

9:02 a.m.

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: Okay, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to call this meeting to order. I'd like to welcome the folks who are here today. Under the law in Alberta after every two elections the legislation says that there shall be a review of electoral boundaries in the province, and the guidelines that we have to use are that the chairman of Executive Council, or the Premier, appoints two people and the Leader of the Opposition after consultation appoints two people, and the chairman is picked from a group of either the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, someone from an academic institution, or some member of the judiciary. It's the Ethics Commissioner's turn, I guess, to be the chairman, so I think that's how come I'm chairman.

I'd like to introduce to you my colleagues on the panel. To my right is Mr. Ernie Patterson. Ernie is the mayor of Claresholm in southern Alberta. He's been the mayor of Claresholm for 33 years and is the vice-president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. To my immediate right is one of northwestern Alberta's characters, Glen Clegg. Glen was the member for Dunvegan for 15 years; that's the Spirit River-Fairview area. He obviously is also on the panel. To my immediate left from the city of Edmonton is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is the former president of the Alberta Teachers' Association and is very well known for her work in the educational field. To my far left is Mr. Doug Graham, a well-respected lawyer from the city of Calgary. So we are the five people who are on the panel.

Our responsibility is to go out and hear from people like yourselves across the province, and as you say, this is the only hearing we're holding in one of the special constituencies. You know that in Alberta, if you check the map over yonder there, there are two special constituencies. One is the riding of Athabasca-Wabasca, and the second is the riding of Lesser Slave Lake. When we say "special constituencies" it means that there can be up to a 50 percent variance in the population.

I should move on then to the guidelines we have to work with. The legislation says that there will be 83 ridings. We must use the 2001 census; that's the most recent national census. If you take the most recent national census, the population of Alberta is recorded as 2.98 million, and if you divide that by 83, whether you use the new math or the old math, that comes very close to 35,951. So if it was absolutely ideal – okay? – that's what we'd want to have in each of the 83 ridings. Well, of course, that isn't the way it is. The legislation says that we can have a 25 percent variance up or down. When the last commission concluded their work, they had variances up or down from the mean of up to 15 percent, and I think that's kind of a target that we'd like to work on. It isn't to say that we're going to reach that target. Then the legislation also provides for four ridings that can be special ridings like your riding, this riding of Lesser Slave Lake, where you can have up to a 50 percent variance. In Alberta today there are only two ridings that have that variance.

We're in our third week of hearings across the province. We started in Calgary, then the corridor, and then Edmonton. The second week we went to St. Paul, Wainwright, Drumheller, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Wetaskiwin. This week we started in Westlock yesterday morning, we were in Edson yesterday afternoon, we're with you good folks here this morning, we're in Fort McMurray late this afternoon, and tomorrow we're in Peace River and Grande Prairie. That will conclude the public consultation part.

Then on Tuesday, Wednesday of next week the commission is getting together in Edmonton, and we're going to start to come to conclusions. We've had all sorts of discussions about what might be

and what could be, and after we've met in some parts of the province, then we've said, "Well, you know, it looks like we could do this or that," but we haven't met in the northern half of the province, as Mr. Clegg reminds me, till starting yesterday, so we've not given any serious consideration to those kinds of options.

I think it's fair to say to you, ladies and gentlemen, that there are three things that we have to keep in mind. One certainly is the legislation. Two is the judicial experience across the country, which has really said that if you're going to have significant variances, you have to have very good reasons and that the basis is not totally representation by population but it's effective representation. What can we do to have constituencies that will allow all Albertans to have effective representation within the guidelines that I've talked about? And, thirdly, quite frankly – and this is going to be the challenge, but my colleagues have a great amount of this – is a matter of a lot of common sense in taking the legislation, taking the judicial decisions that have been made to date, and applying them in a commonsense manner to what we've heard across the province. That's why it's so very important that you people are here today to give us your best judgment when we grapple with what are difficult problems.

You all know of the rapid growth there has been in the city of Calgary. One of the ridings in Calgary has got 82,000 people in it right now, and whatever we do there has an impact some place else across the province. If there's any magic, we haven't found it; have we? So we're here looking for the magic this morning perhaps.

With that background, ladies and gentlemen, what I'd like to do is to ask those people who have registered with Doug Olthof to come forward as you're called. Give us the best advice you can, and then my colleagues will always have some questions or comments or perhaps both, and we'll try to move along as reasonably as we can. If someone has made the point you want to make, tell us the point again but make it in a very concise form. Just imagine you are sitting over here, and give it to us in the manner you think is going to be most effective.

I should introduce to you at the back of the room Mr. Brian Fjeldheim. Brian is the Chief Electoral Officer with the province. If the last election went very well, don't tell him. If there are problems, tell us. Seriously, Brian and his staff are really the resource which this commission is using, and we're very grateful for that. Mr. Doug Olthof is the administrative support person who is looking after all the details, which are very important.

Doug, who is the first presenter?

Mr. Olthof: The first presenter is Mr. Ken Vanderwell.

Mr. Poulter: Mr. Chair, just a point of clarification. Is there a question period after the presentation?

The Chair: There isn't, but. . .

Mr. Poulter: Aren't we allowed to ask questions after?

The Chair: Who are you going to ask them of?

Mr. Poulter: Of your group, from some of the information that's been shared.

The Chair: You certainly can ask questions. The chair is not generally very dictatorial, but we'll see where it goes. Sure. But we're not here to get into an argument with you.

Mr. Poulter: No, that's not my desire.

The Chair: No. I fully understand that. Yup. We'll take a chance on that.

While Ken's getting ready here, I'm going to go get a pen.

Mr. Vanderwell: I'll try to place this so that everyone can try to get a bit of an idea or see what's on it. Maybe I'll swing it this way first.

The Chair: Why don't we just move over here if you're going to use that map, and we can all see it together?

Mr. Vanderwell: Sure.

The Chair: Is that okay, members? You've got 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Vanderwell: Thank you. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and commission. My name is Kenneth Vanderwell. I'm the current president of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency, and I've been a resident of the town of Slave Lake since 1971. The purpose of my presentation this morning is to convince the panel that the boundaries of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency should remain unchanged.

While the population within our constituency is 25,919 and it is slightly under the acceptable range of 26,963 per electoral division, it's very close, and there are four other constituencies within the province which deviate greater from this acceptable range. We believe that our distance from the Legislature in Edmonton, the size of our constituency, which you can see here on the map – we are the second largest constituency in the province of Alberta, outlined here in yellow – and the sparsity of our population across the constituency should be taken into consideration in this request for exception from the commission.

9:12

As background our constituency covers a huge area. It's 90,000 square kilometres. As I mentioned earlier, it's the second largest constituency within the province. It contains 44 communities, 13 First Nations, and three Metis settlements. The individuals within our constituency are from various social, educational, financial, cultural, and community backgrounds which I would submit vary greatly from the majority of other constituencies within the province. However, we believe that we're still well represented by our MLA, Pearl Calahasen, in the current constituency configuration.

Without a doubt, the number one reason for maintaining our constituency in its current configuration has got to be the physical size of it. Within our constituency boundaries we have some common industries. We have farming over here on the west side. We also have fishing within Lesser Slave Lake, Utikuma Lake, and there's some commercial fishing within those lakes. We have the forest industry. Many of the forest management units and licences within the forest industry somewhat follow the boundaries of the constituency. We also have of course the oil industry in our constituency, which the province as well as the communities within the constituency rely upon for their livelihood.

Geographically we begin in the west with the farm district. We move through the boreal forest throughout our constituency on the north, east, and south sides. I believe that even the geography within our constituency strengthens the existing boundaries. On the east side we have the Athabasca River running up along this area here, and the Athabasca River is a natural boundary. The province already recognizes the boundary of the Athabasca in making a distinction between the green zone, which is where the forest is, and the white zone of the province, which is where the farmland is. That

also occurs over here on the west side of the constituency when we get into the Peace country. There's a clear distinction between the green zone of the constituency and the white farming zone of the Dunvegan and Peace constituencies. The boreal forest gives way to the Barrhead-Westlock constituency down here in the southern part, and of course that again, I think we are all very much aware, happens to be a farming district. On the north, well, the boreal forest just continues on and on, and if it hasn't burnt, it ends up here at the Northwest Territories boundary. So our constituency does have very definite geographical considerations that need to be taken into consideration.

As I mentioned, there are four main industries within the boundaries of the constituency. Oil, gas, forestry, and fishing lead the resource sector throughout the constituency. Farming leads the agricultural sector on the west side. These industries are a natural fit within our boundaries.

Regarding traveling within the constituency some of our communities are only accessible by air in the summer. We have our Tallcree north and south hamlets up here in the northern part of the province. We have Fox Lake. Some of these communities, if we've had a rainy summer, are very, very difficult to get into and may be only accessible by air. They require hours of travel to be visited and serviced in the wintertime, when we have arctic pavement. I'm sure the commission can appreciate the amount of time and travel that must be spent by the population and the government just to meet. Our MLA and her staff put on in excess of 200,000 kilometres a year traveling by vehicle just to visit and to address concerns within the constituency. So there is a huge amount of travel that has to take place, and to enlarge our constituency would put an additional burden on the MLA and her staff in continuing to serve the residents of the constituency.

Regarding infrastructure within our area there are of course hundreds of kilometres of gravel, of paving. There are dozens of regional landfills, bridges of various sizes. There's drainage, flood control measures throughout the constituency to protect property and individuals. I'm sure that everyone here is well aware that infrastructure funding is based on a per capita formula, which causes us great concern here. If the commission decided to reduce our constituency in population base, it would be unacceptable because it would reduce our per capita funding. It would also of course move us further away from the acceptable range of residents in the electoral division. If you increase it, we could conceivably be saddled with additional infrastructure without a proportionate population base to fund and to maintain that extra infrastructure.

In closing, I believe that we are one of the four special consideration electoral divisions in the province, again due to our geographical size, distance from the Legislature, and the sparsity of our population. I would submit to the commission that the Lesser Slave Lake constituency boundaries should remain unchanged for those reasons, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ken.

Okay. We'll go back to our seats. I just want to move the map around, Ken.

Mr. Vanderwell: Okay.

The Chair: Well, thanks, Ken, for a succinct, to the point presentation. Bauni Mackay has the first question.

Ms Mackay: Thanks for the presentation and thanks for the map. That helps a lot.

Mr. Vanderwell: You're welcome.

Ms Mackay: I'm interested – you've got a population of 25,919.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes.

Ms Mackay: Do you know sort of the division of population? What I'm wondering is: how many people live, say, from that 14,000 down relative to 14,000 up?

Mr. Vanderwell: I don't know offhand. I do know that High Prairie has a population base of around 13,000 to 14,000, and Slave Lake and area have a population base of probably around 7,500. So the majority of the population is in the southern part of the constituency.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Ken, I was wondering what the reason – and I've never been up there. I'm not a logger like you, Ken. But on 3, why have we got that jog? Why doesn't that line go straight on the left side of the map there?

Mr. Vanderwell: I believe that follows the Peace River, does it not? I'd have to actually check on the map.

The Chair: Brian, are you checking on that for us?

Mr. Fjeldheim: Yeah. It follows a range line. We're talking about the west side of the constituency?

The Chair: West side, yes.

Mr. Fjeldheim: It follows the range line down. There is no municipal boundary. The next municipal boundary is over to the river.

Mr. Vanderwell: Is that what you were talking about?

Mr. Clegg: That's exactly what I was talking about. I'm sure there are no people living there, or are there?

Mr. Vanderwell: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Clegg: Well, then, I don't know why the line wouldn't be straight. That's the only thing.

The Chair: He's talking about way up.

Mr. Fjeldheim: He's talking about up here, yeah.

The Chair: There are a couple of settlements that would be left out if there was a revision.

Mr. Fjeldheim: The reason, if I recall, was that it goes between the Indian reserves there.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes, there are some Indian settlements there.

Mr. Fjeldheim: If it goes straight down, it's cutting the Indian reserves. It's gone east a little bit and then down again. The road connection is over to High Level this way.

Mr. Poulter: I think this changed when that boundary was originally done. It was a long while back. There was no connection south towards Slave Lake then for those reserves. The only connection was across to High Level.

Mr. Clegg: Then after all that discussion – and I'm sure it's not all in *Hansard* – do you see any problem with making that line straight?
9:22

Mr. Vanderwell: I'm not sure which line you mean, Glen, actually.

Mr. Clegg: Where that 3 is, just make that line straight on the west side.

Mr. Vanderwell: Take this out and come straight down here?

Mr. Clegg: Yeah. That's what I'm wondering.

The Chair: What would be included in there, Ken?

Mr. Vanderwell: If I could show the folks here, he's talking about bringing that straight down right through there. Fort Vermilion is within that area.

The Chair: That would take population out of Peace River, then?

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. That would decimate Peace River's constituency.

The Chair: Okay. All right.
Any other questions, Glen?

Mr. Clegg: No. I'm good.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson?

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ken, for your presentation this morning. If we did have to add any population – and this is hypothetical of course – going south, is there kind of a natural area that could be added in that wouldn't create too much of a problem if we did have to do that, going south? I'm just thinking about a natural community, natural trading area.

Mr. Vanderwell: Going south, we do end up in the community of Swan Hills, which is a possibility. I think a more natural fit, if we're talking about changing our boundaries, would be McLennan and Donnelly being included perhaps within the constituency, and that would be over on the west side. A lot of the residents of McLennan, Donnelly, and Guy already head toward High Prairie to do their retail shopping or do business, and it seems to me that that might be kind of a cultural fit, along that side.

Mr. Patterson: All right. Would you have any idea roughly how many people that would involve? A couple of thousand?

Mr. Vanderwell: I'm afraid I don't, no.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Well, thank you for that suggestion, because it's very important that we find out natural travel patterns or community relationships rather than drawing lines on that that don't fit. Thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: You're welcome.

The Chair: Ken, one of the comments we heard rather repeatedly in Westlock yesterday from the good Swan Hillians – is that the right term they use?

Mr. Vanderwell: I guess so.

The Chair: They pointed out to us that the area between Swan Hills and north to the highway was pretty desolate – I've driven through there several times myself, and I agree with that – and that really they had more community of interest with the south or the west than they would with the north. I think that's a fair summary of what we heard yesterday; wasn't it?

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes.

The Chair: Doug.

Mr. Graham: Yes. I note that although you're one of the special constituencies now, you're in fact at this point in time the fourth smallest constituency in the province, I believe. Is that right? So that leads me to believe that you've been doing quite well and have been growing perhaps faster than some of these other constituencies. I just wondered: is that true?

Mr. Vanderwell: I have here that Athabasca-Wabasca is the first smallest, followed by Dunvegan, followed by Barrhead-Westlock, followed by Drumheller-Chinook, and then followed by ourselves.

Mr. Graham: So you're the fifth smallest?

Mr. Vanderwell: So we're the fifth.

Mr. Graham: That leads me to believe that your economy has been doing well and your population base has been growing. Is that right, in your experience?

Mr. Vanderwell: We would like to think so. There are probably other folks that would be better able to address that than I would.

Mr. Graham: I would assume that when the constituencies were set the last time around, you probably were the second smallest in the province, and that's not the case anymore. Is that correct?

Mr. Vanderwell: I wasn't at that, and I'm not really sure.

Mr. Graham: Yeah. All right. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions, colleagues?

Mr. Patterson: Just a point of information relevant to a question that Mr. Clegg asked on why number 3 jogged down that way.

The Chair: Well, we'll give you a chance at the end.

Mrs. Torresan-Chykerda: It appears on the map that Fort Vermilion is surrounded by a group of Beaver Ranch Indian reserves. That jog appears to separate and group all the Beaver Ranch Indian reserves in with Fort Vermilion, and it separates them from the Tallcree Indian reserves. If a line goes straight through them, we see that there's a definite split between all the Beaver Ranch Indian reserves.

The Chair: Good. Thanks very much.

Mrs. Torresan-Chykerda: It looks like there's a group of five or six Indian reserves all belonging to the Beaver Ranch reservation.

The Chair: Then it would make sense to have them all in one constituency or the other; wouldn't it?

Mr. Poulter: That's our point, yes.

The Chair: Good. Thanks very much.

Mr. Charette: I'm from Fort Vermilion and from the Tallcree First Nation. Tallcree is composed of four very distinct communities, one of which is in the village of Fort Vermilion itself, and the other is in Beaver Ranch. As Ken pointed out, that jog in there sort of excludes Fort Vermilion and Beaver Ranch from the other two communities of the Tallcree First Nation.

The Chair: Are you going to be speaking to us later on?

Mr. Charette: I don't expect to.

The Chair: Well, we may call you and ask you, if you're agreeable, how that works for you. Would you do that?

Mr. Charette: Yes. I'll be only too pleased.

The Chair: That's great. Thanks very much.

Ken, thank you very much. Appreciate your contribution.

I'd like to now ask the representative of the county of Athabasca.

Mrs. Gislason: Good morning.

The Chair: I'm pleased to introduce to the panel Reeve Lorraine Gislason from the county of Athabasca. Lorraine, would you introduce your sidekick?

Mrs. Gislason: This is Edgar Koehler. He's one of our councillors, and he's going to answer all of the hard questions that you pose to me.

The Chair: Okay, Lorraine. Have at us.

Mrs. Gislason: Mr. Chairman and hon. members, thank you for the opportunity to provide the commission with some input from the county of Athabasca. My name is Lorraine Gislason, and I am presently the reeve of the county of Athabasca. I am accompanied here today by Mr. Edgar Koehler. Our purpose in coming here today is to help you understand the extreme differences between our constituency, the Athabasca-Wabasca riding, and the other more compact and accessible ridings. To this end, we have three points that we would like to make.

Point one. Effective representation is every Albertan's right. The Athabasca-Wabasca constituency is a huge geographic area that is sparsely populated. I believe our riding has the smallest population of any provincial electoral constituency, and this was mentioned by the last speaker. Our current MLA, the Hon. Mike Cardinal, works very hard to remain accessible to the residents of his area. Compared to an urban riding in Edmonton or Calgary, our MLA is still relatively inaccessible. The problem of sheer distance makes it hard for most of the residents in Athabasca-Wabasca to meet with the MLA. Many residents must travel several hundred kilometres to get to his Athabasca office. If you add to the distance factor the additional barriers of snowbound roadways, limited communication lines, and difficult travel, the task of efficient or effective

representation becomes even more daunting. Our MLA deals with at least 15 municipal councils, several school regions and regional health authorities. His time and energies are spread very thinly when he strives for effective representation.

Point two. Rural Alberta is Alberta's economic heartland. The economy of Alberta is driven in the most part by natural resources, which do exist in the rural areas. Oil, gas, and forestry are major components of the Athabasca-Wabasca area which contribute significantly to the well-being of all Albertans. Rural Alberta therefore needs strong representation in the Legislature to ensure that the concerns related to infrastructure, the environment, and water resources are considered. In the Athabasca-Wabasca constituency we are split by the green zone and the white zone, so we have farming in the south and we do have forestry in the north portion of our constituency.

Point three. Agriculture is still rural, and rural Alberta feeds all Albertans. The province of Alberta has recently indicated that growth and development of the agricultural industry is a major provincial objective. Obviously, the majority of agricultural pursuits in Alberta do take place in rural areas. The Athabasca-Wabasca constituency has a strong agricultural community, with cereal crops, beef production, and speciality crops evident and thriving throughout the region. We believe that a strong rural voice is needed in order to maintain agriculture as an important component of the provincial economy.

9:32

In summary, we would ask your commission to ensure that the number of rural ridings in Alberta is not reduced during this boundary review. More specifically, we urge you to leave the boundaries of the Athabasca-Wabasca constituency as they now exist. The need for effective representation and the challenges of geography should be ample reasons to justify a status quo approach to this constituency.

Thank you very much for the opportunity. Respectfully submitted.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Lorraine.

Mrs. Gislason: Thank you.

The Chair: Lorraine, could I just ask a question?

Mrs. Gislason: Yes.

The Chair: From a municipal point of view what's north of the county of Athabasca? What's between the county of Athabasca and the municipality of Wood Buffalo?

Mrs. Gislason: We have Sandy Lake and Wabasca, which are heavily involved with the oil and gas industry at the present time.

The Chair: And they're in what kind of a municipality? Are they in your municipality?

Mrs. Gislason: No. That's in the MD of Opportunity.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Gislason: We have Slave Lake on our west, we have Barrhead-Westlock to the south, we have Lakeland to the east, and we go all the way up to Wood Buffalo on the north.

The Chair: What I was trying to get at is: what's south of the MD

of Wood Buffalo?

Mrs. Gislason: Well, it's the MD of Opportunity.

The Chair: The MD of Opportunity. Okay. Good.

Mrs. Gislason: Yes.

Mr. Koehler: Actually, the Athabasca-Wabasca constituency takes in Chipewyan, which goes around Wood Buffalo all the way back to Athabasca.

The Chair: The reason for asking the question is that the idea has been floated someplace that you take the MD of Wood Buffalo and make that into its own constituency.

Mr. Koehler: It is now.

The Chair: No, I don't think so. Fort McMurray is its own constituency.

Mr. Koehler: Okay. That's what I meant. That's called Wood Buffalo.

The Chair: Yes. So if you took Wood Buffalo and made it into its own constituency, how crazy is that? I guess that's what I'm asking.

Mr. Koehler: That would include – what? – Fort Chipewyan as well? That's your question?

The Chair: That's my question. What's the answer?

Mr. Koehler: Yeah. I guess I don't know how the constituency serves – our biggest population probably is in the southern area as well.

Mrs. Gislason: The county consists of approximately 10,000, and I know that Wabasca itself is around 5,000 to 6,000. The population in between and beyond I'm not sure of, but we are very sparsely populated in between.

The Chair: Yes.

Any of my colleagues? Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you very much for coming and making a presentation today. This is very helpful especially for me, who comes from the deep south and am just trying to get my mind around all the problems and distances in the north.

Our chairman mentioned that we have to be very, very careful that we do not do something that, when we get a report done, will cause us to have a court challenge. I'm just kind of looking at your statement here that the number of rural ridings in Alberta is not reduced. You don't have to answer this; it's kind of a hypothetical question. We consider, then, the fact that we're limited to 83 – if we'd been told that we could have more, it would be simpler, or if it was fewer, maybe our job would be simpler – and to take in areas like Calgary-Shaw, which has 82,010.

Mrs. Gislason: I realize that.

Mr. Patterson: You don't have to, but did you want to comment on that?

Mrs. Gislason: Well, I think the general feeling is that rural

Alberta is getting the short end of the stick, pardon the expression. I think that as a rural person myself I can see where the urban areas with their great population can easily outnumber, outvote, outdo anything that rural Alberta would like to see happen. One thing that I think all urban constituencies should realize is that the north, the rural area, is where the resources come from, and we have to have good representation because of this.

Edgar, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Koehler: Well, I think that whole statement didn't say that maybe you shouldn't look at some other rural areas.

The Chair: And not look at you.

Mr. Koehler: Yeah.

You've got a developing corridor, with forestry and oil and gas, and you have no population there, and it's a big concern. Our constituency is the corridor to the north there, yeah. I think somebody related before that the resources are very important to all of Alberta, and I think representation is the key factor here.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, if I might just ask this question. The idea was presented at our hearings in Lethbridge that possibly we should look at Montana. The problem of rural representation looks like it's going to continue, and while we have all these ideas about less government, in the state of Montana, of course, you have a huge state and a very small population. They have the upper House, or a senate, to take care of the geographical representation. I can see that this is going to continue to be a real problem, the rural versus the urban, and we have to face that. Any thoughts? Or am I maybe taking you by surprise by asking you for thoughts? Maybe one way is to have an upper House or some kind of a second body to ensure that there's a second level of protection for rural areas. Just a thought.

Mrs. Gislason: This is my own personal view. I don't think we need any more levels of government. Sorry, but I don't.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Then, Mr. Chair, that points out a real level of difficulty. People are saying less government and then trying to ensure effective representation.

Mrs. Gislason: I'm not saying less government but, please, no more government.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Lorraine, one of the things I'd failed to do in my opening remarks was to say that the commission is going to have its interim report available to the public in the early part of September this year. You'll get a copy of that along with anybody else who wants copies, and you'll have a chance to look at it. Then there'll be a second set of hearings around the province in December or early January. Mr. Clegg tells me that there may be no need for the second set of hearings since everyone's going to be so pleased with the first set, but he's an eternal optimist, as you can tell. But we do have to have our final report, Lorraine, in the hands of the Speaker early in March next year. So that's the timetable, and I should have mentioned that earlier.

Mrs. Gislason: Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very, very much.

The Lesser Slave Lake regional council. Allan Willier.

Mr. Willier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, commissioners, for allowing me the opportunity to present. Welcome to our Treaty 8 territory. As introduced, my name is Allen Willier. I'm the chief executive adviser for the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council. The regional council is comprised of five First Nations immediately surrounding the north, south, east, and west sides of this beautiful jewel of the north, the Lesser Slave Lake. I just want to proceed with my presentation, which will be very brief because the previous speakers certainly reinforced some of the other comments I was going to make. I guess I can just say one word: "ditto" to the first two speakers. That could end my speech right there.

The Chair: We need a little more than that.

9:42

Mr. Willier: My concern and our concern in the brief discussion we had on the subject matter with the five chiefs and the elected officials of the First Nations is consistent with the last speaker's latter comments: the rural voice is disappearing. It is of great concern to us. The application to the provincial formula of a population of 35,951 will serve only to lessen the voice we need in government to represent our interests. The article in yesterday's *Edmonton Journal* certainly captured the potential impact this application of the population formula will have. Based on the formula there is a possible reduction of four seats presently representing the rural communities throughout Alberta, and that is of significant concern to us.

It is unfortunate that the urban voice is 51 strong, yet our north produces the vast majority of wealth in our province. We want to be heard in issues of sustainability, management of resources, and development of these resources. We cannot expect one individual to keep abreast of all these developments even in our one riding unless special considerations are made for these MLAs.

Effective representation I believe is all our goal. We need to ensure that the vastness of our riding is considered in a realistic manner. The transitional nature of many people working in our area is not considered in this count. Representation by population cannot work without special consideration, I reiterate again.

I want to talk briefly about the potential separation of communities that was referred to earlier by the audience, in that Beaver Ranch is certainly part of the Tallcree First Nation. In that one First Nation communities are divided into two ridings, so if there is consideration of changing the boundaries, certainly keep that in mind. Keep these communities bound together to ensure that their representatives are of like mind with these communities.

Now, my final summary, consistent with proceeding with changing the boundaries, is that if it is going to occur, we would recommend that Swan Hills be added to our riding in that any potential impacts flow into our jewel, the Lesser Slave Lake.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very much. Could you give us your best advice on what we should do in that Fort Vermilion area? You were indicating that presently there's some separation there. What's your best advice to us?

Mr. Willier: The only advice I can give you is that the one community should be represented by the same MLA from a First Nations perspective. Beaver Ranch should be consistent with the Tallcree First Nation. Am I correct there, Bernie?

Mr. Charette: We also have a reserve right in the village of Fort Vermilion, and Beaver Ranch is to the east towards John D'Or and

Fox Lake.

Mr. Willier: I guess, knowing Bernie for years and years, he's saying that it'd be nice to have them all under one riding.

The Chair: Bernie's going to give us his views in a few minutes anyway.

Mr. Willier: It's just that I wouldn't take the liberty to speak on behalf of another First Nation.

The Chair: And we're just trying to get advice from anyplace we can.

Mr. Patterson and Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. When I asked the original question about making that boundary straight, one person was going like this, and the next guy was going like this, and I'm really, really confused now. I understand that Fort Vermilion is in there. We can certainly find that information out, but how many people are we talking about here? I'm interested in hearing your remarks or anybody else's remarks about that. The only reason I asked the question in the first place is to keep the line as straight as possible. That's the only reason I asked the question.

The Chair: Bauni.

Ms Mackay: Thank you. I have two questions. You say that the urban voice is 51 strong. Who are you including in there besides Edmonton and Calgary? That's 40 seats there.

Mr. Willier: Yeah. The rural areas adjoining those urban centres.

Ms Mackay: Like Spruce Grove. . .

Mr. Willier: St. Albert.

Ms Mackay: St. Albert, all those places.

Mr. Willier: Sherwood Park.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Then the other thing – and this is totally out of my own curiosity and reflects my ignorance, but I always thought that the First Nation reserves were basically a federal government jurisdiction, so to what extent, then, does the provincial government have any impact on the lives of First Nations people living on reserves?

Mr. Willier: You are correct in that the federal government has primary fiduciary obligation and responsibility to First Nations, and it's governed under various legislation and specifically the Indian Act. However, when you look at the 1930 Natural Resources Transfer Act, part of the fiduciary obligations were delegated to a provincial government. In any court of law you will find that you cannot have two Crowns: one federal Crown, one provincial Crown. Whenever there's a transfer of responsibilities, there are certain fiduciary obligations that are assumed by the province. If the province so chose, they could deliver services on reserve to improve the socioeconomic dilemma that we're contending with on a daily basis, and by law they are obligated to do that. Politically they choose not to do that because the First Nations back in 1974 told Mr. Lougheed that they would prefer to maintain a stronger federal arrangement, and that's been the understanding ever since, contrary to numerous requests to ensure that the gaps in programming and

services available to First Nations were consistent with the neighbouring community; i.e., Slave Lake.

Ms Mackay: Thank you.

Mr. Graham: I'm sorry. It's early in the morning, and I still am confused, and this is our chance to get this straight about this area around Fort Vermilion and the Beaver Ranch First Nation and the Tallcree First Nation. When this was first raised, I thought that what people were saying was that there was a reason for that line because the Beaver Ranch First Nation was part of a homogenous group and the Tallcree were part of another First Nations group, and it was appropriate to have them divided. What I'm hearing you say now is that that's not the case. I don't understand. I want to understand it as best I can before we leave today. Are they or are they not part of the same First Nation?

Mr. Willier: They are part of the Tallcree First Nation. The decisions made on the north Tallcree reserve, where the head office is located for the Tallcree communities, affect and impact directly on the community of Beaver Ranch. That's still the same way, eh? The decisions made at north Tallcree, the head office of the four communities, will determine the development and everything else on Beaver Ranch. Let me share with you another example. You're familiar with the Dene Tha' First Nation.

Mr. Graham: Yeah.

Mr. Willier: They have nine Indian reserves located throughout that northwest area. The decisions made at Dene Tha', formerly known as Assumption, affect those nine reserves; Meander River, for example, and Bushe River, bordering High Level. All decisions are made in Assumption.

The Chair: So can I ask – Doug, do you want to follow that up?

Mr. Graham: Well, you can as well, but it's becoming clearer to me. I take it that these Beaver Ranch bands have some degree of local autonomy, but they are also part of a greater group's confederation, if you will, and they are affected by decisions made by the band council, which is on the Peace River side?

Mr. Willier: Yeah, south of the Peace River side. No, Beaver Ranch is on the Peace River side along with the First Nation situated right in the town of Fort Vermilion, and then the headquarters, or the band office, is situated in our riding here.

Mr. Graham: So this line is presently. . .

Mr. Willier: Separating.

Mr. Graham: The line as it's presently drawn separates certain of the bands which are part of a greater First Nation group; is that it?

Mr. Willier: Yes.

The Chair: Is there some logic, then, to put that line on one side or the other so everybody is together?

Mr. Willier: I guess that's the decision you guys will have to make.

The Chair: Well, we're here asking.

9:52

Mr. Willier: I'm just advising you that communities like to be

similarly represented, so one MLA. But Bernie is in a better position to speak to that.

Mr. Charette: I've lived in the Fort Vermilion area as well, but it just seems that we're getting hung up on a detail here. To make this thing kind of clear and as basic as possible, what we're dealing with here are the Tallcree Indian reserve and the Beaver Ranch Indian reserve, which are linked federally together underneath one nation. They're currently divided. You have the Tallcree nations within Lesser Slave Lake; you've got Beaver Ranch within Peace River, of which part of Beaver Ranch is right in the hamlet of Fort Vermilion.

So I guess the point that I'm getting from these guys is that they would prefer to have them all together, and the only way that you're going to get that completely is to put the line in and include Fort Vermilion and Beaver Ranch and throw it into Lesser Slave Lake; all right? I don't know what Peace River would think of that, but that's what they're getting at. So if you want to simplify it and you guys want to figure out where to draw the line to make everyone happy, that's where it is. Cut off Fort Vermilion; kick it in along with Beaver Ranch. Problem solved.

The Chair: Or go the other way.

Mr. Charette: Or go the other way.

Mr. Willier: Or go the other way, yeah.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Charette: You're welcome.

Mr. Willier: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Allen.
High Prairie regional school division.

Mrs. McCoy: Good morning. Thank you very much for allowing us some time to speak to you. We represent High Prairie school division No. 48, which extends from Slave Lake here in the east to Falher in the west. So we are approximately 200 kilometres long. It's a diverse school division both culturally and economically, as you know. Many of the previous speakers have referred to the kind of variety that we have in this area. We are here hoping to persuade you not to cut any of our representation. We very much need and appreciate the representation that we have presently. I have a very brief presentation to make to you, and I'll just read.

High Prairie school division functions in a northern rural setting with a sparsely distributed population. Our operations are affected constantly by the costs related to the distances involved, communication challenges when stakeholders are distributed in a wide variety of environments, each with special concerns, and time commitments when responding to concerns arising across our geographic area.

We are served currently by two Members of the Legislative Assembly, whose challenges mirror our operational concerns. Their constituents are distributed over a broad area. They are grouped in small communities with widely varied interests related to resources and employment. The cost in resources and time to adequately communicate with their constituents makes their job demanding and stressful. Actions that will remove representation from northern rural areas will only make the challenges that our representatives face on a daily basis grow more onerous.

Rural Alberta continues to be the source of the agricultural and

resource base that keeps our province strong. Those individuals who choose to live in these areas and deal with these challenges deserve the protection of good representation for their unique concerns. Those individuals who are elected to represent them at the provincial level deserve a geographic constituency that permits them to actually meet and serve the individuals they represent.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Vivian.
Dawn, anything you want to add?

Mrs. Konelsky: No. That's fine. I was just here in case you had some other questions that maybe I could be helpful with from the west side.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Clegg used to represent that west side, so I'll have him start.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, girls. It's great to hear your presentation. Yes, I did represent – not that area. I was MLA for 15 years, but only in '93 I think it was I took over the Little Smoky and all that Falher, Girouxville area. I can certainly vouch for your brief today for the concerns that you express, and the chairman kind of put me on a spot, because I agree with everything you said. So thank you for coming.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson is a retired school superintendent. You'd think he'd have a question or comment; wouldn't you? Mr. Patterson?

Mr. Patterson: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I do know that with the regionalization of school divisions it's created a lot of problems with communication. You have the problem here of trying to work with two MLAs, and of course that's common. That's probably a good thing in some ways. But it's interesting – and maybe this isn't a question, Mr. Chair, so you're probably going to call me to order here – that we're so concerned about communication patterns and trading areas and natural communities, yet when the regional divisions were set up, some of them don't even begin to fit into that. So I understand from a school division point of view how difficult it is, because you get such diverse processes with people who have no real trading connections or anything else. Maybe you want to comment on that a little bit.

Mrs. McCoy: Yes, I think you're correct in that. I think that one of our concerns is that rural areas, as you know, have different problems from urban areas, and if we were to lose our representation in government, there would be decisions made that would definitely be detrimental to us. Already we do face inequities with operations and management costs. It's very difficult, and even with funding equity we still struggle to keep up. If we were to have less representation overall, then there would be less people who understand the concerns that we have. The large school divisions naturally are concerned with protecting their own interests, and their interests are sometimes not our interests, so we very much need at least the number of representatives in the provincial government that we presently have. At least. We'd like more.

The Chair: Thank you. Yes, Dawn.

Mrs. Konelsky: Mr. Clark, one of the things I want to mention is some of the granting process. Dr. Oberg is very much moving towards the technology end when it comes to education, and some of the grants that are available are only available if we have access to things like the Supernet; okay? In High Prairie for instance we

are going to be the last people that receive the Supernet; it looks like probably not until 2004. That means that for the last three years the granting that was available is not available to us because we do not have a system to fit it in.

The Chair: I don't want to interrupt you there, but that would be a very good presentation to make to this education commission that was announced yesterday.

Mrs. Konelsky: It's been made.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Any other questions or comments?

Mrs. Konelsky: But my point to that was that people in the urban areas do not realize that we do not have a facility. We cannot just carry on with the rest of the world like they do because we don't have the facilities to do that, and we need voices from here saying that we need those facilities too. We're just as important.

The Chair: And you want the Supernet here in 2002 or 2003, 2004?

Mrs. Konelsky: I could have had it in 1999. I'd have been very happy with it.

Mr. Patterson: If I might just say this and ask you this question, I know it's more of an education thing, but is it your school division that has one school that if somebody's on the Internet, the whole phone system is cut off?

The Chair: Now, let's not go there.

Mr. Patterson: But the point I'm trying to make here is that you do have some very real, serious problems with communication.

Mrs. Konelsky: Yes.

10:02

The Chair: Okay.
Any other questions? Mr. Graham.

Mr. Graham: Just a point of clarification. I understand that your school division then straddles a boundary of two constituencies. Is that right?

Mrs. McCoy: Yes.

Mr. Graham: What two constituencies are those?

Mrs. McCoy: Hector Goudreau's in the west end and Pearl Calahasen's here in Slave Lake.

The Chair: Lesser Slave Lake and Dunvegan.

Mr. Graham: Okay. So it straddles Lesser Slave Lake and Dunvegan. Do you see the fact that you have representation by two MLAs and you can go to two of them rather than one as advantageous, disadvantageous, or neutral?

Mrs. McCoy: We see it as advantageous.

Mr. Clegg: Especially with the one you had before.

Mrs. McCoy: Of course.

The Chair: There'll be no more campaigning.

Ladies, thank you very, very much on behalf of the commission. We appreciate your taking the time and the contribution you made. Thank you.

Mrs. McCoy: Thank you.

The Chair: Now I'd like to ask for Sheila Foley.

Mrs. Foley: First of all, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to come up and speak today. I actually represent three points of view here. Our municipality, the MD of Lesser Slave River, is part of the Hon. Pearl Calahasen's constituency and also the Hon. Mike Cardinal's. I am the reeve of the MD of Lesser Slave River. I live in Mike Cardinal's constituency, Athabasca-Wabasca, and I'm also the president of the Athabasca-Wabasca constituency. So I have concerns in several different areas. The main issue I want to bring to you today is just the feeling of our council, so what I'll do is I'll just read what I have here, and then if you have any questions, by all means.

On behalf of the MD of Lesser Slave River we would like to take this opportunity to express our comments relative to the electoral boundaries review which is currently underway. As a relatively sparsely populated area in north rural Alberta we are getting very concerned over the gradual population shift to urban areas, particularly to the two big cities to our south. This shift is reducing the ability of rural members to influence government policy and may in fact be starting to hinder the effectiveness of individual MLAs. For example, many rural MLAs represent constituencies of such a large geographic size that the constituencies are now becoming unmanageable. We simply cannot allow these constituencies to grow any more in size.

As a council we also feel that the new electoral boundaries must consider more than just density of population. True effective representation must also consider geographic size, distance from the Legislative Assembly, number of local governments, school boards, and other community organizations within a constituency. We recognize that population must be a factor, but it must be balanced with other, equally important indicators.

Currently our municipality is split between two electoral divisions, and for the most part council has been pleased with our current representation. Council would not, however, be supportive of a change in our current electoral boundaries relative to enlarging the size of either constituency. Any further change to our electoral boundaries would diminish any form of effective representation for our region.

Now, I'd just also like to compliment Ken and Lorraine for their input, their stats. Statistics are very informative and indicative of the issues that we face here.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Sheila. Sheila, how many people in the MD of Lesser Slave River?

Mrs. Foley: We actually increased in population in our Lesser Slave River municipality. We increased by about 500 people during this last census. We're up around just over 2,800 people. We're almost half and half divided between Pearl's and Mike's constituencies. Our northwest end, which is mainly the oil and gas and our residential area, country residential, borders the town of Slave Lake. There are about 1,500 in that area. Then our farming community, which has an awful lot in common with the Athabasca-Wabasca area, is in the south and southeast.

The Chair: Okay. Clearly, you want no changes.

Mrs. Foley: Well, if I could just make one suggestion, wearing a different hat.

The Chair: Yes. Please do.

Mrs. Foley: I know that you brought forth the issue of the north end of Athabasca-Wabasca, north of Fort McMurray. That is an extremely hard area for us as a constituency to represent, although we do our very best. I commend Mike for his efforts, but he's on the road all the time. If you give any consideration to including that in Fort McMurray or Wood Buffalo, I would seriously like to have you consider bringing our boundary further south. We have an awful lot in common with that Westlock area, and we would have no problem representing them within our constituency as well. We've done it in the past with the Athabasca group, and we had no problems with that.

The Chair: What's your advice to us on taking the MD of Wood Buffalo and making that a constituency which would include the city of Fort McMurray and Fort Chip?

Mrs. Foley: Well, I would have to be very honest and say that they have more in common with Wood Buffalo than they probably do with Athabasca. However, if they do travel, they automatically come through our area. I think with regard to the aboriginal people in the north they probably do most of their traveling to Fort McMurray.

The other comment I might just make, too, is that with the highway 813 paving being completed from Athabasca, Calling Lake, and into Wabasca, the impact on the economy of the communities of Wabasca and Athabasca and down south is going to be greatly improved. So we don't want any consideration given to removing that area from our area, because it is going to be utilizing the Athabasca area quite heavily.

The Chair: Any questions?

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for your presentation and your comments. I'm just trying to clarify this in my mind. If we were to take the municipality of Wood Buffalo and make that into one constituency, you're saying that would actually then cut down a lot of the travel and you would look favourably on adding to the south.

Mrs. Foley: Exactly. The population numbers in that area, as you're aware, are very minimal, so we're not talking a great difference to the total population within our constituency. But we have more in common with those areas to the south, and I know that we as a constituency would have no problems carrying our meetings on down there and working with them. We do as a municipality right now. Our municipality works very closely with the counties of Athabasca and Westlock. It's just a natural fit. So that to me would be very favourable.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

Mr. Clegg: Just a clarification. If I understand it right, when you go from Athabasca south, I think it's about 10 miles east of Westlock. Forget about the municipalities working together, but do the people in the Athabasca area go into Westlock a lot or do they go straight into the city?

Mrs. Foley: They'll use the eastern route and go straight into the city, but when I say to bring that boundary further south, I don't just

mean Westlock but even the other communities along that eastern highway – sorry; I lived in Lac La Biche for many years, but I forget that main route – even into the Redwater area. It's an area where we have so much in common with the farming community and that.

Mr. Clegg: Well, obviously, when you look at the patterns of traffic in Alberta, Edmonton and Calgary are the hub and then everybody goes either north or south or east or west, you know, to feed into there in general. Sometimes communities can only be 20 miles apart, but there is not really any community relationship.

10:12

Mrs. Foley: Well, we do with the Westlock area, especially with our health board and our school board, so we're already dealing with the RHAs and the school division.

Mr. Clegg: So you are in the same RHA as Westlock?

Mrs. Foley: Uh-huh. That's right.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

The Chair: Any further questions?

Mr. Graham: No. That's been very helpful. Thanks.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very, very much.

Mrs. Foley: You're welcome.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Ray Stern, mayor of Slave Lake, expressed interest in asking a few questions.

Mr. Stern: I think my question has been answered. Thank you.

The Chair: Your Worship, feel free to give us your best advice.

Mr. Stern: Well, I'll let the other gentleman go first.

The Chair: Who's next then, Doug?

Mr. Olthof: Well, all of our registered speakers have presented. You had expressed interest in hearing the views of Mr. Bernie Charette.

The Chair: Yes. Come on up here, Bernie, and if there's anyone else who wants to give us some advice, talk to Doug and we'll get you on the list. Bernie, will you tell us your name and where you're from?

Mr. Charette: I'm Bernie Charette. I'm working with the Tallcree First Nation, the head office of which is in north Tallcree, and north Tallcree and south Tallcree are in the riding of Lesser Slave Lake. I report directly to our chief, whose name is Frank Meneen, and I discussed this matter with him before I came down. He was wondering why a new reserve is in the hamlet of Fort Vermilion, which is part of Tallcree, and Beaver Ranch, which has been there for many, many years, is sort of separated from our administration, which is in north Tallcree.

The Chair: Quite frankly, Bernie, we don't know the answer to that. My supposition, Bernie – only a supposition; okay? – is that it may have had something to do with numbers, to get enough numbers in the Peace River riding or this riding to meet the designation last

time. But I think you got the sense from the panel members this morning that we're really interested in hearing what your best advice to us is. Common sense seems to say: put it in one riding or the other.

Mr. Charette: I think it would be just good common sense to put it all into one. There is the thought that these various First Nations shouldn't be separated. You know, there are four communities within Tallcree.

The Chair: Well, what's your best advice to us? Better to go to the Fort Vermilion-High Level area or come down and stay in Lesser Slave Lake, or would you sooner not answer that here?

Mr. Charette: Well, I can certainly say that we do receive wonderful co-operation and support from Pearl Calahasen, and I would think it would be up to you people to make the decision on this.

The Chair: But you could live with being a part of Peace River, too, if you had to; could you?

Mr. Charette: Well, we've grown used to it.

The Chair: On that note, Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Bernie. My memory might not be right, but I think it was included in Peace River. I don't think it was for sheer numbers. I think it was because there were no access roads into that area from Lesser Slave Lake. Correct me if I'm wrong; I don't think there were at that time. I understand – and correct me again if I'm wrong – that there is access from this area into that area now. I think that was the reason for it being in Peace River, and if it had to be represented by somebody and basically from this area, then it would have to go through the whole Peace River, which is about 350 kilometres. You'd have to go through Dunvegan and you'd have to go through Peace River and get over to that area. So I think it was felt by the last commission that it was considerably more reasonable to in fact be represented in Peace River. Now, maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think I am.

Firstly, do you think that's the reason, and secondly, is there access from the north into this area today?

Mr. Charette: Yes, there is access, and I traveled it yesterday. I'm not sure of the history, but Mr. Willier was very familiar with this area. Highway 67, which I presume may have been opened in 1967 – I'm only guessing – recently turned into highway 88, and that is the connecting point from Lesser Slave Lake right to the town of Fort Vermilion. From there they connect with highway 58, which goes down east of High Level to Beaver Ranch. How long these highways have been in – I'm not an old-timer in that area.

Mr. Clegg: I have a question and we can obviously get the answer, but would you have any notion or idea how many people would be involved if we took in that Fort Vermilion area? I've been up there once in my life. People say that they live in the Peace, but keep in mind that you're 300 miles from where I live, so that's the kind of distance we're talking about in the north. What kinds of numbers of people? Fort Vermilion has maybe got 800 people – I'm just doing some guessing here – and there's the surrounding area, so we're probably looking at in the neighbourhood of 1,000. Have you got any figures?

Mr. Charette: Your estimate of Fort Vermilion is very accurate,

and we have a large ranching community east of Fort Vermilion which leads into the Beaver Ranch area. I would say perhaps a few more than a thousand, maybe 1,200. I'm just guessing.

The Chair: Bernie, does it make any sense if we were to do that? This is like dominos. What do we with La Crete then?

Mr. Charette: Well, that's a very good question.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'd like a very good answer.

Mr. Charette: La Crete is sort of a community of its own.

The Chair: It is; isn't it? Yes.

Mr. Charette: Yeah. The First Nations in the park where I come from do an awful lot of business in the community of La Crete, in the amount of millions of dollars. I don't know where La Crete stands on this, but they are not included in this little jog on this map.

Mr. Clegg: We might hear that in Peace River.

The Chair: Yes. Glen thinks we're going to hear that in Peace River, so we'll wait until then.

Mr. Charette: Pardon me?

The Chair: Glen thinks we may hear that in Peace River, so we'll wait until we get to Peace River to solve that problem.

Anything else you'd like to tell us, Bernie?

Mr. Charette: No. I just thank you for the privilege of being here, and I'm here more as an observer than to, you know, give some sort of a report or recommendation.

The Chair: Tell the chief we think he's well advised, will you?

Mr. Charette: I'll tell him, yes. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hudson Foley. Good morning.

Mr. Foley: Good morning.

The Chair: You're not going to give us all that; are you?

Mr. Foley: Oh, no.

The Chair: Good.

Mr. Foley: It's just my messy life here.

The Chair: Not a problem.

Mr. Foley: I'm just here more as an observer, but like I say, I'm fairly intimate with our local political scene. I guess I could say that I'm a fairly proud member of the PC Party and an even prouder Albertan. You'll note that I didn't say northern or rural Albertan. I'm an Albertan, just like everyone else.

I think the problems that we've been discussing here today affect all Albertans, not just us living in the rural or the northern areas. I think it's important to note that this is not just a point in time issue. Like, it seems that we discuss this every couple of years, whenever you guys do the rounds after the election.

The Chair: Every two elections.

Mr. Foley: Every two elections? As you say, every couple of elections. It's just becoming a progressively worse problem. We're looking at the erosion, basically, of the sparser populated areas with regard to political representation, and I think that all the best of intentions that have been discussed here today aren't really going to solve the problem. I know that you guys said right at the outset that you've got the act and the legislative laws of the land that you have to follow, but at the end of the day you're going to kind of curtail that with a bit of common sense. But I'm having a hard time understanding how that's going to resolve some of the issues we're dealing with, because as far as I can see, in the next go-round here we're going to be dealing with the exact same problem, if not worse.

10:22

The way the current setup is, there's no denying the fact that the urban centres are definitely growing at an exponentially higher rate than any of the rural areas, and you're basically looking at a dying breed. I'm a young guy who is settling in northern Alberta, trying to make a living and raise a family, and there are getting to be fewer and fewer and fewer of us. There's no incentive for us. Whether you look at infrastructure, funding, or whatever the case may be, it's becoming less and less attractive for me and people like me to come north or into the rural areas and settle, because we're getting less and less representation. The driving force for any initiatives is going to be the urban centres with the higher ridings, and I guess it really worries me. It worries me and it worries me for my kids, because there seems to be this lack of understanding. It's never written down; it never seems to be right out in the open. While you're definitely dealing with different beasts in looking at our constituency versus, say, Calgary-Shaw, we are all Albertans and we are sharing the exact same problems. Our problems are theirs, and their problems are ours.

What has to be understood is that all the resources that come rocketing down these highways from up in these rural and northern areas are the things that translate into the dollars that pay for overpasses in Calgary or inner-city social funding programs for Edmonton; you name it. So what they've basically created right now is an environment that's just going to become progressively worse as the years go by, and eventually they're going to reach a situation like: "Oh, where's the money? Why doesn't anybody want to go up and work in the timber industry or the oil and gas industry?" You know why? Because everyone's going to be moving to the cities, and that's where they're going to basically concentrate on working on the amenities.

I'm just really worried because it seems that we're talking about playing almost juggling games and looking at where people are living, where the access routes are, and if we move this line over here, then we can maybe make it work. Everyone keeps referring to the population listing as kind of a reference, but I'll be honest with you: I view it as a hit list. The impression that I get from this committee, whether it be veiled or otherwise, is that, "Oh, well, we see Athabasca at the top; these guys will be the first to go," and we're at number 5 right now, I think it is. I really don't see how we're not heading that way. We're talking about chopping up Mike's riding.

I guess we have to look at this from a different perspective. The way I look at it is as a young Albertan who is going to be basically looking after you guys; right?

The Chair: I hope so.

Mr. Foley: Well, I guess your decisions may dictate how I look

after you or where.

The Chair: Or when.

Mr. Foley: Or when.

The Chair: Or if.

Mr. Foley: That's right.

I guess I just wanted to make sure that that point gets across. The other one that it seems the younger – I'm looking far into the future, not just toward retirement. But the biggest issue that I see in this province is that whether you're dealing with the water management strategy that one minister went around with, or any other type of issue, is that there seems to be this almost assumed position that when Edmonton and Calgary are looked at, there are no limits. No one sits back and says: well, with economic development, I think we're reaching our limit here. It's always like: well, it's getting hard for us to develop anymore in Calgary or Edmonton, so what can we take from northern or rural Alberta to make it work so that we can keep building more factories or more mills or more whatever the case may be in Edmonton or Calgary?

We have to start looking at saying: "No. We've reached our limit here in outer Calgary. We can't look at shipping water down there." We can't look at any of these other types of options. We have to actually start looking at viable options and say: "No. We can't handle it in this area anymore. If you want to develop in Alberta, unfortunately you're going to have to look elsewhere other than Edmonton or Calgary, whether it's in northern Alberta or the rural areas or whatever the case may be, so that we can start spreading out these impacts: economic, environment, and otherwise."

It just seems to be that that one is always kind of skirted around. I was present at the water meetings, and that was one that really kind of got to me, because their big question was, "We don't have enough water in Calgary, so what can we do to get more down there?" I'm like, "Well, there's lots of water in northern Alberta." I mean, why aren't they looking at that option? But that wasn't even an option. "No; it costs too much." Well, sorry; it costs too much in my backyard too.

I just wanted to get those points across. A lot of them are kind of repetitive and a little strong, I guess, but it's been my experience that for some reason government officials need to be told two or three or four times before it finally tends to sink in. No offence. My wife would call it selective hearing. All husbands have to be told stuff three times. The first time they don't hear you. The second time they don't think you're serious.

The Chair: You better stay there for a minute. I think we have some questions.

Mr. Foley: Sure. You bet. Go ahead.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, and I certainly like your philosophy. Seventy percent of the wealth that's generated to the province is generated in northern Alberta. That's the first fact. And in B.C. 90 percent of the oil and gas revenue that goes into Victoria is generated in the northeast. What would your feeling be if we joined another province and had northern Alberta and northeastern B.C. in one province?

Mr. Foley: That would be not a bad idea.

Mr. Clegg: Our biggest concern would be to just write out cheques to all the people that lived there.

Mr. Foley: An even better idea would be to take the percentages that you just enlightened us all with and tie those into the infrastructure funding formula. Why not?

Mr. Patterson: Well, Mr. Chair, after all of that, I just want to indicate that I come from the deep south, which is very poverty-stricken. Thank you.

Mr. Foley: Yeah. Well, I need a rag for my tears here.

The Chair: Any comments or questions?

Ms Mackay: Well, just thanks for your comments. I mean, I agree with what you're saying. The whole urban/rural population shift is a major problem for the province, and there have to be ways of addressing it. It's good to see that somebody your age is taking this on very seriously. I don't know what the solutions are. I don't think the electoral boundaries, mind you, are going to solve the problem, but that's a major issue that somebody's got to start grappling with pretty soon.

Mr. Foley: Well, I think that's your job though; isn't it? Isn't you guys' position to look at this issue? I guess the biggest problem I have is that it's great you guys are here and it's great these discussions are being held, but I don't think it's enough. I think that right now it's just kind of a song and dance, playing with the numbers, playing with the boundary lines on a map and how we can keep working within the existing legislation and what our requirements are. Because at the end of the day, no matter what your best intentions are and what you guys may think, your hands are going to be tied by the 83 ridings and the allowable exclusions under that; right?

Ms Mackay: Well, exactly. Exactly.

Mr. Foley: So you pull up that list, and you've got five that are on the top end. I don't know how you guys at the end of the day are going to be able to avoid doing something with Mike's constituency. Like I say, my biggest point is: far be it for me to say that, you know, I'm number five, so therefore go after Mike. We're all northern Albertans. We're all Albertans, for that matter, and I don't want to off-load my problems on anyone else.

I think that we should be viewed as a separate piece. I don't know what the answer is, whether you're looking at caps or different ways of funding or whatever the case may be. But the point has been brought across several times today and is very relevant that our representation is being continually eroded, and even what we've discussed today hasn't addressed that point. We're basically going to be right back here again two elections from now talking about the exact same position, and you know what? I think we're going to have even less constituencies in the northern rural areas, and it'll just be like: "Oh, well. Yeah, it happened again. Geez. You know, let's move some more lines." Two more elections and it'll happen again. Pretty soon everyone will be voting out of Edmonton and Calgary, and we'll have, like, one lone northern Alberta constituency; right?

The Chair: Well, I think I'd summarize your presentation as the most blunt that we've received, and you've seen through the smoke and mirrors pretty well. To be very candid, Mike, if we end up having to give Calgary one or two or three or whatever – and you get people who say there should be four or five – there's no Santa Claus

in this business, or at least if there is we've certainly missed him, so where do those come from?

Mr. Foley: I don't know.

The Chair: That's why I think one of the things that the committee has talked about is taking some part of our report and talking frankly about how this urban/rural gulf, if I could put it that way, is getting more and more pronounced, and to do this every eight years and have the same thing happening isn't very satisfactory to my rural friends or to my urban colleagues, because we're all Albertans at the end of the day.

Mr. Foley: That's right.

The Chair: So you've spoken bluntly to us, and we appreciate that.

Mr. Foley: Thank you. By the way, whenever you guys do have that meeting, let me know where it is and I'll help you solve it. Okay?

The Chair: Why don't you take this evening and write down a few suggestions for us and get them to us?

Mr. Foley: I will. All right. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks, Mike.
Mr. Olthof.

Mr. Olthof: Yes. I notice I mixed up the names when I gave them to you. Sorry.

The Chair: Hudson Foley?

Mr. Olthof: That was Hudson Foley.

The Chair: Sorry.

Mr. Foley: That's okay, as long as you heard what I said.

The Chair: I heard what you said, Hudson, several times.

Mike Poulter. We had a chance to speak earlier. This is the gentleman who I think it's fair to say got roused at six o'clock this morning and told: get down to Slave Lake and give them some advice. Is that a fair assessment?

10:32

Mr. Poulter: Or words to that effect, yeah. And just don't say anything too outrageous.

I'd like to congratulate Mr. Clegg. I don't know whether it's because he represents Dunvegan, but I see he's come around to Grant Notley's old position that the north should separate. Glad to hear it.

Mr. Clegg: I'm thinking of money.

Mr. Poulter: Well, that's what he was thinking of as well.

Mr. Clegg: Our fair share.

Mr. Poulter: Yeah.

I just have basically about three points that I'd like to make. I'm representing the town of High Prairie here, and we don't actually have a formal position on boundaries except that we are really

getting tired of being at the end and edge of a constituency all the time. We're at the edge of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. We're at the edge of the federal constituency. It would be nice just once in a while to be in the middle.

That ties in with something that was suggested earlier which I would like to just touch upon for a second, and that was the idea that was floated by someone about maybe moving some of the communities in east Smoky into this area. That would be McLennan, Falher, Girouxville. Whilst that would be nice because it would be coterminous with the school division boundaries, I suspect that there may be some problems. Although many of those people do indeed come to High Prairie for shopping, they are all French-speaking communities basically, and their community lies more with the French-speaking communities in that area. The other communities like Marie-Reine and Jean Cote, et cetera, would not naturally be part of the High Prairie area because they are too far away and they are too deeply embedded in the Peace River area. So although that may look like a nice quick fix, I'm not so certain it would necessarily be a good one to work on.

I think the town would probably agree that, yes, obviously representation by population has to be a factor, and it has to be the major determinant in what you do. However, we do accept very, very firmly the idea that once you get to the big rural areas where the population becomes thinly spread, the area becomes very, very large. You cannot necessarily chop them down in size and make massive, massive areas. We have too many of those already.

Just to give you one example of one of the other regions that exists here, the Peace River library system covers an area from the Northwest Territories border down to Fox Creek and from the B.C. border down as far as Fawcett, which is over a quarter of the province. Now, when you start to get to an area that big, it becomes very difficult to tie things together and talk to people and do normal business arrangements, because it's just too big. You can't even reach the communities involved in one day if you're driving.

The other point I wanted to make to you, and the original reason I asked to speak, was this. You indicated at the very beginning, Mr. Clark, that you were being guided by the 2001 census. I would like to caution you that the 2001 census was very poorly done. I don't know what happened in every community, but I do know that in mine in many cases the census forms were just simply left on doors for people to mail in. Whether they were mailed in or not we do not know. Certainly the town of High Prairie and the MD of Big Lakes are so suspicious of the numbers we got back that both of us are currently in the process of doing a new census because we feel that we have been given very low figures. So it may well be that the numbers you have been given are low.

The Chair: That's the town of High Prairie and . . .

Mr. Poulter: The MD of Big Lakes. The town is just in the process of tabulating its census; it has just about finished it. I'm not certain whether the MD has finished yet or not. Dawn, have you finished?

Mrs. Konelsky: Well, I know that they've been out at my house, so they must be pretty close to being done.

Mr. Poulter: Pretty close to being done.

We both know that our figures are far lower than they should have been, and we suspect that it's because a lot of people just didn't bother to return this form. There was actually in many cases no contact with the federal census takers. They just dumped it on the door handle. That's what happened in my apartment. I came home one day, and there it was on the door handle. I was expected to just

fill it in and mail it in.

The Chair: You've let Dave Chatters know; have you?

Mr. Poulter: He's not my MLA. Oh, federal.

The Chair: Whoever your MP is.

Mr. Poulter: No, I haven't yet. I assume that he has been told this, but it's an important point that those figures are suspect. That was the main point I wanted to make, that we may have different figures and that it may be worth your while to check back with both the town and the MD to see what our final figures are, perhaps before you complete your report and do the work on figures.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Any comments?

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks for the presentation. You made the remark that the French settlement, I call it, could go in with this area. What happens quite often when we talk to two or three other people is they say: well, High Prairie should go in with Dunvegan. Well, obviously you can't do everything. Regardless of what you do, we're both short in numbers. I don't want to put you on the spot. If you're from the town of High Prairie, I understand that they haven't taken a specific – I have heard from a couple of people that they would rather go that way and make it into Dunvegan. You don't have to answer the question. We'll have to answer that question, I guess.

Mr. Poulter: Yeah. That becomes part of the problem. There are so many different regions that we are already part of, some of which go that way, some of which go across the two, and some of which go more to the east. I think our basic point is that we wouldn't really be too happy at moving if it meant we moved from being the westernmost community on a constituency to being the easternmost community on a constituency.

Mr. Clegg: You want to be in the centre.

Mr. Poulter: Well, the constituency that used to be there, of course, if you check back far enough, is the old Grouard constituency, which did include very big areas around Grouard and High Prairie going up towards Peace River and across – I forget exactly how far west it went, but I believe it did include Falher and Girouxville – and then east towards Slave Lake, which was not then Slave Lake, of course.

The Chair: There was a great rife at that time between Slave Lake and High Prairie because they had two constituencies.

Mr. Poulter: Yeah. So whatever you do, if indeed this is the area that needs to be adjusted, it's going to cause some confusion and some dislike by various people.

The Chair: Anything else you'd like to say to us?

Mr. Poulter: Nothing else. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Olthof, is there anyone else who'd like to make a presentation or make some comments?

Mr. Olthof: The mayor of Slave Lake at this time would like to speak to us.

The Chair: Your Worship.

Mr. Stern: Actually, I think that at the risk of redundancy, the points have been clearly made a number of times about distance and so on, and those are the key points from our perspective. The discussion in regards to Fort Vermilion: do you realize that you're 500 kilometres away from where you're sitting to Fort Vermilion and close to 700 kilometres away from the Legislature Building? If you have to be there on Thursdays as a cabinet minister and meet in your constituency the next day, do you understand the challenges? Please, please, please remember sheer size. It is a major factor.

Thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: I have one more comment.

The Chair: Reintroduce yourself; will you, please?

Mr. Vanderwell: It's Ken Vanderwell.

The Chair: Ken, you'd better come to the mike.

Mr. Clegg: You haven't been talking to Brian; have you?

Mr. Vanderwell: No.

Mr. Clegg: If you did, we don't want your remarks.

Mr. Vanderwell: I have one more question for the commission kind of on the tail of what Hudson indicated to you. Given the fact that legislation should reflect the realities within the province of Alberta, can you tell me why the commission would not recommend to the government that we do increase the ridings within the province of Alberta in response to the population base increasing? Instead of staying with the 83 constituencies, maybe we'd end up at 85.

Thanks.

The Chair: Just stay seated for a second; would you? At the risk of opening up a whole other can of worms, that's certainly something that we can do and could consider. I should tell you, though, that the largest one issue that we've received written presentations on has been on the issue of number of seats. The vast majority of that representation is that there are too many seats already.

Mr. Foley: They're Calgarians.

The Chair: Well, I don't know where they're from. Hudson, I'm not sure that's totally right.

10:42

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, that's why I raised this other issue earlier that something is going to have to be done differently in the future, which did not receive a very positive response. I know that many of us do not like the second-House concept, but when you look at the United States, they do have that second House, which is recognizing the geographic representation more than the population.

This issue is going to become worse, and the chair is right: the vast majority of the submissions that we've had in writing – and not necessarily from Calgary and Edmonton; mostly from rural areas, from my reading – are saying to reduce the number of seats. I think possibly that's why the government left it as it is.

We have to think outside of the box. I hate that term. This is going to be a continuing issue. Sometime in the future there's going

to have to be something done or some process where we start to recognize that there's some way of getting representation on a geographic area. The point has been made here several times very effectively and very emphatically that pretty soon there'll be maybe nine or 10 truly rural constituencies, and the rest will all be urban of some type.

The people living close to the Montana border in response to the question there said: "Well, yes, we understand how it works there. That should be considered." So I know that this is different thinking, but something is going to have to happen.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Anyone else who'd like to make any comments?

Well, might I say thank you very much.

On a very personal note, you good folks from High Prairie will be surprised, but if you go check in the High Prairie school, you'll find kind of a weird guy's name on there as opening the school way back in about 1970. I remember being up here in Slave Lake and being involved with the school situation here and one Gunnar Wahlstrom, who I think was a fairly active Liberal at that time who was one of the local characters and wasn't fearful of giving the minister of education or, as I recall, anyone else lots of advice.

So I'm delighted to have the chance to be here and say thanks to my colleagues and to you good folks for your blunt, straightforward approach, and, Hudson, keep pushing.

Thanks very much.

This commission is adjourned now until Fort McMurray this afternoon.

[The commission adjourned at 10:44 a.m.]

