



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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1:02 p.m.

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chair

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Brian Evans, QC
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Robert Bouchard, Reeve, County of St. Paul No. 19
Craig Copeland, Mayor, Cold Lake
Linda Ference
Cecilia Quist, Deputy Mayor, Lac La Biche County
Sonny Rajoo, Councillor, Town of Two Hills
Don Whittaker, Councillor, County of Vermilion River

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon. We're going to start, so we'd ask if people could take their seats. First of all, thank you for taking the time to come out and share your views with us today. I know I speak for all of us when I say that we're looking forward to hearing from you.

My name is Ernie Walter, and I'm the chairman of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce you to the other members of the commission here with me today: to my far right, Dr. Keith Archer of Banff; next to him, Peter Dobbie of Vegreville; then to my left, Allyson Jeffs of Edmonton; and next to her, Brian Evans of Calgary.

Our task here is that we've been directed by the legislation to make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions based on the latest census and population information that we have. In other words, our job is to determine where to divide Alberta into 87 areas so that each Albertan receives effective representation by a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Over the next few months we will seek community input through a province-wide consultation before developing our recommendations. Through public hearings such as the one here today we want to hear what you have to say about the representation you are receiving in your community.

In carrying out this work, we have to follow the provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It says that we are to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly regarding the areas, boundaries, and names of 87 electoral divisions. You realize and recognize that this means we're mandated to propose four additional electoral divisions in Alberta, which will come into effect at the next general election. We are also reviewing the law and what the courts have said about electoral boundaries in the province of Alberta and in Canada, the work of previous commissions and committees which have studied the boundaries in Alberta, and the population information which is available to us.

A brief summary of the electoral boundaries law. First of all, 87 electoral divisions. We have a limited time to accomplish this task. We are required, after consideration of representations made at these public hearings, to submit an interim report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in February 2010 that sets out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 proposed electoral divisions and the reasons for these proposed boundaries. Following the publication of the interim report, a second round of public hearings will be held to receive input on the proposed 87 boundaries. After consideration of the input the commission must submit a final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by July 2010. Then it is up to the Legislative Assembly by resolution to approve or to approve with alterations the proposals of the commission and to introduce a bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the resolution. The law would then come into force when proclaimed, before the holding of the next general election.

One way to ensure effective representation is by developing electoral divisions with similar populations, especially where population density is similar. The law directs us to use the populations set out in the most recent census of Alberta as provided by Statistics Canada in the 2006 census, but if the commission believes there is population information that is more recent than the federal census compiled by Statistics Canada, then the commission may use this data in conjunction with the census information. Here in Lac La Biche-St. Paul we have available to us more recent population information. As of 2008 the population was listed as 30,839. This

puts us in this region at 23.8 per cent below the provincial average population of 40,466. I note that we are also required to add the population of the Indian reserves, that were not included in the census, as provided by the federal department of Indian and northern affairs.

In dividing Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions, the commission will take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate, but it must and shall take into consideration the following:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations, including those of [First Nation] reserves and Metis settlements,
- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (e) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries,
- (f) the number of municipalities and other local authorities [in any given division],
- (g) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (h) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

The population rule in this act states that a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 per cent above or below the average population of all 87 electoral divisions. Now, there's one exception to this. Up to four of the proposed electoral divisions may have a population that is as much as 50 per cent below the average population of the electoral divisions in Alberta if three of the following five criteria are met:

- (a) the area . . . exceeds 20 000 square kilometres or the total surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15 000 square kilometres;
- (b) the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of [any] proposed electoral division by the most direct highway route is more than 150 kilometres;
- (c) there is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 8000 people;
- (d) the area of the proposed electoral division contains an Indian reserve or a Metis settlement;
- (e) the proposed electoral division has a portion of its boundary coterminous with a boundary of the Province of Alberta.

It goes on to say that for these purposes the municipality of Crowsnest Pass is not a town.

1:10

This is a very general overview of the legislation, but the Alberta courts and the Supreme Court of Canada have also provided guidance. In rulings they have agreed that under the Charter the rights of Albertans include the right to vote; the right to have the political strength or value or force of the vote an elector casts not unduly diluted; the right to effective representation; and the right to have the parity of the votes of others diluted, but not unduly, in order to gain effective representation or as a matter of practical necessity. These rulings as well as the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act must guide our decisions and, ultimately, the proposals that we make to the Legislative Assembly.

Now that I've explained the law that we are to be guided by, we want to receive some very, very important input, and that's your views. We want to hear from the people. I stress to you that it's important that we hear from the people when we're looking at making electoral boundary changes. We want to ensure that we're recommending a new electoral map that will ensure fair and effective representation for all Albertans.

Again, on behalf of the commission let me welcome all of you here today. Those of you who wish can still make your views known in writing by e-mail, fax, or however.

With that background information I will now call on the staff to call the first speaker. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then five minutes for questions and answers with the commission. The commission's public meetings are being recorded by *Alberta Hansard*, and the audio recording will be posted on the commission's website. Transcripts of these proceedings will also be available. If you have registered as a presenter or choose to participate in this afternoon's meeting, we ask that you identify yourself for the record prior to starting your presentation.

Now, could we have the first presenter.

Ms Friesacher: Our first presenter is Don Whittaker.

**Don Whittaker, Councillor
County of Vermilion River**

Mr. Whittaker: Good afternoon.

The Chair: Good afternoon.

Mr. Whittaker: I'm Don Whittaker. I'm a councillor from the county of Vermilion River. You've been provided with a written submission from the county of Vermilion River. It really talks about rural Alberta in general, in my opinion. That's what I'm here to talk about. Rural Alberta is basically that area outside of the metropolitan areas along highway 2. I'm pleased that you're talking about effective representation because that's really what rural Alberta is looking for.

Sometimes we become restricted in access to our MLAs, elected representatives, by the distances – it's outlined in my presentation – that they have to travel from one end of the constituency. Even this constituency itself from one end to the other is just about a three-hour drive. The county of Vermilion River is not quite the same size, but it's still a significant drive. Of course, the MLA there serves several municipalities, as you're well aware.

Rural Alberta has really been the fuel in the engine that's driven the Alberta economy for a number of years. Certainly, Alberta, being a very rural presence in its beginning, that has continued. The rural parts of the province have been pretty good stewards of the land and the economy and the whole social network. As we've seen over the last number of years with the reviews of the electoral boundaries, we have lost the rural voice in the Legislature.

I'm sure you've driven through this area as you drive out to this country, and you see a lot of diversity. I have the privilege of chairing a couple of major groups within eastern Alberta. One is a 911 call centre, basically highway 16 south down to the special areas, which has 27 members serving 28 municipalities. The other one I'm chair of is REDA, Northeast Alberta Information Hub, and in this area north of highway 16 we have 34 members, very diverse and intense economic growth and development. There are 10 First Nations reserves, which are not all members of Hub but certainly have a very significant presence, as well as four Métis settlements, and with the variety of economic growth of forestry, heavy oil, gas exploration, plus agriculture and tourism, there's a lot of activity and a lot of pressure on the lands.

You're probably wondering why I'm going here, but as we experience this economic activity in this part of the province, that creates conflicts and strained relationships with landowners and economic growth and those types of things. It usually ends up resulting in an increased workload for the MLA, dealing with complaints and pointing them to the right authorities and agencies within government. That workload is significant because in our case, in the county of Vermilion River, where we have 9,000 oil

wells, we have traffic, we have dust, and we have good people who have jobs in that industry, too, so it comes to be a balance. Basically, at the end of the day that all falls back onto the number of times that an MLA is approached, and certainly the travel times in a constituency like Lac La Biche-St. Paul or Vermilion-Lloydminster are significant.

Effective representation is basically the ability, in my mind, for the MLA to be able to serve and to listen and to have the time to travel and to meet face to face with his constituents or her constituents to understand the issues and the nature of what's happening there and to represent those concerns in the Legislature. As the rural voice declines as far as the number of MLAs actually serving rural Alberta, they have a much greater role in presenting a message to the rest of their caucus or to the government of Alberta on the issues that really face Alberta and the issues that are really driving the economy of Alberta.

I have another point, and I'm pleased that you mentioned the census. Certainly, we have new census data in the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency that was different from the Stats Canada census, and it shows a significant increase.

I basically conclude that we're in full agreement and recognize the difficult task you have to find a balance to increase the number of constituencies that are in the province but also to recognize the different needs and to move those boundaries around. You know, geographic size, distance to the Legislative Assembly, the number of local governments and community organizations, distance to major centres, local political culture and history, traditional transportation and trading patterns, and communities of interest are all important. You've listed those, and I'm pleased that you're going to be able to look at that and consider them. Again, something that's very high as a municipal councillor is the fact that we have continuity of our municipal boundaries with the electoral boundaries. It makes it very tough to split a municipality where maybe it doesn't need to be.

1:20

Again, just to conclude, I think the ultimate goal of this exercise should be to represent people, not the numbers, and to recognize also that people have different needs and priorities and a right to effective representation regardless of where in the province that they live.

I submit to you the written submission there and thank you for this opportunity to present this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you.

Brian, do you have any questions?

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman, and thanks very much, Mr. Whittaker. Great presentation. In terms of the existing electoral boundary for this constituency, do you have any comments about that, whether it is appropriate to stay with that electoral division, whether there are any obvious areas that could be added that wouldn't create other, rippling issues for constituencies around this constituency? Any comments on that?

Mr. Whittaker: Well, I'm really not in a position. There are members present today that represent this particular constituency more aptly than I do. I'm in the constituency directly south of them for a portion of the way. We do have an area where in some areas the North Saskatchewan River becomes the boundary that separates us and other places where there's sort of an interruption by First Nations and Métis. We have a smaller community that is in the county of Vermilion River, and I know it was considered last time to shift it north, yet for all their services those people in particular

travel for the most part to the south, for schools and that type of thing. I'm speaking specifically of the area west of Onion Lake, Tullibee Lake area, that area there.

As far as the rest of the county of Vermilion River, there's representation here from the county of Minburn. We have some continuity there. Two Hills is here as well, I think, and we have some good continuity there as well. Wainwright is on our south side. So the boundaries that exist have been working well for us. Our population numbers grow. I'm not exactly sure where we are as far as total population for the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, but the boundaries seem to be working for us.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Keith, do you have any?

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Whittaker, for your presentation. One of the issues that you mentioned was the importance of the overlap between current municipal boundaries and the boundaries for electoral divisions. At the moment is there a direct overlap between those two boundaries or not?

Mr. Whittaker: For the most part the county of Vermilion River is totally within the boundaries. There are portions of other municipalities that are in the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, but there are other municipalities that are split between other constituencies. I think Minburn may be one of them, Two Hills as well.

Dr. Archer: Thanks. The population that we're working with, you were mentioning that there's some census data that may be more recent. Maybe Municipal Affairs already has that. I'm not sure.

Mr. Whittaker: They do, yeah.

Dr. Archer: The census data that we're working with shows that with the Vermilion constituency it seems to be right on that borderline of about 25 per cent below the electoral quotient for the province as a whole. You're also suggesting that there are some additional difficulties in representing rural constituencies. Certainly, one could make an argument – and I suspect we'll be hearing this in some parts of the province – that a region or an area should be a recipient of the special consideration for constituencies that provides for the possibility of population even more than 25 per cent below. Is it your sense that that's a relevant consideration within Vermilion?

Mr. Whittaker: I would hope it would be a consideration, yes. I realize that we're pretty close to that. I'm not sure of our exact numbers. Again, on the eastern side of the province we have a provincial boundary which we deal with. All along the fourth meridian we share, in places, health services and then have to serve two provinces, and that actually provides a significant workload for MLAs and municipalities. I mean, as neighbouring municipalities we work back and forth, but it's different when you work at a provincial level. The MLAs have to work minister to minister or MLA to MLA and develop teamwork. It takes a lot of extra time, in lots of cases delivering different levels of services, in Lloydminster in particular, that the rest of the population wouldn't receive. So in health care it's a real issue. Education is another issue.

Dr. Archer: Thank you.

The Chair: Just for the record Vermilion-Lloydminster is at 35,742. It's 11.7 under the average.

Thank you very, very much. That was excellent. I really appreciate the time and effort that went into this brief, number one, and number two, your submissions here were very informative. Thank you very much.

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you for having me.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Geraldine Biduluk.

Geraldine Biduluk
Private Citizen

Ms Biduluk: Good afternoon. My name is Geraldine Biduluk, and I come before you as a concerned rural Albertan. Welcome to St. Paul, and thank you for taking the time to hear input from northeastern Alberta as you review Alberta's electoral boundaries.

The past and current balance of urban and rural MLAs has worked well for the benefit of all Albertans. Maintaining this rural-urban balance in Alberta's Legislature is critical when determining provincial electoral boundaries.

Welcome to Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Our constituency has four First Nations, two Métis settlements. The total population on these six settlements is near 6,400. These communities have unique challenges and require support and guidance. The rest of our general population is 30,839, all neatly tied up in an area of nearly 13,000 square kilometres.

Lac La Biche-St. Paul brings an interesting and challenging mix of scenarios. We are a very diverse constituency – oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, small business – with a wealth of multinationalities: the White Russian community at Plamondon, the Lebanese at Lac La Biche, the Mexican Mennonites at Two Hills, the French in St. Paul, First Nations and Métis throughout the constituency. Then mix in the rest of us, and you have one culturally diverse constituency. I'm sure that Hon. Ray Danyluk has been told in at least a dozen native tongues where to go and how to get there really fast. Each of these unique nationalities brings their own special set of challenges and needs.

Our constituency is also home to two colleges, Portage College and Blue Quills First Nations College; three provincial parks, being Lakeland provincial park, Garner Lake provincial park, and Whitney Lakes provincial park; and four school boards: St. Paul education regional division, East Central Francophone, Northern Lights, and Aspen View. Lac La Biche-St. Paul includes three counties: the county of Lac La Biche, the county of St. Paul, the county of Two Hills. It also includes approximately half of the county of Smoky Lake. We encompass 23 villages and summer villages. Diverse seems almost inadequate in describing our part of the world.

1:30

Politics is about representation, not just equal representation but equitable representation. Hon. Ray Danyluk advocates tirelessly and travels close to five hours from the northern tip of our constituency to the southern tip. Eliminating this constituency by dividing it up and making the neighbouring constituencies bigger would mean constituents would have to travel even further to see their MLA. Urban MLAs may see 50 constituents in a 15-minute walk down the street. Our rural MLA on a long road trip may see five.

Our constituency saw considerable changes during the last boundary review. In short, we got a whole lot bigger. Stability is critical to our constituents. For active individuals, knowing where to go to see their MLA is not an issue. For others, who perhaps just need a little help, changes to the boundaries often pose a real problem. They simply don't know where to go. Enter stability and the need to keep existing boundaries in place. During these trying times stability is even more critical.

There are a number of urban constituencies in Edmonton and Calgary below the benchmark of plus or minus 25 per cent. I would like to gently suggest these be looked at and corrected first. I respectfully ask this commission to consider Lac La Biche-St. Paul one of the special consideration electoral divisions in accordance with the guidelines. There are five, of which three must be met, and we're there.

The guidelines. Number 1, "There is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 8000 people." Lac La Biche-St. Paul has no towns with a population over 8,000 people. Number 2, "The proposed electoral division contains an Indian reserve or a Metis settlement." Lac La Biche-St. Paul has four First Nations and two Métis settlements. Number 3, "The proposed electoral division has a portion of its boundary coterminous" – I practised that word all night in my sleep – "with a boundary of the Province of Alberta." The northeastern side of our constituency, the air weapons range, borders on Saskatchewan.

As you can see, we not only meet the three; we are close to meeting all five. Criteria 4 and 5: "The total surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15 000 square kilometres, [and] the distance from the Legislature . . . in Edmonton to the nearest boundary . . . is more than 150 kilometres." Our constituency is nearly 13,000 square kilometres in size, and the distance from the Leg. to our boundary is roughly 120 kilometres although our MLA must travel over 200 kilometres from the Leg. to his home one way.

When you consider the big picture in Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the diversity, the multinationalities, the size, the distance from Edmonton, and simply crossing from north to south, providing equitable representation is not for the faint of heart. It is what the constituents demand and deserve. Rural Alberta's challenges, be it agriculture, oil and gas, forestry, small business, social problems, education, or health care, all have an effect on how strong Alberta as a province will continue to be. Rural Alberta is the backbone of this province.

In closing, I ask this commission to name Lac La Biche-St. Paul one of their four special consideration electoral divisions. In doing this, you give Lac La Biche-St. Paul the stability it deserves. In addition, you are also preserving a strong rural voice for all Alberta. Rural and urban, one Alberta: both must remain strong.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Jeffs: I thank you very much for that presentation and for your suggestion. I'm wondering. You talked about the different counties and communities that are within the constituency as it exists. Are there any problems with the current boundaries with respect to those other overlapping counties and other communities that should be adjusted, in your view, at all at this point?

Ms Biduluk: Thank you for the question. I'm hesitant to suggest any changes to our constituency simply because I believe that stability is so, so critical. If we hadn't seen the changes that we did in the last boundary review, it might be a different scenario, but because we did – and I know the challenges that some of the constituents have and had when they joined our constituency. It is a huge constituency. As I said, there's an awful lot here. We're very, very diverse. Hon. Ray Danyluk manages to do it; it is not easy. I believe that sustainability and leaving it as we are is really the best for all constituents in Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: I can call you Geraldine because we know each other.

Ms Biduluk: Yes, you can.

Mr. Dobbie: The quick math using the electoral quotient we have of 40,466 would seem to have this constituency almost at 25 per cent below the average but not quite. My quick math is 30,347. If the 30,839 number is correct, it puts you slightly above the 25 per cent. Would you change your request to have special status knowing that, or is there something else associated with the designation of special status or one of the special regions important to you that we should hear about?

Ms Biduluk: Granting us one of the four special electoral boundaries is bringing in stability, I guess, for our constituents and for northeastern Alberta. Because we meet three of the criteria – you know, there are five, and there are three that I see that we meet, and we're very close to meeting the other two – for the sake of stability, that is why I would ask for us to be granted one of the four special electoral boundaries.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, I was just going to follow up on Peter's question as well, Geraldine. I think our sense is that because the constituency size already is within the plus or minus 25 per cent, if there were no change to the constituency boundaries, there wouldn't actually be a need to have the designation of a special constituency. It would just fall within the standard allocation. I think that's what prompted the question: is there something else about having the special designation that's important? One could go ahead with the proposal for no change without needing to resort to it.

Ms Biduluk: I apologize, Peter. I am so passionate about protecting our constituency. You're right. I understand. If we're not looking at changing these boundaries, if we're not taking away anything and we're not adding anything, I have no problems. If we're going to start taking away or adding, then I reiterate that I'd like us to have the special status.

Dr. Archer: If I could just throw out a hypothetical.

Ms Biduluk: Sure.

Dr. Archer: If the commission rejected that view for whatever reason and said, "It makes sense to add some population to this constituency," is there a direction, from your perspective, that makes more sense than another? You know, should the southeast corner of the constituency be expanded? Does it make more sense to go west? Do you have any advice in that regard?

1:40

Ms Biduluk: With all due respect, do you know Hon. Ray Danyluk? Do you know how big he is? Do you know what he would do to me if I made his constituency bigger?

Dr. Archer: I don't want to put you in a tough spot.

Ms Biduluk: If we were going to go anywhere, just off the top of my head I would probably say: go west; move over into the county of Smoky Lake; perhaps take a little bit more of that county. What probably would make more sense is to go that way. But with all due respect, I would like to tell Ray Danyluk that you asked me that question. I'd appreciate that.

The Chair: Unfortunately, it's on the record.
Keith, anything further?

Dr. Archer: No, nothing further. Thanks.

Mr. Evans: I'm going to try to make your life easier after that last one. Thank you for your presentation.

One of the factors that we have to consider if a constituency is close to that 25 per cent is what the likelihood is of a growth improvement, if you will, over the duration of the time that those electoral boundaries will be in force. You know, you quite rightly identified that this is a very diverse constituency in terms of its economic base: oil and gas and forestry and agriculture and tourism. Would you like to make any comments – I'm sure that the hon. Mr. Danyluk wouldn't have any problems with you speaking about this – about any of those economic generators that we as a commission might take into account as being a focal point for logical population expansion and improvement and growth in the next eight to 10 years?

Ms Biduluk: Thank you for your question. That's very interesting. One thing about this constituency is that you can start in the north, and when you're travelling across it, you have to set your mind. You'll start in the north, and you're dealing with forestry. You may come 50 miles down the road, and you have to switch your mind to agriculture, another 50 miles to oil and gas, another 50 miles to tourism, small business. It's so diverse that as you're moving across this constituency, you have to move to – I don't want to say to a different issue – a different plan because we are so diverse. All are so critical to this area. Be it tourism, be it oil and gas, they are all equally valuable. It's just really, really critical that we look at keeping our constituency as it is and focusing on sustainability, whether it is with aiding tourism or aiding our farmers or small business.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was a great presentation, and we'll certainly take it to heart.

Ms Biduluk: You're welcome. Thank you. Good luck.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Cecilia Quist.

**Cecilia Quist, Deputy Mayor
Lac La Biche County**

Mrs. Quist: Hon. Justice Ernest Walter and members of the commission, I would like to welcome you to the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. I'm the deputy mayor of Lac La Biche county.

At the Lac La Biche county regular meeting on September 8 of 2009 the Lac La Biche county council carried a unanimous resolution to maintain the current constituency boundaries for the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. We feel that there has been effective representation provided to this area.

We are an area which is blessed with a mixture of geographic and demographic features. We have both rural and urban interests within Lac La Biche county which are similar in nature to those of the remainder of the constituency. It has been repeatedly demonstrated, we feel, that our interests have been properly represented but also understood and appreciated by our MLA. We believe that this is in part because of the many common features that are shared within the

constituency; that is, small urban centres, large tracts of agricultural land, large natural areas, and an abundance of lakes and environmentally significant areas.

I just wanted to mention that within Lac La Biche county we have the Lakeland provincial park. Lakeland provincial park is considered the jewel of the crown. It's a significant international and national site. In 1920 we were given a birding designation for Canada. That particular park is adjacent to the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, and we believe we are stewards of that park. We've been given that, and we take that responsibility seriously. We believe that having that Cold Lake Air Weapons Range adjacent to us is an important part of our Lac La Biche county.

Under the lower Athabasca regional plan there are three areas that they're looking at: social, environmental, and economic. We do gain economically from having the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, but much more than that is the environmental stewardship of that Lakeland provincial park, which we hold dear. Lac La Biche county continues to support responsible natural resource development in this area. This provides future development of the petroleum and forestry industries. We believe it is important to maintain a constituency area which can be effectively represented by someone familiar with and sensitive to the important balancing act that needs to continue to be performed in promoting continued development and growth of this area while preserving the environmental integrity of it.

SAGD, or in situ development, will continue to attract people to the area. This will, in turn, attract further commercial development and spinoff industrial development. Because of the strong growth it would not be advisable, we believe, to increase the constituency area. We are challenged by a large geographic area now served by the MLA, and although we feel that he has done an excellent job of serving all of his constituents, we believe that further growth in this area will mean that it would not be appropriate to expand the boundaries further as at this point it will become difficult and perhaps impossible for the MLA to provide an appropriate level of service to the constituency.

I just wanted to point out one thing for you. The government of Alberta, in looking at the lower Athabasca regional plan – I'm on the regional advisory council – gives population growths for 2003 and 2007, and when you're looking at Lac La Biche county, between 2003 and 2007 it increased 13.2 per cent. That is an increase that is larger than the town of Bonnyville, the MD of Bonnyville, and the city of Cold Lake if you looked at them separated out, so there is significant growth there.

Now, when we think of that growth, we must also consider the shadow population that's there during the winter months. We see quite an increase in population, and that's not always counted into our numbers. I just wanted to make that point clear because as we have that vast increase in in situ development going on in that area, we get all kinds of workers through the winter months, which stresses our waste management, our landfills, our water, our traffic considerations; all of those are a part of that. I just wanted to comment on that.

We further do not favour shifting the boundaries in some manner as we do feel that the communities within the existing constituency boundaries share many common interests and philosophies. I think one of the great comments made by the previous speaker, a citizen of this constituency, is that we do share quite a unique blend of peoples and people groups. We do have four First Nation groups; we have two Métis settlements. So that MLA must be able to represent those views effectively as well because they are within his constituency, and he does that well.

1:50

We also have unique communities like our French community of Plamondon, which celebrated the centennial in 2008, and of course our French community right here in St. Paul, that celebrated their centennial in 2009. Both the communities of Lac La Biche and St. Paul have within them a wonderful and diverse mix of heritage. Here, again, we believe that the MLA has demonstrated great understanding and appreciation of the diversity of his constituents, and we believe that there is great value in continuing to group these communities together within the same constituency.

Since the last commission within Lac La Biche county we've had a number of changes that I just wanted to point out. In 2002 the village of Plamondon had a dissolution and dissolved into Lakeland county. Again, in 2007 the town of Lac La Biche and Lakeland county amalgamated into one municipality. So we've had quite a number of challenges within our municipality to, I guess, administratively see all these changes occur, and the one stabilizing force in all of this has been our MLA through this time, which has been a tremendous benefit to our whole area.

Although in recent decades there has been a move towards the urbanization of the population in Alberta, this trend has not been uniform throughout the province. In fact, as noted, this area continues to grow and develop. The growth not only represents the challenge of ensuring that the constituency area does not become overpopulated in future years, but it also represents the challenge that this growth and change itself present to us. The needs are many and will continue to be in years to come. There will be many more infrastructure-related needs which will have to be addressed and reviewed by the sitting MLA than there would be in more populated constituencies in established, status quo communities.

Rural representation, of course, presents physical geographic challenges at the best of times. For this reason, effective representation has meant that there have been constituencies established in larger geographic areas with smaller than average populations. Considering the future growth that will continue to happen within this constituency, we believe it would be in the best interest to continue to support the existing boundaries.

In closing, Lac La Biche county is very pleased with the current constituency structure and would encourage the review commission to consider the effective representation that has been realized in this area as well as the anticipated growth as reasons to maintain the current boundaries in Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much for your presentation. Just a couple of points that I was wondering if you have some additional information on. You talked about the growth between 2003 and 2007, and I'm wondering if there are any projections looking outward for what that trend might look like in the near future and also if you have any indications or estimate as to how large the shadow population is that you mentioned.

Mrs. Quist: Thank you. What I'd just like to say is that Lac La Biche county has taken on a project of building a multiplex. As a result of that, what we had done was a study by Nichols Applied to look at population growth projections, and there is definitely, from their projections, steady growth within Lac La Biche county that will be realized because of the activity of the in situ development.

Now, your other question, around shadow population. We've never actually done any statistics on shadow population, but I have had an opportunity to speak with the mayor of Wood Buffalo,

Melissa Blake. What she said is that they've kind of themselves done, like, a shadow population to see what it's like for them, and they're estimating about 30,000 in their area. Now, that's a large municipality, Wood Buffalo, but that's what they were estimating, that about 30,000 are shadow. We really see it for sure in the winter months, when we have the increased activity that's going on with the wells and so on.

Thank you.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your presentation. Just to follow up on that shadow population, it's a difficult issue for the commission to deal with because to get our average for the 87 constituencies, we don't take into account shadow population. We recognize, on the other hand, that municipal grants, per capita grants, can give municipalities and municipal areas a benefit. So the real question for us to answer – and maybe you can make some comments on this – is: does that ability to access municipal per capita grants solve the problem of the shadow population, or are you recommending that we somehow take shadow population into account in determining what the size of the constituencies should be? Again, we're required to be within 25 per cent of the resident population, you know, the average.

Mrs. Quist: Thanks for your question. You know, obviously, we don't have any hard numbers on that. You have to, when you're making your decision, look at sort of hard fact numbers. For sure, just understanding that the impacts are certainly there at the municipal level. I mean, when you look at our hospitals – they end up with having injuries, work-related injuries on the site, and they come in, and they're accessing that service – and the extra waste for landfill, I think it's more of the government of Alberta looking at that in terms of if they're going to do funding formulas for our areas which have that in, they have to really start to look at that because it impacts how we are not always able to provide the service because of that increase. I'm not sure how you would address that.

I know that one of the other comments that was made earlier as we were starting the day is that you haven't taken into consideration in your population count the First Nation communities. I didn't know any of the stats on that, but the speaker prior to me said that there were about 6,400 within Saddle Lake, Goodfish Lake, Heart Lake, and Beaver Lake. I think those numbers should certainly be taken into account because we do serve those people.

Mr. Evans: Right. Thank you.

Mrs. Quist: Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Deputy Mayor Quist, do you have any data that would tell us how often, for example, your county is meeting formally with the MLA? Is there a regular monthly meeting? I don't need that answer today, but if you have that kind of data in terms of the amount of contact. We've heard anecdotally from some MLAs about the amount of contact they have with different municipalities and other municipal MLAs about the contact they have with organizations within their constituency. If there's any data in terms of it's 87 meetings or it's eight meetings, that might be helpful to have if you can get it.

Mrs. Quist: Okay. Well, I know that as far as access occurring with Mayor Kirylchuk, there's regular phone contact. I do know that.

Physical contact with Minister Danyluk: he has made himself available whenever we've invited him to our council. He has definitely made himself available for his constituents. When we're at conferences, he's made himself available there for us. I sit on the Northern Lights library system board, and this evening he will be available for the constituents at our evening gathering. He's very much a part of his constituency and very much available, you know, whenever we've contacted him.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you for a very excellent presentation. We really appreciate it.

Mrs. Quist: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Linda Ference.

Linda Ference
Private Citizen

Ms Ference: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, members of the boundary commission. My name is Linda Ference. I'm a long-time resident of the St. Paul area. I'm coming with a little different angle on this commission. I've been the returning officer for Elections Alberta since 1989. Six elections and three boundary commissions I've been through, so I have gone to the – I don't know if it's work – effort of finding some statistics.

In 1989 in March we had a small geographic area: the county of St. Paul and a portion of the county of Smoky Lake, three First Nations reserves. We had 10,437 names on our voters list and a voter turnout at that election of 61.1 per cent.

In June of 1993 the boundaries were enlarged to now include Lac La Biche, the county of St. Paul, county of Smoky Lake, plus five First Nation reserves and two Métis colonies. We had 16,011 names on the voters list, and a voter turnout of 62.24 per cent.

2:00

In March of '97 the boundaries remained the same, but our names on the voters list went down. I'm not sure why, if it was poor enumeration or what happened, but it was down to 14,448, and our voter turnout was 61.6 per cent.

In March of 2001 the boundaries remained pretty much the same. The names on the voters list increased to 15,641, and our voter turnout was 56.9 per cent.

In November of 2004 the boundaries enlarged again to now include the county of St. Paul, the county of Two Hills, Lac La Biche, a portion of the county of Smoky Lake, four First Nation reserves, and two Métis colonies. The names on our voters list went to 18,451, and the voter turnout was 49.6 per cent.

In March of 2008 the boundaries again were the same. The names on our voters list increased to 19,019, and our voter turnout was 48.5 per cent.

You probably wonder where I'm going with all of this. Politics is a strange game. We elect an MLA to represent us, but then we increase the size of the constituency to make it next to impossible to represent his people. Rural Albertans, farmers like I am, are a unique breed of people. We get to know our neighbours, we share work with them, we socialize with them, and we look after each other. In order to be an effective MLA in rural Alberta, the MLA also needs to know their constituents and to be a presence in the area. When large distances prevent that, people become lethargic, and it shows up as lack of interest in the electoral process.

When considering our boundaries, I urge you to consider the demographics of our area, not just the plus/minus 25 per cent of the

provincial average for the constituency. We need to come up – and I don't know how this is going to happen; I'm not an Einstein – with a formula that includes the square mileage plus the population, not just the population.

I've always maintained – and I see Lori is back there from the Elections Alberta office – that if we could find something that works in rural Alberta, it'll be a walk in the park in the city. The problems we have incurred – the elections don't work in rural Alberta because they're designed to work in the city. It just doesn't work when you've got a long distance between polls. I'm an employee of our local UFA store here in town. We have a sign that says: if you ate today, thank a farmer. I think the farmers of Alberta are indeed our roots and should be treated as such.

Just for your records, from Heart Lake, which is the farthest north part of our constituency, to Heinsburg consists of approximately four and a half hours of travelling time. That would be like an Edmonton MLA representing Calgary, and that doesn't seem right, does it?

Thank you for hearing me out.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you for your presentation. I'm hearing a strong message of holding the current boundaries from the other speakers, and you've given us a bit of a history. Are the current boundaries workable, do you think?

Ms Ference: Personally, I liked the first set of boundaries because we knew the MLA and he knew everybody and, like I said, we had a good turnout of voters, everything. I know we can't go back to that – I'm not that naive – but I wouldn't want them any larger. As a returning officer it is a nightmare to try – we have advance polls; we have to get ballots from up north to Heinsburg. You know, people can vote anywhere in the constituency during the advance poll period, and we have to let the individual polling people know: you gotta come to our office the day after. Usually it's the Saturday that it closes, and Monday is the election, so we've got Sunday to get all this information to 50 or 60 different polls, and it's not funny. Any larger would just make it worse. That's purely selfish on my part, but I'm sure Mr. Danyluk would agree that the size doesn't need to get any bigger.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

Mr. Evans: This presentation from Ms Ference is very clear, Mr. Chairman. I don't think I have any questions.

Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Well, more of a comment. This is the first time, though, that we've heard the suggestion that in addition to the challenges posed to the MLAs with geography, the ability to vote and the ability to manage the election are affected. That's very helpful to hear that. Have you provided any written information to the commission or to the website?

Ms Ference: No. If I wouldn't have had today off, I probably wouldn't have been able to come here either. It was my day off, so I'm spending it with you guys.

The Chair: Would you be able to give us a short written submission?

Ms Ference: As to what? The differences in the distances?

The Chair: Just about what your thoughts are.

Ms Ference: You can have what I've got here if you want it. I don't care.

Mr. Dobbie: Even a written comment on your experience of the challenges of administering an election in a large constituency. This is not something that I had read in any of the background material in previous commissions. We're building either a formal or an informal matrix as to how we make the best decision, and this is, I think, a useful point that would even carry more weight if we got it in writing from someone who has been in your position.

Ms Ference: Okay. If there is any need to expand it, the only place that I can think where we would – and that's just to benefit the people that live here – is just north of town. We have an area called St. Vincent. It's part of the Bonnyville constituency, and we have trouble with them every election because they have to vote in the Bonnyville area. They come to St. Paul for everything. It's not, like, a huge area. It wouldn't give me 10,000 people extra or anything like that, but it would make life simpler for them and for us.

The Chair: Okay.
Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks, Ms Ference. Maybe it's more of an observation than a question, but I would invite you to comment on it as well. You were reviewing the history of constituency sizes or constituency population in this area from the '80s to the present and then compared that to voter turnout. The implication that one could draw from that is that as constituency sizes increase, voter turnout decreases. I guess I would make the observation that the voter turnout in this constituency was substantially ahead of voter turnout in Alberta as a whole in the last provincial election, where voter turnout, I think, was about 42 per cent compared to 48 per cent here.

While it's understandable that for reasons of continuity and challenges of representational effectiveness to want to preserve the constituency at its current size, nonetheless, the requirements for us are to work within constituencies of plus or minus 25 per cent, and this one is really, really close to that cut-off point at the moment.

Ms Ference: We're over 19 or 20 per cent. Is that where we are, I think? That's what the book that I had said. You might have a more up-to-date one.

You have taken into account that that's just population. Yeah. That's not voter turnout. The First Nations people don't participate. I have constituencies that have a hundred per cent turnout because there are only four people that voted, and they were sworn in on polling day. But that doesn't have anything to do with the 25 per cent.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. I think that for us the challenge will be to make a direct linkage between the size of a constituency and voter turnout because the legislation that created the commission tells us we need to create 87 constituencies. That generates a certain average constituency size, and there's really no way of getting around that. So the specific linkage between constituency population and voter turnout within this riding is probably not a compelling reason, it seems to me, for the preservation of the constituency in its current configuration.

The Chair: But certainly something we will take into account.

Ms Ference: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Craig Copeland.

The Chair: Go ahead.

**Craig Copeland, Mayor
City of Cold Lake**

Mr. Copeland: All right. Welcome to St. Paul. For those that have never been to Cold Lake, we're another hour and a bit down the highway depending on how fast you travel. It's nice to see Tim Hortons in St. Paul, though, for those that travel to Edmonton. Welcome here today. In the city of Cold Lake I've been the mayor for the first term and then on council prior to that. I've lived in Cold Lake for over 25 years. Originally I'm from the Toronto area. I spent a couple of years in this St. Paul area in the '80s.

2:10

This is our only opportunity to present. The commission is not coming up into our area, but basically our council looked at this Tuesday night from a totally different perspective, hearing the submissions today. So I'd like to sort of, if I can, just read through the presentation. We had a council of the whole where we supported the document that you're going to be reading.

The city of Cold Lake resides in the Cold Lake-Bonnyville constituency. Our current electoral boundary is a long-standing riding with a good mix of industry, with air force and the oil sands as the anchor of the region, and a strong First Nation and Métis community. The Cold Lake oil sands is the third-largest oil reserve in Canada, producing about 300,000 barrels a day of oil.

The following summarizes the challenges with the current electoral boundaries that we find from the city of Cold Lake perspective: the boundary does not follow a natural watercourse; the Cold Lake First Nations traditional lands, which are on the air weapons range, are located in another electoral boundary, Lac La Biche-St. Paul; 4 Wing, the Cold Lake air force base, which is located within the city of Cold Lake, works primarily in the air weapons range north of the city, which is located, as mentioned, in Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

For those that have never been up there, it's the largest fighter base. The fellas and girls take off the strip, and they're fully engaged as soon as they come off the runway, a very unique situation not commonly found in the world. They go up to the air weapons range and do their air-to-air combat and drop all sorts of nice stuff onto the landscape. At the same time, there is a heavy oil and gas exploration on the bombing range with EnCana and CNRL working on the range. So it's very unique up there, and amazing wildlife as nobody hunts or fishes up there other than Cold Lake First Nations and other native bands.

The province has a lack of lakes, so the unique Lakeland area is split into two ridings. The oil industry that operates on the air weapons range needs to work with two different MLAs. In my job as mayor I'm fully engaged with the oil companies, and this is a common thing that you see, where they have to work between two MLAs. The oil industry is not very politically active, in a sense, but they are very community minded. It does cause them trouble to work with two MLAs and just a duplication of their effort, really.

What we'd like to propose are a couple of options for the commission to look at. We didn't dig into the population, so I'll save that question. I can throw it out in the air and bat it, but I'm sure there are professionals that can do this for us.

The two options that we want to be considered. First off is to move the air weapons range into the Bonnyville-Cold Lake electoral

boundary. This adjustment would put the Cold Lake First Nations traditional lands and the 4 Wing Cold Lake lands for the base under one constituency, so the oil industry on the air weapons range will then be working with the MLA that represents where their workers live. There's only one road up into the range. It's on the southern boundary of that bombing range. For those that know the area, the road is north of La Corey, which is a four-way stop north of Bonnyville, and from there the road travels up. It has one entry controlled by the DND. To gain access onto the range, you have to have courses and stuff, and they have to understand where you're actually going to be working on the range. There's one road in and one road out, and it's a controlled access.

The second option is more of a seeing it from the clouds, something that Cold Lake likes to do. Whether or not the province agrees with it, we want, based on sort of the direction of the commission in a sense, to realign the boundaries based on natural watercourses and environmental and industrial similarities. What we're proposing is – I'll just talk about boundary 1, which would be called the Lakeland region. I'm going to just sort of in that paragraph describe the boundary. I have a map for you that I'm going to leave. Our GIS guy did it for me as best he could, so we have to take it with a grain of salt. The southern boundary of the new riding would be the Beaver River from the Saskatchewan border to the east. That would be the east boundary. Then travel west along the Beaver River, and we would include the Cold Lake Indian Reserve No. 149. That's the main settlement.

I know we're not supposed to, you know, count the numbers, but they are a significant player. It's funny that we're talking about not counting the population, yet your MLAs spend a tremendous amount of energy on the reserves and the Métis settlements. It's a huge, huge demand.

The Chair: Just for the record, we do take those population numbers into account in arriving at these numbers. The Canada census counts them in a different way.

Mr. Copeland: Okay. Sorry. I thought you were saying that they weren't counted.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Copeland: Okay.

Anyway, they are high energy for the MLA. The question that we really had as a council is that we weren't really aware of where the Elizabeth Métis settlement would figure into the boundary ridings, where they'd go to for their services. It's not included in this Lakeland region, but we do want to raise a red flag that we're concerned that we might have missed the Elizabeth settlement.

As the river travels to the west along, you know, the Beaver River, it would then meet highway 36, and this would be the westerly boundary of the Lakeland region. From there you would travel up highway 36 until it reaches highway 63, which is the road up to Fort McMurray, as everybody knows. From there it would go all the way up to the 21st baseline, and that's way up in the bush. So the 21st baseline would be the northern border, and that would travel east to the Saskatchewan border. Significant communities in the Lakeland riding would be Lac La Biche and Cold Lake.

The following summarizes the benefits for the area. The Conklin area of the oil sands being better represented in this new constituency rather than being lost in the Fort McMurray riding is a significant development. The Conklin area, for those that have been there for a long time, is going to be a major area, a producer, and it's going to get lost in the shuffle in that mess up in Fort McMurray.

It's better served in the Cold Lake oil sands and the oil sands north of Lac La Biche. It just makes a better fit. Depending on how growth works in that area, it's mostly camps up there with some of the big oil guys. Eventually the lure of living in a camp is going to wear off workers, and someday you're going to be seeing communities very close to some of these sites. We feel that Conklin is going to be an up-and-coming community that needs to be part of this Lakeland region.

In joining this area, there would be more similar synergy in the oil sands growth, sort of what I mentioned before, and related issues in the protection of the natural lakes in this region, Lakeland. When you look at the map, pretty much all the lakes in Lakeland are covered in this region, and it's very, very unique in the province. The province has very few natural water bodies, so this is a significant riding of merit. The air weapons range would be part of the 4 Wing in Cold Lake First Nation, as mentioned in the first recommendation, the oil companies would be under one constituency rather than two, and both Cold Lake and Lac La Biche are lakeside communities with significant tourism and quality of life attractions to all Albertans and tourists from across the world. The boundary follows as best we can natural water courses, mainly the Beaver River, as the southern part of the border. It's sort of flowing into the land-use framework and everything that is going to be developing through that.

Boundary 2 – I know my back is to them all, but we took some liberty in trying to create another riding without creating new ones – would be a Bonnyville-St. Paul-highway 28 riding, as we call it. Following the river course again as your main focal point, the North Saskatchewan River would provide the southern boundary of the riding, and the northern boundary, of course, would be the Beaver River, our southern boundary. The western boundary would be from the North Saskatchewan River north to the town of Smoky Lake and continue along secondary highway 855. You would encompass the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement, and then it would join up to our riding up in Lakeland. Significant communities would be Bonnyville, St. Paul, with Elk Point and Smoky Lake also. You'd have several First Nations and Métis communities that would exist within one riding.

The following summarizes the benefit for the area. You would have similar industries such as farming and light oil. There's a tremendous amount of activity in the Elk Point area, as mentioned, a little bit different than the type of oil up in the sands north of Cold Lake and Lac La Biche. The communities in the constituencies have strong rural roots, as demonstrated by the voting turnout. These people take their politics seriously down here.

2:20

The constituency follows natural river courses, the North Saskatchewan and the Beaver. The native and Métis communities represented under one riding would provide better and more consistent representation being achieved where the message is being delivered by the same MLA. A lot of the settlements have got several different MLAs. In this way you're going to encompass a lot of them in the same riding. I think it's just going to be that much more efficient and maybe help with better co-operation and just a better synergy.

Like I said, in closing, we've attached a map. When you see it on a map, the amount of green space in the Lakeland area is quite stunning, and as the population is increasing in our province – for a while it was, anyway – the green space is going to be significant. Also, probably more important than oil will be water. The protection of big, huge water bodies like Primrose Lake, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche lake, and the rivers that are in that region is so significant, and

when you've got Christina Lake and Winefred Lake, it just cannot be stressed more.

The way the current boundaries are, it's very chop-chop, and it's just not being effectively controlled. When you look at it, if you had a strong MLA for this Lakeland region, possibly that person could be SRD minister or something significant, Energy minister. Right now when the Premier picks his cabinet, it's a hodgepodge whereas if you had, you know, an MLA with some substance, they could be in a portfolio that made sense for their region.

I think I'm about done.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman. Thanks very much, Mayor Copeland. A couple of questions. First of all, did you do any kind of a calculation, tabulation of the rollout of populations of the two constituencies that you're proposing?

Mr. Copeland: Well, I think that we're going to be falling in that 30,000 range. You know, it's going to be in that area. Cold Lake has 14,000 people now. We just did a census. We are experiencing growth in a big way, 4 per cent a year. We are the retail hub of the northeast. Our shopping draws 55,000. We get a lot of people from northwest Saskatchewan, so we're willing to take them into the boundaries, too, if you want.

Mr. Evans: I don't think we can do that under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, but you never know.

Mr. Copeland: We didn't spend much time on the population. I think it's going to be pretty much similar to what it's at now. I think the highway 28 riding would probably fall where it's at if not higher.

I want to echo the messages – and you guys might ask me this question. I think that MLA effectiveness is much more significant than population. I would argue that the rural MLAs have a greater workload than any inner-urban MLA would because the rural people are so hands on. You talk to the aides for the MLAs at the Leg. I don't know why the Tories have this, but some of the aides work for two MLAs. Speak to them. They'll tell you that a rural MLA's workload is tremendously more than inner city.

Mr. Evans: My second question, Mr. Chairman, if I might, just relates to your comment, if I caught it correctly, that the oil and gas companies, CNRL and Esso, would prefer to only have one MLA to deal with. I would take it from the other point of view, that if they have, as they do today, two MLAs, that's two voices in the Legislature, in the government if they are government MLAs, advocating for and putting forward the position of the oil and gas companies and the particular issues in that area. Do you feel confident that that position is the position of CNRL and Esso?

Mr. Copeland: Oil companies don't get political, but the CAPP association is starting to make some strong movement on taxes in Alberta, so they'll go to their association to lobby the province on their behalf. An oil company won't get into the sandbox that the city of Cold Lake is in right now with their assessment disparity in the region. Where I'm coming from is that they have community stakeholder people that work in the community, and the MLA gets invited to a lot of functions, et cetera, but you've got to realize that for them they've got to see two MLAs. If they're going to be concerned about what's going on in the patch, they're going to go to Mel Knight, you know, the Minister of Energy, direct. I mean, it's

just that in our region they've got two MLAs to work with, so two MLAs have got to get invited. From my standpoint and the council's standpoint it's a duplication, and we're just trying to streamline their work.

Mr. Evans: So it's more an observation of Cold Lake as opposed to anything you've heard directly from the oil and gas companies.

Mr. Copeland: The oil companies are very careful in what they say because they don't want to be perceived as being political.

Mr. Evans: I hear you. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much. If you could leave the map with the staff here, that would be appreciated.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Robert Bouchard.

The Chair: Good afternoon.

**Robert Bouchard, Reeve
County of St. Paul No. 19**

Mr. Bouchard: Good afternoon and welcome to Lac La Biche-St. Paul and to the town of St. Paul. A beautiful day. I kind of wish it would have been drizzling myself, but still a nice day.

I have a very short presentation. I would like to thank the commission for the opportunity to present my thoughts on behalf of the county of St. Paul. We respect the difficult decision the commission will have in arriving at an outcome that would please everyone in the province of Alberta. However, to base that decision or outcome primarily on a population model is, I believe, simplistic.

We in the sparsely populated areas of Alberta need to be assured of quality, effective representation. Our ratio is in decline every time we have a boundary review. With no disrespect for urban MLAs, the province of Alberta must have a fair ratio of MLAs that have a sound understanding of agriculture, oil development and exploration, forestry, and mining. These are the drivers of our provincial economy, and issues related to those industries must be represented by members who understand the complexity of the industry.

We would like to believe that wherever possible the coterminous boundaries of municipalities should be within one riding and respected. A factor that should be considered is the amount of organizations that rural MLAs represent versus urban MLAs. Many or most urban MLAs have one or two municipal governments, two or three school boards, one or perhaps no hospital. Our rural MLAs in many cases will represent eight to 10 municipal governments, First Nations, Métis colonies, two or three school boards, and four to five hospital boards. All these factors put a lot of pressure on our rural MLAs for representation. To reduce ridings would further jeopardize quality and effective representation.

In closing, I hope the commission would consider some of the thoughts brought forward. We feel very strongly that rural Alberta must be at the table with fair and effective representation. The electoral boundaries review done in 2003 made its recommendation on the premise that the purpose of the right to vote enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights is not equality of voting power per se but the right to effective representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you very much for your presentation. As we've been discussing today, one of the challenges that we're going to face is looking at the population of the riding as it currently exists being almost at that threshold of 25 per cent below the average, and we've certainly heard a very strong message to try and hold the ground on that. You also brought up, though, the issue of the coterminous boundaries. Are there any boundaries that, in your view, need to be adjusted in terms of assisting with the other municipal governments, or does the boundary as it exists now work? It does split some, I believe.

2:30

Mr. Bouchard: Well, thank you. The boundary for the county of St. Paul is coterminous, the boundary for Smoky Lake is not, and I believe Lakeland's is. I can say that for many years our boundary was not coterminous. The county of St. Paul had, I believe, the Vermilion riding, the St. Paul riding, and then the Bonnyville riding. The Bonnyville riding, interestingly, where I was, came only five miles north of St. Paul and quite a ways west. It was really very, very, I believe, ineffective representation. I was in Bonnyville. I lived in St. Paul; my business was in St. Paul. Everything was in St. Paul. So at that time the MLA for St. Paul basically represented me also because he was basically my MLA although I had to go vote in Bonnyville.

I think it's quality of representation also. I think you belong to a community. Your business is in that community. Everything is in the community. Of course, your local governments are, perhaps, in that community. So your effectiveness lies in that community. I think it's very important that an MLA has a hand in it if it's possible at all. I know that, certainly, it's not always possible, but where it's possible, it should be respected as much as possible.

Ms Jeffs: Just, if I may, one more. We heard sort of an interesting presentation from the speaker immediately before you. Do you have any commentary on that presentation and those divisions that were suggested?

Mr. Bouchard: Well, I certainly wouldn't want to see my riding get any bigger. I think we've been watered down for a long, long time. Perhaps I go back a little bit further. I know that Ernie can relate to this for sure. When we go back to 40 years ago, when you look at the kind of ratio we had in the province and Legislature, and when you look at where we are today, then you have to wonder: where are we going to be 40 years from now? I really believe that the commission should probably at some point in time make a recommendation that we look at where we're going. Where are we going 40 years from now? Are we going to have 85 MLAs out of the city and four or five out of rural Alberta? Is that the kind of representation we want? Is that going to be quality, equal representation?

You know, rural Alberta is the driver of our economy. We basically support the economy. That's where the rubber hits the road, really, to a great extent. There must be people that can speak on our behalf. I know that on a population basis it's very simple, but I think you need to look at the way the government has looked at population with the granting system. You know, there are all kinds of computers today. You can do those types of things. They've taken into account the infrastructure that's represented, the sparsity, and they came up with some formulas that address that. It's not just because you live somewhere that you get that kind of grant or something. It's based on a formula.

The government is very innovative at making people believe that sometimes they give just a little bit, and it's great. They've done a real good sales job. I know they've done that to the agriculture

industry, where they gave us a couple of million dollars on the BSE, and at the end of the day everybody figured we were almost millionaires, yet it was the same money being thrown again and again and again.

Surely there should be a creative way of bringing forward a formula that enshrines something for the future so that we do have representation, rural Alberta, or else we're going to get so watered down that pretty soon there won't be anybody. That's my concern.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. One of the suggestions that we heard was for sort of Bonnyville-St. Paul. Any thoughts on that?

Mr. Bouchard: Well, you know what? I guess there are always possibilities, room to grow. I think there's a place for us to grow in the north if we have to. To be assimilated with all other communities I'm not sure is the answer. I really believe that our constituency is large enough the way it is. It's not a very old constituency.

You know, another thing in rural Alberta. As you grow those constituencies, you really create a very uneven playing field for our MLAs. If you always have a backbencher, it's not too bad. He does have more time to spend in a very large constituency like we have and drive. The urban MLA, if he's a backbencher, has all kinds of time. Now we have a minister that, you know, thank God, has the ability and has moved into a cabinet position, and he's serving all of Alberta. That makes it very, very difficult for him to spend the kind of time he needs to spend with his constituents the way someone else could. In the city of Edmonton or Calgary, where you only need 15 minutes to drive across your constituency, perhaps have no local government, or you're not a cabinet minister, it's great. I think that to some extent you create a bit of an uneven playing field for some of those members. It makes it very, very difficult for them.

So, no, I certainly wouldn't want to come with any type of recommendation. I would leave that wisdom to you people to decide where it goes.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Does anyone else have questions?

Dr. Archer: Well, one of the principles that was articulated in the last presentation had to do with looking at focusing on natural boundaries rather than political boundaries as an initial organizing principle for determining provincial constituency boundaries. Do you have a view on that? There have been a number of people today who have come and said, you know, that the existing municipal provincial boundary makes sense to overlap with the provincial constituencies, so keep with that. Then we've had another presentation that said: let's start with a different principle, looking at natural boundaries. Again, I'm just wondering what your thought is on that.

Mr. Bouchard: Well, natural boundaries, I guess, give you a reason to draw a line in a different place than it is right now. I mean, I'm not sure you're accomplishing a whole bunch. I think there's maybe more reason to draw boundaries where people have a lot of things in common, perhaps. You know, with natural boundaries you'd have to redraw the whole province completely. It's just a place to draw a line, I guess. I don't have any attachment, myself, to natural boundaries. I think you place it where it makes the most sense, and that's probably where it should go.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Mr. Evans: Just a quick one. It's about technology. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I presume that in the number of years that you've

been involved in the county of St. Paul, you've witnessed a change in the direct access to the MLA because of greater area, more responsibility, et cetera. Have the improvements in technology made up for that in any measurable way, in your opinion and in the opinion of the county? Is technology solving some of those problems of sparsity of population and distance?

Mr. Bouchard: Yes, I believe that it makes a huge amount of difference. You know, years ago we didn't even have phones, so that made it really difficult. Of course, the computer certainly has brought us forward a tremendous amount. I know that with Ray, you have the e-mail. So it absolutely does. But, you know, in rural Alberta, and I think some other speaker brought that forward also, we're still a little bit hands-on. We like to talk to our MLA. We like to shake his hand. We like to look him in the eye and say: "You know what? This is kind of what we need. This is what happens here." So, absolutely, technology has certainly brought the two sides much, much closer together, a great deal, but in rural Alberta we still tend to be hands-on quite a lot, and we still like to see our MLA quite often and discuss things face to face with him.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Robert. Appreciate that. That was very good. Thank you again for coming.

Mr. Bouchard: It's a pleasure. Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Sonny Rajoo.

**Sonny Rajoo, Councillor
Town of Two Hills**

Mr. Rajoo: Mr. Chairman, members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, ladies and gentlemen, I thank the commission for granting me the opportunity of making a presentation. My name is Sonny Rajoo, councillor for the town of Two Hills. It has been my pleasure to serve rural Alberta as a reporter, editor, publisher for the past 20 years, and I know full well the importance of having adequate representation in the Alberta Legislature. By choice I decided to serve on many community organizations, including political, educational, and cultural, and therefore have a good grasp of intermunicipal and provincial relations.

2:40

Mr. Chairman, my major concern and fear is the possibility of losing rural seats to major centres due to the population imbalance. I understand that our political system based on representation by population is the very cornerstone of our electoral process, but special attention should be given to our special circumstances, including long distances to centres and the importance of our largely agricultural, energy, tourism, and forestry sectors. It is vital to have a strong voice not only in the Legislature but also in caucus, where important decisions are made. In our own Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency long distances between towns are very challenging not only to our MLA but to residents in the constituency. Any decrease in seats will only aggravate the already trying situation. I understand, Mr. Chairman, that our major centres by virtue of their population increases, some as much as 25 per cent, call for an increase in seats, but I appeal to the commission not to do so at the risk of eliminating any rural seats.

It is equally important that I point out that much has happened in northeast Alberta since the release of the 2006 federal census. In the

case of the town and the county of Two Hills and the villages within the boundaries, the town conducted its own census and found that due to the influx of Mennonites into the region the town's population increased from the 1,041 of the federal census to 1,231 in the municipal. I strongly believe that if the county also had done its own census, there would have been an increase of 500. The school population in Two Hills is the highest it has been for several decades. I hope the Electoral Boundaries Commission will take into account this and other changes. As well, applications for development and the number of permits issued have increased dramatically. Any loss of seats in this region will create hardships for our residents.

While our urban cousins and our rural communities have mutual concerns such as health care and education, agriculture remains the very cornerstone of our economy and, indeed, our existence. I suspect that agriculture is not given the attention it deserves largely due to the few MLAs that are directly involved in this industry. Any loss of rural seats will only make matters worse. Mr. Chairman, I suggest that much of our province's wealth was created not in the boardrooms of Calgary and Edmonton but on our farms, where livestock, grain, oil and gas, and forestry have their very foundation.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we may not have the skyscrapers, nor do we have a maze of neon lights, but we are rural Albertans worthy of consideration and deserving of a strong voice in provincial politics. An increase in the number of seats may be necessary, but eliminating rural seats, however few, will do irreparable harm to my beloved Alberta in general and our rural communities in particular.

One more point I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, that I don't have in the report. As a director of the Canadian Association of Journalists I was disturbed when the national media picked on our own MLA for the amount that he earned as a salary. It was misleading and quite an unbalanced article. They did not take into consideration the size of his riding, the amount of travelling he had to do, the distance between areas. I felt it was unfair journalism, and I reminded my colleagues in the industry that it was so.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I wish you well in your meetings throughout the province. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Keith, do you have any questions?

Dr. Archer: Well, one of the questions we've been asking a lot of people, Mr. Rajoo, is whether you support the current constituency in its shape and contours or whether you see that it would be useful to change it in one way or another. I'd just like to present that same question to you.

Mr. Rajoo: I do support the current boundary, Dr. Archer. We were in Two Hills' part of the Vegreville, then Viking constituency. Any change now would confuse the people. As well, we are part of the St. Paul education regional division. As such, it is important for us, I think, to stay in our current boundaries.

Mr. Dobbie: Sonny, it's great to see you again. One question I had is the 1,231 population figure you have. Do you know if that's a number that has been submitted to and accepted by Municipal Affairs?

Mr. Rajoo: It has, Mr. Dobbie. It's the first time I can talk to you without shaking in my boots because we normally meet in the courts, I as a reporter and you as a lawyer. But no, it is what our municipal funding is now based on.

Mr. Dobbie: Because, as our chair had mentioned, we are able to take into account more recent data, and where it has been accepted by Municipal Affairs, it's certainly our intention to consider it. I would, I guess, ask you as a councillor to make sure that that data has been submitted.

Mr. Rajoo: One final point, Mr. Dobbie, in response to your question is that the Mennonite population, the school population, has grown in just one year. Remember, Two Hills is a very small town. It has gone up from 344 to 391 in the space of one year, and growing continuously.

Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian? Allyson?

Thank you very much. That was very good.

Mr. Rajoo: Thank you.

The Chair: Now, do we have any further presentations?

There being no further presentations, I think we do have some coffee, and I think that then we have to board our plane for Wainwright, if I'm not mistaken.

Thank you all for coming. Thank you for your input. We will look at it very seriously. Thank you.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:47 p.m.]

