually, like, "I'm from Swan Hills and I like you in Whitecourt" type deal. You know, it's "I'm from Swan Hills and you're from Whitecourt" type deal.

The Chair: Any other questions? Bauni.

Ms Mackay: You talked about all the summer villages basically being inhabited, at least in the summertime, by city people who expect city standards and, you know, the pressure that puts on everybody. I'm just wondering: to what extent would the people particularly at the east end of the constituency have a lot of their trading patterns and working and so on with Edmonton itself?

Mr. Johnson: Oh, definitely. The eastern portion of the constituency is – probably 80 percent of those people, if they don't work in Onoway or Stony Plain, they'll work in Edmonton. Trading patterns: I would think that if we can't supply it in Onoway, they certainly wouldn't drive to Mayerthorpe but they would drive to Edmonton. It seems kind of a natural.

Ms Mackay: And health care and some of the social services and that? I mean, in more extreme cases – I realize that all communities have their own.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah, in the extreme cases. For example, right within Onoway Aspen has its own office which does physiotherapy and community, population health. We don't have an acute care facility; the nearest is Stony Plain. So I think probably it would be safe to say that if it's not available in Onoway, then the people are driving to Edmonton.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions or comments?

Well, Dale, thank you very much. We appreciate your input, and be sure and have a look after the first of September; get a copy of the report and see what we've done for you and not to you.

Mr. Johnson: Robert, thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity. It's very, very interesting being able to speak to it – it's the first time I've been able to – because you're quite right: you need information from outside. I mean, if one of us goes out and gets information, it's a big job. But if a panel goes and then a whole mass of people help you, that's how we can make it work.

The Chair: I'm sure we've had over 125 submission to us, and we have some yet to come, so we very much appreciate your help. Thank you very much.

Mr. Johnson: Good. Well, thank you very much. Good day.

The Chair: Doug.

Mr. Olthof: As of this time I have no other registered presenters, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Is there anyone who feels an urge to give us some good advice or some other kind of advice too?

The gentlemen who are with us are the president and vice-president of the West Yellowhead constituency association. So would you introduce yourselves, gentlemen, for the record. And take that sign down, would you? If I get to calling you Moe, you may wonder why I call your friend Curly.

Mr. Becker: I'd answer anyway. My name is Floyd Becker, and I'm the president of West Yellowhead constituency.

Mr. Gomuwka: My name is Jim Gomuwka. I'm the vice-president of West Yellowhead. I apologize for not being prepared. We only heard about this a short time ago. We thought there was going to be another presenter here this afternoon, and because there wasn't one, we thought we should be able to say a few words if you don't mind.

The Chair: If we had minded, we wouldn't have given you the opportunity, Jim.

Mr. Gomuwka: Great. Well, thank you very much.

The Chair: Please give us your best advice.

Mr. Gomuwka: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Actually, what we have to say is very brief. Our constituency is very large, and we're finding that our MLA is doing an extensive amount of work, but it's mostly in driving. He's recording hours of driving time of 45,000 to 60,000 kilometres a year in order to cover his constituency. We would like to see our constituency stay the same way as it is at present just because of the nature of the distances he has to travel and the people he has to represent. He has some very unique problems in this constituency that he's worked very, very hard at, and it's taken a lot of his time, such things as the coal industry, which has been going through some pretty rough times. He has spent a lot of time in places like Grande Cache, which is the outer reaches of our constituency. He has spent a great deal of time up there.

Our constituents don't travel a lot because of the vastness of the area that we're in. Some of the people that are in the constituency have way different needs than, say, Grande Cache, Jasper, Edson, Hinton. We all seem to have our own needs, but none that are really linked; maybe Edson or Hinton more so than the other two. We see at this time that change in the constituency boundaries for us would not be an advantage. If we were to be made bigger and moved, say, to the east, which would be the most obvious and only area to move into – that would be Whitecourt-Ste. Anne – that would not be an advantage to us. It would just do nothing for our representation in this area.

Do you have anything to add to that, Floyd?

Mr. Becker: The one thing I'd like to add is that during our campaigns I traveled with Ivan extensively, and I don't think that our area could stand to be one foot bigger than it is. If anything it could be reduced by Grande Cache entering into Grande Prairie, but I would just as soon, like Jim says, leave it exactly the way it is. We've had conversations with Ivan, and he feels the same way.

We really need rural representation. I realize that the cities have lots of voters, but in areas like this we need the representation so that we can develop our area for our kids so that they're staying in rural Alberta and not all moving to the cities. I think it's key for us as constituents in our area to make sure that we have the Alberta advantage in the future for our kids. That's what I strive for.

Mr. Gomuwka: Yeah. Thank you, Floyd. I heard the comment earlier about the larger centres such as Calgary, and I looked at some of the figures, you know, because you're not within that 25 percent range high or low, plus or minus. I recognize that. Representation, especially when you have more seats in the House, is a real neat thing to have, I suppose, but the comment was made earlier about the accessibility of an MLA in Calgary being somewhat different

than, say, here in a place like this or even Whitecourt simply because our MLA has to travel to his constituents. He doesn't wait for them to come to him. If that were the case, we would not have any contact with a lot of our constituents in such places as Grande Cache or even Jasper. They'd soon come to the point where they'd feel they were being left out, especially through some very tough times. They need their MLA at the worst times when he can represent them at his best. When that comment was made, I think it was a very valid one. The people of Calgary, Edmonton, and the larger centres can go to their MLA, which is probably not a great distance, and talk to him. He's more accessible.

The Chair: One of the things we've only toyed with, just talked about in a general sense, is trying to get some sense as to what areas are easier to represent and what areas are more difficult. I'm only speaking for the chairman, but my blue sky, kind of, would be that maybe Edmonton is the easiest to represent because MLAs live there. Calgary might be next because they've got all the government services basically in Calgary as they have in Edmonton. Then maybe the corridor would be the third one, and then you've got a number of jurisdictions where you've got cities or, let's say, communities of 10,000 or more plus a rural area. They might be the fourth level, if I could put it that way. Then you've got areas that I kind of call rural/rural. I don't know if that's a good term, but you understand what I'm saying: no centres over 10,000 or 8,000 or whatever the magic figure is. Those may be the most difficult. That's just my own brainstorming, and my colleagues would tell you that on occasions my storms are better than others.

That's one of the things that the commission is trying to grapple with, some kind of a balance in that. Do you have any reaction to that? Shoot me down.

4:45

Mr. Gomuwka: I think that representation by numbers at one time was a good way to represent your area. I don't think numbers are always the strongest point of your representation anymore. I think a lot of times it's the need of the area and the vastness of the area also. So numbers alone, where you have thousands of people in a very small area being represented, are not necessarily always as important as the smaller area with the fewer number of constituents.

The Chair: As one of the MLAs in Edmonton told us: I've got 21 different languages spoken in my constituency that's maybe 15, 20 blocks, 30 blocks north/south and 40 blocks east/west. So it's a challenge there too.

Mr. Gomuwka: Yes, it is.

Mr. Becker: Some of the other constituents that I've dealt with, like in Edmonton and Calgary, say that they have 80 percent of the voters in those two areas, so we've got to scratch for whatever we can keep here. That's my opinion. If we can keep our area even similar to what it is – I lived in Whitemud in Edmonton, and it was easy to go see my MLA there because I only lived about four blocks from him. Here it's a lot more difficult for Ivan to get to Jasper or to Grande Cache, and he makes a point of making sure that he gets to all these places.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. Ivan the Great: what's he doing? Holidaying?

Mr. Becker: Well, I don't know where he is today.

Mr. Clegg: You can tell him that Glen Clegg said that he should have been here.

Just to get a feeling – I look at the map, and it is a large area. I know about the 45,000 to 50,000 because I used to drive 60,000 when I represented Dunvegan. Of course, I was a lot farther from Edmonton.

There are three specific questions. We can get the answers, but do you know them? How far is it from Hinton to Grande Cache?

Mr. Gomułka: I wouldn't be able to tell you exactly the distance, but it's about an hour and 25 minutes, I believe.

Mr. Clegg: And how far north of Grande Cache do you go?

Mr. Gomułka: Actually, I think it's just right to the Grande Cache boundaries of the community, and that's it.

Mr. Clegg: To the north boundary? Okay.

Mr. Becker: Just where the river is. The Smoky.

Mr. Clegg: And south from Jasper, how far do you go there?

Mr. Becker: We go 20 miles. There's a rest area just out of town here. That's the end of our area. It's about 5 kilometres from the highway to Whitecourt. That's where it ends.

Mr. Clegg: No, I don't think you got my question.

Mr. Becker: You were talking about south; weren't you?

Mr. Clegg: South of Jasper. Do you just go to the town of Jasper?

Mr. Gomułka: I think actually it does loop down south, though, because we have the communities of Robb and Cadomin also in that constituency.

Mr. Clegg: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I do have a question, and here we're just kind of speculating a little bit. Grande Prairie-Smoky is slightly above the population requirement. You people know the area better than I do. Is there any obvious area there that might fit in that wouldn't be too difficult, that would be kind of natural if we were to take a little bit from Grande Prairie-Smoky?

Mr. Gomułka: No. Actually between Grande Cache and Grande Prairie there's nothing but a lot of bears.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. So that wouldn't help then.

Mr. Clegg: You'd have to go within 20 miles of Grande Prairie to gain anything else.

Mr. Gomułka: Yeah, that's exactly right.

Mr. Patterson: That would just make it worse. Okay.

Mr. Gomułka: Yeah. There's nothing west, nothing north, nothing south. It all goes pretty much east.

Mr. Patterson: I had to ask the question because I'm from the deep south.

Mr. Clegg: Is there an area that we can take from B.C.?

Mr. Gomułka: Well, we'd sure like to have that area just over toward Valemont. We wouldn't mind having that. I understand tourism is starting to get pretty strong over in that part of the country. It would work right in.

The Chair: So I guess what you're telling us, gentlemen, is that if we do feel that we have to do something, we should act very gingerly and it would have to be on the east side so that Ivan could get it on his way to Edmonton.

Mr. Gomułka: I think he does some of that now. I think that he and George have some sort of agreement anyway, because I always see Ivan's picture springing up in Evansburg.

The Chair: Well, if that's really the case, you two should get together and let us know.

Mr. Gomułka: Yeah, I suppose.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Well, gentlemen, thank you very much. I appreciate your coming just kind of from the floor and giving us your best advice. It's very helpful. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gomułka: Well, thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. Becker: Yes, thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: Mr. Olthof, is there anyone else?

Mr. Olthof: Not at this time, no.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Jorgensen, did you want to say anything?

Mr. Jorgensen: No, I'm just here to listen. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Mr. Jorgensen is a colleague of Bauni's and a gentleman I've known for many years. It's good to see you out, Art, and good to see you up and around again.

This session of the commission meeting is adjourned until tomorrow morning in Slave Lake at 9 o'clock. Thank you very much. We appreciate your being here.

[The commission adjourned at 4:52 p.m.]