

2:59 p.m.

Thursday, June 27, 2002

[Mr. Clark in the chair]

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, we welcome you to the meetings of the Electoral Boundaries Commission here this afternoon. I'm sure that Hector and Gary would tell us that in these kinds of things you always save the best to the last, and this is the last phase of three weeks of hearings that the commission has been involved in.

I'd like to take just a few minutes and give you a bit of background. Under the law in Alberta after every two elections there is a look at the electoral boundaries in the province. As you know, two elections have occurred since the last redoing of the boundaries. The legislation says that there will be 83 seats and that we should use as the basic figures the last federal census. We are quite fortunate this time because the last federal census was done in 2001, and even though we hear that it's got significant shortcomings in some areas, the commission before us had Stats Canada information that was three to four years old. So if you take the population of Alberta according to Stats Canada, 2.98 million, and you divide that by 83, because that's the number of seats the Legislature has said there will be, you get some magic figure of 35,951 and a half. The challenge for us as a group is to realize that obviously that's not going to be what constituencies are going to be. That's the target. The legislation allows, though, for a 25 percent variance up or down from that 35,950, or 36,000 for all intents and purposes.

The last commission in its recommendations didn't go as far as 25 percent; they went as far as 15 percent. All the constituencies were 15 percent or less with one exception. Part of the rationale for that, as was explained to us when we met the former chairman, was that these boundaries will stay for two terms, or for two elections, so it gives some flexibility on both ends: the minus or the plus.

The legislation also says that there may be up to four ridings which are regarded as special ridings. When you are looking at the map of the province, you will see the riding of Athabasca-Wabasca and the riding of Lesser Slave Lake. Those are the two special ridings in Alberta at this time. Both those ridings at least initially had more than 25 percent below the target and can go up to 50 percent. I emphasize that the legislation allows for four, and there were only two after the last redistribution.

The legislation says that we should familiarize ourselves with the Stats Canada information, of course, and then with the court decisions that have taken place because under Canada's Bill of Rights Canadians are guaranteed the right to vote, and there are some court decisions that say that it isn't based on representation by population but that it's based on the term "effective representation." My sense is that that's why we have this variance that's built in, that I already talked about.

The procedure which the commission is following is this. This is our last session. Then next week we'll be getting together to start formulating our conclusions. Following that, we will have an interim report in the hands of the Speaker in early September. That will be released to anyone who has made a presentation, anyone who wants it, and of course to all members of the Assembly. There will be a period of looking at that, and then individuals who feel that we haven't done the job exactly the way we should or close to the way we should will have an opportunity to advise us. Then the legislation mandates a second set of hearings across the province, and it'll be in December or early January. We have to finish that and then have a final report in the Speaker's hands by the early part of March next year. On one hand, that gives you the time frame we're working with; on the other side, it gives you the constraints or

the responsibilities that are ours.

The members of the panel are appointed on the basis that the chairman of Executive Council appoints two members and the Leader of the Opposition after consultation appoints two members. Then there's a group of characters that include the Ethics Commissioner, the Auditor General, a member of the judiciary, or head of an academic institution. I conclude that it must have been the Ethics Commissioner's turn this time to be the chairman, and I suspect that's how come you've got me as chairman.

I'd like to introduce you to my colleagues on the commission. To my right is the longtime mayor of the town of Claresholm, Mr. Ernie Patterson. Ernie's been the mayor of the town of Claresholm for 33 years without interruption. He's also the first vice-president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. It says something for Ernie, and it says something for the good folks of Claresholm too, I'm sure. To my right is a gentleman you can introduce to me better than I can introduce him to you, and that's Glen Clegg, whom we've come to regard in the course of our traveling across the province as truly one of Alberta's characters. To my immediate left is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is from Edmonton. She's the past president of the Alberta Teachers' Association and has had to work hard to keep Glen in control. I'm not sure you've been successful, either.

Ms Mackay: No.

The Chair: And to Bauni's left is a well-known Calgary lawyer and a respected member of the legal fraternity, Doug Graham. So this is the panel. We look forward to your presentations this afternoon.

Basically the pattern that we've been following is to ask groups, as Mr. Olthof calls them up, to give us a presentation, and generally those presentations have been in the vicinity of 10 minutes or so. Then my colleagues on the panel will ask questions or make comments, and from time to time you may hear the chairman say, "Would you please state your question?" Or I may say, "Question." I know it will surprise you that once in a while people with our backgrounds tend to have long preambles before they have questions, and it's my job to cut the preambles off.

Without any further ado, I'd be remiss if I didn't introduce to you Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer, Brian Fjeldheim.

Mr. Fjeldheim: Good afternoon, everyone.

The Chair: If you have any complaints about the way the last election was run, talk to Glen. If you have any compliments, give them to Brian. Okay? Brian and his staff have been the resource for us, and really we very much appreciate Brian's and his staff's help. Despite what Glen says, Brian, we think you're doing a good job.

Doug Olthof. Doug is a political science student from close to the area where I live, in Carstairs. Doug is taking political science at Simon Fraser in British Columbia, but he's back here where his roots are, in Alberta, and he's providing the administrative support.

So, Doug, who is the first presenter?

Mr. Olthof: The first presenter will be the group from the Dunvegan PC Constituency Association.

The Chair: And the initial spokesman is . . .

Mr. Dunwoody: I will be. Daniel Dunwoody.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Dunwoody.

Mr. Dunwoody: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the

commission. I've been asked by the Dunvegan Progressive Conservative Constituency Association to make this presentation this afternoon. You have already received a rather thick document. The intent is not to read that verbatim, and I do apologize if some of those sections are already committed to your memory, but certainly they are being used by us to put this presentation together.

I understand that the commission is in the process of preparing recommendations for change to the electoral boundary divisions in this province. As it currently stands, there are five electoral divisions whose population falls below the minimum threshold of 26,963 individuals, and there are 10 electoral divisions whose population exceeds the maximum threshold of 44,939. Our document references those five and 10. We don't envy you your particular task and appreciate that this task must be balanced with the requirements set out in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which itself is influenced by federal legislation, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

3:09

You may during my presentation hear me reference areas outside our own constituency. I do not pretend to speak on behalf of Albertans, but certainly one cannot deal with one's own electoral division in isolation. I want to focus on the five electoral divisions whose population falls below the minimum threshold. We are going to spend some time in our presentation talking about section 15(2) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which states:

Notwithstanding subsection (1), in the case of no more than 4 of the proposed electoral divisions, if the Commission is of the opinion that at least 3 of the following criteria exist in a proposed electoral division, the proposed electoral division may have a population that is as much as 50% below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions.

The subsection then goes on to outline the five criteria.

We would like to present to the commission arguments not only for having the Dunvegan electoral division as one of the exemptions permitted under section 15(2) but why we believe the Dunvegan electoral division has the strongest case. The five criteria essentially deal with the area of the division, the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of the proposed division, that there be no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 4,000, that the area of the proposed division contain an Indian reserve or a Metis settlement, and fifth, that the proposed electoral division have a portion of its boundary coterminous with a boundary of the province of Alberta. We realize and appreciate that the commission needs to only be of the opinion that at least three of the five criteria exist. We respectfully wish to advise the commission that the Dunvegan electoral division is, we believe, the only division that meets all five of the criteria. There's documentation that we've listed in the presentation, and we need not go into it in terms of where Dunvegan meets all five and others meet four or less of the five.

We would have some difficulty in our constituency understanding why the commission would not support the Dunvegan electoral division as qualifying for the exemption that is permissible and available. However, we're going to take just a few minutes of your time this afternoon and outline the importance and why we are seeking it as opposed to other remedies. If a redistribution or a realignment of electoral divisions is necessitated because the exemption is not granted, our division, the Dunvegan electoral division, shares a border with the following: Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River, Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and Grande Prairie-Smoky. The Lesser Slave Lake electoral division, like the Dunvegan, is below the minimum population threshold and frankly isn't a candidate for realignment. If the Peace River electoral division was realigned with the Dunvegan, both divisions would be below the

minimum population. The two Grande Prairie electoral divisions have the population base to permit a redistribution, and the Grande Prairie-Smoky would permit the best. It's beyond our scope today to talk about the geodetic boundary changes that might be possible, but to say that it would be quite an area would be an understatement, because the Dunvegan is short 2,306 people from the minimum threshold.

I have no doubt that during your travels the commission might have been asked: why not just eliminate one or two of the northern electoral divisions and create an additional electoral division in Calgary? Our brief basically says this: if you take the population of the 21 electoral divisions in the city of Calgary and divide it equally, they all fall below the maximum threshold that is permitted. If you include the three electoral divisions that immediately surround Calgary, again that population of just over 1,021,000 people can be divided among the 24 and still be below the minimum.

With respect to the 10 electoral divisions that are above the maximum population threshold, it is possible to realign neighbouring electoral divisions within the population threshold permitted under the act without eliminating a northern electoral division.

I would encourage the commission to consider straightforward solutions as opposed to complicated ones. Also, I put it to you that it is our belief that moving an electoral boundary a few blocks in an urban area, while a challenge, is not as difficult or taxing on a Member of the Legislative Assembly as moving electoral boundaries hundreds of kilometres as would be necessitated in the north.

We undertook a review of the final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from the 1995-96 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, and we note with particular interest table 3 on pages 43, 44, and 45, entitled Measurement of Variables Matrix. What was of particular interest to us was the inclusion of and weighting of information not specified in section 15(2) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. We contend that the inclusion of factors not specified in that legislation is in fact beyond the scope of the commission.

We've taken the liberty of attaching various appendices to our presentation. We have, although it bears no place in the legislation, provided the commission members with a list of councils, boards, agencies, commissions, and other organizations within the Dunvegan electoral division. What is readily apparent is the number of school boards, the number of municipal councils that the MLA must deal with. The other thing is that we were unable to find a central registry of such groups and organizations, and it made it very difficult to verify the completeness and the accuracy.

Essentially in a nutshell, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission, it is our contention in our presentation today that the Dunvegan electoral division falls within section 15(2), and it is also our contention that it is not necessary to realign the northern divisions in this province.

If there are questions, I'll be happy to answer as best I can or defer to my colleagues Gwen Tegart and Roch Bremont.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Anything you want to add, just briefly?

Mrs. Tegart: No. I think it's summed up.

The Chair: Okay. You've done an excellent job, gang. Who has the first question? Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for coming and making such a thorough presentation. In looking at your 2001 official population list in the appendices, I note that you're using the outdated census figures. Municipal Affairs is not

yet using the 2001 census figures, and when you look at those census figures that you have included in here, they are five years out of date. I don't know whether you realize that or not.

Mr. Dunwoody: Which appendix there?

Mr. Patterson: Well, it's the 2001 official population list. You got that probably from Municipal Affairs, and Municipal Affairs is always one year behind for grant purposes, in doing grants. So it's the 2001 official population list, but we're using the 2001 census list. When you look at the figures in this list here, these figures are five years out of date. I don't whether you realize that or not.

Mr. Dunwoody: The populations that we are using is the information that was provided. Our source of information in terms of determining the maximum and the minimum is the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission 2002-2003 document, You Are Invited to Participate in Shaping the Electoral Map of the Province. Appendix B is provided for background in terms of the compliance and the five subsets. So there are two different populations here. We are using the one that was mailed out by the commission for purposes of the minimum and maximum thresholds.

3:19

Mr. Patterson: Okay. You still haven't answered my question, though. Why, then, have you included this Alberta Municipal Affairs official population list? The figures don't match.

Mr. Dunwoody: One of the five criteria for exemption is that there is no town in the electoral division exceeding 4,000 people, and the only place where we could today find that population was in fact the outdated 2001.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much. You've answered my question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, folks, for a great presentation. Obviously, I taught you all well to do good work.

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr. Clegg: Okay. See what I mean?

There are no minor changes that you would suggest whatsoever? I say this because I know – and I can't even think of the community over on the other side of the Saddle Hills. There's a little area there. Did you look at that to think whether that should be left in or taken out? There are only a few people. I understand that.

Mrs. Tegart: We looked at it. The population didn't bring it anywhere close.

Mr. Clegg: The only reason I ask is because Hector would know and certainly I knew that you have to go through – well, I guess you can go through Grande Prairie, but in my case I used to go through B.C. to get to that area. That's the only reason I ask that question.

Mr. Goudreau: The community of Gundy.

Mr. Clegg: Gundy. Yes.

Mr. Dunwoody: Certainly in our presentation, Mr. Clegg, on the

second last page, under other groups and communities, the special circumstance – and every MLA is going to have some special circumstances in his or her dealings. But in our particular case our MLA must reach the community of Gundy through the Peace/Wapiti, or by traveling through British Columbia.

The Chair: Is there a . . .

Mrs. Tegart: Page F2.

Mr. Dunwoody: Second last page of the entire brief.

Mrs. Tegart: Second paragraph from the top.

Mr. Clegg: How many people are we talking here?

Mrs. Tegart: There are 20 homes, and I think there are 25 people.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions or comments from my colleagues?

Mr. Graham: Well, I think you've made an excellent case, and I want to compliment you. You've obviously done an awful lot of work. We really appreciate it because there's a lot of good information in here, and we're going to refer to it again. I think you've made an excellent case for your own constituency, and I think really that's about as far as you have to go. I think there are obviously distinctions to be made between your constituency and other rural constituencies and the city of Calgary. That would be my only comment. In other words, it's one thing to say that your constituency may be deserving of special consideration; it's quite another to say it for a rural constituency that's 40 miles from Edmonton, like Leduc, which I think falls into another category again.

I really want to compliment you.

Mr. Dunwoody: I appreciate it, and thank you very much for the opportunity for us to make a presentation this afternoon. We look forward to receiving and reviewing the interim and final reports, and we do wish you well in your deliberations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Doug.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Walter Doll.

The Chair: Walter, thank you very much for coming this afternoon. We look forward to your presentation on behalf of the MD of Fairview. I should tell you that over the last three weeks we've heard a few rather rollicking stories about one of the four members of your council over a number of years, but we won't hold you accountable for those, Walter.

Mr. Doll: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and panel members, MLA Gary and MLA Hector, ladies and gentlemen. With Glen around we always are due for a comment or two somewhere along the line. It just goes without saying.

Thank you for the opportunity to make an oral presentation here. I do that for I think two or three reasons. I have grade 8, so I really can't write very good. My spelling is really horrible, and then the other thing is that I can't read very good. So I'll just make the presentation right from the shoulders, if you don't mind.

The Chair: I'm always suspicious of somebody who starts out that way. Carry on, Walter.

Mr. Doll: The other thing is that I'm not able to express myself very eloquently, but sometimes some of us have to go by freight, so I'll just speak . . .

The Chair: From the heart.

Mr. Doll: I will start off with the Charter of Rights, which is Canadian and set down by the Supreme Court. It is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and while we are talking here today provincially, some of that has been the fallout of what has been said outside. When we talk about equality of access to our MLAs between rural and urban, we can't even comment on that because there's quite a distinction between the rural and the urban insofar as access to MLAs. In some of the urban ridings you can access an MLA within 15 minutes with your car. In our ridings, both in the Dunvegan and Peace River, if I can speak on the Peace River – I really should maybe be staying with the Dunvegan riding because that's where I reside – for some residents to get to their MLA takes eight hours to go there and back. That's why I say that the equality part is really out the window when it comes to something like that.

But I think that along with that what we have really missed along the line here is the ability of the MLAs to cover the area. Let's try it from their point of view, too, and be fair to them as one of your colleagues in the Legislature, have fairness for them. In our riding there are two counties, four municipalities, probably half a dozen towns and villages, and I don't know how many other boards, whereas in urban ridings there might be one or two. Along with that, there are a lot of functions that an MLA is invited to. It just isn't physically possible to cover it because of all the distance, and to make that even greater would be totally, totally unfair. As an MLA, as one of our MLAs in the northern part, they try as hard as they can to cover all the different municipalities, counties, towns, villages, and functions. Undoubtedly it upsets some of the people that they represent because it isn't physically possible to get there at a certain time because of the vast distances. I'd like to really work on that one.

I'm going to be very short and very brief on this, and I think I've made my point. We would be very remiss if we could support any realignment of our boundaries. I think they're far too huge, but we don't want to be naive enough to say that we want them smaller; it ain't going to work. But we hope that you in your deliberations please leave our boundaries the way they are.

I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Walter. So straight and to the point, and you're really saying: leave us alone. I take it you'd be pretty much in sync with the group who spoke to us before when they said to think seriously about making this a special riding.

Mr. Doll: Yes, sir. That's true.

The Chair: Okay. Any questions or comments?

Mr. Patterson: You took my question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clegg: And you won't let me talk, so go ahead. I'm good. Thanks, Walter.

The Chair: It's questions I'm concerned about. Okay. Walter, thank you very much.

Mr. Doll: Thank you.

The Chair: Appreciate very much your presentation.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Craig Bissell and Joyce Dvornek of the MD of Big Lakes.

3:29

The Chair: I had an opportunity to meet Craig and Joyce just before, and they enlightened me and pointed out where your good part of the world is, the MD of Big Lakes. My only claim to fame would be that one of the people who used to be on the council there in the past – Wilfred or Alvin?

Mr. Bissell: Alvin.

The Chair: Alvin Billings put up with me in school way down south a lot longer ago than he or I would like to admit.

Thank you very much. We look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Bissell: Okay. I'll keep my comments very short because Joyce is usually a little bit more long-winded than I am.

The Chair: I accept that.

Mr. Bissell: I merely want to summarize our submission. You have it there. Basically, we're asking that you keep all four of the northern ridings as special, because if you look at the map at the back, they take up 49.1 percent of the province.

The Chair: That's 49.1?

Mr. Bissell: That's 49.1 percent of the landmass. So they are already huge. The only other one that we have that we talk about is Barrhead-Westlock, which doesn't fall into the same category, but if we don't use the plus or minus 25 percent, we're going to wind up creating a whole bunch more humongous electoral divisions.

With that, I'll turn it over to Joyce.

The Chair: Craig, you really are a man of few words.

Mrs. Dvornek: Now he's going to make me look bad.

I'd like to take the opportunity to address the concerns of the High Prairie school division as well as the municipal district of Big Lakes. I understand that a presentation was made to the commission yesterday in Slave Lake on behalf of the High Prairie school division, and I would just like to emphasize the vastness of the current ridings of MLAs that we as a school division have direct relationships with. The Hon. Pearl Calahasen, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the representative for Lesser Slave Lake, has 50-plus schools within her jurisdiction and a landmass of 87,909 square kilometres. Mr. Hector Goudreau has 26 schools within his riding. The point that I would like to make clear is that there are MLAs currently who do not have any schools within their jurisdictions. Likewise, there are MLAs who do not have a farm or any industrial operations within their jurisdictions.

With these things in mind, I would like to make sure that the Electoral Boundaries Commission understands that northern Alberta and the people who live here are unique and should receive consideration as special electoral divisions. With consideration for the residents who live, work, and are currently developing northern Alberta along with the resources that support the entire province, by at least maintaining the current ridings we will feel that we have been recognized for our contributions to Alberta.

We have good communications with our representatives, although

it does demand much more dedication on the part of these individuals to meet with their constituents and the local governments that they also represent. As a provincial government there has been a lot of pride taken in listening to the grass roots in Alberta. I would like to suggest that sparsity and distance be considered in the formula for representation.

Again I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation on behalf of the MD of Big Lakes as well as the High Prairie school division.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Craig, could I just ask you again: that was 49.1 percent of the landmass?

Mr. Bissell: Yes, 49.1.

The Chair: What percent of the population?

Mr. Bissell: Sorry; I don't have the population numbers.

The Chair: Okay. We can certainly get that.

Mr. Bissell: That coloured map really looks nice, I think.

The Chair: We have one too.

Mr. Patterson: I would just like to thank you very much for coming and making a presentation. That's appreciated, and we've got the message.

3:39

Mr. Clegg: If I can just say thank you too. You know, I consider not just Dunvegan but northern Alberta my area. I've got to have all the support I can get, and thank you for your support.

Mr. Graham: I'd echo that. I just want to make something clear; that is, you said that we should consider sparsity and distance, and in fact we are. That's one of the criteria that was set out in the previous report. We're certainly very aware of that, so thank you very much.

The Chair: One of the things we are doing that's consistent with the last report and was mentioned by the folks from the association is that we're in the process now of having this matrix developed and took into consideration sparsity of population, distance: those kinds of things. Maybe it isn't fair to say that we hope to have a new and improved version of that matrix, but we are looking at refining that somewhat, and I can assure you that distance and sparsity of population will be key factors in that.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Bissell: Thank you.

The Chair: Good.

Mr. Olthof: Helen Mussio, municipal district of Northern Lights.

The Chair: Helen, we welcome you, and we look forward to your representation to us.

Mrs. Mussio: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. Probably I'm the only one that you don't have a little joke to tell about for an introduction.

The Chair: We haven't finished with you yet, though.

Mrs. Mussio: I'm afraid of that. Gary will fill you in on the details. He knows me well.

Michael Smith, who was to give the presentation today, is unable to be here. His son was killed in an industrial accident in Edmonton. Our CEO was going to be here today, but he's in Keg River settling people back from the fire, so our MD asked me by default. I'm the councillor for Weberville, which is just north of here.

We've titled ours Effective Representation Is Based on the Following Key Points. The right to vote means the right to effective representation. Without effective representation the right to vote can be rendered meaningless. Alberta's citizens have a right to an accessible MLA. If constituencies in the less-populated areas of the province were to be forced into a representation-by-population alone scheme, these would have to be of such a vast size that the local MLA's ability to effectively meet the needs of their constituents would be severely compromised. As a result, not only would the number of rural representatives be drastically reduced but the quality of that representation would be as well.

Residents in rural ridings often lack access to the media and other resource collections that are readily available in urban ridings. Rural voters depend on their MLA more directly for government information and assistance. Rural voters are more likely to personally know their MLA and are therefore more comfortable interacting with their MLA. MLAs working in their rural constituencies have greater logistical barriers to overcome than do their urban counterparts. Basic infrastructure – snow removal, communication lines, air service, local road distances, et cetera – are more of a hindrance in rural areas and can be a significant impediment to rural MLAs physically attempting day-to-day, door-to-door conduct of their business.

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

Since agriculture remains a vital component of Alberta's economy, a strong rural voice is needed to constantly promote and protect the interests of the agricultural sector. Alberta's economy continues to be heavily dependent on natural resource development and extraction. This activity takes place primarily in rural areas, and a strong rural voice is needed to make certain that proper attention is paid to the use of rural infrastructure, environmental concerns, et cetera. The wide diversity of geographic, economic, and demographic differences from region to region requires that all areas of the province be well represented in the Legislative Assembly.

Boundaries should always be designed for the most effective representation and include nonpopulation factors such as the geographic size of the constituency, which clearly affects the ability of MLAs to maintain meaningful face-to-face contact with constituents.

Travel time from the Legislature to the constituency. Hours spent on the road or in the air reduce the time available for the MLA to spend with family and constituents.

The number of other local governments, school boards, health regions and other community organizations within the constituency. Given that each organization represents an important segment of the constituency population with often different interests and that each has a need for regular contact with the local MLA, designing electoral boundaries to complement municipal boundaries would be one way of easing this challenge to a certain extent.

The distances of the community from other major centres. Remote communities present a unique set of challenges and priorities and often require individual representation. To simply amalgamate these communities into one huge constituency with the

nearest available centre may effectively disenfranchise the small, remote communities.

Local political culture and historical content. It's not easy to quantify the local political culture and historical context of an area, which can have a very important impact on representation requirements. The local rural individual or organization cannot always abide by rules and regulations that are being made to suit major urban individuals and organizations.

Traditional trading and transportation patterns. To the greatest extent possible constituency boundaries should respect traditional trading and transportation patterns. This is important to MD No. 22 with the 200-kilometre strip of highway 35 running north and south.

Communities of interest. Shared common interests and history needs to be considered, too, when it comes to ethnic backgrounds, languages spoken, political activism, or employment environments of huge industrial entities.

In closing, remember that the goal here is to represent people, not numbers. People have different needs and priorities and a right to representation regardless of their urban or rural choice of residence. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Helen. I may not have had a story to tell about you, but one thing I've noticed about people from this part of the province is that you tell it the way you see it and you don't mince words, and you certainly fit in with that tradition.

Mrs. Mussio: Well, thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Helen, for this brief. You know, as you travel around the province for three weeks, you hear a lot of things that you bring up here, and every one of them is a good point. I just thank you very much for coming and filling in. It was a good presentation.

Mrs. Mussio: Well, thank you, Glen, and I think you will attest to the fact of the problems of the distance, and I think everyone else is reiterating that. Gary, of course, will know how very often he wants to come to a meeting that we may be having in Manning, but time just doesn't allow it because he may be at a meeting in another one of the communities. It's a difficult factor to deal with.

Thank you.

Mr. Clegg: You don't find that he's getting old or anything, that he can't make those trips?

Mrs. Mussio: Oh, he told me he wasn't getting older.

Mr. Clegg: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Helen.

I should say that I've just been advised that the four northern divisions which, we were told, represent 49.1 percent of the land mass are 3.33 percent of the population for the province.

Mr. Clegg: Quality people, though.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, you didn't allow any other questions here.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry. Did you have a question you wanted to

ask Helen? Helen, Mr. Patterson would like you to come back.

Mrs. Mussio: Oh. Somebody told him a story.

The Chair: You may wish they had, though.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I think maybe this is a good time for me to raise this idea which I've been kind of putting forth here and there. When we were in southern Alberta, we of course heard the presentation about rural population declining and the two large cities growing and that this is going to continue. This was a problem for the last commission, and it's a problem for this commission also. So I just want to float the idea that was suggested to us down there that maybe we should take into consideration some kind of geographic representation, which Montana has with a second House. Australia also uses this. Of course, I know one of the reactions is that we have to have less government, but as time goes on, this is going to be more and more of a difficulty. So I'm just wondering what your thoughts would be if we were to suggest – and all we can do is suggest – that as this problem keeps growing, to ensure that rural areas, as you have very well pointed out, are effectively represented, maybe we should have a second House based on a regional or geographic situation. The MLAs would still be there.

Mrs. Mussio: I'm not familiar with how a second House would function or operate, but I think we have to go back to the basic concept of representation. You're not only representing people; you're representing their needs. There may be less people in the north, but the needs of those people very often can be greater than a concentrated group of people in one small area. Because of our great distances apart we have a very large diversity of needs, and those needs have to be addressed. Just because there are a few people out in a rural community – their needs are much greater perhaps than that same number in a concentrated urban community.

So while we deal with statistics and numbers and population and so on, it's not the only basis that gives effective representation. You have to look at the problems we have in our MD with infrastructure, with roads, because out of this area come the oil and gas, the logging, the agriculture. Many of the rail lines are gone, so now we have other needs. I can go on into the transportation headaches and problems, a great diversity of things that our MLAs have to address that one MLA in downtown Calgary doesn't have to deal with at all.

Mr. Patterson: Right, and that's of course why I'm asking the questions.

Mrs. Mussio: So I don't know the structure, and I don't know how it'd work, but we'd be interested in seeing some literature on that.

Mr. Patterson: Well, thank you very much. I think something has to happen here, because we're tied by court decisions and we want to be very careful that we don't face a court challenge. But as these commissions meet every 10 years and this becomes more and more of a problem, maybe here's an opportunity for Alberta to have a senate or second House that can prove to be very effective in helping to ensure that there is regional or geographic representation from areas such as you're talking about.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Mussio: We'd be interested in seeing literature on that.

The Chair: Helen, just before you leave, not to be a bit of a fly in the ointment, in fairness to my colleagues to my left we've heard from ridings in the city where MLAs tell us they have 22 different

languages spoken in their constituency, just the difficulty of doing that, or where there's a very high concentration of people who are new to Canada in an area that may be in the centre of one of the cities and then move into other areas of the city.

I come from rural Alberta also, but I just want to make the point to you that it isn't as easy a challenge as it might appear on the surface with a riding that's 20 blocks or 25 blocks one way or the other when you have more people living in one apartment building than would live in my home town of Carstairs. I'm not taking away from your arguments, Helen; I'm simply saying that there is another side that we have heard, too, that we have to keep an eye on.

3:49

Mrs. Mussio: Uh-huh. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Olthof: Elaine Sky, Peace River school division.

The Chair: I'd like to welcome to the proceedings Elaine Sky. Elaine is the chairman, chairperson of the Peace River school division. Elaine.

Mrs. Sky: Chairman is just fine. I go by that.

The Chair: Chairman. All right.

Mrs. Sky: When I asked if anybody was coming with me, they said: "No. We're right behind you in the back row."

The Chair: I noticed that.

Mrs. Sky: Yeah, right.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. Peace River school division has a geographic area of about 7,300 square miles with a total population of 25,000 people. Now, while the geographic area is quite large in relation to many other areas, the real challenge is the geography of the area. There are many geographic features in our area that limit how people are able to travel and meet one another. Distances between people may be short as the crow flies, but deep coulees, et cetera, add many miles. We have one spot – and this has kind of been alluded to before – on the border between Alberta and B.C. where our school bus travels into B.C. in order to pick up our Alberta students. It's the most effective way to do it. This all gives a perspective on an issue that we live with every day and our elected representatives find very challenging in order to provide effective political representation for their electors.

Peace River school division has seven elected representatives responsible for this area. We share this area with two MLAs, representing Dunvegan and Peace River electoral divisions. They don't have coterminous boundaries; rather, they have a portion of our jurisdiction included in their very much larger areas.

Now, Peace River school division believes that there should be three considerations when establishing rules that support electoral divisions, the first one being representation by population. That's already been dealt with, so we won't dwell on that one.

The second consideration should include a sparsity component, and we realize that there already is, but just some comments on that. If, for example, an MLA represents an area that has less than a predetermined number of electors per square mile, then their area would be adjusted with this sparsity component. The need for this type of factor relates to the ability of the MLA to stay in touch with and get around to his or her electors. While the telecommunication industry has made keeping in touch much easier, it still has not

solved the face-to-face needs of staying in touch.

Just a comment on the telecommunications and distance learning and such that is a part of schools in the north and in the south as well. I think this is one area that the MLAs around the urban/metro areas don't have to deal with a whole lot because they don't have to have the distance learning, whereas we do.

Now, the reality for elected officials is that they need to meet with and be seen in their local communities to stay in touch effectively, and that was mentioned before. Our MLAs have a large number of local governments in their areas, and this has also been mentioned. These include municipal districts, towns and villages, school boards, hospital boards, child and family services, et cetera, and in the case of the Dunvegan electoral division, there are 36 of these local governments that Hector has to deal with. It's in the best interests of Albertans when these local governments can all work together, and when our MLAs try to stay in touch with each of these through face-to-face discussions, it requires time.

I believe that the MLAs in a more densely populated area only have to work with one municipal council, one hospital board, three school boards, possibly four at the most in the case of Calgary, and they often share these with many more MLAs. They don't have to deal with them just by themselves.

In addition, the distance between meetings is significant. Our MLAs could spend half the day traveling from one community to another to attend meetings or functions, as was mentioned before.

Instituting a factor that recognizes sparsity would continue to allow our provincially elected officials to meet locally with their electors to ensure effective representation. Failing to provide such a factor severely limits the ability to provide adequate representation for their constituents.

The third consideration that's of great concern relates to what we'll call program equity. We would define this as having relatively similar program access whether one lives in Edmonton or Cleardale, which is part of the Peace River school division. With the continued shift of population from the rural areas into the metropolitan areas, rural Albertans are finding more and more that services are disappearing from our rural areas. In large part this can be attributed to those in the governing role not acting in the interest of the province of Alberta but rather in their own electorates' desired interest. Now, we struggle with this as a school board as well, and we try very hard not to disadvantage our small schools in favour of the larger ones, even though the larger ones are not large. We have to consider what's best for the whole division when we make a decision, keeping in mind all the time the kids.

There are very distinct philosophical differences between the thinking of the metropolitan areas and rural Albertans. There needs to be a balance between these two distinct philosophies at the governance level. To counter this, perhaps there should be more emphasis on balancing the effect of rural and metropolitan areas to ensure that rural areas continue to receive services that they deserve as Albertans.

Now, up until now Alberta has done fairly well in trying to balance rural and metropolitan issues, but it's becoming harder for rural areas to have their voice heard as our population decreases and our voice in government diminishes. We have little enough voice now without losing more. We appreciate the work that the commission is doing and look forward to recommendations that will not disadvantage rural Albertans any more than they currently are.

Thank you for receiving our thoughts on this important issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Elaine.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Elaine. It's great to see you here speaking for the north. I just want to assure you that we are as a

commission taking in the factor of distance, and I think the chairman said that earlier.

In a really good world the school board boundaries and the MLA boundaries and the hospital boundaries and child services boundaries would be coterminous, but obviously that never took place and probably couldn't have taken place. Certainly it would be an ideal situation if that could be. You're represented by two MLAs, and I'm sure that you have no trouble with the two MLAs.

Mrs. Sky: No, not at all. We get along very well, I think, with our MLAs. We just met with them in the last week. We try to keep our MLAs up to speed on what's happening in education because I know that they have a large plate. They have to deal with everything that's going on, whereas we only have to deal with the schools and what's happening in education, so we try to keep them aware of what's going on.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks, Elaine.

Ms Mackay: Elaine, on the second page. At the top you say that "with the continued shift of population from the rural areas into the metropolitan areas, rural Albertans are finding more and more that services are disappearing from our rural areas." Would you just explain that a bit further and give an example, please.

Mrs. Sky: Well, I'm not necessarily meaning in school. It was alluded to before. I mean, we're losing our grain elevators; we're losing our railways. A lot of those things are going. I mentioned, too, with decreasing population we're having to use distance learning in some of our schools, and we're not able to attract in some cases specialty teachers to the north. At the moment we've been doing some looking for our principals, and the pool is not good, so most of our principals are coming from within. We're having to work on that. People just don't want to come to the north, because they seem to think that we don't have everything that is needed. Now, I don't know if maybe one of my colleagues could give an example there.

The Chair: It doesn't look as if anyone is jumping up.

3:59

Mrs. Sky: No, they're not jumping up; are they? Bruce will.

Mr. Moltzan: To use an education example, Elaine mentioned that it's very hard to recruit in our small communities, the small educational programs. I don't think that someone in Edmonton has any concept of how difficult it is to offer high school education to students. You know, we have a high school right now – well, actually it's a K to 12 school – that we expect next year will have less than a hundred kids in it. Now, the high school might have 30 if we're lucky, and we're expecting that to drop. So how do you staff that? In terms of providing an education for those kids, you need more than two teachers. We can't afford more than two teachers.

Ms Mackay: So it isn't that the urban has taken it away from the rural. It's just that as the population has become increasingly urbanized, the population at the rural level is so low in, say, the schools that you can't provide the same services.

Mr. Moltzan: Right. And I don't think there's a good understanding of that issue in the metropolitan areas, and really how do you support it? We haven't seen any strategies – and we've been trying to work with the Learning people – that help support what we need. This little school is 60 miles away from the next nearest high

school. How do we support that? You know, metropolitan areas really don't have an understanding of the need, firstly, and then how you support it.

I've heard some other noneducational examples. I was amazed in talking to a brother-in-law a few months ago about Supernet. He was pooh-poohing it. I look at it and think: it's easy for him to say that from downtown Edmonton. I mean, they've got access to all of that service, and here we had to basically have the private sector install our own wide-area network for our technology needs, but in downtown Edmonton it's not an issue. Well, there's a big disconnect there; right?

Ms Mackay: So you don't have Supernet yet, but it'll be here. People from the government said that they're putting it in right across the province.

Mr. Moltzan: Oh, yeah. I mean, that's an example of something that's happening that's right, but the perspective of the people living in the metropolitan areas is: why are we doing this? Well, we're doing it to help rural Albertans. I mean, you could point back in history to the postage-stamp rates for natural gas and utilities. You know, that's not something that metropolitan areas were really interested in, but it's something that really benefited rural Albertans. Why? Because I think we had representation in the rural parts of Alberta that allowed us to do that, and there are other examples like that.

Ms Mackay: Thank you. I understand what you're talking about now.

The Chair: Thanks.

Elaine, might I ask you: do you still have a superintendent whose last name is Woronuk?

Mrs. Sky: No. He's our deputy superintendent.

The Chair: Deputy superintendent?

Mrs. Sky: Yes.

The Chair: Well, if his son Kent Woronuk is an example of the young people that you turn out from your system, you do a bloody good job.

Mrs. Sky: Oh, we turn out very good kids from our system.

The Chair: I know him rather well, and I'm proud of the acquaintance.

Mrs. Sky: He just got married on Saturday.

The Chair: Well, what can I say?

Thank you very much, Elaine.

Mrs. Sky: Thank you.

Mr. Olthof: Brian Grant, MD of Peace.

The Chair: Brian, thank you very much for coming. After Brian's presentation we're going to take a short break, and there should be some coffee and things like that over there to help. We'll take about a 10-minute break.

Brian, we look forward to your presentation. Thanks for coming.

Mr. Grant: Hello. Thank you, Chairman and board members. This won't take very long, because I don't want to hold anybody up from a good break.

The Chair: Well, no, that wasn't the intention of me making the announcement that way.

Mr. Grant: Actually, I'm not going to dwell on any of the things that have already been said. One of the things that kind of came to my mind whenever I was listening to the presentations is that even with our technology and the fact that our population is decreasing in the rural areas and migrating to the urban areas, one of the things that's happening, too, is that the younger people are the ones that are leaving and it's the older ones that are left behind. One of the things that the old people have become accustomed to in rural Alberta is that chances are that they were born and raised here, and they may even know the MLA personally. They demand a certain amount of his attention that probably an urban MLA would not. Maybe he would get some of that but probably not to the same degree. That's one of the things that I thought I would mention and also the fact that with the aging population the technology of the telecommunications industry and that helps but at the same time probably not to the same degree because of the older population probably not utilizing Supernet and some of these newer ways of communicating.

I guess the only other thing I can mention that really sticks out in my mind is that the MLAs from up here – the distance has been gone over and over, but the one thing I'd like to say is that whenever these MLAs are on the road, I hope to goodness they have cell phones with hands free. They're going to have to spend a lot of time on that phone sometime during their day, and they can't spend it on the phone and on the steering wheel at the same time. That's a problem.

The Chair: Brian, thank you very much.

Any comments – I'll even allow comments – or questions?

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Brian, for being here. Being an MLA for 15 years for Dunvegan I certainly know that your submission is well taken not just by myself but by all the other members and the chairman. Thanks for coming. It's things we've heard before. You know, it's kind of like if people keep telling us that, then we're certainly going to believe it; aren't we?

Mr. Grant: Yeah. We'll just tell you over and over and over.

The Chair: That would never happen at municipal council; would it?

Mr. Grant: Oh, never. No.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I just want to make this comment. When we were down south, my friend Glen here kept commenting that I did have some friends down south, so I'm very impressed that my friend Glen has some friends up here too.

The Chair: I think the operative word was "some."

Thank you very much, Brian. We'll adjourn for 10 minutes and then we'll commence. Who is next, Doug?

Mr. Olthof: Bruce Rutley of the Alberta Liberals, Dunvegan constituency.

The Chair: Okay. So, Bruce, in about 10 minutes you're on.

[The commission adjourned from 4:06 p.m. to 4:18 p.m.]

The Chair: Bruce, thank you very much for coming today. I believe you were here when I introduced my colleagues earlier. Were you?

Mr. Rutley: Well, actually I wasn't.

The Chair: Well, actually, I'll introduce them to you then. The members of the panel are appointed, two by the Leader of the Opposition after consultation and two by the Executive Council, and then the chairman is from a group of either the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, a member of the judiciary, or head of an academic institution. I happen to be the Ethics Commissioner. I guess it's his turn.

To my right is Ernie Patterson, the mayor of Claresholm. To my immediate right is Glen Clegg, whom I'm sure you've crossed swords with previously. To my left is Bauni Mackay. Bauni is from the city of Edmonton and former president of the ATA. And a lawyer from the city of Calgary, Doug Graham.

I look forward to your presentation, Bruce.

Mr. Rutley: Thank you. Should I just forge ahead?

The Chair: Just go. Give it your best shot.

Mr. Rutley: Okay. This is a submission from the Dunvegan constituency association, the Alberta Liberals. I'm just going to start with the preamble and go from there.

We start with the basic tenets of western democracy include the one person, one vote and equal representation. Equal representation is to be accomplished through a system of equal-size electoral divisions. Geography, population distribution, existing municipal boundaries, and community interests make the application of equal-size electoral divisions virtually impossible. Therefore, the concept of effective representation, which allows for a variance in electoral division populations, has been embraced. Changes to electoral division boundaries are inevitable as population changes within the province. This could lead to frequent boundary changes and/or changes that serve a particular party rather than a community unless the principles of boundary stability and changes for the good of the electorate are upheld.

While effective representation may mean different things to different people, one aspect of effective representation where consensus is expected is access to one's elected Member of the Legislative Assembly. This is difficult when there are too many persons within an electoral division, as there currently are in the Calgary-Shaw electoral division. But distance to the MLA's office, often located in a community hours away, and the multijurisdictional responsibilities of the MLA also create an access barrier unique to rural electoral divisions. Unfortunately, modern telecommunication systems within rural areas are currently not sufficiently advanced to compensate for this distance. Therefore, it's imperative that an assessment tool continues to be utilized to rank the difficulty in administering an electoral division. It's with these concerns that the constituency association makes the following recommendations to the Electoral Boundaries Commission with respect to effective representation.

Recommendation 1 is to maintain existing ridings as much as possible. When electoral division boundaries are adjusted, consideration of common community interests, municipal and community boundaries, geography, et cetera, and trading patterns must remain paramount. Those decisions must also be made free from gerrymandering as much as possible.

Maintain the variable matrix concept. I've referenced section 4.5 in the previous report. This concept is an effective tool for identifying the challenges as associated with representing constituents within the various electoral divisions. Reducing the number of electoral divisions based solely on population does not contribute positively to the concept of effective representation.

Recommendation 3 is to maintain the exception to the 25 percent rule as articulated in section 1.3 of the same report. However, consider a modest increase in the number of exceptions – i.e., up to not more than, say, 10 percent of the number of electoral divisions – if that will allow current boundaries to remain. Alternatively, if you can't change the number of seats and if you can't change the number of exceptions, i.e. four, then go to the criteria that's articulated in the report and increase that number from three of five to either four of five or five of five and let the ridings fall off accordingly. Okay?

The Chair: Yup.

Mr. Rutley: Recommendation 4. Maintain five electoral divisions within northwestern Alberta. Population growth supports this position. Population within northwestern Alberta continues to increase at the provincial average, and I've included a table appended. Although population change within each electoral division is quite different – and it ranges all the way from, the last election to the current census, plus 31 percent to minus 4 percent – on a regional basis in the northwest we're within the 25 percent, i.e. 82 percent. Assessing variance on a regional basis has merit – and I believe there's been a separate submission to address that point, so I haven't detailed it – and would allow for boundary adjustments without reducing the number of electoral divisions within this region.

Northwestern Alberta has many of the highest ranked electoral divisions for difficult administration, in my words, in the province. Peace River is ranked second; Dunvegan, third; Lesser Slave Lake, fourth; Grande Prairie-Wapiti, 11th; and Grande Prairie-Smoky, 20th according to the variables matrix in the 1996 electoral commission document. You know the points in the matrix, so I won't articulate that. They're there for your reference. They are all important criteria because they take into consideration things like distance and population density. These data support the need for five electoral divisions within northwestern Alberta.

So the final recommendation is to maintain the current Dunvegan electoral division boundaries. Our comment on that is that Dunvegan is currently ranked fourth in the variables matrix. That's reason enough to leave the boundaries where they currently lie.

Mr. Chair, I have another recommendation. It's in another area, and I'm not even sure if the commission is the one to hear it, but if I may, I would like to address it.

The Chair: It seems to me that you're going to tell us anyway. Go ahead.

Mr. Rutley: Well, it has to do with the operations of the constituency.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Rutley: Okay. We're recommending that you introduce a funding formula that provides additional resources to electoral divisions that are above the provincial average within the variables matrix. The following formula is an example. It could be used to determine an appropriate level of funds that could be allocated for the additional costs associated with rural electoral divisions. These costs, for example, include travel. For example, in the Dunvegan constituency – and Mr. Clegg can help you there with the details –

there are four local newspapers in order to cover the area, so that's four times the money. There's little opportunity for pooling, for making information known to the area. So just a couple of examples. Of course, there's the cost associated with multiple office locations, and I've provided an example there.

So basically the formula would read that the amount of money made available to a constituency office for its operations would be equal to the current funds, or whatever base fund the government feels is appropriate, multiplied by a ratio. The ratio is to take the ranking of the constituency association, divide it by the average of the matrix ranking, and that's the ratio. For example, Dunvegan has a ranking of 68. The current provincial average is 36. That's 1.88. Then in order to operate this constituency, a factor of the base times 1.88 would provide additional dollars to run a constituency. There are a number of ways in which you can cut that, but the concept is the important part for you to consider.

In summary, maintain the existing electoral divisions as much as possible throughout the province, boundary stability is desirable, the matrix of the 25 percent exception criteria is a sound concept, maintaining five electoral divisions within northwest Alberta is supported through census data and matrix rankings, and maintain the current Dunvegan electoral division boundaries.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Bruce.

Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Bruce. We have heard your remarks about this funding. Obviously, it's not within our mandate, but that doesn't stop us, knowing us five, to make some comment or recommendations away from the thing. I'm sure we are going to make some recommendations. You did say that although this formula might not be perfect, it's the idea. We've heard that many times. We've never had the detailed work that you've put into it, Bruce. It's great to be here and to see that pretty nearly every brief, although different, has supported basically the same concept. So that's good, and certainly I want to thank you. I know and everybody here knows that you were a candidate in the last election, and you know the difficulty traveling from Bear Canyon to almost High Prairie. So thank you very much for your brief.

Mr. Rutley: Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate very much your comments on the matrix and your appropriate credit to the last commission eight years ago. It's my understanding – and the Chief Electoral Officer will wave his head in the wrong direction if I'm wrong here – that this was the first attempt anywhere in Canada to develop some kind of an evaluation tool, for lack of a better term. We have got the people from Alberta Finance who have plugged in the most recent Stats Canada information, and they are in the process now of having refined this somewhat. At least, we hope they've refined it, because next Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock we're going to be meeting with them. Certainly your comments and the appropriateness of them is right on, so thank you very much.

4:28

Mr. Rutley: You're welcome.

The Chair: Bauni and then Mr. Graham.

Ms Mackay: Just looking at your chart, Bruce, you have projected populations for 2005 and for 2010. Where did you get that?

Mr. Rutley: Yes. Reading across the top of the table there, you'll see on the fourth column 1994-1995. That was from the electoral commission document. The 2001 is the document that was circulated to announce the hearings. All I did was just simple math and extended that over 2005 and into 2010. It's just a simple rate. I just maintained the rate. The change from '94-95 to 2001, for example, for Grande Prairie-Smoky was 31 percent, so I just maintained that. Okay? So you can see that there's going to be a shift in the area, but over time the region is increasing at the same rate as the provincial numbers.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thanks.

Mr. Graham: I was going to ask the same question. These darn schoolteachers always anticipate what you're going to do before you do it.

Ms Mackay: That's right.

The Chair: We need that type; don't we, Bauni?

Mr. Graham: I just wanted to compliment you on a presentation which basically, I think, summarizes a lot of the things we've heard. It's a nice handy document because it puts it altogether in one place. Thank you very much.

Mr. Rutley: My pleasure.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Bruce. Appreciate your help.

Mr. Rutley: Thank you for the time.

Mr. Olthof: Carolyn Kolebaba, the municipal district of East Peace.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Carolyn. We look forward to your presentation. Have at us.

Mrs. Kolebaba: Thank you. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to address the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission 2002-03.

In creating the electoral boundaries to achieve the goal of effective representation, our municipal district of East Peace No. 131 would ask you to consider the following nonpopulation factors. The geographic size of our municipal constituency and the ability an MLA has to maintain meaningful face-to-face contact is severely hampered. Even though more money is allocated to this region for travel, the human factor must be taken into account. In my municipality a portion of the area still does not have land phones or cell phone capability. Seehta Mill has 70 people, more or less, at any given time living there. Our air transportation service is very unsettled in the north. The north struggles with the ability to get from A to B through weather conditions and the lack of road access. Not all areas have the same Alberta advantage. Should you have driven into northern Alberta rather than flying, I am confident that you would not be holding your meeting on this time schedule. Our MLA does his best to cover his constituency in the best manner possible and have the necessary personal contact with his electorate. We are already contributing to the Alberta advantage, that has eluded the north thus far.

The federal boundaries are much bigger, and contact with our federal Member of Parliament is even more removed. It's not any fault of his but the fault of a geographic terrain. As a result of my previous statement I must ask this question: will our northern voices be lost, similar to the Alberta voice in a federal election? It is commonly known that the outcome of the federal election has been

determined even before we are finished voting in Alberta. The north should be treated with special allowances due to its size and lack of population. The ever increasing contributions of revenue from the north are supporting provincial, federal, and metro/urban governments. The north receives little in return.

The distance of the communities from the Legislative Assembly and the time required to travel to and from the Legislature reduce the time available for the MLAs to meet with constituents. Rural Alberta MLAs, whether in the north, east, west, or south, struggle with the ability to get to their constituents within a timely information factor.

In the metro/urban centre the Alberta advantage overpowers the rural already. Large communication papers and radio stations are easily accessible to the metro/urban MLA. Communication systems are set up so that urban MLAs can poll their constituents daily, whereas our MLAs in the north are hampered by the lack of daily communication. The metro/urban MLA may have six or seven papers and several radio stations with daily access. The rural MLA does not have this advantage. My point is that communication factors and the ever shrinking numbers of rural MLAs inhibit our voting power. Where is the Alberta advantage afforded to these rural MLAs and their constituents?

The number of local government and community organizations demanding the regular contact of these MLAs is increasing. The people of the north see our voice and vote being lost to the metro/urban centres. The municipalities and industry are wanting more from our MLAs. Not all problems or concerns can be dealt with on the phone or the computer. You have to see to believe. More time must be allowed as we continue to grow in the north for the MLAs to understand the complexity of the issues we face on a daily basis.

The MLAs are struggling now to understand fellow MLAs' challenges within their regions. Overload is a factor. It is incumbent upon this committee to recognize that should you enlarge the boundaries and reduce the number of rural MLAs, this overload factor will increase. The next question that I must ask is: who will then be willing to run in an election, knowing full well that in a short time they will be taxed to the limit?

How many Albertans are voting today in provincial elections? Are we already so far removed from the people that they have lost faith in the system? We believe that erosion of rural representation is the major factor in the disillusionment of our voters as it relates to rural Alberta.

Is there no other alternative to reducing the number of rural MLAs? The plus/minus factor in metro/urban centres can be altered to accommodate the equation. The distances between communities and their remote locations present a unique set of challenges. The MLA must set his priorities to provide individual representation. To simply amalgamate communities into one huge constituency may effectively disenfranchise many communities. Today this is already happening in the north, and I would strongly caution this committee on the rationale behind any boundary changes.

In closing, I make the following observation. The north is beginning to wonder if we are part of the Alberta advantage. Rural residents of Alberta need to maintain the number of existing MLAs in order to have fair representation for all Albertans so that we can all have the same Alberta advantage. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I don't think there's any doubt where you stand.

Mrs. Kolebaba: No. There isn't; is there, Senator?

Mr. Clegg: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. And thank you again

for giving me my correct title, Carol.

4:38

The Chair: Someone hasn't told the Prime Minister, unfortunately.

Mr. Clegg: As soon as he gets back from the Kananaskis, I'll be phoning him.

Carolyn, as I said before, this reinforces just about every brief here today. I don't think that you have to convince anybody from this area that we need fair representation. Truly that's what it's all about: fair representation. We just can't say: well, you know, this riding is going to do it. There's got to be some reason for it. You've fully outlined it along with many other briefs, and I thank you very much.

Mrs. Kolebaba: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: I want to thank you very much for your presentation, and I want to just get your reaction to this. Most of our written submissions and a good many of our oral presentations have indicated that we should be recommending that the number of MLAs be reduced. I take it you would disagree with that.

Mrs. Kolebaba: Well, I know that 83 is a magic number for the Premier of the province, but at the same time I'm saying that in the north we are developing, and in order for us to continue to extend our boundaries – we are pioneers here – we need our MLAs close. We need them to hear us. We need them to make you understand in Edmonton or the urban centres what is happening out here. Like I say, if you had driven here, you would probably understand.

The Chair: Despite the fact that we didn't drive, I think that we still understand. We're certainly getting the picture. If we don't understand this afternoon, there's something wrong with us; isn't there? From a former politician to a present politician, I think that we understand each other.

Mrs. Kolebaba: I'd like to take you on a few drives in our area, and you could see what the MLAs go through here.

Mr. Clegg: Have we got the time?

The Chair: I'm not sure that the Ethics Commissioner had better do that.

Carolyn, thank you very, very much.

Mrs. Kolebaba: Thank you.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Peter Hawryliuk, Northwestern health services.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter. We look forward to hearing your presentation from the standpoint of the health side of things.

Mr. Hawryliuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. I'd like to thank you for giving us, the Northwestern health authority region No. 17, the opportunity to voice ourselves in regard to the boundary changes. My name is Peter Hawryliuk, and I've had a number of years of experience on the health authority and the hospital board in the past and do understand the significant governance challenges that already exist as a result of our current geographical boundaries.

The challenge of delivering effective, sustainable, and accessible health services is magnified in the Northwestern health authority. The delivery in Northwestern is significantly different from elsewhere in Alberta. We have a culturally diverse, sparse, and

young population spread over a large geographic area. The region has the largest landmass, greater than the three Maritime provinces combined, and the lowest population density of other health authorities in the province. We have a sparse population spread over a large geographic area. This creates unique challenges which require a strong commitment to ensure that access is not compromised. Only 18 percent of the region's population lives in communities with more than 1,000 residents, compared to almost 92 percent for Northern Lights and just under 80 percent for the entire province of Alberta.

We as a health authority firmly believe that the electoral boundaries must not change. We believe that if electoral boundaries were changed to reflect an even larger geographic area, our access to fair and equitable representation would further be compromised. We further believe that larger electoral districts will completely diminish the rural voice in the Legislature. It is already difficult for us to have our concerns fairly addressed by the province's decision makers. We cannot and will not allow this to erode any further. We've given you an example.

Lastly, our communities and our residents enjoy excellent representation from our current Member of the Legislative Assembly. He has made a strong and demonstrable commitment to be in personal contact with all the areas and to understand the unique challenges that exist throughout his constituency. It is obvious that any increase in the constituency would jeopardize a level of representation and understanding that we believe it is our right to enjoy.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We look forward to support of the preservation of our current electoral boundaries.

I had the opportunity to be on the council as a vice-chair for a couple of years, and I strongly feel that our communication with our MLA is the best of all the health authorities, so we certainly wouldn't want to see that lost. We're a long way from Peace River here, and if we have to go even a little farther, that's too much. Our contact with government I guess to get things done is through our MLA. Our MLA has been very good. He's always brought other MLAs and ministers down with him to tour the region, and we have very good communication. We'd hate to lose that.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter. Is your whole region in Mr. Friedel's riding?

Mr. Hawryliuk: It is, yeah, all except the very, very eastern part. It's in Pearl Calahasen's.

The Chair: Okay.
Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thank you, Peter. Again you're confirming what we've heard. I just have a very simple question. How much did your MLA pay you to say twice what a good fellow he is?

Mr. Hawryliuk: Well, I was delivered by a midwife, and I was dropped.

The Chair: I think it's your turn, Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: I can't beat that.

The Chair: Peter, it must have been a soft landing, because it was an impressive presentation.

Mr. Hawryliuk: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I also want to say thank you very much for that response to my friend Glen.

The Chair: Thanks, Peter, very, very much.

Mr. Hawryliuk: Thank you.

The Chair: That may be the quote of the afternoon.

Mr. Olthof: Now the MLA for Peace River, Gary Friedel.

The Chair: Good afternoon, Gary. That's going to be quite an act to follow.

Mr. Friedel: You thought you had the only characters.

The Chair: Yes. Right.

Mr. Friedel: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. Even though we're probably getting to the end of our reports today and the end of your tour, might I say welcome to Peace River as the host MLA. I'm presuming also at this point that your attention span tends to get a little more difficult too. I've been on some of these tours, and I certainly appreciate the diligence with which I see the commission hanging in there.

I'm certain that when you see a submission from an MLA, there must be a little bit of suspicion that the member might be looking at protecting a vested interest, and I'm not going to go through any of the examples of, you know, how difficult it is to service, to represent a rural versus an urban constituency. I'm going to look at a philosophical point of view. We know that changing circumstances need an adjustment in our own attitudes and the way we govern ourselves, and that is the purpose of this commission, but I'm concerned sometimes that when changes are at hand, there's a temptation to make changes just for the sake of doing it rather than always making an improvement.

4:48

I think Alberta has a long history of being well balanced both from idealistic and realistic points of view. This has allowed us to take advantage of the various sectors. I'm talking about rural versus urban ways of life, what they contribute to the economy, and all these sorts of things. I think it's important that we protect that balance. It's a little bit like saying: don't put all your eggs in one basket. While that does sound a little overly simplistic and certainly is not the only factor that you have to consider, I think it is an excellent testament to where and why Alberta stands where it is today.

One of our primary goals is that we want to remain a diverse community. I'm not going to spend a lot of time speaking on other concerns, but I really want to emphasize that I hope that the commission does not move towards changing the current balance of representation between the urban and the rural points of view. I think also that we have to be careful when we talk urban versus rural. We're not talking towns and the smaller cities. Because of the interdependence of the towns and cities to the rural population around them, that point of view remains fairly balanced, but I think you would all agree that perhaps in Edmonton and Calgary it is not quite the same because the two centres tend to be entities unto themselves. They're very large, and if you take the metro area of Edmonton and the metro area of Calgary, they represent two-thirds of the population of the province. In the sense that they have a mix among themselves, the closeness with the rural area around them is not physically possible, even if the people wanted to represent that.

The other thing that you've probably heard many times is that you

cannot overlook the fact that the vast majority of the resources and thereby the wealth of the province come from the area outside of the two metro centres. I think you have to ensure that the levels of service that are provided to the communities that work in the centres of the resource, their access to government, and their representation in government remain somewhat intact. I think it should go without saying that if everyone shares in the profits, then perhaps the benefits and the responsibilities should be equally shared.

In my presentation I've made reference to a couple of quotes from the Supreme Court ruling. I don't think there's any doubt that the message is: don't oversimplify the definition of representation by population. We don't allow minorities in any other area of our dealings with citizens to be ignored or overpowered, and I think that it's equally important that the same rights should be afforded to the people in smaller communities, or the minority, which is rapidly becoming the rural population. I think anything less would disenfranchise those who live outside the major populated areas of Edmonton and Calgary.

I think the commission should also remember that representation by population is far from pure if we look at the federal government structure. Some preconditions to provinces joining Confederation would be the example of, say, some eastern Maritime provinces having far more than what would be afforded if you took simple representation by population. But I think we also agree that because of promises and because of the evolution of the system, it was done to ensure fairness. In my presentation and I think in a lot of what you've heard here today this is the request. It's not whether it is physically possible for one individual or several rural MLAs to get to more areas, to physically cover greater areas – you could add some clerical staff at a little bit of additional expense, and you could cover just about anything you would want – but is it fair? You know, one has to question that. What I ask is to ensure that fairness prevails as you're making your findings.

I'm not going to comment on the quotes I have in my brief from Justice Beverley McLachlin. You can read them as well as I can. The gist of it, however, and the concluding remark is that the goal of effective representation may justify somewhat lower voter population in rural areas.

The next point – and you heard it a couple of times today – is reference to the matrix that was developed in 1996. I think they did an excellent job of determining that there are ways of justifying variances in any kind of formula. No formula is ever perfect. That was mentioned by several people today. But it recognized and I think thereby justified that variances are not just acceptable but probably necessary. In no way am I suggesting that representing a constituency with a large but concentrated urban population doesn't have its challenges. I meet with many of my colleagues from Edmonton and Calgary, and I'm aware of the problems that they face. On the other hand, in spite of all of those concerns I'm going to suggest in all sincerity that the challenges they face hardly compare with some of the ones in the geographically large rural constituencies. Parts of the matrix formula I think pretty well lay that out, and you don't see any of the metro areas with the highest degree of ability to service. I think that does speak for itself.

My concluding comments are that the province of Alberta owes much of its present economic and social status to its history of a good balance between rural and urban views, and I'm saying: please keep that balance as intact as possible. The comparison between equitable treatment and equal treatment would be the same as effective representation or representation by population. They both sound very good, but if you look at the depth of the meaning of it, there is a tremendous difference. In this case it's the same as saying, as I said before, that the principle of fairness should prevail.

Finally, the goal of effective representation may justify somewhat

lower populations in the rural ridings. The Supreme Court has indicated that that is possible, and I think the goal of the commission should be as much as possible working within the confines of the Supreme Court ruling – not as much as possible; you don't have any choice in that – and looking for ways within the ruling to make sure that we have a balanced and fair distribution of points of view so that we don't go backward from where we are now.

I want to thank you for hearing us out. I guess there are a couple more presentations. Certainly I wish you well in your deliberations on what has to be a very sensitive but extremely important issue. Thank you.

4:58

The Chair: Thank you, Gary.

Mr. Graham: Thank you for a very eloquent and balanced presentation. I really appreciate it. It has struck me in our travels over the province that each constituency is in its own way unique, in my view, and I just want to know what your views are on this. The distinction between urban and rural I think is somewhat simplistic. There are grades of urban and rural, and I think it was a presenter out here that referred to your riding as almost a frontier riding, which is very different from some places – for instance, in central Alberta between Calgary and Edmonton – even though it may be a rural riding to some extent. I just wonder what your feelings are on that and where you would put your riding on that continuum.

Mr. Friedel: Well, having promised that I wasn't going to attempt to feather my own nest, the distances within the constituency – just to give you an example, for me to travel from where we sit here in Peace River, which is nearly the southern part of my constituency, would be the same as someone traveling from St. Albert to the Montana border. This is after you travel back and forth to Edmonton.

The needs of the communities. I heard someone say earlier that there are some ridings in the cities that have a number of ethnic groups and languages they have to contend with. We have the same thing. We just maybe have fewer people with the same need. In my constituency there are two dialects of German being spoken in communities where some of the older folks do not understand English. We have French communities with the same problem. We have two aboriginal languages here, you know. So the same thing applies. I'm using that as an example because obviously someone from the city made that comment assuming that it's their exclusive domain, that kind of a problem.

Is it possible for someone who can travel home after being in session, for example, or on a normal day to realize that maybe a rural MLA having meetings in Edmonton on Monday and on Wednesday can't just sort of say, "Well, I'm going to skip home on Tuesday and do work in the community"? The distance and the cost of it is prohibitive, so you end up staying away from your community for three days for maybe two one-hour meetings. I'm not sure if I'm rambling a bit there, but I'm using it as an example. Would someone who lives 15 minutes away or even, you know, on the farthest outskirts of Edmonton or in Calgary understand those kinds of problems?

I'm not complaining that I'm doing it. I chose to do it on my own, and we run repeatedly for elections, so we're not saying that we didn't go in there with our eyes open. But to make sure that there's a fairness in representation, we need to have some numbers that can express this view, make sure that that view is translated to our government counterparts, and work together so that we understand their problems, they understand ours, and keep that balance.

Mr. Graham: Thank you.

The Chair: Gary, one of the things we've toyed with – and it's only toying; we haven't gone any further than that. I'd better not say "we," but what I've toyed with and yapped about a bit is that it's likely easiest to represent constituents as an Edmonton MLA. It's likely second easiest to represent people if you're a Calgary MLA. It's primarily based on the fact that in Edmonton all the government and pretty well everything is there. In Calgary there aren't many government services that aren't available to an MLA. They help people deal with issues and so on. The third level I guess would be the Calgary/Edmonton corridor, and then I kind of said that the fourth group would be, let's say, the areas outside that area that have a centre of 10,000 or more in the constituency, where you'd have a fair mulling together of government services. The most difficult group, the fifth group, would be what for lack of a better term I've called rural/rural, where you have less than that 10,000 – and I'm not sure they manage to go 10,000, Gary – but then a massive number of local governments and other groups. Would you shoot holes in that for me?

Mr. Friedel: I didn't hear the last comment.

The Chair: I mean, does that sound reasonable, or am I missing something in that?

Mr. Friedel: I think you're absolutely dead-on. The degree of assistance that is required in the smaller and most remote communities is not always related to the fact that those people might be not as intelligent or, you know, not as capable of going out and doing things for themselves but simply that the resources to get the help and get the information aren't at hand. I won't use Edmonton or Calgary, but let's use, say, Red Deer or one of medium-sized centres . . .

The Chair: Use Didsbury. That's where I come from.

Mr. Friedel: . . . where the government service centres provide a fairly varied and fairly extensive degree of service.

You're sitting in the largest community in my riding, which has a population of slightly over 6,000. It goes down from that to about 200. In some of these communities there are no government offices. There's no school board office. There's no health region office. So if an individual is looking for some assistance, they don't have an agricultural specialist or – what could I use? – a transportation person, a government staff person that they can go in and look for help from. The nearest person and the only one they know is the MLA, so you're expected to be an expert on agriculture, education, health. You're not just the policy adviser. You become the administrative adviser as well. You can't just say: well, I'm going to give you the phone number of the guy that's in the office, and he'll look after you. We actually have to go out, do the research. Yes, we have access to them, but I'm the guy that knows the expert they want. The type of service, if I might be so bold as to say, becomes teaspoon service rather than being a generalist, so your analogy is pretty much dead-on.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Yes. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Gary. I was very impressed with your presentation, not just because you are sticking up for our area and the need to keep our representatives but also for taking a broad look at the whole province. Although we really believe in what we think, that we need fair representation, I think good-thinking people always look at the province as a whole, whether it's Edmonton or Calgary or

throughout the province. You know, I believe, Gary, you took your training under me; did you not?

Mr. Friedel: And I want to add . . .

Mr. Clegg: I've got the mike. Thanks.

The Chair: You can plead the fifth amendment. It's all right.

Mr. Clegg: I have a specific question, Gary. You do represent Fort Vermilion. When we were in Slave Lake, there was some talk, and I just want your opinion on Fort Vermilion. There's a little jog in the line there. Well, it's right beside Fort Vermilion. You go out, and then you come back. You go to the east, and then you go north and you come back. The Chief Electoral Officer, if you want to look around, will show you where it is. [interjection] Yes, he does know where it is.

There was some talk in Slave Lake that maybe that area should be extended just a little bit to take in the Tallcree band. There are a couple of bands there. What's your comment on that? Would that be reasonable?

Mr. Friedel: Well, prior to 1993 that was in the Peace River constituency, and I think it was changed to balance off the lack of numbers that existed in the Lesser Slave Lake area. The Peace River constituency has always been much closer to the provincial average simply because the only highway that goes through to the Northwest Territories comes through here, so there is depth in population. If you look at the Lesser Slave Lake and Athabasca-Wabasca ridings, there's very little in terms of population beyond halfway through the constituency. That's not the case here. At least 50 percent of this population is in the north half.

5:08

Mr. Clegg: So you would not be opposed to just extending that. I really don't know how far we'd have to extend it – maybe some member does, but I don't – to take in those specific bands, to be in one.

Mr. Friedel: It would be relatively minor. We're probably talking several hundred people, and the distance isn't all that great. Again you'd have to look at the reason why it was moved in the first place, but access might be better from this side, without wanting to look like I'm raiding anything, just as a practical observation.

Mr. Clegg: Well, Gary, representing people is what it's all about; isn't it? Although we have that jog there, if we made the jog a little better, if we can represent people better because of roads and other reasons, then we should be looking at it. That's all I'm asking the question for.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Gary, thank you very much. I appreciate you taking the time and the forthright way in which you addressed the issue. Thank you very much.

Mr. Friedel: Could I add one comment? Being under Glen's tutelage is sort of the same thing as being dropped on your head at birth.

Mr. Hawryliuk: I've been dropped twice, Gary.

The Chair: Moving right along.

Mr. Clegg: I'm losing out today for some reason.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I'm really glad to hear these good comments about my friend Glen, because I suffer down south and now I see it.

Mr. Olthof: Tom Baldwin, Northern Alberta Development Council.

The Chair: I'd like to welcome Mr. Tom Baldwin from the Northern Alberta Development Council. Tom, welcome and we look forward to your input.

Mr. Baldwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and that Baldwin is one word by the way, not bald one. Baldwin. I get that all the time.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation on behalf of the Northern Alberta Development Council. Mr. Friedel is the chair of the organization, and I might add that the submission in front of you has been adopted unanimously by the 10 members of the Northern Alberta Development Council.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's critical to underline the fact that the NADC area covers about 60 percent of the province and represents less than 10 percent of the population. It's in and around that 10 percent mark. Within that, there are 12 constituencies either whole or in part. At, if we can call it unofficially, northern caucus you can virtually have the 12 MLAs covering 60 percent of the province. So it's a huge area and a very diverse area in many ways.

I'd like to underline and highlight a few factors, and I won't belabour them, Mr. Chairman, because again you've heard a good number of them already. Certainly the balancing of Alberta's rural/urban interests has been a strength of the province, as underlined by Chairman Gary Friedel, and trying to maintain that rural/urban balance is not only to the benefit of the north, but I think that there's a benefit there across the province.

The degree of difficulty to serve. You've heard many comments in regard to the size of the northern constituencies, and when you look at that level of difficulty – things like access, the physical access to all parts of the constituency, the size, the distance between communities, the distance between the constituency and the Legislature Building, and even the natural features in the north – sometimes we get very prohibitive. As Mr. Clegg mentioned, there's that Gundy area, where you actually have to travel through the province of British Columbia to serve that part of Alberta.

There's what we've called the elected officials ratio. We've used the Peace River constituency as an example. Now, when you look at organizations that may have, if I can put it this way, an electoral or a political twist to them – and in the case of the Peace River constituency there are some 21 organizations that have 146 elected or semi-elected, appointed if you will, officials working with those organizations. Mr. Chairman, that doesn't include the recreation boards, the economic development boards, the volunteer groups, and so on and so forth, that to a degree demand that type of contact with the Member of the Legislative Assembly that represents them.

We the council would like to underline, Mr. Chairman, that sometimes when you hear the argument, "Well, today we have e-mails and fax machines and photocopiers and telephones" – and the list goes on – there's still something about that face-to-face meeting. Within many of the constituencies in the north to get that face-to-face meeting with your MLA you have to travel a good many miles and a good many hours to be able to do that. So I don't think we should ever underestimate accessibility to the MLA and how important it is.

There are a number of socioeconomic connections, and I believe that in terms of the guidelines for the commission you're looking at those and working with those, things like traditional trading patterns,

transportation links, and some of the historical social and human interactions within those areas. Two things we'd like to highlight under that title of Socioeconomic, especially when you're looking at northern boundaries and the redefinition of those boundaries, Mr. Chairman, are the transportation systems in the north. Please keep in mind that our east/west transportation connections, especially highway and to a degree air, are virtually nonexistent. We're working hard. Reeve Kolebaba has done an excellent job of outlining the importance of trying to connect Peace River and Fort McMurray, and there are those connections that still have to be made.

Also coupled with that, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that some of our northern communities still do not have all-weather access, and that in itself poses an interesting and unique challenge for an MLA to try to service those communities and vice versa, when those communities, their residents and businesses and organizations, try to get up to meet with their MLAs. So those are two key ones in the north: the fact that the east/west connections are still being developed, perhaps not as quickly as we'd like to see them but nevertheless are being developed and still have a long way to go, and the fact that some of our communities have no all-weather access.

So after discussing the situation, Mr. Chairman, the members are wanting to make three recommendations to the commission: firstly, that the current balance of rural and urban members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be maintained; secondly, that effective representation for northern Alberta be a key consideration in that the number of current northern provincial constituencies not be reduced; and lastly, thirdly, that there are grounds for several of the northern Alberta constituencies to be given consideration under the legislative provisions for the use of special consideration electoral divisions in the province of Alberta.

If I may add, Mr. Chairman, clarity is so important, whether it be clarity of the boundaries, the clarity of the level of government, or even the clarity of where to vote. I'd like to use an anecdotal story about how important that is. In an election a few years ago the former MLA for Dunvegan was doing some campaigning in the village of Berwyn, Reeve Grant's area, and went to the Autumn Lodge. An elderly gentleman met him at the door and said: "My God. How did you get here so quickly? What a wonderful man." Glen said: well, you know, it's important. He said: well, I just mailed my letter to you yesterday, sir, and you're here already. Glen, being Glen, said: well, I spoke to Canada Post, and they specially delivered it to me yesterday so that I could be here with you today. When he got to his fellow resident at Autumn Lodge, the gentleman said: I'd like to introduce you to my good friend John Turner. A true story, Mr. Chairman. I'll conclude with that. Of course, he's a lot better looking than Mr. Turner.

The Chair: Well, Tom, thank you very much. It certainly wasn't by design that you ended up being the last presenter today. You've done an excellent job of summarizing, frankly. [interjection] Oh, there are two more. Then you're the third-last presenter, and as the third-last presenter you've done a darn good job.

Mr. Baldwin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Any questions?

Mr. Clegg: I'm shy. I'm not going to ask any more questions.

Ms Mackay: I think I must have something mixed up here. You say that you cover 60 percent of the province and you have 10 percent of the population, but you're served by 12 different constituencies?

Mr. Baldwin: In whole or in part.

Ms Mackay: Do you mean 12 MLAs?

Mr. Baldwin: In whole or in part. We have a number of constituencies: West Yellowhead, Barrhead-Westlock, I believe even a little part of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Actually, the Northern Alberta Development Council boundary bisects them, so there are a number of constituencies that are partially within the NADC area.

5:18

Ms Mackay: But you would have 12 MLAs who would be able to speak in the House on your behalf.

Mr. Baldwin: That's right, but then take a look at the math also, if I may be so bold. You've got 83 MLAs: 74 government MLAs and 12 northern MLAs with some of them whole or in part. So I would suggest to you that it's quite a challenge as you try to convey those northern priorities and opportunities and such. Yes, within the NADC there would be 12 MLAs representing. When we get together with the northern MLAs – when I say we, the NADC – it's 12 MLAs around the table including the chair.

Ms Mackay: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Tom, thank you very much. We appreciate it.

Mr. Baldwin: Thank you, folks.

Mr. Olthof: Mr. Walter Sarapuk of the municipal district of Mackenzie.

The Chair: Welcome, Walter. Walter told me as we were shaking hands there that he came the furthest. Where would that be from, Walter?

Mr. Sarapuk: I live in a little place called Rocky Lane, which is 30 miles east of High Level. It's unfortunate that you folks couldn't have come up there and visited the true north, which starts at my place and goes another 200 miles north.

The Chair: Well, I did open a school in High Level in 1970.

Mr. Sarapuk: I appreciate that.

The Chair: So I have been there and a couple of times since. Okay. Walter, please.

Mr. Sarapuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and panel members. I'm not going to read my submission. It basically parallels MD 22's submission, which you have already heard. I just have a comment and maybe a suggestion.

We need more representation in the north. We have different needs in the north, and we need many strong voices in the Legislature so that when policies are set, they fit the north as well.

Maybe an example of a policy that doesn't fit quite as well in the north as it does in the south is the water resources policy. When we go to drain some farmland or build a road through some swamp, we have one heck of a time to do so. You know, it costs extra money, and really the amount of slough and swamp areas we have there – we've got lots, a lot more than we do down south.

My suggestion would be that the provincial government follow the MD electoral boundary style that places emphasis on regions as well as populations. For example, we have a hamlet in our MD that has less than 200 people and a hamlet that has 1,300 people. They each have one representative, and things work out fairly well there.

In closing, I'd just like to say that we agree with all the comments that have been made here previously, and being one of the last speakers, it's easy to say, you know, ditto.

The Chair: Well, Walter, thank you very much, and I do apologize for indicating that I didn't think we had any more presenters. I really earnestly apologize to you for that.

Mr. Sarapuk: That's not a problem.

The Chair: Mr. Clegg.

Mr. Clegg: Thanks again, Mr. Chairman. Walter, you were here when I asked Mr. Friedel the question about this jog in the boundaries there at Fort Vermilion and mentioned that we should maybe extend it a little further east to take in the Tallcree band. You're up in that area. What do you think about that?

Mr. Sarapuk: I don't really have much concern with it. The two bands work together in that area, and it's not a great population.

Mr. Clegg: I understand that, but it was brought up at Slave Lake, and that's the only reason I'm bringing it up. Somebody in Slave Lake suggested that the two bands should maybe be in either one constituency or the other. That's the only reason I bring it up. You don't see any problem?

Mr. Sarapuk: No. I think we should create another constituency there, actually.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you.

Mr. Sarapuk: No. I don't believe so.

The Chair: I think your first idea was a better idea, but it didn't make any difference.

Any other questions?

Mr. Graham: I have a question, Mr. Sarapuk. As a resident of High Level do you consider Mr. Clegg to be a southern Albertan?

Mr. Sarapuk: I told you that northern Alberta starts in High Level, in my opinion.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Walter, thank you very much. We do appreciate your making the effort. How long did it take you to get down here?

Mr. Sarapuk: About three and a half hours, not following the speed limit though. I'm a farmer.

The Chair: As one who follows the speed limit, too, I understand what you're saying. Thank you very much.

Mr. Olthof: Barb Spurgeon, the Silver Birch child and family services authority.

The Chair: I'd like to introduce to you Barb Spurgeon, from the Silver Birch child and family services authority. I think you're possibly the first representative of a child and family services authority who has made a presentation to us, so thank you very much.

Miss Spurgeon: Well, good. I'm not going to say anything that

anybody else has said. I've listened all afternoon, and they've said it very well, but I think that there are examples to emphasize. To come and do a five-minute presentation, it took me eight hours to come from High Level, sit here, and go home. You will be home in your beds long before I will tonight, so I think that that helps emphasize what distance does.

The Silver Birch authority has coterminous boundaries with the Fort Vermilion school division and the health authority and MD 23 for the most part. Within those boundaries alone is 116,000 square kilometres. That's about half of the Peace River district, I think. That gives you an idea of what the vast landmass is.

Within the north, the real north like High Level north, we've got some of the oldest communities in this province, being Fort Vermilion, and some of the newest, being Rainbow Lake. Rainbow Lake has some of the highest educated heads of household across this province as well as the highest income. We can go down to our reserves just down the street, where they have some of the lowest income, where \$6,000 is an annual income. Forty kilometres down the road we have reserves where the education level is about a grade 3.

We provide a lot of revenue for this province, but what we don't have is a lot of resources for ourselves. Gary has been absolutely wonderful in trying to meet all of the needs and understand the diversity of our region, and I think it's important that if it gets any bigger, how can anybody possibly travel to all those places and understand the diversity of the communities? Certainly I would urge you to keep the boundaries of these constituencies where they are.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: No, I'll leave the question. I think Mr. Clegg will ask the question about the Fort Vermilion area.

Mr. Clegg: Well, thanks, Barb. It's kind of like I'm scared to say anything up here anymore. I'm very pleased that you're down here. I'm pleased because I never even heard of you before, so I guess I must be central. And truly I am central Alberta. When you consider that between Barrhead and Swan Hills is the centre of the province, I guess most of us do fall into central Alberta here, but we think we're northern. Certainly you are northern. How far are you from the border yet?

Miss Spurgeon: Another 150 kilometres.

Mr. Clegg: Thank you. And thanks for coming.

Miss Spurgeon: I just want to say that to serve our Silver Birch boundaries, we have a little community called Peace Point, Alberta, and to travel from High Level means that we have to go up into the Northwest Territories, through Hay River, through Fort Smith, and back down, because there's no other access into that tiny little community.

Mr. Clegg: Is that in Gary Friedel's riding?

Miss Spurgeon: You know, I think maybe it's not; it's in Pearl Calahasen's riding. But it's an additional seven and a half hours from High Level.

5:28

The Chair: Barb, just as a matter of interest, how many children would you be – I'm not sure what the right term is – supervising or having to care for?

Miss Spurgeon: That's a difficult question to answer, I guess.

The Chair: On the average, kind of thing?

Miss Spurgeon: We probably have anywhere from 100 kids on the caseload at any time, but one of the things that we've done is that we've put in several early intervention projects. The problem with our vastness is that there are many children who need more supports than we can give. There are real child welfare concerns out there, but we are unable to meet the need up there.

The Chair: Barb, on behalf of my colleagues, thank you very much. You've shown my colleagues on the panel that you're in the last frontier – shall I say the newest frontier? – in Alberta.

Miss Spurgeon: Absolutely.

The Chair: We do appreciate very much your taking the time and coming, and educating us somewhat and emphasizing to us that we don't want changes in the constituencies in northern Alberta. Thank you very, very much.

Miss Spurgeon: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Olthof.

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

The Chair: Thank you. I want to say to the good folks who are here with us this afternoon: thank you very much. I know some people who make some speeches in Ottawa about how there's a big pipeline that comes from the west and goes there, and the pipeline that comes back is pretty small. I somehow get the sense that I'm glad you didn't tell us that today, and I'm quite sure the pipeline isn't 36 inches down and a garden hose back. I think you've given us all a lot to think about, not only the landmass but the contributions you've made and continue to make to the province. You've just added to the difficulty of our challenge. Thank you very, very much.

[The commission adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]