

8:02 a.m.

Thursday, June 27, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to welcome you to the third day of our round of consultations on electoral boundaries in the northern half of the province. This committee is set up under the electoral boundaries legislation. After every two elections under the law in Alberta there is a review of constituency boundaries. The legislation says that there shall be a committee of five people, two of which shall be appointed by the Executive Council of the province and two of which will be appointed by the Leader of the Opposition after consultation. Then the chairman will be either the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, a member of the judiciary, or a member of an academic institution. I guess it was the Ethics Commissioner's turn. That's about the only way I can explain how come I happen to be the chairman, but it's turning out to be an interesting and challenging experience, underlining the word "challenging."

This is the third week of our touring across the province. The first week we were in Calgary, Olds, Red Deer, and Edmonton, and then the second week – I have to think about this – we were in St. Paul, Wainwright, Drumheller, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Wetaskiwin. This concludes our first tour. In fact, we're meeting in Edmonton next Tuesday and Wednesday, when we're coming to some conclusions and then starting to write our interim report.

The interim report will be in the Speaker's hands early in September. Each of you who is making a presentation will get a copy of that along with anyone else in Alberta who wants it. I doubt that it will be a number one best-seller; nevertheless, everyone has the opportunity to get a copy of that. Then there is an opportunity for a second round of hearings, which would be in December and early January of next year. Following that, the commission must wind up its work by the early part of March in 2003.

The criteria or the ground rules that the commission must work with are that we must use the 2001 Stats Canada census figures and we must keep the same number of seats in the Legislature as there are now. So, in a very simple form, if you take the population of Alberta, 2.98 million, divide that by 83, you get 35,951 and a half. I'm being facetious, of course, but 35,951 people ideally for every riding. Well, obviously, that's impossible. So there is provision for a variance of up to 25 percent above and 25 percent below. The last commission using the variances was up to 15 percent above and 15 percent below, I believe, with one exception, which was 16 percent.

There are also provisions in the legislation for four special ridings. Those special ridings are ridings that touch boundaries of the province that have a very sparse population, no urban area with more than I think it's 5,000 people, and several other criteria like that. If you look at the map of Alberta – and I would urge you to look at the maps when we take a break – right now there are two special ridings in Alberta. One is the riding of Athabasca-Wabasca, which is that northeastern portion of the province excluding the city of Fort McMurray, and the other special riding is Lesser Slave Lake.

So in a nutshell, ladies and gentlemen, you can see that our task is interesting but also certainly somewhat daunting. We have a situation where we have one riding in Calgary where there are 82,000 people, and we're not only bound by the legislation, but also there are a number of court decisions under Canada's Bill of Rights which I suppose can be interpreted to say – and Mr. Graham is a lawyer who can correct me later on perhaps – that the goal is effective representation within the criteria I've talked about, the 25 percent and the 50 percent. So when we're going to make major deviations from being close to rep by pop, we have to have good and substantive reasons and be able to show whoever asks us what those reasons are, and we're in the process of doing that.

I'd like to now introduce to you my colleagues on the panel. To my far right is the longtime mayor of the municipality of Claresholm – he's been mayor for some 33 years – Ernie Patterson. To my right is Glen Clegg, who I described in other parts of the province – and I hope that it is not too much of an exaggeration – as one of northwestern Alberta's true characters. I think that's an understatement. I see Walter Paszkowski back there hardly being able to contain himself. But when I introduce him that way, I think I'm right on. To my left is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is the former president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, and Bauni is from Edmonton. To my far left is Mr. Doug Graham, a well-respected and highly regarded lawyer in the city of Calgary. So that's the panel.

The group that we have this morning – we have six presenters. The mayor of Fairview interrupted Mr. Clegg's breakfast this morning and asked if she could make a presentation early this morning. She's here in Grande Prairie on some other business, for the children's authority I believe. They're interviewing for an executive director.

Ms Charchuk: It's for board members.

The Chair: For board members. I'm sorry. It seemed to me to be a very reasonable request, so I'd like to ask Mayor Jean Charchuk from Fairview to address us first of all.

Doug, could you give us the list of people who are going to be making presentations this morning? Just announce them now.

Mr. Olthof: Yes. Following Ms Charchuk, we will have Gord Graydon, Tony Yelenik, Barry Robinson, Gerald MacDonald, and Roy Borstad.

The Chair: Okay.

Two other people I should introduce to you. You've already met Doug Olthof. Doug is a political science student at UBC, but he's an Alberta product. In fact, he comes from a little community just out of Calgary called Carstairs. He's the administrative assistant. When things go well, it's because of the panel. When things don't go well, it's Doug's responsibility. The gentleman standing behind you and who'll be asking you all if you knew where to vote in the last election is Brian Fjeldheim. Brian is Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer. He and his office have given us just remarkable support, and we appreciate that. And we're going to withhold any decisions on Glen's future recommendations until after we're finished.

Okay. Your Worship, if you would, please.

Ms Charchuk: First of all, members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen, I'm thankful that I have this opportunity to have our say from the north to this panel. I have given out copies to the panel, but I'll read it for the rest so that you can understand where we're coming from.

Rural electoral districts in the past have been set up to try and include as many people as possible to try and balance the population of all the rural and urban districts in Alberta. This attempt to balance districts resulted in the shifting of boundaries, resulting in large districts and leaving many with unnatural boundaries. Boundaries for districts should take into account the trading flows of the area, use natural boundaries, and consider the health region and school board boundaries where possible. Currently Edmonton, Calgary, and immediate area have over half of the electoral districts in the province. Using an average for the whole province would mean that additional districts would have to be put into Edmonton and Calgary. Loss of districts in the rural area will have a greater impact on democracy than adding more districts to the two major

centres.

I believe that the electoral divisions in the province have to be based on geographic size and location and cannot be based totally on population. It is much easier for an MLA to serve a district when he or she has to travel 45 minutes across the district as compared to large rural districts where travel is up to four hours one way. We are content with the number of districts in the province and the current split between the two major centres in the rest of the province, but we cannot take divisions out of the rural areas and make more divisions in the cities.

The review should be made with the goal of improving the boundaries to align with natural boundaries and take into account trading patterns.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Jean. My colleagues always have some questions or comments. You're the first person in Mr. Clegg's part of the province, so we'll let Mr. Patterson go first.

8:12

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Mayor Jean, for coming this morning and making a presentation. Doug at the back has some information on court cases which have a big influence on what we have to do and how we have to do it.

One of the suggestions that came out of our hearings in Lethbridge was that maybe we should look at something different in the future, and this probably won't sit too well because everybody says less government. The disparity between urban and rural is going to continue. The two large cities are growing rapidly. In Australia and in the United States there's a second House, which takes in geographic representation. Some of the people who are next to the state of Montana down in the south, recognizing that Montana has a state Senate based on geographic representation, have put forth the idea that maybe this is something we can look at in the future.

While we can't deal with that, we can make some kind of recommendation. We're not going to really solve this problem of rural disparity, the rural population either staying the same or increasing at a slow rate and then the large cities growing at a very high rate, so I'm just wondering what your thoughts and reactions are. Maybe I'm taking you by surprise on this, as I have already said, with the reservations that most people have about more government, but any thoughts on that?

Ms Charchuk: I like it actually. I think that would give us a voice, and what we want is a voice. By having that, I don't know how many dollars that would cost, and that's why people don't want more government.

Basically, if you took – for instance, I'll use our area – one MLA out of there, it would cause such large traveling that the MLA is really beside himself to get around the area. Our MLA right now travels from Falher to Bear Canyon, which takes at least four hours – I'm not sure – and I think that's pushing the speed limit. That's one way. Now, if he wants to go there and back and have a meeting with anybody there, he almost has to stay overnight. It so happens that our MLA is from the other end this time, whereas Glen was in the middle, so he didn't have that problem. He was two hours away from everybody. When it happens where your MLA is at the one end of the constituency, that happens.

We only have 24,000 approximately, and we are in fear that we might be the ones that are eliminated by this process. We just don't want you to do that to us. If this new idea comes forward, well, I'm always ready to listen to new ideas.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

The Chair: Now you can listen to Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Jean and colleagues. Certainly I don't want it to happen either. I don't think they'd want me back in the community, in Dunvegan, if this happens, but we never know what will happen. We haven't been looking at boundaries yet.

Thank you for your brief, Jean. We've heard this many times throughout the province. We've also heard: try and keep the municipal boundaries in each electoral division. We've also heard in some cases, especially in the cities, in the bigger centres, to keep the community leagues together. You know, they have different areas. Which do you think would be the most important, keep the municipal boundaries or the community groups together? I'm sure that in the city of Grande Prairie they have that now.

Ms Charchuk: Yes. Were you asking me a question, which I would think? I don't think there's a choice. They're both important. I guess that's a weasel's way out of the situation, but I think it's important to keep everybody flowing. I know that Mr. Clark said that there weren't any thoughts to adding seats to the Legislature because that's not allowed. If they had to add two more seats, it would be more preferable for me than to take two away. I guess that with a growing population it seems only reasonable that you have to add seats rather than take them away.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you, Jean.

The Chair: Okay. Any comments or questions down here?

Mr. Graham: Well, I have a comment, Your Worship, and it's this. I note the matters that you indicate we should be considering, and I just want to assure you that we are. The matters that you wish us to consider are trading flows, natural boundaries, health regions, school boards, and in fact those are on the list, and they're all matters that we are considering. So just to give you that bit of feedback.

Ms Charchuk: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other comments, questions?

Jean, on behalf of my colleagues thank you very much. Good luck in your deliberations at your next event, and we do appreciate your presentation. Thank you very much.

Ms Charchuk: Thank you very much for taking me early.

The Chair: Doug.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Gordon Graydon.

The Chair: Mr. Graydon, as you know very well, is the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. His predecessor on the other side of Grande Prairie, Walter Paszkowski, is here, and I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize Walter formally.

Gord, we look forward to hearing from you.

Mr. Graydon: Well, good morning. I think I'm here to praise the merits of a rural/urban constituency. There aren't a whole lot of them in the province, but there are two here, and I think they work extremely well. Not everyone would share that opinion. I think that particularly in the bigger cities there's some fear of that, and it may be justified. But certainly in this region myself having half the city and Mel Knight having half the city and then a rural population

around gives us the population base that we need. In my case particularly it gives the constituency a geographical size that's easy to service. Mel has a little more distance when he goes from Fox Creek to Grande Prairie, but at any rate we do have the population that we require.

I think it probably works really well here because while Grande Prairie is a city of close to 40,000 people, it's very much a rural city. I mean, people live in the city and work on farms; people that own farms live in the city and go farming during the day. Agribusiness is very big in our community. It's certainly still I think the backbone of the economy in the region. So there's no line in the sand that that's rural and that's urban, and as a result I think the arrangement that we have here works very, very well.

There was a time in the past when the city was pushing for its own constituency. They had the population and said: we merit a city of Grande Prairie MLA. I don't think they're here today, and I don't know if they're planning on coming, but if they were here, I think you'd hear from them that they're quite happy with the arrangement that they have now, that they're no longer pushing for that, that they think there are advantages to the current arrangement in that now there are two MLAs representing the city; mind you, half each. At any rate, we're both there, and when it comes to the city of Grande Prairie, I mean, we don't say: well, that's on your side of the street, and that's on my side of the street. Certainly Mr. Knight and I work extremely closely together, well together. We have many common projects that we work on, and to be quite honest, we don't pay a whole lot of attention to where the boundary runs down the middle of Grande Prairie. It's an issue, and we just deal with it.

I think really all I had to say is that a 'rurban,' if you want to call it that, constituency can work. I think it works very well here, and it's something that maybe could be looked at in other parts of the province. I appreciate that it would be different if you took part of inner-city Edmonton and put rural with it. Well, probably that's not going to work, but in some of the other cities I think there's an opportunity there to move some lines around.

8:22

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Gord. That's similar to a presentation we had in Medicine Hat, because part of the Cypress riding is included in the city of Medicine Hat, and if my memory is accurate, the sense certainly there was that that was working well. One of the things we've heard very often in the course of the presentations has been what some people have referred to as increasing urban/rural split, and I for one at least am really pleased to hear that this is one of the ways in which we can perhaps dilute that. I guess it forces you, whether you live in the city or in the county, to better understand the issues in the other way of life.

Mr. Graydon: I think the opposite is happening here. I think the rural and urban are working closer together than they have in the past, and the county and city have signed an agreement just in the last few weeks with some more co-operation. But they've always, despite what you may read in the press from time to time – the city and county for example have worked well together, have many joint agreements in place, so that's not an issue.

The Chair: Any questions? Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Morning, Gordon. Good to see you again. You've had to put up with me for many years in different committees and places.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Clark has my sympathy.

Mr. Patterson: The commission, as you well know, is limited or restricted to the 83 seats, and we have heard very strong representation from rural people that they need representation also. This was a problem with the last commission, where the number of rural seats was decreased, and here again we're faced with the same rapid growth in Calgary. It hasn't quite happened in Edmonton but probably will by the time the next commission comes around, and we are trying to think of ways or methods or means that we might include in our report for future consideration.

You heard me mention the idea to Mayor Jean Charchuk, and maybe we don't need to look so much at the United States' process but the Australian process of a second House to guarantee geographic representation, which would mean that the rural area would still have good input. You're a member of the Legislature, so I thought maybe I would put that question to you and ask if you had any thoughts on this.

Mr. Graydon: Well, I'd be a supporter of less government, not more government, I guess. That might answer that question.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. Then can I come back at you. . .

The Chair: Mr. Patterson didn't like the answer he got.

Mr. Patterson: Gordon is very familiar with me, and this is such a process. I have a lot more questions.

Mr. Graydon: Keep asking till you get the answer you want.

Mr. Patterson: Would you have any thoughts, then, on how we can – and I really appreciate what you've come and said this morning, this rural/urban, because this is a good idea. But have you any thoughts as a sitting MLA on how we might be able to do something to make sure that there is effective representation as this rural population either remains stable or declines and the two large cities expand? Any thoughts?

Mr. Graydon: No. Other than the issue we're talking about, about including some rural in with some urban population. I'm looking at a wagon wheel, if you will, and between the spokes you have some urban in the middle and rural around the outside to get the population up there, and it might keep the geographical distances down. In this case here, if Grande Prairie were its own constituency, you'd end up with a hole in the donut, with one poor MLA going from the B.C. border to Fox Creek. Well, I mean, there are MLAs who have distances like that now, and every day I thank my lucky stars that I'm not one of them, that I have a very manageable constituency. But if you start just doing things like that, the distances – these guys are spending all their time in their cars unfortunately.

Mr. Patterson: If I might, Mr. Chair. You're really saying that maybe instead of a second House or something we should really look more carefully at what's happening here and apply that to the two large cities, create some 'rurban' ridings that would kind of bring both together.

Mr. Graydon: I know that the opposition would probably come from the urban areas saying: you know, we've got urban issues, and they're not similar to the rural issues. The rural people might not be quite as concerned, because it would be a way for them to keep representation closer at hand as opposed to losing out. But once the population and the MLAs got over that hurdle – and it's just a mental hurdle more than anything else – I think it would work very

well.

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

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Gordon. Ernie doesn't get the answers he wants from me either, so don't feel bad about that.

We as a committee are always very happy when we go into a community – I see the reeve of the county is here, and I hope his reaction is the same as yours because when we get people in an area agreeing, then it makes our job easier. Certainly it's very good to hear that the people are in this area from you at least – you can't talk for everybody, but certainly from your point of view it's working very well, and I thank you for it.

The Chair: Any other questions? Bauni.

Ms Mackay: When you look at the two Grande Prairie constituencies, the Smoky one is plus .6 and the Grande Prairie-Wapiti is minus 8.2. I don't think we need to touch that, but if we did, if we had to do some balancing, is there any logical way to move the line?

Mr. Graydon: No. The trading patterns, et cetera, that we've talked about in other presentations are pretty logical, and the division down the centre of Grande Prairie, down 100th Avenue, is a very easy thing to explain. It's very easy to point out on the map.

Ms Mackay: So in other words you wouldn't want any changes; like, you wouldn't want the line moved one block over or whatever.

Mr. Graydon: I don't see any advantage to it personally, no.

Mr. Graham: Just a comment. I found your presentation very interesting because quite frankly the majority of presentations we've been getting emphasize the necessity of preserving communities of interest, even small constituencies, and it's always occurred to me that there are advantages to going the other way as well. In other words, you get to know other people as well as the fact that you've got more than one person representing you potentially, so you've got that going for you. So just a comment. I found your presentation very interesting, and I think you've made some very good points.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you.

The Chair: Gordon, thank you very much on behalf of my colleagues. This is a great part of the world you have the privilege of representing here.

Mr. Graydon: Thanks.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Tony Yelenik.

The Chair: Tony, I think you were here when I introduced the members of the panel, and you understand the task that we have. We look forward to your advice. Thank you very much.

Mr. Yelenik: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, members of the committee. I'm Tony Yelenik, and I'm the reeve of the municipal district of Greenview. I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to submit our council's position on a very important issue.

Currently our constituents are represented by three MLAs: Gord Graydon, Mel Knight, and Ivan Strang in the Grande Cache area. Ensuring effective representation by dividing the province into 83

constituencies and ensuring that electoral divisions are within 25 percent of the provincial population average is not an easy task without affecting current representation in our province. Council for the MD of Greenview believes that though your task is difficult, it can be done, and it can be done while still preserving the rural representation that continues to play a key role in our province's economic viability, whether it is through the oil and gas, forestry, or agricultural sectors.

Equal representation doesn't mean just representation by population. When determining equal representation, one should take into consideration population, trading areas, geographical locations, local governments, school divisions, regional co-operation, community organizations within the constituency, and existing municipal, community, and electoral boundaries as well as the distance of travel for MLAs to serve their constituencies, an issue that's been brought up by both presenters prior to myself. The municipal district is currently represented, as I mentioned earlier, by three MLAs in three constituencies: West Yellowhead, Grande Prairie-Wapiti with Mr. Graydon, and Grande Prairie-Smoky with Mr. Knight. It covers the entire MD including Fox Creek, Valleyview, DeBolt, and Crooked Creek areas as well as the Grovedale area to the south of the Wapiti, south of Grande Prairie, which is represented by Mr. Graydon. I might add that it's represented very well by all three MLAs.

8:32

The MD believes that the geographic size of the constituency is probably the single most difficult factor for a rural MLA to deal with. When you have to deal with 36,000 constituents spread over an area that takes more than two hours to drive and with several school boards, local governments, numerous community associations, and other organizations, it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve effective representation. Though technology enhances the ability to communicate with individuals and organizations, we truly believe that personal contact is very important. It allows the opportunity for citizens to access their MLA and be a part of the democratic process. Geographic size hinders this, and we encourage, when realigning the 83 constituencies, that you take this into consideration.

Another important fact to consider when dealing with electoral boundaries is that they should be consistent with local government boundaries whenever possible. Therefore, regional co-operation also plays an important role in dealing with equal representation. The MD of Greenview is proud to say that we have an excellent working relationship with the three urban centres within our municipality – being the towns of Fox Creek, Grande Cache, and Valleyview – as well as with the city and the county of Grande Prairie and many other neighbouring rural municipalities. Many of our services are local government issues, and local government issues are being dealt with through regional co-operation agreements. Through these agreements we are able to deal with common issues and to demonstrate to government and to our MLAs our need to be represented by a voice that understands these issues. The farther away one is from MLAs and the greater the distance to travel make it extremely difficult to understand some of the local issues. Time constraints and other commitments of an MLA make it more difficult to provide fair and equal representation to the constituents.

As society continues to migrate toward larger centres, it is important that the rural aspect of life is maintained in our legislative representation. It's important that trading patterns, transportation corridors, historical context, and common issues are considered. As local governments play an integral role in the development and enhancement of government services, it is important that equal representation considers the balance in all of these areas. If you simply divide the electoral boundaries by population, the

Edmonton/Red Deer/Calgary corridor would have the vast majority of seats in the Legislature. But would it represent the issues and concerns, the strengths, the resources, the other factors that make up this entire province?

On behalf of the MD I urge the Electoral Boundaries Commission to consider the following in realigning the constituencies, please. Consider our municipal boundaries whenever possible. Look at our geographical size and the number of local government and community organizations that must be served by our MLAs. Also, consider traditional and future transportation and trading patterns, respecting the distance from the Legislature and the distance from other major centres. Finally, consider the community's best interests.

In conclusion, we feel that all our MLAs and the constituencies they represent are a necessity. Grande Prairie-Smoky, represented by Mel Knight, and Grande Prairie-Wapiti, by Mr. Graydon, mirror the provincial average of population and therefore should retain their current boundaries.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you. Tony, it's always nice to hear from people who are – and I won't go so far as to say happy with the MLAs but certainly happy with the way it's divided up now.

Mr. Graydon: It improved at the last election.

Mr. Clegg: The audience isn't supposed to comment unless they're up here.

The Chair: Maybe you should let us in on the joke, Glen.

Mr. Clegg: Certainly, Tony, we're glad to hear that. The only question I have is about the line. I think the line is in the proper place. I'm not too sure, but I think that just this side of Grande Cache there's an area there that has no population. So you feel that that line should be left exactly the way it is?

Mr. Yelenik: Yes. We think it is very effective. The population surrounding the town of Grande Cache is predominantly native. It's not a large population. Ivan has represented them well in the Legislature, and I think he probably will continue to do so.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Any of our other colleagues?

Mr. Graham: Well, I'd just echo what I said to one of the former presenters, which is that we are, believe me, considering all these factors which you're asking us to balance. It's a bit of a juggling act. There are a lot of balls in the air, but we are certainly considering them.

Ms Mackay: What's the population of your municipal district?

Mr. Yelenik: Our municipal district's population is approximately 5,500.

Ms Mackay: And you have three MLAs?

Mr. Yelenik: Yeah.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, thank you, and thank you, Mr. Reeve, for coming to make the presentation. One of the interesting things is that the majority of our written submissions probably tell us that people feel that the number of MLAs should be reduced. Then when you consider the facts – you know, you've already heard me go into this urban/rural, and then we have your presentation here, which has been made by many rural people – you can see the dilemma that the commission is in with the pressures saying less government and fewer MLAs, yet trying to meet all the court challenges. I just wondered if you had any comments on maybe balancing some of these other written and oral submissions which say to reduce government and reduce the number of MLAs, and here we are with this dilemma. Any comments on that?

Mr. Yelenik: Yes. I have very strong feelings about the government. People raise the issue of less government and less cost, but the number of MLAs and the costs associated with that are insignificant when you look at the total overall budget in the province of Alberta, when you look at the overall cost of governing in the province of Alberta. I think that effective representation is much more important.

As Mr. Graydon stated, the majority of the constituents in our riding are from the city of Grande Prairie, but the MLAs work very effectively to represent the rural population as well. I think that the mix is working very well in this area. We have no problem with the city having the majority of voters in our constituency. It works very well.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for responding that way, because I think it's important, if I might say, Mr. Chair, that we do sometimes get it recorded in *Hansard* that there are people out there who think that there is a balance and that when you put it in proportion to the total budget, it's reasonable. Thank you.

The Chair: Tony, I'd like to explore one issue with you. I come from a small community in that horrid Calgary/Edmonton corridor, a little place called Carstairs. Having said that, it seems to me that in a place like Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Lloydminster, Wetaskiwin, and Camrose, where we have these kind of urban/rural joint arrangements now, the likelihood is that people who farm in the area, who have small businesses in the area are likely to settle in those communities when they're able to retire or choose to or whatever. So it's almost like having friends or the kids or people they've sold to doing their thing in the surrounding area. It seems to me that that develops kind of a different community of interest, if I can put it that way, Tony, as compared to the problems you have in Edmonton or Calgary. We hear about people in those cities – and I find that a little unique – who make a pretty good living in Edmonton or Calgary but can't wait to get out of the city. Then when you talk to them about doing some melding, if I can put it that way, like we've done in other areas: "Oh, my God, don't do that. We'll lose our identity." I'm grappling with that, as you can see, not very successfully, Tony. Am I wrong about this kind of community of interest with the surrounding areas as opposed to what you'd expect in Calgary or Edmonton?

8:42

Mr. Yelenik: No. I think you're perfectly right. Our citizens have a certain trading area. Grande Prairie being the largest centre in the region, the trading patterns, the regional hospitals, all the other resources are slanted in that direction where the people migrate. I think the majority of people in this area retire in this area. They go

into lodges and into extended care in the area.

I can't comment on what people do in the city, but I think the city gets equal and probably effective representation. The numbers may be a little bit skewed compared to some of the rural ridings. I can sympathize with Mr. Clegg's former riding; I think it's a vast area and difficult to cover. City MLAs can jump on their 10-speed bike and cover their entire constituency in a few minutes. I think it's much easier for them to represent their constituencies than it is for the rural MLAs.

The Chair: If I can be a bit of the devil's advocate, some of the city MLAs tell us that they've got 22 different languages spoken in their constituency, a large number of people who have health problems, and perhaps new Canadians. I'm not meaning to be argumentative, but part of the chair's job is to kind of keep a balance. That's some of what we hear from the other side of the table, and I think it has certainly registered with me, anyway.

Mr. Yelenik: I think people in rural Alberta can understand your dilemma. However . . .

The Chair: Don't change us.

Mr. Yelenik: Yeah, that's right.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments from my colleagues? Tony, thank you very, very much.

Mr. Yelenik: Thank you.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Barry Robinson.

The Chair: Good morning, Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Robinson: Good morning.

The Chair: Thanks for coming. We look forward to your presentation and to a lot of good, sound advice.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Chairman, members of the panel, and other participants and observers, thank you for allowing us this opportunity to speak to you today. I'm here today representing the Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky Liberal constituency associations. I'd like to address some issues of concern to us here in northwestern Alberta. As I've worked to reach consensus just within our constituency associations on our short presentation today, I can appreciate what you face in reaching consensus on a provincewide basis. I thank you for your efforts, particularly as I understand that you're at the end of a month of hearings, and appreciate your attention.

On behalf of the constituency associations I wanted to discuss two issues today. The first is a general concern regarding rural representation, and the second is a more specific concern regarding the boundaries in Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti. First, with regards to the issue of rural representation I know that this is not the first time that you've heard this in your travels in the past month and not the first time today. Rural Alberta electoral divisions face difficulties in effective representation as a result of their large areas and sparse populations, and these difficulties include such things as long travel times for MLAs to get back here – I know that Gordon must face that – and long travel times within the constituency from one side to the other to visit all parts of their riding regularly. Similarly, that means long travel times for constituents to meet with their MLAs, as the MLAs typically

maintain one office or possibly two within a riding.

Attempts to overcome these difficulties with this big area have got to be balanced with a reasonable level of representation by population. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, as you know, specifies reasonable as being plus or minus 25 percent of the provincial average. The most recent census data, as you know, indicates greater population growth in the urban areas, particularly Calgary, compared to rural, and this has led to some speculation. I've noticed in the press in Edmonton and also here that Edmonton and rural Alberta may lose one or more electoral divisions, but such a loss, as you've heard from others today, just increases the difficulty in trying to represent these large rural ridings, and it adds to the concern of rural Albertans that urban issues dominate the agenda.

However, when I had a look at the census data and did some analysis, it appears to me that maybe it's a bit of a false impression that this shift has to be made. If you look at page 2 of my presentation, there's a little table there. What I did is I looked at the province and divided it up regionally. I took the four major urban areas of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge as urban centres and divided the remaining rural areas into north, central, and southern regions.

If you notice in the far right column of that table, all of the average populations fall within that plus or minus 25 percent range. So what this says to me is that you can meet these population guidelines while maintaining the current distribution of electoral divisions regionally, within a region. You may have to do some adjustment within the region of the boundaries obviously, because we know of these ones that have, you know, 60,000 or 70,000 population, but regionally the population averages can be met while maintaining that sort of same regional distribution. That holds even in the northern ridings. If you take the seven northern ridings, we fall within that plus or minus 25 percent, and the desired population averages can be met.

Now, I know that if I were a resident of Calgary, I'd raise the question: why should I have an average of 42,000 in my riding – as you see there – while someone in the north has an average of 30,000? My answer is twofold, and it goes back to your comments, Mr. Chairman, about the key being effective representation. First, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, in an attempt to achieve that balance between geographic area and population, has determined that populations between roughly 27,000 and 45,000 give reasonable representation. Therefore, I don't see a basis for concern from someone, say, in the city of Calgary, because they can still fall within what has been determined by the act is reasonable representation.

Secondly, when you consider that the purpose of these reasonable limits is to ensure effective representation and to ensure that MLAs are able to get out and communicate and that constituents can get in and communicate to the MLAs, I would contend that despite the seeming disparity in population in a riding, the Calgary voter, whose riding may span a few city blocks and who is within a 10-minute drive of their MLA's office, has better access to representation than a riding in the north, where perhaps you travel two or three hours to visit your MLA and meet them in their office.

Based on this information, our recommendation to the commission is that in order to maintain reasonable and equitable rural representation and to prevent further exacerbation of the difficulties of representing rural electoral divisions (a) the current regional distribution of electoral divisions be maintained, (b) electoral division boundaries within regions be revised as necessary to meet the average population guidelines, and (c) the special exemptions allowed under section 15 of the act be used to maintain reasonable geographic boundaries in northern Alberta.

Moving on now to our second point, which is regarding the specific boundaries of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti, I hate to disappoint Mr. Clegg in his wish for consensus in the community. As you are aware, the current boundary divides the city of Grande Prairie through the centre of the city, and it's not quite as clean as Gordon laid out. It goes across 100th Avenue, but then it goes down a railway track so that you end up with a community in the south which is mostly Wapiti being actually in Smoky. It's kind of a funny line that runs down the southeast side of the city.

The northern half of the city is in a riding, Grande Prairie-Smoky, that runs 200 kilometres east and south to Valleyview and Fox Creek. The southern half of the city is in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti riding that runs some 90 kilometres out to the B.C. border. I should note that the current boundaries also divide the county of Grande Prairie into two different ridings. The current division raises a number of concerns. Constituents in the rural portions of these ridings have expressed concern to me that because of the nature of the city of Grande Prairie as an urban regional centre, they feel that rural concerns are not adequately represented.

The two communities, rural and urban Grande Prairie, are different economically, and they have different concerns. For example, in the rural communities the kinds of concerns are things like keeping small rural hospitals open, keeping small rural schools open, support for the agricultural community, regional road systems, concerns with the impact of industrial development on the environment, and that sort of thing. While the residents of Grande Prairie city indirectly share some of these same concerns, the city faces a very different set of issues, namely things like maintaining and enhancing a regional hospital that has secondary services and specialists, keeping up with the growth of a school system that is growing very rapidly, maintaining and enhancing a regional community college system, and attracting retail and commercial activities.

So these are two very different sets of interests, and I think it's difficult for an MLA to adequately represent such a broad spectrum of interests. Just two weeks ago I had a farmer who lives west of the city say to me: I just don't feel comfortable talking to my MLA about a farm issue because I feel like the issues of Grande Prairie always dominate these two ridings.

8:52

Secondly, as I noted earlier, the current boundary divides the city of Grande Prairie and divides the county of Grande Prairie. Citizens living within a few blocks of each other in Grande Prairie have different MLAs but share an MLA with a community over 200 kilometres away. Similarly, the county is arbitrarily divided while there is a commonality of interest within the county. I know the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act indicates that the commission should take into account common community interests and municipal boundaries, and we believe that this would be best achieved by the following recommendation. In order to enhance effective representation of both rural and urban interests in the Grande Prairie area, we recommend that the following electoral boundary change be made: that the city of Grande Prairie be established as a single electoral division with a population of approximately 37,000 and that the rural portions of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti be combined into a single district with a population of approximately 32,000.

I thank the commission members for your attention, and I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Well, it's good to see that a wide variety of points of view are alive and well within the Peace River block too. I wouldn't

say that Glen had led us to believe other things. We appreciate your presentation.

I might just start with the first question. I find it an interesting argument that the whole area wouldn't be interested in the college here in Grande Prairie or that the whole area wouldn't be interested in maintaining the best possible health services. Could you help me along on that? I'm lost there a bit.

Mr. Robinson: I think they are interested in that, but when I talk to people in the rural communities, they're more interested in: is my hospital in this community going to stay open; is my school in this community going to stay open? It's not that the regional hospital and the college aren't important to them, but I think they find the local issue more important. Politics is all local.

The Chair: Okay.

Bauni, do you have any questions?

Ms Mackay: Well, I'm just looking at your chart here on page 2, and it's interesting the way you've divided the constituencies. For example, with Edmonton you've included Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, and I'm wondering why you picked those two and left out St. Albert – there are two St. Albert ridings; right? – and Sherwood Park, which is a huge riding at the moment.

Mr. Robinson: I drew lines several different ways, and I think you'll find that if I included those, you know, it wouldn't change the math that much. The numbers stay pretty much the same. It's probably more my lack of geographical knowledge than any other purpose.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Glen.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks. We're not really used to having a hearing and everybody agreeing, so I'd have been disappointed if everybody in this hall agreed. You know, if everybody agreed everywhere we went, our job would be very easy and simple.

Barry, I understand what you're saying, to have Grande Prairie have one riding and then the whole district. Can you not see real difficulty, though, on the B.C. border with the MLA representing that also representing, well, Fox Creek we'll say? It's a tremendous area to represent. I've heard what you have just presented. I've heard that in conversation, not today but I've heard that. You know, something has to be forgiven or taken or whatever word you want to use. So I just want to ask you: don't you see real difficulty in somebody – and I don't want to get into political parties. I don't want to get into the member of the Legislature, because that person could in fact be on the B.C. border instead of Little Smoky or something. I see a real problem for that MLA with that size of a rural area in order to get to your population. That's my concern about your presentation. Could you remark on that?

Mr. Robinson: Yeah, I must admit that I had the same concern. That certainly is the one disadvantage to what we're recommending: the size of that combined rural riding becomes quite large. What we have considered – and I guess I toss this back into your hands over the next few weeks – is that there may be some adjustments made to, say, the Dunvegan, Slave Lake, and Whitecourt-St. Anne boundaries that would tighten up that Grande Prairie-Wapiti/Grande Prairie-Smoky combination so it's not quite so big. But I didn't want to speak on behalf of those other ridings or riding associations;

they weren't involved in our thought process. I think there may be some other adjustments that can be made with the three or four surrounding rural that would limit the size of the Grande Prairie-Wapiti/Grande Prairie-Smoky and make it a little bit more manageable.

Mr. Clegg: Just one more question. We've heard before that when you have these massive rural ridings – many of them said that if they had more resources, they could have more offices. Everybody runs on a budget regardless of what the budget is. Do you think that would help rural/rural ridings? That's what I call a rural/rural riding.

Mr. Robinson: Absolutely. That would be something we would support totally, some additional funding for rural MLAs to allow them to operate more sort of satellite offices, to travel more. I certainly would support that.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Barry, for coming. I want to echo my friend Glen's statement here that the diversity of opinion that we get everywhere helps people to understand the difficulties we have.

You alluded to there being a bit of a problem with the boundaries in the city of Grande Prairie. Something about it wasn't maybe as clear cut as it should be. Could you elaborate a little bit on that to see if we do need to look at that to make a minor adjustment there or not?

Mr. Robinson: Yeah. If we were to keep the city split, I don't know that you can draw a line that's going to keep everybody happy. Right now the line is sort of confusing the way it swings south. It leaves one part of Grande Prairie in the south aligned with Grande Prairie-Smoky. I know from visiting the people in that area, actually everywhere in Grande Prairie, that there's so much confusion about: who is my MLA, and where do I vote? But it's more: who is my MLA? People say: gee, I went in to vote this time, and I thought I was going to vote for so-and-so, but I found out that he's on the other side of the line. So there is confusion there.

Is there a perfect line in Grande Prairie to split the city? I don't think there is. That's somewhat the advantage of making it the city boundary; then it's clear.

Mr. Patterson: Right.

The reason why we were smiling when you talked about people being confused about where they vote is because our Chief Electoral Officer has been kidded here and there about people not knowing where to vote.

I wanted to pick up on your remarks, though, because if there is an obvious solution to this, now is the time for us to hear the details of it. Maybe if you want to think more about that and forward something to us more precisely in writing, we'd appreciate that. Now is the time to correct those anomalies and avoid having our Chief Electoral Officer having to face barrages about people not knowing where to vote.

Mr. Robinson: I think the obvious and easy solution is what we've recommended: make it the city boundary, and then it's clear.

The Chair: Any more questions or comments?

Barry, thank you very much on behalf of my colleagues.

The commission will now take a 15-minute break, and when we

come back, Walter, you're on.

[The commission adjourned from 9:02 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.]

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Olthof, who is the next gentleman?

Mr. Olthof: Walter Paszkowski.

The Chair: Good morning, Walter.

Mr. Paszkowski: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and fellow participants. I want to welcome you to Grande Prairie and to the Peace River country. I understand that you're spending the entire day in the Peace River country, so welcome. I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity of sharing my views regarding what I consider one of the more important processes of maintaining an open and fair method of representation under the democratic process.

Although there is a thought that the only type of representation is that each voter's vote has an equal meaning, this becomes a greater challenge when we consider the process of representing the voters. Having been given the opportunity of representing first the people of the Smoky River constituency and then the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency for 12 years less two days, I can share with you that many factors come into play when we endeavour to represent each voter fairly and equally. With your indulgence I'd like to reflect upon some of my personal challenges and how the structure of the electoral boundaries played a part in the efforts of Marv Moore before me and Mel Knight presently in providing quality representation.

I'd like to name 10 points that I consider as critical and important points in fair representation. The number of constituents is a critical factor. The number of groups you need to work with: municipalities, school boards, hospital boards, library boards, senior and youth groups, and recreation groups just as examples. The nature of the economy of the constituency – active, static, or failing – is a very critical factor. We dealt with some of those through the period of time when indeed local communities were in a failing mode, and it becomes very, very challenging to find solutions to their particular needs. The diversification of the economy: is the constituency a one-industry economy, or is it broad based through various types of activities? The services provided: here I refer to the infrastructure. Generally, the further north you go, the more recent the settlement and the less infrastructure there is in place for the constituents. The social demographics and geographical distances, or size of the constituencies. Physical geographical challenges: by that I refer to river crossings – how many river crossings are there in order to serve the entire constituency? – and the number of isolated communities and the difficulty of reaching those isolated communities. The location of the constituency to the Alberta Legislature is certainly very, very important. The 10th point is the density of population. Though there are many other factors, these are the ones that I consider very important.

It's critical that each constituency must have access to representation. During my time in the Legislature I drove over a million miles by car. I flew commercially over a million miles and probably flew with the government plane somewhere close to what was traveled with commercial air. This of course consumes a great deal of the MLA's time, time Edmonton and Calgary MLAs can spend with their constituents. Travel in and out of Edmonton has become much more of a challenge by air with the almost closure of the municipal airport, and certainly the use of the International Airport is not conducive to rapid movement in and out and emphasizes even more so the importance of completing the north/south corridor from northern Alberta right through to the

southern part of the province.

With the long distances, the diversity of the economy – agriculture, forestry, energy, tourism – and the sparsity of the population the MLAs representing the north have a huge challenge to represent their people fairly. Indeed, I would urge the committee to leave the boundary structure in the north in much the same form as it is now. The city of Grande Prairie should remain represented by two MLAs as is provided. This indeed provides a good nucleus population for each MLA, thus keeping the constituencies geographically smaller and providing good representation for the city. This would allow for continuity in what is a rapidly growing area.

I appreciate the many challenges your committee faces and understand that the decisions are made on a provincewide basis. However, I believe that the northern representation as it is now structured meets the needs of the 10 points that I've identified for the fairest possible representation.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my views on this important decision, and I certainly commend you for the work that you are doing, because indeed in the end we are all benefactors from it. So thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Walter. On that last comment, Walter, I think each of the five of us on occasion, since we've agreed to take on this challenge, have said to ourselves: why did I take this on? I appreciate the comment you make about the importance of the responsibility which we have.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Walter, for this brief. It's a brief that, although not the same, we've heard many times in rural Alberta, and it's always good to hear from somebody that has represented a constituency in the north. I know that you were minister for many years, and you had even more trips than maybe I did, although I was a longer distance from the Legislature. So these are points that certainly this committee has been looking at, and I want to thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Paszkowski: Thank you.

The Chair: Ernie.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, thank you, and thank you very much, Walter. It's good to see you again. You've heard me talk about our real problem here, which was there for the last Electoral Boundaries Commission, is here for this commission, and probably will be even more significant for the next Electoral Boundaries Commission, which will be in place – when? – about 10 years from now according to the legislation.

I've kicked out this idea of the second House. You having served as an MLA, both rural and then rural/urban and as a minister, and knowing all the concepts out there about reduced government and so on, do you have any thoughts at all – and maybe I'm taking you by surprise a little bit – on the concept that we might want to put forth for people to think about some way of geographic representation? This problem of rural/urban is going to continue to grow and even be a more dominant factor. Any thoughts on the second House? Should we look at it? Should we consider it?

Mr. Paszkowski: Well, I think the way of the future – and certainly you being in municipal government appreciate and understand the role of future municipal governments particularly – is one of regionalization. As we continue to regionalize, the integration of rural and urban is going to become increasingly important, so I would suggest that anything that can be done to

enhance that role would be productive in the longer term.

As far as the second level of representation, or the Senate as they do in Montana, I think the tools are in place with what you have here now to deal with the issues, the geographical problems that are created with rural/urban. I think that with the tools that are in place representation up until now has been fairly fairly administered. Rather than enlarge government and rather than find a whole new discipline for government or a new way of providing to achieve the same end, I would suggest just using the tools that you have in place today. I would very much discourage anything that would take away from where municipal types of government are leading and going forward to, which is more operating on a regional basis.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

9:25

The Chair: Any questions? Bauni and then Doug.

Ms Mackay: I'm interested in what you have to say about government becoming more regional, moving away from the north and towards Edmonton. Would you say, then, that we should be looking at regionalizing the whole capital region when we're looking at determining the constituencies there in order to give the urban people fair and effective representation?

Mr. Paszkowski: It's the way of the future. When I was with Municipal Affairs, we traveled to some of the areas that had regionalized earlier, some of the first areas that had regionalized, and those that have successfully come together are the most rapidly growing areas in North America at the present time. In the one case there were 184 municipalities that had come together to form one region. In the area of San Diego, for example, part of the region involves Tijuana, which is international, yet that's one of the most rapidly growing areas of the United States.

Yes, I would suggest very strongly that the capital region continue to work towards a regional type of delivery of service, not necessarily governance. Governance is secondary, really. It's the providing of services that's very, very critical, because in the end you can do it far more effectively and far more efficiently.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Graham: Just to expand on this. I find this idea very interesting, and it's the first time it's been brought up. We've been wrestling with this issue, obviously, for weeks. If you could expand on it, I'd be grateful. We've talked about regionalizing, for instance, the Edmonton area. Are you also then talking about regionalizing areas of more rural Alberta such as this? How would that work, and what would you see?

Mr. Paszkowski: I really don't think there's a lot of choice. I think that's going to be a necessity. In order to provide the rapidly changing services and the needs of the communities to stay on par with the rest of the world, I don't believe that municipalities are going to have too much choice in the process. They're going to have to come together, because it's the only way they're going to be able to provide those types of services. Calgary, for example, is working very closely with their immediate neighbours in forming a region. Red Deer has 22 municipalities working together as a region. The Lethbridge area is working towards the development of that type of concept. Here the county, the city of Grande Prairie, and the town of Sexsmith are coming together – and this is just the starting point – to try and deliver services. So at the end of the day I really don't

think there are going to be too many options other than coming together as regions. That's going to be critical.

Mr. Graham: That would then become almost another de facto level of government or something.

Mr. Paszkowski: It depends on how it's structured. It doesn't necessarily have to become another level of government. It has not in the areas where we traveled: the Chicago area, the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, and San Diego.

Mr. Graham: So as I understand it, you're saying that we should bear in mind that the focus is not just on the representatives in the Legislature; the focus is on what those representatives are doing and how best to deliver services.

Mr. Paszkowski: Really it's the constituents that everyone serves. At the end of the day I think it's so critical that we don't lose focus. We have to find a way of providing the best possible representation, the best possible delivery of services for those very people who elect the representatives.

Mr. Graham: Thank you very much.

The Chair: If I could just follow up on that. I support the approach that you're talking about, Walter. A result of that is that you end up with MLAs who have a much more rounded point of view.

Mr. Paszkowski: Broader. Yes.

The Chair: One of the things we've heard a lot in areas some distance from Edmonton, especially the south and the eastern parts of the province, is great talk about the urban/rural split. Someone made the comment to me earlier today that having a city like Grande Prairie along with the adjacent rural area forces an MLA to become far better acquainted with the issues of the other side, be it urban like Mel or rural like Gordon, in that there's a better understanding. My question – it's a miserable question, and if I'm being unkind, I know that you'll find a very nice way of telling me that – is: do you recall a lot of occasions in the House or in caucus, when issues of real substance were being debated, when the lines were really on urban/rural?

Mr. Paszkowski: That's something that we have to try and avoid as much as possible, and we have to realize that at the end of the day when decisions are made, each MLA's vote matters, and it's critical and important that each MLA be as knowledgeable as they possibly can on indeed every issue, basically, that they are dealing with. I think the worst scenario that you can develop is to try and urbanize and distinctly have urban representatives and distinctly have rural representatives. I think that's a tragedy, really, and something that I would very much encourage the commission to keep in mind. It's very, very important that the decision-making process be allowed to be made on as broad a concept as is possible. I know that in this particular area I feel very, very strongly that the situation with Grande Prairie as it is today allows for a much more knowledgeable MLA as far as the urban and rural issues are concerned. It would be very sad if a representative from just the city was allowed. If indeed you structured it where there was just a representative from the city and a representative from the rural, I think you'd lose the effectiveness of representation.

The Chair: If I can then just proceed one step further, you lived

through both of these, if I recall.

Mr. Paszkowski: Yes.

The Chair: So you're able to reflect on having been, if I can put it poorly, a rural MLA and then a 'rurban' MLA. I take it that you think the change was extremely worth while, and obviously that's why you're telling us to leave things as they are.

Mr. Paszkowski: I think it would be useful to even expand that 'rurban' concept in other parts of the province. I think you would get a far more effective type of representation really. The idea of rural not having something in common with urban and vice versa is a weakness. That's a weakness that we have to try and avoid as much as possible so that the rural and the urban have commonality, because indeed without the rural there would be no urban and without the urban there would be no rural. That's the reality. We have to appreciate that and work to try and diminish the confrontation between the two so that indeed it's seamless, and the more seamless we can make the process, the better and more effective this province will be.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Walter, I thank you very much. You bring a tremendously unique perspective because you're one of the few former members who has come and made a presentation to us, and I'm very grateful for that. You're also likely the only living member who has gone through being a rural member and become a 'rurban' member. Then, of course, in your responsibility as the Minister of Municipal Affairs you've had to think seriously about the issues of what the metropolitan centres of the future are to be like. Your insight is tremendously important to us. Thank you very much.

Mr. Paszkowski: Thank you very much.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Gerald MacDonald.

The Chair: I asked Mr. MacDonald, when I introduced myself to him this morning: Mr. MacDonald, who are you representing? Mr. MacDonald said: I'm representing myself. That's fair; isn't it, Gerald?

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. We look forward to hearing your views.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the commission, and members of the audience. My name is Gerald MacDonald. I'm a private citizen. I happen to live in the city of Grande Prairie. I have several comments to make on the forthcoming revisions to the electoral boundaries in Alberta, and I think you're going to find that many of my positions are somewhat at odds with those of most of the previous speakers.

The Chair: That doesn't make any difference. We're here to hear all views.

Mr. MacDonald: That's right.

Firstly, I have concerns about the concept of allowing a 25 percent variation from the average when determining the population of a constituency. I think it's important to remember that fundamentally the focus of what we're about is selecting the Assembly that is going to govern the province, enact legislation for the province on our behalf, and whatnot. So this 25 percent variation could have the

effect, immediately after redrafting the constituency boundaries, of having a 50 percent difference between the most populated constituency and the least. In short, therefore the vote from the smallest constituency would be worth more than that from the largest one. That is, the vote of an elector in the least populated constituency would have much more influence on the outcome of an election than the vote of an elector from the most populated.

The most extreme example of this involves the constituencies of Athabasca-Wabasca and Calgary-Shaw. Currently Athabasca-Wabasca is the constituency with the smallest population, that being 20,752. That with the largest is Calgary-Shaw, 82,516. Calgary-Shaw has almost four times the population of Athabasca-Wabasca. Therefore, a vote cast in Athabasca-Wabasca has four times the influence on the makeup of the government as one cast in Calgary-Shaw. Electors in Calgary-Shaw are thus partially disenfranchised, each of their votes only being worth a quarter of a vote in Athabasca-Wabasca. This violates the principle of representation by population established at the country's founding 135 years ago.

9:35

My own view is this. The commission should make every attempt to maintain an almost exact balance of population amongst the province's 83 constituencies. From a practical perspective it should attempt to keep the variation at a bare minimum, such as 5 to 10 percent. When in the fullness of time demographic shifts have so changed the distribution of population as to cause some of the constituencies to exceed the aforementioned 25 percent limit, that should be the trigger for reinstating the process. In other words, the 25 percent limit ought not to be the permitted variation after redistribution but instead ought to be the maximum amount of variation allowed before redistribution is once again undertaken. If legislation needs to be amended to provide for this change in the rules, then so be it.

Secondly, I would like to discuss the urban/rural distribution. As a Grande Prairie voter I would much prefer to be represented by one MLA elected only by the residents of this city, who can represent the interests of urban voters like myself. The issues for rural and urban voters are much different, and I feel that it is unfair to expect an elected politician to adequately represent those disparate issues. A politician from the city may not fully understand the concerns of rural constituents such as agricultural issues, including intensive livestock operations, and the problems of the economics of farming such as crop insurance and the international subsidy problem. Certainly a previous speaker, Mr. Barry Robinson, has in fact pointed out these concerns in a more effective manner than I have. Conversely, a politician from a rural background may not be fully cognizant of city concerns such as public transit, low-cost housing for the homeless, and the provincial downloading of fiscal responsibility to municipalities.

Therefore, I propose that the commission adopt a policy of not dividing any city or town when that city or town has a large enough population for it to comprise its own constituency. For example, the city of Grande Prairie now has a population of 36,983 according to StatsCan's 2001 census. This is 2.87 percent over the desired average size of constituency of 35,951 stated in the commission's published advertising. Therefore, the city of Grande Prairie ought to be one undivided constituency. The remaining population of the current G.P.-Smoky and G.P.-Wapiti would be 32,182, or 10.5 percent less than the desired average. I should note that other similarly sized cities have their own constituencies. I think it's important also to point out that the rapid growth previously alluded to is not confined to the two large metropolitan cities of Alberta. I moved to Grande Prairie in 1988, and it had a population of roughly 25,000. In that 14-year period we've gone to 37,000, which is

roughly a 50 percent increase. That's a tremendous amount of growth.

Finally, the two major cities of Calgary and Edmonton need to be given more appropriate representation. The 21 constituencies of Calgary comprise a total population of 878,866. This works out to an average of 41,851 per seat. To attain the average of plus or minus 5 percent that I advocate, Calgary would need four more seats. At 25 seats that would put them at 35,155, which is within 2.2 percent of the desired average. On the other hand, Edmonton has a total population of 666,104 with 19 seats. Their average of 35,000 and change is within 2.5 percent of the desired. Thus Edmonton would not require an increase in the number of seats but must still have a redistribution to even out the populations of all the constituencies.

If the above is done without an increase in the total number of seats in the Legislature, the four-seat increase for Calgary would necessitate reducing the number of seats for the remainder of the province to 39. The remaining population would be 1,438,950. That works out to an average of about 36,896 per seat. If the seven mid-sized city constituencies – Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West, Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South, Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, and my proposed new Grande Prairie – are factored out, with their total populations of 246,625 the remaining 32 seats could still be distributed to represent a little under 1.2 million. The average per seat would be 37,260, which is again within 3.64 percent of the desired average. I do empathize with the distance issues involved in representing large, far-flung rural ridings. However, I notice from looking at the map on the back wall that the municipal districts are equally far-flung, so it kind of puts them in the same boat as the representatives of those municipal districts.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that every elector in Alberta ought to feel that his or her vote has equal weight to every other, such as now is not the case. It is the responsibility of this commission to remedy these and other anomalies and to restore the principle of representation by population that was one of the fundamental principles of this nation. Furthermore, the commission must also re-evaluate the distribution between city and rural constituencies with a view to grouping the natural constituencies together for more effective representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You put it squarely to us, and you can see why the challenge of the commission really brings into the picture three things: one, the legislation as it presently is; two, the Supreme Court decisions. I guess the ones which had the greatest impact were those decisions by Madam Justice McLachlin. So we have that as kind of the second factor. I think the third factor is a rather strong degree of common sense. Presentations like yours cause us to go back and check the sense of where we're coming from, and from that point of view, Gerald, I think it's very valuable. Thank you very much.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Gerald. Like I said earlier, it's always a challenge when we hear different points of view. However, when you started out, you were certainly right by using the figures for Calgary-Shaw and Athabasca-Wabasca. Your figures are obviously right, but when the last boundaries commission went around, those figures were certainly not 82,000 for Calgary-Shaw. At the same time, the same rule was followed. There was only the odd riding – four ridings could be below 50 percent.

Your method of changing this, if my figures are right and if yours are right – and I'm sure they are – is that in Edmonton your average voters would then be 35,058 and in rural Alberta it would be 37,260. Now, I hope you don't try and tell us that it's easier to represent a

rural riding where you have to travel an area twice as big as Prince Edward Island than it is to represent a 12-block square. Of course, you know the Supreme Court decision. That 25 percent and the 50 percent were there for an absolute reason. Could you tell me how you can justify rural Alberta being about 2,000 votes more per constituency than the city of Edmonton?

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Now, currently what we have is that constituencies in the large cities are representing many, many more citizens than those constituencies in many of the rural areas. Correct?

9:45

Mr. Clegg: In some cases.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. In many cases.

I think that there's probably room for some juggling. One of the limitations, of course, is the requirement not to increase or decrease the number of seats, and I think that might be a challenge. I was looking at trying to make things closer to the average than they are now. The current variation of plus or minus 25 percent, which was the goal, I felt is much too broad a variation, and I was advocating for a variation of plus or minus 5 or 10 percent. You'll notice, if you look at the current ones, that you have a variation of anywhere from 42 percent under to 129 and a half percent over the average.

I'm sorry; I can't speak to the Supreme Court decisions. I've read about them vaguely in the media, but I don't really have access to those in any detail. I'm not a lawyer. I'm a nurse actually, so that's not really something that I know much about. I think the representation issue has to be looked at in two ways. I've heard a lot of speakers saying that it's important that they be able to represent their constituents and that their constituents be able to meet with them, which I presume involves things like dealing with government – you know, citizens dealing with government, businesses dealing with government, advocacy groups and municipalities dealing with government, et cetera – but it's important to remember that the most important function of a parliamentary democracy is to pass legislation that citizens want passed, to provide budgets and to provide the administrative structure that the citizens want to see operating and to represent us in that way. So it's representative government. We elect the people who are supposed to carry out our wishes under the dome, and I feel that it's very, very important to try as much as possible for every citizen to have an equal voice in that area. When it comes to those other kinds of issues, those other kinds of representation, I think that has to take a secondary position.

Mr. Clegg: No, I'm not done yet.

The Chair: One more question and then Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Clegg: Gerald, we don't mind spending six months in Siberia, but we don't want to be there for the rest of our lives, and with your recommendation I think that's where we'd be.

The Supreme Court – and it'd be interesting for you to get that and read that. That's why they did allow the 25 percent variance for distance from the Legislature. There are many factors, and I don't want to get into them. I'm not here to argue with you. I'm just saying that distance to the Legislature is a big factor and the distance within a constituency, as far as I'm concerned. You really don't think that's any concern then?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm not saying that it's not a concern. I do empathize with those people who represent very large and widespread constituencies, and if you were to talk to our federal MP,

Mr. Penson, who has to represent all of Peace River, I'm sure he would also be able to speak to that, but I think that can't override rep by pop. I'm a very strong supporter of rep by pop. What's happening now is that a voter in a constituency that is well above the average size has a much smaller weight on election day than a voter in a constituency whose size is much smaller than the average, and I think that every voter, every citizen should have a vote of equal weight, and that is the absolute and most important. Mr. Robinson and some other discussion with the panel did discuss issues involving increasing support to rural members with respect to travel and offices and things, and I certainly can't argue with that. That would be a wonderful way to deal with that, but I think that the principle of representation by population is crucial.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Gerald, for coming to make this presentation this morning. I find it interesting. In Saskatchewan the legislation there requires the variance to be 5 percent, but they also have special constituencies. Our legislation allows us to have four. I do appreciate your emphasis on representation by population, because when you go back to the rotten boroughs of England, there were Members of Parliament who sometimes represented 10 or 15 people and sometimes just their own employees from an estate. We don't want to get back to that, and I don't think we will, and I don't think you're implying that. So I do appreciate your emphasis on representation by population.

My question is, before the chair calls me to order here . . .

The Chair: You just made it.

Mr. Patterson: You talk about the great variance here, and reading the Supreme Court cases and looking at the Saskatchewan legislation – and they recognize special constituencies . . .

The Chair: Ernie, the question is?

Mr. Patterson: I'm just getting to it, Mr. Chair. Would you accept, you know, the idea of our implementing the four special constituencies, which then might help us to implement the other? I know that it wouldn't meet the variance here, but your thoughts, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, I think the commission should make every effort to avoid doing that, but if you find that there is no other way to provide representation for those constituencies – I mean, I recall from the preamble at the beginning of the meeting that there are two special constituencies and the legislation provides for a maximum of four. If you find that you have to do that in order to even things out in the rest of the province, I think that that's not the ideal solution, but it may be necessary. I'm willing to go along with that, but I think it's important that the commission make every effort to reduce the necessity to do that if possible.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you. I won't ask another question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're right.

Ms Mackay: Well, I'd like to thank you for your comments related to the value of keeping in mind the principle of representation by

population. I have to say that since I've started on this commission, I despair as to the degree to which many people have absolutely no value placed on that, and I worry about that, quite frankly. But, anyway, having said that, you sort of have an idea of what I'm grappling with.

I need to ask though. The government is in the process of putting the Supernet across the province. Is it here yet? I mean, does this part of the province have the high-speed Internet and all the towns wired, et cetera. It hasn't arrived? It's still in the process?

Mr. MacDonald: I honestly don't know. I know you can get high-speed connections in Grande Prairie. I don't happen to have one, but I know you can get it. But, no, I can't speak to that. I don't know.

Ms Mackay: Oh, okay. Obviously the government has something in mind in terms of improving communication, you know, between people all over the province, and I was wondering just what . . .

Mr. MacDonald: I think anything that could be done to improve communications in the modern era is probably going to go a long way. However, somebody did point out earlier that the personal approach is often the best, and perhaps that's true. Certainly, though, if a person were running in an election, the fact that you have to run a lot farther to get between the boundaries of the constituencies of Grande Prairie or Peace River or Athabasca or whatever is a challenge. I respectfully submit, though, having been in Alberta for over 15 years now, that I think those individuals who have lived in rural and small communities in this province are used to driving a long way for everything. They're used to driving a long way to come to Grande Prairie to shop, and I would suggest that it's possible that those persons who are from a rural community who choose to stand for election would do that with the knowledge already that they're going to be doing a lot of traveling. If they're not willing to do that traveling, they probably shouldn't be running. Whereas cities are different. This city is getting bigger and bigger. This city is getting more like a larger city than it ever was, and I think that the issues are just different. Those of us who sit here in an urban setting don't understand the rural issues well enough to adequately evaluate candidates, and I think that the issue is the other way around as well. I'm somewhat disappointed by the way, I should mention, that there's nobody here from city council to speak to you guys.

Mr. Graham: I want to commend you for all the work you've done. I think it's great that someone shows this kind of interest, particularly at an individual level, and is prepared to do the work and analysis you've done. I think that's great.

You mentioned that you haven't read the law. We of course are bound by the law, and I'm a lawyer, so I recognize that. I would suggest that you perhaps talk to Mr. Olthof, because the arguments that you've made have already been made to the Supreme Court of Canada and rejected. They were rejected on the basis that strict rep by pop must be tempered by other factors. So I think you might find that very interesting, and I encourage you to get that material from Mr. Olthof and read it. He's showing you a copy of it right now. I think you might find it very interesting.

9:55

The other thing is just to follow up on what Mr. Clegg said. I know that when I got on this commission, I got a phone call and they said: would you like to be on this? It was kind of a dozy afternoon, so I said: well, yeah, that sounds kind of interesting. Then about a

week later they phoned up and said: well, here's what you're going to have to do. I think that if this commission were functioning constantly, everybody would know what it was doing, so you wouldn't get any volunteers on it at all. That's probably another stumbling block to adjusting the constituencies every time one goes over 25 percent. I don't think you'd get any volunteers to do it.

The Chair: Okay. Any further questions?

Gerald, certainly I echo the comments that Doug has made. Presentations like yours help us to expand our minds. Thank you very much.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Roy Borstad.

The Chair: As Mr. Borstad is settling in, I would have to say that I recall him being in Toronto not long ago when we both were part of a presentation by the Grande Prairie Storm to bring the Canadian junior hockey championship to the Swan City, and we were successful, Roy; weren't we?

Mr. Borstad: Yeah, that's right.

The Chair: We look forward to your presentation. Thank you very much.

Could I ask. That character sitting beside you, that's your brother Elmer; isn't it?

Mr. Borstad: Yeah, that's my brother. He just walked in the door.

The Chair: Who used to be a member of the Legislature. Elmer, it's very good to see you again.

Mr. Borstad: Anyway, good morning, ladies and gentlemen, members of the board. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important democratic function. The county of Grande Prairie No. 1 is a municipal government incorporated and operating under the authority of the Municipal Government Act. The council to govern the county is elected every three years. Every three years a person wishing to serve on the council must let their name stand and seek judgment from the voters of the municipality. The term of office at three years ensures that we as local politicians stay in touch with our constituents. We have to know and react to their needs, but most of all we have to be available to them so that when issues arise, they have a voice. This system brings us closest to the people. It provides us a unique opportunity to comment on the provincial system.

The county of Grande Prairie is fortunate to be in a major growth area in Alberta. The growth and changing demographics within the county will force the county to realign its district boundaries to reflect the right of effective representation. The county does this review on a regular basis.

If we apply the same principles of effective representation that are followed in the county to the provincial system, we note the following criteria as being important. These include accessibility. An elected representative must be accessible to the public. Access can be ensured through the application of reasonable boundaries to the electoral division. Accessibility by our definition means face-to-face meetings with the elected representatives, direct contact. It does not mean electronic contact or screening through a secretary. Boundaries should include a reasonable geographic area, an average population and miles of road, historical trading areas, community boundaries, and other factors.

Geographic areas. The district should have boundaries that make sense, not be confusing to the voter. It should incorporate the natural boundaries of communities and not split communities, particularly small hamlets, towns, and villages. Often rivers make a natural boundary.

Roads. Highways, roads, rail lines, and other transportation facilities must be considered.

Historical boundaries. The history of an area must be considered. A small community should be kept intact. On a provincial scale it would appear that the courts have intervened to establish rules for the establishment of electoral boundaries. The courts have given some latitude and discretion to the Legislature to determine boundaries, but the guidelines established by the courts cannot be deregulated. There is some latitude for exceptions to create special ridings in the province.

As far as the applicability of the special riding status to the province is concerned, the county of Grande Prairie notes the following: northern Alberta and in particular the Grande Prairie area is one of the fastest growing areas in the province. The boundary review commission should consider existing population and future population that might be expected in the area in drawing the boundaries. Northern Alberta contains 60 percent of the land base of the province, only 10 percent of the population. This should be grounds to consider much of northern Alberta in the context of a special riding where necessary, as the geography and sparsity of the population combine to make effective representation a real issue.

The economic future of the province will be in the north. It will be important to ensure that the north has effective representation in order to enable the north to influence the development of our resources in a manner that benefits the north. The north should have a priority in the consideration of a special riding status. The decision of the previous boundary commission had certain ridings in the north receive special riding status, which was a wise decision. We believe that for the most part the county has been well served by this decision. More often than not the common issues facing the north draw us together. We support our neighbouring ridings such as Dunvegan and Lesser Slave Lake and Athabasca-Wabasca. In our efforts to retain representation, in the past we have looked at working with our MLAs and those of other neighbouring constituencies to address the common problems facing the north.

The county realizes that there is likely to be an effort to create more seats in the major urban centres of Edmonton and Calgary in an effort to reach the provincial population average for a riding. Any adjustment along these lines will result in the loss of seats in rural Alberta. We strongly urge the commission not to increase the number of seats in the two centres but rather to adjust the boundaries of the ridings within Edmonton and Calgary to reflect a higher overall average population. In our opinion, the higher overall average would provide a fair compensation factor for the increased travel time incurred by rural MLAs and help to balance the accessibility to their constituents.

Should the commission find it necessary to give the urban areas more seats, the realignment should not be at the expense of northern constituents. Our ridings are large enough. In the past the commission sought to find a balance between rural and urban communities. In the Grande Prairie area the balance between urban and rural representation was struck with the division of the city of Grande Prairie into two ridings, each with a rural and an urban component. In our opinion, this has served the area well. The county has appreciated the work of our former MLAs and the strength that they have brought to the cabinet table and caucus in dealing with the northern issues.

It is important for an elected member to have a holistic view of the

province and the issues it faces. Stringent segregation of the riding along the urban and rural lines does not lend itself to a broad vision; rather, it puts walls and dividers around existing and future members. We believe our northern MLAs to be among the strongest in the province because of the diversity of the experience and issues that they must deal with in representing both urban and rural components. Moreover, the economic strength of the urban areas lies in the resources found in the rural areas. Our MLAs are required to have knowledge of the cornerstones of Alberta's economy: oil, gas, agriculture, forestry, and tourism. An MLA representing a single municipal unit does not enjoy the diversity of knowledge.

10:05

With respect to accessibility it is argued that all Albertans can access their MLAs via phone, e-mail, and other electronic means. The provision of these services in a rural area is expensive and not always available. Cell phone coverage in northern Alberta is sporadic, and high-speed Internet services, even in a larger urban centre, are almost nonexistent. Moreover, the cost of providing these services to the rural area is prohibitive. With the privatization of the services, the small number of users does not justify the expense. The lack of electronic connection together with the possibility of a reduction in the number of rural MLAs will further disconnect the rural population from the elected office. To rural residents accessibility means face-to-face meetings. The larger the geographical riding, the less opportunity for a face-to-face meeting. This will also result in reduced accessibility. It must be prevented.

The county believes that the current boundaries serving the Grande Prairie area are generally satisfactory and serve us well. We urge the commission to think long and hard if there is any serious consideration towards making a major change to the boundaries. Significant change would not be supported. The current boundaries of the two ridings affecting the county might stand some tweaking. The north and south boundary between the two can be difficult to understand as it follows a legal, not a natural, boundary. Starting in the north, highway 2 could be used as a boundary between the two ridings, with the provision that Sexsmith stay with Grande Prairie-Smoky. The line could follow south to the north boundary of the city, then west along the western boundary of the city until it meets highway 2. It could then proceed east along the present boundary to the east city boundary and then south along the city boundary to Bear Creek. Minor amendments would allow city residents to vote in polling stations in the city instead of what is currently happening; city residents are required to drive to the county to find a polling station. It would not have any significant impact on the population distribution of the two ridings.

Our suggestions to the commission are based on what we perceive as strengths of the municipal government system. It is based on ensuring accessibility to our residents in rural Alberta. It is based on reasonableness and fairness. As a municipal government we rely heavily on our contact with our MLAs to keep us abreast of the changes to legislation and funding programs. We rely on our MLAs to carry our issues to government for action. We are very nervous about changes to our electoral boundaries that will reduce and not enhance accessibility to government.

Thank you for taking the time to hear me and consider our submission. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Roy.

Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Reeve Roy, for coming and making this thorough

presentation. Could you elaborate a little bit on people having to go out of the city to vote in the rural areas? How many people are affected that way? Maybe just talk a little bit more about that. It concerns me when I hear this because sometimes that causes people not to go to vote.

Mr. Borstad: There have always been one or two polls with certain little border lines in the city where people have had to go three to four miles out of the city to vote. Now, this may be due to the way the electoral commission has set up their polling stations or where the polling stations are accessible or what, but that does exist in this area.

The Chair: We'll ask the Chief Electoral Officer to look at that. He's here, he's standing at attention, and I'm sure he'll take a very serious look at that. I can tell by the expression on his face.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I managed to get that question in without being called to order. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg, a question?

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you. We've heard the same complaint before of the Chief Electoral Officer, and we're glad to have him with us so that he can take your concerns. Thanks, Roy, for the brief. They are points that I certainly agree with.

The Chair: Any of my colleagues?

Ms Mackay: I just want to ask something. In another life I visited a fair number of schools in this area in both the county and the city, and I remember being in some just great computer labs, and the kids had access to the Internet and so on. So I'm kind of confused when you say that high-speed Internet service, even in the larger urban centres, which I guess would mean Grande Prairie, is almost nonexistent. Is that accurate?

Mr. Borstad: It's not too far wrong, no. There's pretty good Internet in the schools, but in most businesses and whatnot it's not.

Ms Mackay: I don't understand that, but anyway. Okay.

The Chair: I think we're going to hear from the Grande Prairie school division later on. I believe that's right. By the expression on their face they have an alternate point of view.

Roy, thank you very much. Much appreciated.

Mr. Borstad: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Olthof: Bryn Kulmatycki.

The Chair: Bryn's been sitting back there. I've been watching him. He's had a variety of expressions on his face over the last hour, so I'm really looking forward to a concise and to-the-point presentation.

Bryn.

Mr. Kulmatycki: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm Bryn Kulmatycki. I'm the superintendent of schools for Grande Prairie and district Catholic schools. Our school district is way beyond the boundaries of the Grande Prairie area and extends into areas north of the Peace River into Fairview. We have three MLAs that serve our area, so we are impacted a fair bit by the boundaries for elections. Many previous speakers have been very eloquent and have already said

some of the things that I was going to say, so I'm just going to kind of concentrate on some of the areas that I think need to be expanded on.

The first area is that we are quite content at this point with the overlap of the boundaries as they now exist. From the school board's perspective there are no significant issues that we need to raise at this time. We would support maintaining the boundaries as they are. Other people have already expressed needs to maybe make small adjustments, but they do not impact us. We have three MLAs currently. I'm going to raise an issue later in my talk advocating a contrary opinion that we want maybe four or five MLAs, but I understand that you have problems legally with that.

The Chair: We're glad you understand that we understand.

Mr. Kulmatycki: Oh, believe me; I do.

I would like to echo Mr. Graydon's comments for less government as opposed to more, and I understand that there's a push in urban areas for more representation, Edmonton and Calgary maybe specifically. I'm speaking personally here more than from the school board's perspective. I'm for less government, not more government. School boards have merged, and I'd like to just take the comparison of the city of Calgary. I looked at the map back there, and there are just a hoard of MLAs in Calgary and only I think seven school trustees representing the same population base. It's the same people and the same electors and the same people voting, so somehow they need 20-some people in the Legislature but only seven people running schools for the whole city. I don't know how many aldermen they have running that whole city, but I'm sure it's less than the number of MLAs. So I'd like to see the thing move in the other direction. I think we're already going too far the other way.

I'd like to raise the issue, although you are legally bound by the issue: is population absolutely the rigid and only issue that you are able to look at when you're talking about distributing the boundaries? Representation by population, as you mentioned earlier, is a very ancient concept. That's an old British concept. At one time representation by population was something that was advocated in Britain because that's all they could do to fix the problem. Today with technology we can get instant access to people's perspectives, and if you just log on to a computer site like CBC or CFRN, daily they ask questions like: what do you think of the smoking bylaw? What do you think of the cat bylaw? What do you think of the ambulance service? We get an instant response of what the people believe about those services.

10:15

We don't have to have people elected to start making decisions. I see in the future people will be providing instant feedback, and the rules of the province and of the country will be appropriately adjusted to match what the people want. There will be more participatory involvement by people in government, as opposed to people in government involved in government. That's the way I see the future moving.

The fourth thing I want to talk about is that several people here have talked about this rural/urban split. The rural/urban split is a confusing concept to me. I have lived in Edmonton and Calgary. I have lived in southern Alberta, northern Alberta, eastern Alberta, western Alberta, and central Alberta. It's like the sign of the cross, because I'm a big Christian, you know.

The Chair: We'll be the judge.

Mr. Kulmatycki: People are advocating rural/urban split.

I want to talk about the Camrose/Wetaskiwin situation. People are complaining in Grande Prairie; I heard a speaker here complaining that they wanted one MLA for Grande Prairie. Well, Camrose and Wetaskiwin are two cities. They are two completely independent corporate entities with two different population bases and two different sets of people that live there with completely separate needs and everything, yet they have one MLA, and it seems to work fine. I've been there. I lived there, and it never really bothered me when I lived there.

The rural/urban split: there are some issues there, but I challenge the people in this room to identify one rural/urban split issue that has provincial implications that we should be concerned about when we're talking about MLAs. What is the issue that you have to talk about where there's a big rural/urban split? MLAs may be able to help me with that, because I'm not aware of one. What is the issue that people in rural Alberta have a completely different focus on than people in urban Alberta on a provincial level? I don't see it. It's Alberta, and Alberta decisions would impact everyone equally.

I think the problems are the self-interest groups and the power structure that's in place. People are unwilling to be flexible in their power organizations, and they're unwilling to be flexible in areas where they can control government for their own personal benefit. That's where the boundary issue may come into play, but that is not a rural/urban split. People who live outside of Grande Prairie have just as much interest in things happening in Edmonton as people living in the city.

The fifth interest I want to talk about is the boundaries and the number of MLAs as they impact northwestern Alberta. We have three MLAs here, four or five if you start counting the whole north Peace region. There was a suggestion about going to a dual House, sort of like a Senate thing but not really a Senate. In the States they do have that. They have regional representation as well as population representation. Alberta would be in very dire straits if it weren't for northwestern Alberta. We have forestry, we have agriculture, we have gas, we have oil, we have – you name it – transportation. We are an economic hub of this province significantly, and we only have a handful of people to represent us in government and, even worse, no one in cabinet, which is a real personal bugaboo with me. But that's not a boundary issue.

There's a need for people in northwestern Alberta to have appropriate representation to represent our economic interests in this province. We talk about the Edmonton/Calgary/Red Deer corridor. That actually has a name. It's called the golden Edmonton/Calgary corridor. If you want anything and you live in Edmonton, Red Deer, or Calgary . . .

The Chair: Be careful; I live there.

Mr. Kulmatycki: That's why I'm saying it.

The Chair: That's why you'd better be accurate.

Mr. Kulmatycki: I'm accurate.

I would challenge you to count the billions of dollars that the provincial government has pumped into the golden corridor and compare it to the services that the province is providing for us here in the northwestern part of Alberta and compare that to the amount of financial gain that the province as a province has gained from northwestern Alberta. You are raping us financially, and it is not good. We are entitled to the same level of services that you get elsewhere in the province. Basically, the money is coming from us, and we feel we are entitled to it. I feel that we are entitled to more representation because of that reason.

The last issue has to do with the inadequacies of living in rural

Alberta. When I have raised this issue with people in the Legislature and mainly with the minister, "How come Edmonton got such and such, and Calgary got such and such, and we in our school district don't get such and such?" the answers that I get not only from the minister but from people in the department would be something like: "Well, when you live in rural Alberta, there are certain inadequacies that you have to put up with." Well, you know, we turn that table around out here: when you live in the city, there are certain things that you should have to put up with, and we are one of them, and we are entitled to the same level of service.

With the boundary issue you need to re-examine how you are going to start distributing some of Alberta's wealth and some of the resources, and we need proper representation in the Legislature to be able to do that. Our three MLAs have done an outstanding job. When we need something in our school district, we go to the MLAs. They gang up on all those people in Edmonton and Calgary, and we seem to get some of the things that we need. They have been very, very accommodating to us. But there is a need to have more representation from the economic base in Alberta, which is where the oil and gas, the agriculture, and the forestry are: in the northern part of the province.

The Chair: Thank you, Bryn. As you know, we have two former eminent educators on the panel, so I'll ask Bauni. Do you have any questions, Bauni?

Ms Mackay: Well, I'm still trying to get some information about the Internet in Grande Prairie. Can you tell me why the schools have it and the rest of the place doesn't?

Mr. Kulmatycki: Well, no, I don't think that's an accurate reflection. Within the city of Grande Prairie itself, which is what I can speak to – I don't know what the other communities have – we have access to high-speed Internet either through fibre optics or through cable. We have a number of very sophisticated industries in Grande Prairie that cater to technology. People here who are working in Grande Prairie and are employed by other corporations – the high-speed Internet allows them to function. All of our schools have high-speed Internet connection in one form or another with the exception of communities outside of Grande Prairie. They are either connected by tower site-to-site connections or just on-line telephone.

The beautiful thing that you're talking about there, where they're trying to get all of Alberta connected, is somebody's vision and somebody's dream. I've heard about that for about five years now. Saskatchewan is way ahead of us in this. Alberta came out ahead of everybody in Canada, and we are one of the last people to get on board with this thing. There's just too much interference in that one.

So we do not have high-speed Internet in all our schools and in all our communities, but the city of Grande Prairie definitely does have it.

Ms Mackay: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Being a former school superintendent, it's nice to see someone who is currently a superintendent show up to make a presentation. I wasn't quite sure what you were saying. On one hand, I heard you saying less government, and then on the other hand I thought I might have heard the possibility of your endorsing the idea of regional representation by geography. I wasn't sure.

Mr. Kulmatycki: Well, you're very astute.

The Chair: That's what he keeps telling us.

Mr. Clegg: But we don't listen to him.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for that compliment. I hope my fellow panel members take it into consideration.

Mr. Kulmatycki: Yes, both are correct. My vision of less government: we're not ready for that yet here. The polling principle that is now happening where you can get instant access to people: that will be in the future. I see that coming, because we're already using it now for certain things. Eventually that will happen, and I advocate less government in that sense. But today we are not doing that. We are doing this whole representation by population thing. There is a need in our area to have some other concept introduced because rep by pop leaves us out of the loop in terms of the impact that I feel we need to have and the impact that we are alleged to have had under the dome.

Mr. Patterson: If I might, Mr. Chair. Then it could be a very simple concept, and I'd just throw this out. It could be 10 members representing rural geography and maybe 10 urban that give kind of an extra balance. The situation we have now is going to get worse. Your population will probably grow, but it probably won't grow at the same rate as Calgary's and Edmonton's, so whoever is on the next boundary commission sadly will probably be in a worse situation. So I'm hearing you saying – now, correct me if I'm wrong here; I don't want to misinterpret you – that, yes, you think that we should maybe put forth some idea that this should be looked at and considered to kind of balance things out.

10:25

Mr. Kulmatycki: I think so.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Clegg and Mr. Graham tell me that you've convinced them sufficiently; they don't have any questions. So, Bryn, thank you very much.

Mr. Kulmatycki: Thank you.

Mr. Olthof: Dr. Darwin Eckstrom.

The Chair: Darwin tells me he's the superintendent for Peace Wapiti. Darwin, thank you very much for coming. We look forward to your presentation.

Dr. Eckstrom: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, panel members, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to come and address the commission. I'd like to preface my remarks first of all by saying that I'm not Lynne Phillips. She's our board chair, and like any good superintendent, when the board chair says, "I can't make it," I go in her place.

The Chair: We'll report that back.

Dr. Eckstrom: Okay, and I assure you that she's better looking than me too.

The background of the Peace Wapiti school board, for people who aren't familiar. We were born in 1995, the regionalization of three and a half school districts: the county of Grande Prairie, where I worked previously as the deputy superintendent, the Grovedale school district, the Spirit River school district, and part of East Smoky, I guess, Northern Gateway. We took a school from there.

So we have 29 schools.

To answer Bauni's question about the Internet, we have high-speed Internet in and around Grande Prairie. We have the superhighway system being set up right now because they've been negotiating to put in superhighway towers at Savanna, Teepee Creek. We have satellite in some of our rural schools. Our school system has every configuration imaginable. We have large schools here in Grande Prairie where the pressure is extreme. We have Hutterite schools, and we're getting more Hutterite schools. We have K to 12 schools trying to do service to the system with 135 students in a K to 12 school. So we're looking at: how do we configure? What do we do?

It's interesting. You talk about some of the rural/urban things. We do have rural/urban suburban areas within the county right around Grande Prairie where every day, almost on a daily basis, I get stacks of materials coming in for subdivision applications. We'll soon be the second or third largest community in the north. The hamlet of Clairmont is growing by 70 or 80 mobile homes or modular homes almost monthly. As I said, when we have disadvantaged areas, how do you deliver these programs?

The brief in front of you discusses our concept. I'd like to say that we have had very good representation, whether it be Walter or Wayne Jacques, then Mel, Gord, Hector. We have had great representation with Glen as well. Glen worked setting up the northwest regional learning consortium. So what we'd like to see I guess, in a nutshell, is somehow if we could maintain the status quo. Now, we recognize that the Dunvegan riding is outside section 15. The population is quite small. However, we also recognize – and I can say from the fact that it takes me four hours to drive from one side of our school district to the other side, as long as it takes me to drive to Edmonton – that this is exactly the same thing that faces our current MLAs down here in the south and worse in the north, because you have a huge distance and everybody still wants the ear of the MLA. They still want that.

While you can talk about high-speed Internet and all those things, the interfacing, what we're doing here today, is far more significant than what you do when you get on and start to talk with your hands. Now, I'm a Luddite, and they dragged me into it. I check my e-mails and things like that. However, when you get the opportunity to meet with people to discuss and to talk about and to present the dialogue, the dialogical interaction that occurs is more important than that. Yesterday, for example, we were out doing some building with Infrastructure in Spirit River. We're trying to bring two schools into one because populations are going down. We met with Hector face to face. That was his fourth meeting that day. He'd put on about 350 kilometres. I go to meet with Hector next Thursday. I live on a farm north of Sexsmith. It takes me almost two hours to go to his office. So it gives you some kind of an idea.

The materials are there, particularly the Dunvegan. I'm not going to read it for you, because you people can read it. What we'd like to see if possible is a maintenance of the status quo because we feel that there is good representation. If I want to talk to Gord, I can give him a call, and somehow along the line with his secretary and my secretary we can meet. Hector we can meet. If you pulled out the Dunvegan constituency and you divided it and sent them way up to the Northwest Territories almost, you would do a disservice to the rural communities. I feel that in lots of areas there's a disservice already occurring with the diminishing infrastructure.

So that's my little presentation.

The Chair: Thank you, Darwin. I think Mr. Patterson has got a gleam in his eye.

Dr. Eckstrom: Well, we have met on many occasions through

school superintendents. And Glen and Bauni. I know at least three of your members.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Doctor. You, like some other people here, have had to put up with me in meetings from time to time.

Dr. Eckstrom: You never spoke longer than 25 minutes, I don't think, unless somebody pulled you off the stage, but you didn't speak much less than that either.

Mr. Patterson: Well, Mr. Chair, first of all I'm going to make a little tongue-in-cheek comment here if I might. I find very interesting what you have said on your role of superintendent and how important it is to get out and see people. So my tongue-in-cheek comment is that, you know, when these regional systems were set up, I didn't hear very much comment about enabling the administration, the superintendents, to be able to be out, in, and meet people. Now I find it very interesting that we are very concerned about this when it comes to the MLA. Now that I've said my tongue-in-cheek comment . . .

The Chair: What's the question?

Mr. Patterson: . . . the question that I'm going to ask, Mr. Chair, because it would be very embarrassing for my friend Glen here to ask the question, is: would you favour Dunvegan being set up as one of the special ridings to solve the problem of the distance, the sparsity of population? I thought that I would ask this because it would be kind of awkward for my friend to ask that question since he has represented that area.

Dr. Eckstrom: Certainly. I think it's outlined. I don't know if the rest of the audience would like to read the reason why we consider that Dunvegan should be a separate entity.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I think it should be read out so that it's in *Hansard*.

Dr. Eckstrom: The Dunvegan division is considerably greater than the 20,000 square miles in area, and it fits the five criteria. That's the first one. The second one: the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest Dunvegan boundary is much more than 150 kilometres by the most direct highway route. The largest town division is less than 4,000. That's Fairview. The area contains an Indian reserve, the Duncan's First Nation. The portion of Dunvegan division's boundary is coterminous with the boundary of the province of Alberta on the west. So it fits the five criteria that are outlined under the special subsection (2) of section 15.

Another one. You asked a question, Ernie, about more government. I know that it's not chic to discuss more government, particularly perhaps in Alberta, but there is a significant role for government. When you look at some of the privatized and these huge Enrons and Nortels and some of these big, huge private corporations, they're not doing quite as well as perhaps one would hope. I would suggest that if you look at something like that and set your own biases and values aside and discuss the concept of a senate, that would be – I don't know; you threw out 10 and 10. As a reflective second thought I think that there is certainly merit in that, and it's something that we shouldn't just set aside because of the particular paradigm or world view that we're involved in.

10:35

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, if I might just very quickly, then, just say this: it's not necessarily based on the concept of the Senate of Canada. Maybe Alberta could set a role model.

Dr. Eckstrom: Absolutely.

Mr. Patterson: I thank you for that.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg?

Mr. Clegg: Thank you, Darwin, for blowing up Dunvegan. You've missed one point. They're nice people.

Dr. Eckstrom: Not like al-Qaeda or something.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you. No comment.

The Chair: Bauni?

Ms Mackay: No, I don't have any.

The Chair: Doug?

Mr. Graham: I just want to commend you, Darwin, for, after you went through all the various lists of the people that have represented you, eventually getting to Mr. Clegg.

Dr. Eckstrom: I always save the best for last. Always.

Mr. Graham: I know he's kind of shy and retiring and he's hard to notice up there, but you did notice him eventually. We all thank you for that.

The Chair: Darwin, thank you very much.

Dr. Eckstrom: Thank you.

The Chair: Good. Mr. Olthof.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Richard Harpe.

Mr. Harpe: Don't shake your head, Glen. This is just starting.

Mr. Clegg: We have a time limit, Richard.

Mr. Harpe: What's the time limit?

Mr. Clegg: Mr. Chairman, would you give this gentleman . . .

The Chair: Mr. Harpe is the last presenter this morning, and he already knows, Glen, that his presentation is limited to 10 minutes and that there'll be five minutes of questions, excluding you.

Mr. Harpe.

Mr. Harpe: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to come here and present to this commission. I apologize for not having a presentation.

The Chair: It's being recorded.

Mr. Harpe: We farm, and every morning we wake up this spring, we're a day behind because of the late spring and the cold and wet. We're just starting to get caught up now, and Glen knows all about that.

I want to talk about representation, I guess, and how it's divided up and the recent court case, as you all know – not so recent – that one vote does not necessarily mean one person. I guess that was a judgment. I think it's time for the province of Alberta to challenge this and go a step outside the box and represent rural Alberta in a decent fashion, because rural Alberta hasn't been represented as a whole. Living in rural Alberta, I see it. In the last five to eight years our total services have been decimated, more and more have disappeared, and we're without the availability of basic infrastructure that everybody else in Alberta takes for granted.

The previous speaker, Bryn, spoke from a total lack of understanding of rural Alberta, I think. Representation I guess is only good if the representer represents you with an understanding. Nothing against our urban MLAs, but how can we expect urban MLAs to understand rural Alberta? I sit on local government – and I'm not speaking for local government; I speak for the rural community – and I see in local government the lack of understanding of what rural Alberta is all about and how everything affects us. So when the province started splitting off urban Alberta into rural Alberta, my vote disappeared, my right to be heard disappeared, and my access to services is slowly being ground away.

We have the cities of Edmonton and Calgary that have more bloody MLAs than they have aldermen, and what for? Those people run around in a four-block circle representing a really small area, and then we have people like Gord Graydon and other people that represent a huge area, rural and urban combined. The loser, of course, is the rural person because the pressure is in the city in the urban areas, where all the services are delivered, where the bucks are, where the votes are. I mean, I don't expect Gord Graydon to come out to rural Alberta and listen to my concerns, because this is politics. I think the provincial government either needs a decent rural caucus or else they have to get rid of a third or a half of the urban MLAs and just step outside the box and see what happens.

At one time the province guaranteed my access to power, gas, and phone. I no longer have access to phone. It now costs \$6,000 to put a bloody telephone into my yard if I want it. Who can afford that? What farmer can afford a landline worth \$6,000? He can't afford it. So you go with cell or something else, and of course we all know that it's not as handy and is not as reliable a service as a landline. The province has chipped away. I talked to Tom Roberts in Municipal Affairs about this landline stuff. He didn't even know about it. He checked and phoned back in two hours. He said: you're right, Richard; we have abandoned that service.

At one time for \$500 I could get a landline into my yard. Then they upped it to \$750. Then they deregulated the phone service, and the province just removed themselves. Thank the Lord they haven't removed themselves from natural gas. Maybe they did yesterday; I don't know. Or power. I can still get that at a decent price. Whether it's schools, my basic infrastructure, which is phone, gas, power, and roads, our services have gone downhill. They're disappearing.

Even the resource road program, which rural Alberta depended upon – we feed urban Alberta. We get all the dust, the traffic, the cruddy roads so the money can leave rural Alberta and go into urban Alberta. We feed them. The province has removed the basic dollars from municipalities to do infrastructure to maintain this system. So as a farmer – like, you have major roads that go to gas plants, one thing or another – I lose hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of crop every year because you've got those truck routes. On each side of the road there's 500 to 600 feet. There's half a crop, a third of a crop. Glen Clegg knows this. Even my county council doesn't understand this. I lose lots and lots of crop every year because of dust. The crops can't grow. I mean, not only is the province because of a lack of decent representation taking away infrastructure, they're also taking away income from the rural

farmer.

The province has decimated agriculture through lack of representation. I've got one phone number in Stettler now that's supposed to give me all the answers. What a bunch of crap. There are no answers. I can't get help from the province anymore for whatever, so you go to private industry, and you pay more. You pay \$5 an acre, \$2 an acre, or \$10 an acre to manage your chemicals and one thing and another.

I guess representation is more than just having a MLA sitting in the city or on the outskirts of the city of, say, Edmonton or Calgary, and they represent that piece of the city and a big piece of rural Alberta. They can't do it with any clear understanding of what's going on, and that's where Bryn was totally wrong. He said that he doesn't see a split. There is no split. There's a lack of understanding. We can't get representation if the person who represents me doesn't understand what I have to live with every day. And that's not their fault; it's the province's fault. I think you guys should step outside the box, give us decent representation, something or other that I can live with, and make it fair and reasonable. That's the only way rural Alberta is going to thrive and prosper.

You know, you've got Agriculture and Rural Development. What's "rural development"? You've been going backwards on it. You've been hammering on us all the time, and we can't develop. We're going to go downhill. We're going to disappear, and all you'll have is gas plants, pump jacks, and poor roads. The farmers are going to move to the city, and then the mayor of the city says, "Oh, Grande Prairie is growing" and takes all the credit for it. You know, who's feeding all this?

I wanted to make this point, and it's totally outside of my elected representation on the county council. I'm talking for myself and the farming community and rural Alberta.

I sat on a drug committee a few years. Ty Lund was agriculture minister then. There were 28 of us, and then six of us split off to try and get the policies hammered out. Ty Lund at that time said: whatever you do – because it was mostly the north affected – it has to be the whole province. That's fair ball, but when you look at the other provincial programs, what's good for the south is not good for the north, but all of a sudden what's good for the north is good for the south. Everybody's got to benefit from it.

So our representation is, like I said, not fair to the rural inhabitant, and I can't stress that enough. There is no split. Bryn said that he can't understand the split. There is no split. There is no understanding, and you can't represent without understanding.

The Chair: Okay, Richard. Thank you very much. Very much to the point.

Mr. Clegg: Just a quick comment, Richard. You've lost a lot of weight, but you certainly haven't lost any of your zeal, if that's the right word.

Are you recommending that this constituency be changed to have one MLA do the rural and one the city, or are you just talking in general?

Mr. Harpe: This constituency? Personally? The city should have its MLA, but then the rural MLA should take in the towns. I mean, they're more rural than urban. And it shouldn't be so bloody big that it goes from the border to Mayerthorpe. I mean, that is a real killer too. How can that poor person represent that area? I myself would like to see Grande Prairie have its own MLA because that's where the MLA does representation. I mean, we've been trying to get the two MLAs to come to our county council for I don't know how many months. I mean, we're rural, so they don't come. They're too busy. You know what I'm saying? Let the city have

their own MLA, do the city business. Let the rural people have their MLA because it's understanding that we need, but we don't want a huge constituency.

10:45

The Chair: Mr. Patterson?

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming to make your presentation this morning. Just one comment, then my question. I find it interesting that you have really pointed this out. On one hand we're talking about effective representation here in agriculture, and the agricultural services offices are being closed and moved and centralized.

I want to come back to this idea of a second House, a senate. What do you think about that?

Mr. Harpe: I really have no opinion on that. I guess I would like to see rural representation. If we can't do this through MLA distribution, I would like to see some kind of rural caucus where the province appoints, say, five or six people across the province. Like, you guys have done great at regionalizing everything under the sun, and you'll probably work the municipalities next. I mean, the government is growing like a cancer. You know, there are more MLAs all the time. I don't know about a senate but have a rural caucus that talks to policies.

The Chair: Richard, I just have to interrupt you and say, when you say "you guys" . . .

Mr. Harpe: I'm sorry. I apologize.

The Chair: We're a committee appointed by the Legislature.

Mr. Harpe: I totally apologize for that. I'm talking about the province. I realize that you're appointed by the Legislature. I apologize for that remark. I withdraw it. I'm pleased to withdraw it. I don't have anything against you guys.

Mr. Patterson: I'm hearing you saying that there's need for some kind of rural geographic representation. The court case has gone all the way to the Supreme Court.

Mr. Harpe: Yeah, I realize that.

Mr. Patterson: We don't want to go there again. I'm kind of hearing you say "yes," but I'm not too sure that it is yes to kind of the idea of a second level here. I mean, it would have to be effective. We can't just have it just . . .

Mr. Harpe: Like, I think you're appointed by the Legislature to do something for the province, I guess, redividing, redistributing, whatever, and you have the resources to research and background the stuff. I just want rural Alberta's voice to be heard in a decent fashion, whether it's a rural caucus or there's a second House, a senate, whatever. Like I say, we have lots of urban people, and I can see in the agriculture policy, the rural policy that we are losing every year. We're losing, losing, losing. Our very fibre of rural Alberta is disappearing, and Glen I think understands it with clarity.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

The Chair: Any further comments from my colleagues?

Mr. Graham: I just want to assure you that your voice is being

heard, and it's been heard repeatedly, so it's something we're certainly bearing in mind.

Mr. Harpe: Thank you.

The Chair: Richard, thank you very much. I appreciate your frankness and straightforwardness.

To the folks here I say thank you very much for your attendance today. This session of the commission's work is now completed. We will reconvene at 3 o'clock in Peace River this afternoon.

Thank you very much.

[The commission adjourned at 10:49 a.m.]