



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. Thank you for taking the time to come out and share your views with us today. I see we have people here that are prepared to share their views.

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

We've been directed by 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. We've been given the job 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 past few months we've sought community input through province-wide consulting 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're 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 will recognize that this means that we're mandated to propose four additional electoral divisions in Alberta, which will come into effect at the next general provincial election. We've also been reviewing the law and what the courts have said about boundaries in the province of Alberta and in Canada and the work of previous commissions and committees.

A brief summary of the electoral boundaries law. As I've said, we are to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly for 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 of 2010 that sets out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 proposed electoral divisions and the reasons for the proposed boundaries. Following the interim report a second round of public hearings will be held to receive input on the proposed 87 boundaries. After consideration of this input the commission must submit a final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by July of 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 the new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the resolution. This 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, 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. We have been receiving and we do have a great deal of data from across the province in terms of populations for up to 2009. Based on the 2006 census plus the updated census numbers that we have for this area, the population of West Yellowhead is 30,763. This puts the region

at 24.2 per cent below the provincial average population of 40,583.

The commission, as I've said, is required to put Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions, and we are to take into consideration any factors we consider appropriate, but we must and shall take into account 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 Indian reserves and Metis settlements,
- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (e) . . . the existing municipal boundaries,
- (f) the number of municipalities and other local authorities,
- (g) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (h) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

The population rule in the act states that a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 per cent above or below the average population for all 87 electoral divisions. There is one exception to this in that up to four 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 the 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.

That's a general overview of the legislation, and the Alberta Court of Appeal 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; 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 will make to the Legislative Assembly.

9:10

Now that I've explained what the law is that we are to be guided by, we want to receive a very important, probably the most important, part of our input, and that's the views of the public that will be affected. We believe that what we hear from you who will be affected by these boundary changes is critical to recommending a new electoral map that will ensure fair and effective representation for all Albertans. We are anxious to hear what the people have to say, and we're here today to do this. If there is anyone who will not be speaking, you can still make your views known in writing by mail, fax, or e-mail.

With that background information, I'll now call on our 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 website. Transcripts of these proceedings will also be available. If

you have registered as a presenter or choose to participate in this morning's meeting, we have to ask you to identify yourself for the record prior to starting your presentation.

Ms Friesacher: The first presenter is Mr. Peter Aschenmeier.

Peter Aschenmeier
Private Citizen

The Chair: Mr. Aschenmeier, for the record for *Hansard* would you please state your full name?

Mr. Aschenmeier: Peter Nathaniel Aschenmeier.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aschenmeier: I've resided in this area for the majority of my life, operated a successful livestock operation, was involved in the timber industry, construction, trucking, and to some extent recreation. With that background and a lot of involvement in community development, various committees, land use, integrated resource strategy development, and chairing a number of recreational committees as well as economic development groups, I believe I've become very familiar with the county of Lac Ste. Anne. That's the one I'm representing today.

I appreciate the excellent balance that that county has not only in the boundaries, but also the people there are very involved-minded people, and I think anyone who is familiar with that area would recognize that. The Lac Ste. Anne county is a very large one, well over 22,000 square kilometres, and has a tremendous amount of infrastructure to connect the far-flung regions, which include three municipalities: Lac Ste. Anne, a large portion of Woodlands, and a fairly large portion of Yellowhead. The population in this constituency is over 34,000. We still are a little below the average of the province, but when you consider the size, we are within the boundaries of what is acceptable. The eastern end has grown considerably in the last eight years. We have had a growth of close to 14 per cent in that part of the region, and overall population in the entire constituency has been growing.

There are quite a number of different requirements for the MLA to address. We have all the municipal levels plus three towns: Whitecourt, Mayerthorpe, and Onoway. This constituency is bordered by the general area of highway 16 on the south, runs nearly to Edson, includes Whitecourt, runs north in the area of highway 18, and all the way up to Onoway, including the recreation area of Lac Ste. Anne and the summer villages there. There are roughly 12 different villages that are operating under the guidance of the various municipalities that they occur in, but they require communication on a regular basis with the MLA, of course.

Two distinct school districts operate 19 schools, including kindergarten to grade 12. They also operate a consortium for adults and after grade 12 education, the Pembina Institute out of Whitecourt.

Emergency services and policing. There are two rural detachments, one at Whitecourt and one at Mayerthorpe. I think we're all familiar with the Fallen Four situation there that has hit the news across the country, which has created a bit of a tourist attraction since that time.

The industry sector is predominantly agriculture, with a very strong play for the energy sector, fairly strong in the western end for forestry, and a growing tourism factor. There are many, many different industry sectors that have service contractors, development, construction, and so on, that all require the attention of the MLA from time to time to meet the various changes that come along with

environmental requirements and so on. That plus the range of municipal direction required from the three different constituencies plus the towns keeps an MLA fairly busy looking after the changes that occur from time to time and the aspirations of the people and the expanding requirement to diversify our economic base.

The MLA has done a fairly excellent job. We have an excellent organization and traditionally have, for the last 50 or more years, one of the better ones within the province if we wanted to compare, and that enables our MLA to cover the area very effectively.

In closing, I would like to suggest that we leave the boundaries intact at the present time that were constituted in 1963. In the last change prior to that it was known as Whitecourt. I believe the balance that has been created is quite unique in many ways. We have a situation where a lot of the sectors are complementary to each other. The time that has been involved in the development here has made the opportunity to blend a complementary type of development in this community, and the requirements of the people enable the representation to be fairly consistent in many areas despite the uniqueness of certain areas.

With that, I would like to suggest that we continue on with the present structure of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Our population, as I indicated, is growing. We are likely to be closing in on that magic number in spite of our vast size.

Thank you very much. Any questions?

The Chair: Thank you. We certainly will have some questions.
Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for taking the time to drive out here, Mr. Aschenmeier. It's great to hear from you. We've had a chance to hear from a lot of Albertans already about their thoughts, and we're working on establishing some general principles that we want to follow in making our recommendations for the 87 ridings. We've certainly heard from others, as you have eloquently told us today, about the challenges that an MLA faces in dealing with multiple municipalities and entities in a large riding. In your particular riding we've actually had some representation from other members representing municipalities, so we've heard a fair bit about Whitecourt-St. Anne.

9:20

If we were to ask you about making some changes – we sometimes use the word “tweaking” the boundaries. The new quotient we have is not the number that's in the printout that you saw. We have been given updated information, as the chairman indicated. The current provincial average would be something like 40,583. One of the principles that we've talked about as a group is: how do we try to balance the range of averages? One way of doing that is by using more of the special constituency opportunities, leaving some that are significantly below the average because they are special and they meet three or more of the criteria.

In your county's case it strikes us that there is some opportunity to add some population to the constituency without adding a whole bunch of area. I suspect you've thought about that in anticipation of this discussion today, and we've looked at it. Do you have any suggestions for us as to where some natural extensions to the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency would be? We would like to get that constituency within 5 or 6 per cent of the provincial average, so closer to 40,000 than the 34,000. If we were looking to add 3,000, 5,000 people, where would we go, in your view, to make those changes?

Mr. Aschenmeier: Well, I think that when you look at the region surrounding this area, including Yellowhead north and south, we're rather similar. Most of us, until you start to get closer to Edmonton, are in the lower population situation, fairly large. Really, the option, I think, that you people are faced with is moving closer to the metropolitan area of Edmonton. That has some shortcomings, obviously, for the reason that if you create too much of a metro mindset in the voting populace, you have a tendency to counterbalance each other. They sit on the opposite end of the stick in many instances. Some of the social and medical needs and all that are similar, but management of the resource area is generally not very well understood in the higher density population areas. And I don't understand their backyard any better than they do mine. So I think you create some additional problems by doing that.

It's certainly an advantage that it forces the two parts of our population base to get to know each other better by means of necessity, and there will be an interim time where that has to take place. Eventually, usually, open-minded people find a way to work together, but there are some rough spots in the interim.

Mr. Dobbie: All right. Again, we are mindful of that. We've heard most people express the same opinion, that there are positives and negatives in the association.

Mr. Aschenmeier: Most things in life are that way.

Mr. Dobbie: Yeah. I'm wondering, you know, if we look where there are growth pressures, certainly in the Edmonton region but also in the Grande Prairie area, one option could be to look at Fox Creek and its population. My understanding is that there's likely a natural affinity or community of interest between Fox Creek and Whitecourt. Is that a fair assumption?

Mr. Aschenmeier: Well, I think it's a fair one. Fox Creek is for the most part similar to the western part of Whitecourt-St. Anne, less agriculture unless you go farther north so that you start to bring in Valleyview. You actually have a natural boundary there that is geographical, to some extent, when you look at the layout of the topographical conditions of the province.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. So if we were to look to the northwest, that would be a natural addition, in your mind.

Mr. Aschenmeier: Well, northwest. Yes.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. I have a bunch more questions, but I have to stop asking them so I can give my fellow commission members an opportunity.

Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you very much, sir, for coming and speaking to us today. In terms of just the numbers, and I think Peter Dobbie touched on this as well, currently with our new average the riding is down about 12 per cent below. That's why we're grilling you a little bit on some of the options. I have one question about a sliver piece of the riding that just comes down adjacent to the Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert riding. Do you know: was that because of community interests or to capture population? Do you know why there's that little jog? I don't know if it shows on the map in front of you.

Mr. Aschenmeier: I was around when that occurred, and there were a number of reasons, somewhat the same as they are at the present. As you're aware, the next constituency east is not necessarily in a perfect position for population as well, so it was a means to try to appease that balance between the two a little bit at that time. As well, you look at: where do you put a boundary? No matter where you put it, you're going to split someone's social activities or their place of business. In that case there I think they tried to find the seam where it would have the least disruption, and that was why it happened there.

Ms Jeffs: That was why. So it was primarily the population balance.

Mr. Aschenmeier: That and then trying to appease as comfortable a position for people that live and play in a certain area as probably will be served better by the MLA that serves that area.

Ms Jeffs: That serves that area. Thank you.

Mr. Aschenmeier: Not in all cases, but I think in smaller areas where there's higher congested population, that is even more consistent.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you. Following up with another one of Peter Dobbie's questions, you know, talking a little bit that the options for the riding seem to be to creep the boundary a little closer to the metropolitan area of Edmonton or to move it out and perhaps capture something in Fox Creek. Now, one of them adds a little more territory but perhaps provides more community interest. Do you have a preference of those two? You mentioned some concerns about encroaching on the metropolitan area.

Mr. Aschenmeier: I think you've covered the obvious territory, but the infrastructure of that area is that, fortunately, as we develop, we kind of make the linkage from the major areas to the far-flung areas. So they're in place and fairly good. That probably wouldn't be a major hindrance, but at the same time, ask the MLA that serves this area and he'll tell you that his vehicle gets a lot of miles. The type of population density in that area is closer to the trading centre and not spread throughout the entire constituency very much, so it may be a little misleading to look at square kilometres and suggest that representation hindrance would be equal.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. Because it is on sort of that same travel route.

Mr. Aschenmeier: That's right, and everything kind of branches out from Fox Creek and highway 43.

In regard to the eastern side, like I said before, I think that over time you can overcome most things, and maybe in the long term that would be better for Alberta because I think we're facing an imbalance that will be very difficult to manage if we continue the way we are. Sometime we are probably going to have to look at getting a better mix of urban-rural relationships at the grassroots, that type of thing.

Ms Jeffs: Those are the challenges. Of course, we hear in the urban communities about the growth and the representation they would like to see come with that. Then we hear very much in the less populated areas about the challenges of the large ridings, of trying to capture too much population.

9:30

Mr. Aschenmeier: I think there are some definite things to keep in mind, though, when we start looking at trying to build a blend. Like I pointed out, 19 schools of 1 to 12. Some constituencies have two schools with three times the population, along the perimeters of Calgary in some of the fast-growing areas. To get representation that is serving the needs of those people, you could probably do that, I would suggest, in a month's research. You could cover every possible thing that is of high importance to them except for the things that keep coming down. When you move to a far-flung, diverse constituency, you have all those things plus the economic driver for the province that has to be maintained for their benefit and still find a way to enhance the quality of life for the rural people sufficiently to keep them coming out here and doing the work. So it's quite a challenge and one that I think we need to really work on.

Ms. Jeffs: Well, thank you very much.

Those are my questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Aschenmeier, for your presentation. We've heard from a number of rural Albertans who live in constituencies close to large urban centres that they feel that it is a good mix to have those constituencies close to the city to give people who may live in the rural area but work in the city a better appreciation for the reality of living in rural Alberta and some of the concerns that rural Albertans have both from an economic point of view and just a transportation point of view. Would you share those views, that that is a positive mix to have?

Mr. Aschenmeier: When you said a constituency close to them, I think you're right on. When you look at the trend today, rural residential is spreading out at a pretty rapid rate. I have an opinion on that, but I'll leave that for another day.

Mr. Evans: It's a planning issue. Sure.

Mr. Aschenmeier: I think that as long as that's the reality, mixing the population across as wide a spectrum of interactivity as possible enhances the ability to get the best decisions made. Hence, the MLA has a clear direction when he goes to sit down in the Legislature and argue the points.

When you move to a large, rural, industry-based area, whether it be agriculture or a combination, which most of the western ones are, I think you are starting to move into an area that is a bit of a grasp for the individual that is worried more about how to get their child through university and how they're going to have a job downtown somewhere and this type of thing. I'm not knocking that life, but it's difficult sometimes to understand the needs of managing resources and road infrastructure, that's very expensive today, and tax dollars, that predominantly are generated by the primary resources in many cases, having to be spent there rather than coming and making life a little easier in the cities. All those things are big challenges, I think, that we need to work on to create compatibility and a willingness to really understand what it is to walk in the other guy's shoes for a while.

Mr. Evans: Thank you very much for that.

One other question. Obviously, if you were going to increase the size of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, in addition to moving northwest, you could possibly move directly west without raising the blood pressure of the MLA for West Yellowhead unnecessarily.

Mr. Aschenmeier: We're getting pretty close. I'm within about eight kilometres of the town here.

Mr. Evans: Is there some logic in terms of commonality of the area and the constituents in the area to justify a move to the west? Maybe I should put that in the context of the fact that West Yellowhead is very close to being 25 per cent under.

Mr. Aschenmeier: Exactly.

Mr. Evans: We've had some conversations about whether that area, indeed, could fit into the category of a special consideration constituency.

Mr. Aschenmeier: I think you've pointed out the exact challenge you have there, and that is that we do not have a high population density adjacent to us to the west in any particular area. Northwest the Fox Creek thing is probably compatible and a target. I haven't paid really close attention to what the impact would be on the adjoining one to the north. It would reduce it somewhat but probably not as significantly as if we tried to squeeze a little more out of West Yellowhead, which doesn't have any to give in the first place.

Mr. Evans: So between the existing boundary and Edson we wouldn't find much population. We'd have to go to Edson at least and put Edson into Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. Aschenmeier: Well, there is a fair amount of rural residential, but to get large numbers, you have to come very close to Edson. I mean, some of it is spread up as far as Peers and, you know, a bit farther. Once you move that distance, with the cost of transportation nowadays it's a bit discouraging to have too vibrant a rural density of population 40 miles out.

Mr. Evans: All right. Well, thanks very much for those comments.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Aschenmeier. I think one of the members indicated that the discussion thus far has been about tweaking the boundaries. I'll probably go beyond tweaking and talk about some more substantial changes and get your views on these.

The population in West Yellowhead, as was noted, is really close to the cut-off point between the special constituency and the regular variation rate. So that invites us to begin thinking about whether it makes sense to have a special constituency in this area and, if we go that route, what that special constituency would look like. One of the configurations that's possible is to think of the mountain parks as a unique constituency that runs not only from Jasper park and includes the northern part but also would bring Banff park into that same community. It would be sort of a long constituency that would stretch some distance north and south and along the B.C. border.

That would provide an opportunity to also think of creating a constituency that also runs north and south on the eastern edge of the mountain parks but outside the parks. That kind of constituency, again, depending on how far north and south you went, may or may not continue to have the requirement of a special constituency. I wonder if you could comment on that suggestion.

Mr. Aschenmeier: I think that from some of the comments I made earlier and some that you have made, I do not support that. I think

that the more you try to isolate like situations, the less likely you will have continuity with the larger population because it will be managed then as an entity of its own rather than for the benefit of the population of Alberta and larger. I believe that our future is in looking at a cohesive benefit for a wider range of interests rather than a narrower one.

I think we came, most of us, from small communities that were very isolation oriented. When you went to date a girlfriend in the neighbouring community, you had to be a good scrapper or you didn't find a girlfriend. We've moved well beyond that. I mean, I'm not that ancient. We've moved from kind of a very isolated mentality of looking after yourself and your community and the next guy: if it's his loss, it's my gain. That mentality, I think, is one that is negative in every sense for today's world. Looking at putting a special status for one particular purpose in the west, in the playground of all Alberta, would be a negative thing, in my view.

We talked earlier about trying to blend the metro area somewhat with the rural area, and I would support that. I think it needs to be done in a well-organized and well-developed way, not just thrown into the midst all of a sudden, because it takes time for our species to change our mentality, especially when you get a little older. The young ones move pretty quickly into the new way of thinking, but over half of us are kind of set in our ways and don't change too rapidly.

9:40

When you would start to create a boundary there for a special purpose, how would you bring that in a period of time to be for a purpose other than to generate wealth for that entity and charge what the market will bear? I think sometimes our playground shouldn't be totally based on what the market will bear. It might be Europeans, and we'll look and watch them.

Dr. Archer: I think the context for the question is that one of the principles that can guide the discussion of the boundaries commission is the importance of the representation of communities of interest. Over the course of our hearings this week we've been in a variety of communities, Lesser Slave Lake constituency yesterday, for example, in which we heard members of the community say that because of the large aboriginal population within the community, it's important to draw the boundaries in such a way that strengthens the ability of that community to recognize and to represent that interest. So that's the principle that underlies the question.

Thanks for the clarity on your view on that matter.

Mr. Aschenmeier: If I may, when you refer to aboriginal, I can understand that point of view. From that sector I can understand that very readily. Is it in the best interests of their great-great-grandchildren? I'm not certain that it would be. I think your grandchildren and mine will probably validate that point of view.

As we move forward, we have to understand each other but not in isolation. If you create a bloc of like-minded individuals, they generally narrow their way of thinking rather than expanding it to encompass larger points of view and opportunities.

Dr. Archer: I think they're very important points.

Another place where this principle came up is in our hearings in Edmonton in which we heard very clearly from the mayor and others their view that it's important to keep the urban constituencies completely urban and not to bridge across the city of Edmonton and the surrounding areas. Having discussions about these principles I think is a very important part of the work of the commission. Again, I appreciate your views.

Mr. Aschenmeier: If I may expand just a bit on that issue, I notice in some of the work I do that the metro area likes to have a lot of input into the regional development of economic activity around and surrounding the city, so they aren't too consistent in some respects. Maybe they aren't the same people putting that point of view forward.

Dr. Archer: I think I'll leave that one alone. Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Aschenmeier. This has been very informative and just a tremendous presentation. Thank you so much.

Mr. Aschenmeier: Thank you for the opportunity. Let's hope that when you get further along with your work, we'll have an opportunity to have input. As they say, the cake is proof of the skill of the baker once you eat it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mr. Ivan Strang.

Ivan Strang
Private Citizen

The Chair: Ivan, how are you?

Mr. Strang: Very good, Hon. Judge Walter.
Good morning to everybody on the panel.

The Chair: Ivan, could we just for *Hansard* get you to give your name, if you would?

Mr. Strang: Yes, sir. Ivan James Strang of Edson. I just wanted to come forward today to sort of give you people an insight into West Yellowhead and rural Alberta as I served for the government for 11 years. I guess the one thing I wanted to stress and stress very strongly is the aspect of making sure that you're going to keep at least four of those communities below average because if we look at Dunvegan-Central Peace, I mean, you're travelling all over the area. It's pretty tough for one person to get over all the area. Lesser Slave is another one, and I really strongly believe that Peace River is another one because you've got that big section. I just strongly believe that aspect.

Coming back to West Yellowhead, I guess I sort of disagree with Mr. Aschenmeier on one point, the aspect of the eastern part of West Yellowhead. I feel it should be extended a bit because we've got a lot of people that utilize Edson as a trading area. I know that when I had my office in Edson, I served a lot of those people because to go to Whitecourt or Mayerthorpe was quite a big distance. So there might be some bit of juggling there.

On the other aspect of speaking from the perspective of rural Alberta, I had the privilege of chairing the rural caucus for the province of Alberta for eight and a half years. Basically, the whole system there was not to be divisive or anything on the aspect of Alberta as a whole. As you realize, I know I had some other advocates that were deadly against it because they felt it was splitting it up. But my view and my view when I presented to the then hon. Premier Ralph Klein was that we needed to get more unity because everybody lives so far. When you live in Edmonton or Calgary or Red Deer or Medicine Hat or Lethbridge, I mean, you can walk it in a few hours, you know, the riding, and you have the interaction with the other MLAs whereas in northern Alberta or even southern Alberta you don't have that privilege.

Basically, what I did when I was the chair: I brought a lot of the ministers in. It was surprising that after how many meetings we had, the minister would come up to me: well, I never really knew that. He or she would be an MLA, cabinet minister from Calgary or Edmonton, and they didn't understand the rural way.

The other thing is splitting some of the rural and urban. In some areas it works well because you have a lot of urbanites that are living in the rural areas, so they bring different things. As you see now, a lot of people have changed their ways, too, with the aspect number one of moving to the country, and of course they don't want anything done in their area. You know, they moved out of the city because they wanted to have peace and tranquility, so there's a huge balance.

Sort of in closing, I just strongly believe that we have to have a strong definition of rural and urban because that's why you have caucus, and you work well together in explaining that. I strongly believe that if you don't live in the area, you don't know what's happening. It's important to keep the balance, and I think that's where I feel caucus is the big balance to be able to get out your views there and work with the rest of the MLAs. I found that worked out quite well.

You know, I guess one of the big issues that we had when I was there was electricity, and I see we're still having that issue. It worked out well because we brought in the proper people. Of course, I always had to make a report to caucus every Thursday morning on any meetings that we did have, so there was nothing under the table. It was all up above, and it was more from a perspective of education, I would say, so that you had interaction with the rural MLAs so they knew what was happening with the other. Many times when I first got in in 1997, it disturbed me a lot when we'd have a break during our caucus meeting and then you'd hear some rural MLA say: "Well, that's happening in my area." I'd say: "Well, why didn't you speak up? Everybody is just focusing on that one guy's problem. If you've got the problem in your area or the issue in your area, speak up because we need that known so that we can get a better balance and a better understanding as a whole for all MLAs in the area."

9:50

I guess just to sort of quickly sum up, like I say, I strongly believe that we still need to keep those four main areas. I only look at, really, three that are really strong. As one of the previous panel members mentioned about going north and south in corridors, I mean, until you've been in the game and worked the game, you don't understand it. When you're talking about Jasper and Banff and maybe down into Canmore or something like that, it doesn't work. From my perspective – just hear me out – these communities, excluding Canmore, have always been federal. So you're almost like an intruder when you go in there.

It took me almost my three terms to win over a majority of the population in Jasper, and I worked very hard to get them as a municipality, too. It's the understanding because they're always connected with Ottawa, and even the people don't understand it. So it's a big thing, and I think you've got to keep the continuity within your family. You work well with your MP, and I think that always shows, too, when you're working together. I would be careful on trying to work something like that because I think you'll sort of segregate it more, and we don't need that. We need to be as a unity group in Alberta.

Basically, closing, I'd just say, you know, make sure we keep at least four of those because you've got to look at population. The only other thing I'd sort of comment quickly on is the rumbling I heard after our last review, especially for people in Edmonton and

Calgary. Really look hard when you're going to set the boundaries of community regions. The one that stands out in my mind is Calgary-Egmont when the last group split it up, where people had no continuity. They split communities right in half, and you lose the commonality and everything there. So if you'd sort of look at that, I'd appreciate it.

As far as the other aspect of coming up with four more ridings, as I quickly look at it, I mean, you've got the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, where most of the people are migrating. I think that's a natural flow that you're going to be looking at. I think that would possibly be the better way to look at four more places.

I'll leave it at that, and if you've got any questions, I'll try and answer them for you. Thanks, Hon. Judge Walter.

The Chair: Certainly. As you may know, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo now has to have two.

Mr. Strang: Yeah. I agree there. And if you look at Athabasca-Redwater, it could maybe be split in there, too. You've got to look at the commonalities. Yeah, I agree with you there on that one. I had that marked, but I didn't bring it up.

The Chair: Well, the updated figures would indicate getting up towards 80,000 in Fort McMurray.

Mr. Strang: Yeah, but I think the other thing you've got to look at – and I don't want to countermand you on anything – is the aspect of lots of transients.

The Chair: Over and above that 80,000 is 22,000 shadow.

Mr. Strang: Yeah, shadow population. Shadow population has a big need, too, to be represented.

The Chair: You have, in effect, a necessity. You must have two ridings there.

Mr. Strang: Yeah. I agree with you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms. Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Strang, for coming. I just want to touch a little bit on one of the comments you made with respect to the discussion we'd had with the previous speaker about that boundary with Whitecourt-St. Anne and West Yellowhead and, you know, the potential to capture some more population by moving it to Edson. It sounds to me that you may think it needs to move the other way because Edson has a catchment area, if that's the correct term.

Mr. Strang: Yeah. That's what I stated because when I was the MLA, there were quite a bit of people to the east. They couldn't believe that they'd have to go to Whitecourt to vote. I mean, they'd have polls at Peers, but they felt that they're more connected to the Edson area because that was their trading area, so they didn't understand. The boundary is just at Wolf Lake, so it is confusing to people. I mean, that's the natural travelling area that people have. That's what I was just thinking, in making it more convenient for the people.

When I was there, I worked with the then MLA there, and we had an arrangement so that, you know, I would look after them because the worst thing you can do to any constituent is say: oh, well, it's not my riding; it's his. If they've got an issue, you've got to look after them, and that's the partnership we had when I was there.

Ms Jeffs: Do you have a suggestion if the commission were to look at it? How far east would you move that?

Mr. Strang: Well, it gets a little confusing there. It would be from the perspective of: if you go back out as far as Carrot Creek, then why not go to Niton Junction? There's a balance. I'm sure the mayor of the county of West Yellowhead will have some ideas, too. But all I'm saying is that I just think that for more convenience, more understanding for the constituents – you know, we're always looking at the aspect of getting our vote up. I mean, when you've got somebody driving in and say, "Well, you don't vote here." "Oh, to heck with it. I'm not going to bother." We had lots of trouble with that in the federal election, too, with people going. I just think that what we're trying to do is get people to voice their opinion, to try and make it easier for them, not confuse it more for them.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Well, thank you very much for that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much, Mr. Strang. You've talked about three fairly obvious special consideration constituencies. Again, there's some good argument for West Yellowhead being a special consideration constituency as well, particularly if you were to bring that east boundary of West Yellowhead a little further west and put some of that population into Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Do you see any disadvantages to constituting a special area for West Yellowhead or, on the other side of the coin, advantages?

Mr. Strang: Well, I mean, it would make it a little easier for the MLA. But the idea is that the MLA is there to serve the people. If you're going to shorten it, then you'd have to almost bring it up to the town of Edson's boundaries to make any difference. Basically, then, all you have are the peripheral people that have acreages, the majority of them all owners. I know that when I was mayor of Edson, that used to be the biggest flak I got. Any time we made any changes in the town of Edson, the majority of the owners of businesses were people that lived in the Yellowhead county, and they had no say. So you've got to look at the balance. You know, the trading area is a big thing, I think.

Mr. Evans: What if you put Edson itself into the further east constituency currently called Whitecourt-Ste. Anne?

Mr. Strang: Well, if you do that, you know, you lose all the commonalities that have been built up over the years with Edson, Hinton, Jasper, and Grande Cache. There has been more of an encompassing now for the aspect with Whitecourt and Drayton Valley and Mayerthorpe and that, you know, with the different aspects that we work with the economic development with different areas that we have. Rather than just having Edson as an economic development, we've worked on the Grande Alberta Economic Region, so you've got a bigger region. You're still going to have the commonalities. But I just believe that, you know, when you're looking at highway 16 as a major artery, highway 43 as a main one, you don't have the commonalities with the constituents, and I think that's a big thing. Then, again, it makes that much more of a move for the MLA, too.

10:00

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks very much.

Mr. Strang: You're welcome.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Strang. A few questions. First, I think you made a reference to the question about the creation of a constituency that runs along the national parks. I'm not sure that I understood the rationale for the view that you expressed. I think and what my notes say is that because of the federal presence in the parks it's important to divide them amongst several provincial constituencies, but I'm not sure if that was an accurate reflection. Could you just elaborate on that?

Mr. Strang: Yeah. I'll clarify that. Yes, it is. As you realize, when I was MLA, I and the MLA from Banff-Cochrane worked on the aspect of the disparity with the aspect of infrastructure notably. We were able to work with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to go on what the hon. Mr. Walter here was saying about the aspect of shadow population, especially in the summer months. So we were able to get a special dispensation on more funding so that we could bring up the values of infrastructure in the area. Then when Jasper became a municipality and out of the auspices of the federal government, at that time we were able to upgrade their sewer system and stuff like that. So I just feel that it's better that way because you've got two different schools of thought. You're connected differently. Therefore, you have another perspective, and you add more to it from the aspect of two MLAs.

Dr. Archer: I see. Thank you.

One of the comments you made had to do with the importance of representing rural interests within the Legislature. This issue has come up a number of times, particularly in communities that have an urban centre that is larger than 40,000 people, what will likely be the electoral quotient or the average constituency size, but smaller than 80,000. Whether it's Grande Prairie or St. Albert or Medicine Hat, we have a number of these communities of 50,000 or 60,000 people, and that provides a couple of design options.

One option would be to design those constituencies in such a way that there is one constituency that's largely an urban constituency, which would be about 40,000 people, and the remainder would be attached to a mix of urban, rural. A second approach would be to take the population in the city and divide it, you know, fairly equally between the two ridings, so both of them would be a mix of urban and rural.

This came up most recently, I think, in our discussions in Grande Prairie. The views there seemed to be most distinctive on it, but it would have a bearing on the St. Albert ridings, Medicine Hat. Could you share your views and any advice you'd have for the commission on how we should respond to those kinds of situations?

Mr. Strang: Well, I guess the one thing is that you've got to look at traffic patterns. I mean, what we had with Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti was sort of natural with the aspect. Then you've also got to think of the different municipalities, the MDs and counties. You don't want to have them split up too much either because then that really puts a lot of strain on the MLA. Also, it's confusing for the different representatives of an MD or a county, too.

You know, with the other aspect of looking at other places, like other cities, there are possibilities. But like I say, you've got to look at the traffic patterns, I think, and the commonalities that they have. If you're in the south part, like you were saying with Lethbridge, well, if you're looking at the aspect of agriculture and most of the agriculture is on that one side of the city, well you've got the commonalities, you've got the traffic flow, so people have a better understanding of the reason why. I think that would work the best.

I never heard any real negativity when I was MLA with the Grande Prairie model.

Dr. Archer: With the Grande Prairie model being half in one and half in the other?

Mr. Strang: Yeah. No real negativity.

Dr. Archer: I think it was the city, actually, that came forward in this round and advised us to create one entirely urban riding, the other being a mix. That's certainly one of the issues that we're going to be working through.

That's all I have, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.
Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. Strang. I'd like to keep you a little bit longer if we could. I know we're supposed to be limited to five minutes, but it is very helpful to have someone who has been through the system and has stepped back and is now able to give us some perspective from over the years.

We've talked today a bit about principles that this commission needs to adopt, and one approach in creating up to four special constituencies is to use that opportunity to really designate certain parts of the province as unique. Clearly, Dunvegan-Central Peace and the three areas that you talked about certainly merit consideration because they are separate and distinct from many other rural constituencies. We've been given that tool to create up to four special consideration ridings. If we were to do so, one justification for creating up to four rather than the one we have right now is to allow us to then make the other rural constituencies, or the non-Edmonton and non-Calgary constituencies, much closer to the average.

So one argument in favour of using more special consideration ridings is that then the other 40 or so non-Edmonton and non-Calgary constituencies would be much closer to the average, as opposed to having many of them 10 per cent below. I'm wondering if you support that as a concept. Do we use that tool to allow the other non-Edmonton and non-Calgary ridings to be closer to the average, or do we still have to be mindful of the natural boundaries? These things are always a trade-off.

Population. If we try to get close to the number, we are generally going to be breaking up some rural municipalities, a county or an MD, but we do accomplish the task of getting much more parity of voting power per constituency. We are needing to balance those trade-offs. If you were to give us some direction as an armchair adviser, which goes first? Do we work more towards voter parity by using these ridings, or do we weigh more along the natural, municipal, and community of interest issues that you've raised?

Mr. Strang: Well, I think it's a real balance. You know, the more time you spend on it and look at it and by doing what you're doing, by going to all the different communities, I think you'll get a better understanding. I do agree that when you look at the aspect of Dunvegan-Central Peace, you know, as an MLA to travel and see the different areas that you have and all the different hamlets and everything that you've got to look at, you need to have that as a special area. I know that the Peace River one for sure is a huge area. I used to live up in the Northwest Territories, so I know that. Then the other aspect with Lesser Slave Lake.

I think that if you look at the different boundaries, you can find a balance. But like I'm saying, the big thing that I look at is that

we've got to make it as convenient as possible for voters to vote. If you look at our last election, that was really way down. I think that any obstacles you put in voters' way – they don't seem to want to go that extra way to put down that X.

I think that parity would be a good thing as long as you don't disrupt the traffic patterns too much. With municipalities and MDs I think they're fairly flexible, but it makes it more convenient if you work along their lines the best you can. I know that there are going to be some where you can't because of the numbers.

10:10

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. My final question relates to the question of technology. There is an assumption that is inherent in some of the presentations we've heard in Edmonton and Calgary and in other areas that technology does make the job of the MLA easier in the rural areas. We've heard otherwise from some other MLAs. In your experience does the ability to use e-mail, mobile phones, that type of technology, make any material improvement in the ability of an MLA to represent a rural constituency?

Mr. Strang: Yes, it does, but I think the big thing that at least I found is that people want to see you face to face, you know. That constitutes a lot of driving and a lot of different events. But, yes, it does. If you want to get out a message or something, you've got to have those means because most of the time you're not where they want you to be. When you have good staff, they can fill the gap for you. When you're in session and that, it helps because then you can at least get their answer. If they want any more follow-up, then you can reschedule them and try and fit them in when you're back in the riding. So, yes, it has helped, I noticed quite a bit in the last number of years, especially with the e-mail aspect.

Phones. You know, with the cellphone scenario, especially in West Yellowhead, once you get going towards Grande Cache, you lose it. You hit it in certain spots. I mean, I remember one time when I was driving. I usually shut my phone off in that area, and then all of a sudden it rings. I know they had it when we had winter games away back when with Grande Prairie and that, when we used Jasper for the ski hills. I was after Telus – or it was AGT back then – to try and get it organized again, and they said that, well, it was way too expensive. I mean, it does help to have that. At that time I was able to force AGT to get organized and put cellphones right around the perimeter of Grande Cache. It worked really well because there are a lot of people working, you know, in close proximity to Grande Cache. So it does really help.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. Thank you, sir. Those are my questions.

Mr. Strang: Okay.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Ivan. I appreciate your presence here today and your thoughts. We'll certainly be taking them under consideration.

Mr. Strang: Okay. Thanks, Your Honour.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Jim Rennie, mayor of Woodlands county.

**Jim Rennie, Mayor
Woodlands County**

Mr. Rennie: Thank you, all, for having me be able to make a presentation here today. Mr. Strang is a tough act to follow. I think

that he looks at the issue, probably, from a 100,000-foot perspective. Mine's more like a 10,000-foot perspective, especially to do with the municipality that I represent.

The Chair: For the benefit of *Hansard* we have to have you give your full name.

Mr. Rennie: Yes, sir. My name is Jim Rennie, and I'm the mayor of Woodlands county.

Last night I was teaching a tae kwon do class. I had about 20 kids that were three-year-olds, and I was trying to get them to run in a straight line. I was thinking: this is a pretty impossible task. But you guys may have a more difficult issue than that one.

I have some very simple points to bring forward to you. They have to do with Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, which is the area that the majority of my municipality falls within. We have a small municipality by population, but by geography we're quite large. I think that's similar to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. In 2009 we had 2 per cent growth. In a year like 2009 to have 2 per cent growth: I think that's a pretty fantastic number. We look forward to the future, and I know that that rate is going to increase.

The issues that I'd like to discuss are that rapid growth, and the second one is geographical challenges. On the rapid growth I think you've probably heard that from every municipality that you've talked to, so I don't know that I'm talking to anything different, although some of the unique issues that we have going on in our backyard: we have a synfuel electrical generation plant that's about to be constructed, a carbon capture project that we hope to see in the very near future. We have two biomass energy projects that will add onto and enhance some of our local mills. As well, we have a nuclear power plant that has been overshadowed by the Peace River project but that's very interested in the Whitecourt area. All of those things wouldn't have come to light had it not been for our MLA working hand in hand with the municipalities to have those come to the point that they're at. That's the important part that I think we bring up.

I don't know about our urban counterparts, but when it comes to rural economic development, the MLA plays a huge hand in that. Those meetings aren't something where they can just fire off an e-mail and do the kind of creations that we need. It requires hand-in-hand and face-to-face meetings. Also, when we do have this growth, you can just imagine how busy the MLA is to have that happen. You know, that really summarizes the rapid growth part. Again, I don't want to go there because I think that I'm not saying anything differently than you've probably already heard many times before.

I do want to talk about the geographical challenges. I've spent many days with our MLA travelling to meetings. If you've had a chance to look at Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, a typical day for him would require hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of travelling within his jurisdiction, and that's not including if he has to come back from the Leg. to have those meetings. When you have that kind of a day and you have the expectations that you have in the rural areas, I don't think that it's possible to compare it to an urban counterpart. Now, I understand that you're bursting at the seams with a lot of the cities and you have some hard choices to make. But when you take something like our rural area, where you're up and down the same highways, and you're looking at extending areas or changing areas, I'm not sure that that's going to be the best approach. That's something that I'd like to bring to light.

I don't think it's fair for me to say, "Don't change what we have," because I understand that you have so many issues to deal with. I've talked to our counterparts at Lac Ste. Anne county and the town of Whitecourt, and I've asked them: "What do you think would be our

best scenario? What changes would you make?" I think we need to give you some suggestions to make your job easier. The easy fixes would be to take some of our adjoining municipalities that are right in our backyards. Some examples that we looked at on the map were Entwistle and the Alexander band. Those would be easy fits to add.

Some of the fits that we thought would not be good would be to add on other municipalities. I heard Mr. Strang talking about Edson. To add Edson into the mix would be a very huge stretch for an MLA to do the job that they need to as a rural MLA. Fox Creek and Greenview: same issue. One of the things that I think is so important is the number of boards that each of these municipalities has. We have in my area ag service boards, we have seniors' housing boards, school boards, and a variety of other local community groups, and all of those are trying to share that MLA and get their time. If you were to stretch to Greenview or Fox Creek, we enter into a whole other realm of boards that will spread that time thinner.

Now, I can't say that I've spent a day travelling with an urban MLA, but can one hundred per cent guarantee that the rural MLA is expected to attend every awards meal that's held, and they're expected to come and make themselves present at all kinds of community groups, and I really don't think that urban MLAs do that. The reason that I say that is because when I talk to my urban counterparts and they have an issue and I ask them, "Did you talk to your MLA about it?" I get met with that look of: why would we call our MLA about that? But when you get to rural and you're sitting at any community group, the first thing they say is: I'm going to call our MLA. I think that that contact is just something that's the difference between rural and urban.

If I could leave it on that point – and, of course, I'm open to any questions – I think that would really be the strong thing I'd like to say, that in rural areas we expect the MLA. We expect the face time. I don't think that by adding geography that adds kilometres onto the stretch of their geographical boundary, you're going to allow them to do anything that would do justice towards what we expect of them.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mayor Rennie, for your feedback. It is important for us to get specific advice and direction from people within each constituency, and we have talked and had a number of presentations about your constituency.

I believe you were here when I was asking former MLA Strang for some direction on the issue of the special consideration constituencies. We haven't formalized our principles that we're going to follow, but we're in the learning process. It does strike me that a strong case can be made for being very clear and simply saying that in certain areas the basic rules do not apply. If we do that, I think by implication we're also saying that for many other areas we can't be quite as flexible on the population numbers.

10:20

I don't know if you were here earlier on, but the current average is updated from the mail-out that went out. The current average that we're looking at is 40,583. In the case of your constituency, clearly, there is going to be growth, but we know that throughout Alberta there will be growth before the next Electoral Boundaries Commission meets – maybe the number is 48,000 or 45,000 by then – so the base is going to go up next time as well.

If we were to substantially keep the constituency the same but look to add 3,000 to 5,000 people, certainly there seems to be more

population in the east end. Do you have any specific suggestions there? We have a competing concern about the Alexander band, that there's some merit in keeping it in its existing constituency. So if we, for the sake of planning or thinking, take that off the table, where else would you see us go? If we don't go to Fox Creek, where can we go if we're looking to find 3,000 to 5,000 people to get you closer so that you're under 8 or 10 per cent below?

Mr. Rennie: I may be stepping on some toes to say this, but I guess, to be blunt, Woodlands county has two areas. We have the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock riding as well. We probably have a thousand of our residents that live within that constituency. At times it's a challenge. Now, we have a fantastic MLA who represents us in that riding, and he's able to accommodate all of our needs. But if there was some other shuffling – I'm not aware of what else you're looking at for the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock riding – and somehow that meant that Woodlands county could be shifted to one MLA, that may be good from our point of view and the residents' point of view because sometimes it's a challenge to deal with two.

I just want to make it very clear that I'm not criticizing the leadership of either one of our MLAs – they both do a fantastic job – but that may be somewhere where a thousand people could be captured. I'm not a hundred per cent sure of the population of Entwistle and the immediate catchment area nor of the Alexander band, but perhaps there's some way that that east-side boundary could be slightly enlarged to encompass some of that.

When I look at some of the growth for the Lac Ste. Anne county, their growth is fantastically huge for the number of residents that they're looking at. I'm not sure if those are all permanent residents or if those will be, perhaps, people that use those as a recreation facility, but with the growth that they have immediately coming, that alone may add another thousand people, from the numbers of units that I've looked at that they have proposed.

That's the best I can do to give you my advice.

Mr. Dobbie: It would be helpful if you could speak with your planners, your fellow county reeves, and give us some direction. Certainly, my current thinking is that I would like to the extent possible to take the argument that people can point to so many rural constituencies and say that they're below the average off the table. One way of doing that is creating up to four special constituencies, but the obligation becomes, then, to find stronger numbers in the remaining rural constituencies. So we aren't committed to any process, but we don't know those communities of interest. We wouldn't know, necessarily, where to reach, so if you could give us some suggestions, we can incorporate them.

I can guarantee you that so far we've learned that it will be impossible to make everyone happy. We've established that as a clear issue. If you could give us some specific suggestions for your constituency, it would be very helpful. There is a deadline of October 13 for the preliminary information. So if it wouldn't take much to sit down and hammer an e-mail out, we would appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Rennie: So if I was to submit a letter that was on behalf of the mayors of our area that had one common suggestion, that would be accepted?

Mr. Dobbie: Or three conflicting ones, like we often get.

Mr. Rennie: We would have one common one. Our voice would be heard?

Mr. Dobbie: That would be great.

Mr. Rennie: You will have that before your deadline.

The Chair: We have heard that moving Fox Creek into this riding would solve a lot of the concerns we now have, so we want you to look at that also.

Mr. Rennie: Okay. I would have to make my best poker bet that that was not from anyone within the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency that would have said that.

The Chair: You'd be wrong.

Mr. Rennie: Well, I'm glad I'm not playing poker right now, sir.

The Chair: All right. Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mayor Rennie, for coming today to speak with us. Just really a couple of questions. You mentioned that about a thousand of the population of your county is currently in the other riding, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. What's the total population of the county?

Mr. Rennie: Four thousand five hundred.

Ms Jeffs: So it's forty-five hundred? Okay.

I'm afraid my handwriting is not keeping up to your speaking, so I just want to go over a couple of issues here. You talked about Fox Creek but also another area that you had some concerns about potentially adding.

Mr. Rennie: Greenview.

Ms Jeffs: And you were concerned about . . .

Mr. Rennie: Greenview and Fox Creek have a totally different seniors' housing foundation. I'm not sure if you've heard these issues before, but seniors' housing is probably one of the hottest button issues that there is for municipalities to try to face at this time, and it all comes down to funding.

Without saying anything negative about our partners with the province, a lot of work has been given to us, and seniors' housing is growing so rapidly in our areas, as we find seniors are staying in our communities who didn't in the past, that we can't build the beds fast enough. Our MLA has had to work hand in hand with us multiple times per week on these issues, and it's not just something that happens for a season like an agricultural issue might happen one season more than another; this is week in, week out. So to add a whole other foundation to that, that alone would be a stumbling block to me. Plus on top of that you have all of your other issues with other types of community groups and associations.

Ms Jeffs: So wouldn't there be a commonality between the concerns over the seniors in Greenview and in some of the other communities?

Mr. Rennie: We have one board that looks after homes in Onoway, Mayerthorpe, Whitecourt, and a number of those homes. You would have another board that would be looking after a totally separate set of issues. In my dealings with the seniors, they're one of our most vocal groups, and with a great amount of respect for them, they make sure that they have face time with their MLA constantly. I

don't know if it's the same in urban, but in rural I've never seen a group as well connected to their MLA and their provincial government.

To add a whole other set – it's not like you can just take a portion of that seniors' foundation, because it stretches on for a whole bunch of municipalities; you have to get to know the whole entity. So you're going to take a workload that was very large, and you're just going to double that. It's not like any MLA can just bite off a little bit of it. They have to take on the whole thing. That's my understanding and what I've observed working with our seniors' foundations. That's one area alone where I know that if you stretch the limits, you're just going to decrease the ability of the province to help serve the seniors.

Ms Jeffs: Okay.

Just on another point. You talked about the potential to add Entwistle and its surrounding area and the Alexander band. Do you happen to know the approximate populations there, how much that would capture?

Mr. Rennie: No, I don't. I'm guessing that together it would be several thousand people. The reason that I say those – I know very little about them – but the geographical boundaries won't be stretched. That was simply it.

Ms Jeffs: So it's a distance issue.

Mr. Rennie: That's right. When I look at the urban counterparts, you know, in 15 minutes they can go across their constituency, and then I look at ours . . .

Ms Jeffs: Probably not in rush hour.

Mr. Rennie: Perhaps. Yes. That is another issue.

But when I look at the hundreds of kilometres that stretch out, that's the real issue.

Ms Jeffs: Understood. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, those are my questions.

The Chair: Just before we move on to another, I take it you have not spoken with the First Nation group.

Mr. Rennie: No.

The Chair: So you wouldn't have any idea whether they're in favour or objecting to such a move.

Mr. Rennie: Well, I do have . . .

The Chair: Because I can help you. They don't want it.

Mr. Rennie: Okay. Again, we looked at a map with the other municipalities and said: where would it make sense geographically? But I imagine that when you talk about Fox Creek or the Alexander nation, maybe they have a favourite MLA and some not-favourite MLAs. That's a people thing. But geographically that's going to be there for years to come with different MLAs. I'm not talking about, you know, if this is a favourite MLA and he helped this group and not that group or she helped this group and not that group. I'm just saying that you have this many kilometres of highway, and one way you're looking at is going to make that a whole lot longer, and one way is not. That's the point I'd like to make clear.

The Chair: And that's your basis for making your suggestions.

Mr. Rennie: As someone who has lived rurally my entire life and had to drive to every meeting in Edmonton, I am very familiar with the days on the highway, especially on a day like today, when it's a little bit slippery. This isn't bad. You don't see a lot of accidents out here as compared to when we're looking at our city-driving counterparts, but it is a serious issue.

10:30

The Chair: You should have tried Slave Lake yesterday.

Mr. Rennie: It could have been treacherous.

Dr. Archer: Mayor Rennie, thanks so much for the comments. First, the context. There are a couple of ridings that abut the Whitecourt-St. Anne riding that are quite a bit above average. You're quite a bit below average. So we're trying to see where changes to the constituency can come about most logically. We talked a bit about the Fox Creek area. I wonder if we could talk a bit about the eastern boundary of the riding, which abuts Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Populationwise that's the largest constituency in this area by quite a bit. According to the data we're looking at at the moment, it's about 19 per cent above the average, and there seems to be lots of growth happening in that area.

We had a presentation yesterday from someone from this area who recommended a couple of things. Firstly, he asked that we not change that constituency, but when we pursued that a little bit, he suggested that the highest priority from his perspective would be to keep the communities of Spruce Grove and St. Albert, so the southern part of that constituency, within one constituency, which leaves open the possibility of moving some of the population in Sturgeon county either to Whitecourt-St. Anne or to Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. You know, there are just so many ways of doing that. I wonder if you could provide us with any guidance that you'd like about whether a change in that direction would be seen as more or less desirable than a change, let's say, towards incorporating Fox Creek.

Then, secondly, if the east boundary was changed and moved east somewhat, would it make sense to go all the way to Morinville, or should those two boundaries come together in the middle, as it were?

Mr. Rennie: You can tell I'm trying to look at the map because I'm not sure it's Sturgeon county. I think it would be Parkland county, wouldn't it?

Dr. Archer: Sorry. It's the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Mr. Rennie: Okay. Sorry. Right. I believe that constituency includes Parkland county, but I don't believe Sturgeon county is actually touching, although maybe on one of the corners it is touching. Sorry. Just between the name, which is the provincial riding and which is the municipality.

Well, if you have to make a change, you have to make a change. Which one is better for us is whichever one is going to have less kilometres in distance. You're going to add on different boards and different municipalities and their councils, regardless. Would I say one is better than the other? I would say that Fox Creek would be better than adding towards Spruce Grove and Stony Plain.

My reason is simple. The biggest issue that we have facing us – and you're going to encounter it; it doesn't matter where you live in the province – is the mountain pine beetle. Next summer when you

come here, these trees are not going to look the same. If in five years you come here, our backyard is going to be decimated compared to yours. A lot of people are going to come through and wonder what happened here because they don't have a clue what the mountain pine beetle is. I've been busy pushing our provincial politicians for more support. When we get closer to the cities, they don't have a clue what the mountain pine beetle is yet. They're going to be the first to wonder what happened. I just use the pine beetle as one example.

They have different issues in large urban areas from rural. So if you had to make a change, I would say draw a line in the sand to keep the rurals together. When I heard former MLA Strang talking, I think he was on the exact same page. Trying to cut up the pie so that it has a mixture of rural and urban isn't a good mixture because the issues are just so drastically different. I would take geography over, perhaps, mixing something with a strong urban feel to it with a rural feel because I think that the issues are so diversified that it becomes very difficult.

Again, to answer your question, if you had to pick one or the other, I would say go towards Fox Creek over going towards the city just because I think the city has different issues.

Dr. Archer: Thanks so much. That's all for me.

The Chair: Jim, you realize that with the updated figures that we have now, Whitecourt-St. Anne is 16.5 per cent below the average. We're trying to make it closer to the average.

Mr. Rennie: Yes. In my municipality two of our seven divisions are 30 per cent below the average. So I deal with this every day. There are some people that say: well, why don't we just change it? At the end of the day my answer is: because we're going to keep the people happy, and we're going to make sure that they're represented because the people in one area aren't the same as the people in the other. I understand that you have a guideline to try to follow. I'm living the exact same thing day to day, but at the end of the day I know that we have to bend the rules. Numbers don't prove everything. It's the people that really are important.

The Chair: We want effective representation; that's what you're saying.

Mr. Rennie: Exactly. I understand the challenge you have. I just think it's important that we represent the same kind of people. The rural expectation – and I wish I'd done some research to understand where each of you lives so that I would understand if I'm talking to five people that represent large areas or if you're rural like I am. People aren't the same. We all raise our kids the same and those kind of things. We're all good people. But we have different sets of concerns at times. I think that to get our MLAs to represent us, it would be better that they're focused more. A rural riding mixed with urban, I can't see that being in the best interests of Albertans.

The Chair: All right.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Mayor Rennie. I want to challenge you on your last statement. An earlier presentation, which I think you may have heard, made the point that if you have individuals who have only one fundamental background, one fundamental current reality, they tend to be narrower in their perspective. This presenter was saying that that's not good for Alberta, that in order to make Alberta a vibrant place,

we need to have some mixture so that there's a broader understanding of provincial issues.

You asked a question about where we're from. I was born in Edmonton. I spent a number of years in Canmore. I've lived in Cochrane, and now I live in Calgary. I tend to feel more comfortable with the concept of a mixture of individuals, which creates, you know, sometimes some tensions, but it also expands the intellect. It forces people to think outside of their narrow perspective. I also had the great opportunity to be an MLA for eight years. It was interesting to listen to some of my colleagues talking about a specific issue, which might have been very, very important and central to that MLA's constituency, but sometimes it lacked a broader perspective. It was too centralized and too focused on that one particular issue or particular industry, for example, as opposed to having a broader, more cosmopolitan, if you will, but certainly a broader provincial reality and focus. I don't know whether you need to make any comments on that.

Mr. Rennie: I would love to because I think it'll bug me the entire drive home if I don't.

Mr. Evans: I don't want that to happen.

Mr. Rennie: I totally agree with you. I think diversity in any community is great. For example, foreign workers coming to our communities has been the best thing to happen. All of sudden the youth in our schools are met with people that speak different languages and bring different cultures. That's been a fantastic thing. Also a lot of help from our MLA on that because of a unique set of issues getting them here. We needed a lot of help for those business owners and for the temporary foreign workers as they got here.

10:40

I will say this: I was born in Whitecourt. I've lived out in the county on an acreage for almost my entire life. To the people on the north side of the county, who live on the other side of the river, as they call it, I'm the city slicker. Now, I am as far from being a city slicker as any person you'll ever meet in your life, but I'm a city slicker because I live near a bigger town. That community of ours is divided. That river is the dividing line, and it happens also to be the line between the two MLAs or the two constituencies.

They see us as very different because we come from an area near a big town. Now, can you imagine what they're going to feel about those people that come from the big city? I don't think that they're ever going to meet, and what you're going to have is constituencies that are divided. That should never be. They should feel that they have some common ground. I don't know why this is human nature, but there is a city type and the rest of us, and they will never see that they have the same issues. I think that will divide issues, and it will make it so that it's a lot harder a job for those constituencies to represent the people that live there.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mayor Rennie. I want to assure you that even though Mr. Evans lives in Calgary, he, like I, who lives in Sturgeon, supports the Edmonton Oilers.

Mr. Rennie: Thank you very much for having me.

The Chair: Thank you, and if you could send us your written thoughts before the 13th of October – we have an e-mail, a website – we would very much appreciate it.

Mr. Rennie: I appreciate it, and I do want to tell you that although perhaps I challenge your thoughts at times, I really appreciate what you're doing. I realize how difficult this is. You're not trying to get two people to agree on something; you're trying to get such a huge number. Good luck with your challenges.

The Chair: I'll take your class that you mentioned.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenters are Mr. Wes Tweedle, reeve of Brazeau country, and Ms Maureen Schwab, councillor of Brazeau county.

**Wes Tweedle, Reeve
Maureen Schwab, Councillor
Brazeau County**

The Chair: Good morning. Just before you start, for the benefit of our recorders we have to have both of you give your full names, if you would, so it can be recorded by *Hansard*.

Mr. Tweedle: I'm Wes Tweedle, reeve of Brazeau county.

Ms Schwab: Maureen Schwab, councillor, Brazeau county.

Mr. Tweedle: I'll have Ms Schwab read our presentation, and then I'll make some comments.

Ms Schwab: I'm sure, Your Honour, that you do have a copy of our presentation available to you. What we will say basically echoes what you've heard already from Mr. Strang and from Mr. Rennie. We do realize that our constituency is under the threshold level, but we also, as the gentleman before us said, wish that you'll recognize the vast distances throughout municipalities. Our MLA represents a lot of summer villages, the town of Drayton Valley, villages such as Breton as well as portions of the First Nations, Hobbema First Nations.

The industries that drive the economy in the area are quite similar: the oil and gas industry, the agriculture industry, and forestry. Of course, in downturns and in boom times the MLAs are always called upon to assist industries and communities as they deal with issues that come up from having a large growth factor or, as we have now, a slow economy. So one key in our presentation is that we recognize the similarities of MLAs that have to deal with a certain economic base and the understanding that they need to have.

I also did certainly appreciate Mr. Evans' comments about the diversity of the knowledge that MLAs need to obtain, but I also know that as they're appointed to various committees, they certainly gain that. Our MLA, for instance, is the parliamentary secretary for Environment, and she deals with waste-water issues and solid waste issues across the province, so she certainly gets a good knowledge of different issues facing both rural and urban Alberta.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Tweedle.

Mr. Tweedle: Yes. Thanks, Maureen. Our biggest concern is the rural-urban situation. I do tend to somewhat agree that it's probably a good idea to have some diversification. But when you get into the larger centres, their issues are considerably different, and they don't really relate that great with an isolated rural setting.

I know, as Maureen said, our constituency is a little under the population. I think our preference would probably be to expand into a more rural area, maybe to the south of us, to the Rimbey area. I don't know what theirs is like. If we had to move, I think that would probably be our preference rather than going east where we'd be getting into Leduc, Edmonton, the really densely populated urban

centres. To the west side of our county we get into a very isolated area with virtually no population, so there's not much point in moving in that direction. I think that would be our preference.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Peter, would you have some questions?

Mr. Dobbie: Sure. Thank you very much, Mr. Tweedle and Ms Schwab. It's helpful to get, again, the direct suggestions. You heard, I think, what I said before about the concept of trying to build as many rural constituencies as close to the new provincial average as possible. In looking at your constituency, it's very close to where it should be, and it did strike some of us that Rimbey would be a natural addition. There is a commonality of interests, so moving that way does make some sense. The challenge, of course, that we have would be moving population out of one riding. We're just stretching the band. We do have good technology that allows us to test various hypotheses.

Apart from that growth suggestion is there anywhere in your current constituency where there are any illogical boundaries, where you would say: gee, if we had just made a minor change? Is there anything as councillors you have noticed that we need to fix, something in particular, because people are on the wrong side of the line?

Mr. Tweedle: Not that I can think of offhand. No.

Mr. Dobbie: If you think of them, I'm sure you'll let us know.

Mr. Tweedle: Yeah.

Mr. Dobbie: I've asked a number of people this question. Do you have a position, either yourselves or representing your county, on our ability to use up to four special consideration ridings? Have you thought about that? Do you have any recommendations for us?

Ms Schwab: I think that it's a very difficult task for you, but I think it would maybe deal with some of the areas you indicated previously, the Peace region and where there are such vast differences.

With regard to speaking of maybe our constituency moving to the south, I think we would probably concur with that in that the economy there is based on agriculture, the oil and gas industry. Rimbey is a small town – please don't tell Mayor Dale Barr that I said that – but it's a very vibrant town. It also is based on a lot of the same economies as the town of Drayton Valley, so the MLA would be dealing with a lot of the same issues.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Tweedle and Ms Schwab, for coming and sharing those views. As I look at your constituency and the one that's immediately east of you, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, we have a situation in which your constituency is under the provincial average by an amount that is strikingly close to the amount that they are over the provincial average. Then there is a town right on the border, Devon, which is almost exactly the size that would balance them out. So with very little geographical change you would end up with two constituencies that are almost right on the provincial average. Again, for someone who doesn't live in the area, that would seem a real natural change to make in these two constituencies to bring them both within a very close range of the provincial average. Is there a particular reason why we shouldn't be doing that, notwithstanding the fact that your first preference would be to extend south, I guess,

or west and add more of an agricultural area? Is there a particular reason why we shouldn't be thinking about adding Devon to the constituency?

10:50

Mr. Tweedle: I hadn't thought of Devon, but Devon does have a lot of commonalities with us. It's an oil-based town. It was started on oil. I think it would probably be a good mix, in my personal opinion.

Ms Schwab: I really wouldn't know a lot more about Devon. I think I'm probably more familiar with Rimbey because that's where I grew up. It's actually, I think, a lot of the same commonalities, except they're probably getting a lot more of the pressures from being close to the city of Edmonton with regard to the urban sprawl that's certainly getting closer to the Devon area.

Dr. Archer: Right.

That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. I did notice you shaking your head in agreement with the Edmonton Oilers.

Ms Schwab: Oh, yes. We may have a little goalie problem there.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for your presentation. I'm going to be really brief. I just really wanted to ask, looking at the boundaries of Drayton Valley-Calmar, about a notch there that was drawn, I think, by the previous commission. Was that to respect the boundary of your county? Am I reading that correctly?

Mr. Tweedle: I'm not sure. I don't know.

Ms Schwab: Where are you? Is it this notch at the bottom?

Ms Jeffs: Yes, on the southern boundary where there's that notch. Is that following the Brazeau county?

Ms Schwab: I made a presentation the last time this happened, but I can't tell you either. It's strange. You know, I would doubt that that's a very highly populated area anyway. It would probably be rural. I think it would be very doubtful that there's any significant population there. I shouldn't say that, but obviously . . .

Ms Jeffs: So it may not be. I wondered if there was some reason, you know, that we shouldn't square that boundary, if that was drawn for a particular reason.

Mr. Tweedle: I'd have to look and see just what's in that little blip there and try to understand why it was put there.

Ms Jeffs: As I say, it appears from our map, you know, my eyes being what they are, that it may have been to track the Brazeau county boundary. But that's fine.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks Mr. Chairman, and thanks to both of you. I don't have any additional questions other than to say that I probably

agree with the statement that the Oilers have a problem with their goalie.

The Chair: Well, thank you both very much for coming. Thank you for your presentation. If you have any further thoughts, if you could e-mail us or fax it to us, we would appreciate it.

Ms Schwab: Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Tweedle: Thank you very much.

Ms Friesacher: The last presenter is Mr. Gerald Soroka.

Gerald Soroka, Vice-President

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties

Mr. Soroka: Good morning, board. I'm Gerald Soroka, vice-president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. That's who I'll be representing today. I think there were a lot of people in the gallery expecting me to speak. I'm also the mayor of Yellowhead county, but I'll step aside from that role and be the vice-president today. I have brief reading points here that I'd like to make, and I'll be glad to answer questions afterwards.

The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties is an organization that represents the councils of the 69 municipal districts and counties across the province. We are a member-driven organization that advocates on behalf of municipalities to the provincial government. First, I would like to express the AAMD and C's support of Bill 45 and the creation of four new seats in the Legislature. As we are all aware, the population of Alberta has increased significantly, and the government responded accordingly.

The request that we make is for the commission to assign one of the four new seats to the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo area. Though population counts vary, the number of people living in the area has increased radically over the past few years. That area plays an instrumental part in Alberta's present and future. The people who live there deserve to have more than one voice in the Legislature.

Another item I wish to address today is the concern our organization has over possible impairment of effective representation that is currently in practice in the province. Our organization agrees with the 2003 Electoral Boundaries Commission report, which stated 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'." This statement directly applies to constituencies that some argue should increase in area due to the lack of population. Increasing the size of these vast constituencies would only have the effect of decreasing effective representation in that area. Effective representation takes into account social and cultural differences between areas. Alberta is a very diverse province, with some rural economies focused on forestry, farming and ranching, recreation, and oil and gas. With these different economic drivers and different types of employment, areas of Alberta take on their own personalities.

To increase the size of any rural municipality, then, you must take into account greater diversity of social and cultural norms. After all, how can an MLA represent the needs of his constituents when he lives four hours away from them? This is the same as expecting a member in Edmonton to represent the needs of the people in Canmore. Keeping constituencies to a reasonable size will ensure that those intangible social and cultural values can be represented by an MLA who understands them.

To those that advocate for far more equal representation, I say that within the limits of our province's two largest cities there are more MLAs representing those areas than there are city councillors. My point is not that Edmonton or Calgary should have fewer seats. I

simply want to make the point that effective representation does not necessarily correlate to how many people you represent. To define “effective” in such limited terms would do us all a disservice.

Some would argue that in the network age of the Internet, distance does not matter as much; however, for many rural parts of Alberta the Internet is not yet available. This is a separate challenge that the province must tackle. Many urban dwellers now take for granted the high-speed access they have to the Internet, but it needs to be understood that many people in Alberta cannot access the Internet in their own homes. The luckier people build their own towers and cut down trees just to ensure a line of sight to the nearest wireless tower but can still lose service on a windy day. Others do not have a tower within the 30-kilometre radius to connect to any level of service. The AAMD and C is in the midst of completing a study with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Service Alberta to determine how large the problem is. Until the urban-rural divide in broadband access is solved, the government cannot expect the Internet to solve the issues of constituency access to an MLA.

Section 15 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act works to address the challenges of effective representation and to provide flexibility to the 25 per cent population tolerance. However, the AAMD and C is still concerned that effective representation in large constituencies could be at risk if this tolerance level is strictly adhered to during the course of this review. The AAMD and C asks the commission to consider the 25 per cent tolerance to be open to adjustment, should the need arise, to ensure the level of effective representation that rural constituencies struggle to maintain.

Thank you for your time today. The membership of the AAMD and C looks forward to seeing the interim report in the new year. I’d be pleased to answer any questions you have now.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Soroka. It’s very helpful to have your group’s focused input. In listening to the recommendations the group has given, had you considered the specific number of special constituencies that we should be looking at? I know that in general it appears you’re supporting it. Do you have any recommendations to us as to the number we should use and where they might be?

Mr. Soroka: Well, we didn’t have anything too specific because we thought that was putting too much onus or direction on your organization or your board. I think our concern is to make sure that rural municipalities stay strong and vibrant.

I want to comment on what Mr. Evans stated earlier, that it’s good that an MLA has a broad range and focus. With the rural side they have a lot of opportunities. When you travel the size of West Yellowhead – let’s focus on that – from basically east of Edson all the way to Jasper, Grande Cache, you get a lot of diversity. Your urban MLAs, on the other hand, if you have a high-concentration populated area are very narrow focused and narrow driven. I don’t think we want to get into that type of situation where we have so many MLAs from the urban side. They don’t have that broad-based experience, so that’s one of the things we’d like to focus on. You’re saying: as for the specifics? No. We did not focus on any specific areas.

11:00

Mr. Dobbie: All right. Thank you. Another question is that I’d like your response to the proposition we’ve had from presenters on behalf of Edmonton and Calgary. It has been suggested to us that one way of looking at the population of the province and allocating seats is to consider the city of Edmonton and the population within it as one area, the city of Calgary and the population within it as another area, not to create any constituencies that go outside those

boundaries, and then to look at the rest of Alberta. If we do that, the numbers we have show that Edmonton and Calgary represent 51 to 52 per cent of the population. The rest of Alberta is 48 to 49, depending on where you average. As a principle or as an approach does your group have a position on whether they would support that type of approach, or do you have another suggestion for us?

Mr. Soroka: Well, any time that you – maybe I shouldn’t use the word “dilute” – use more urban-based population to justify the riding, then the rural side does lose significantly because it is, after all, voter population, representation by population. If you have 70 per cent of your voters on the urban side, your MLA will probably cater more to the urban side as opposed to the rural side simply because everyone wants to get re-elected. If you don’t have support from your constituents, who are you going to cater to more?

Mr. Dobbie: That’s on, again, the issue of if you have a hybrid riding, a ‘rurban.’ Clearly, you’re not in favour of that.

Mr. Soroka: No, we are not.

Mr. Dobbie: What about the principle, sir, of looking at three areas – Edmonton, Calgary, and the rest of the province – as a starting point to allocate seats? Have you talked about that as a group?

Mr. Soroka: Well, we’ve spoken that this population riding base, the 25 per cent leeway, is where we have some issues because on our urban side you have a very small riding area. They can easily get around that area within a full day, two days and see, basically, all the organizations or the community groups. You could have significant population increase as opposed to our rural ridings, where it’s driving two days just to get across some of these ridings already. The boundaries are getting so large.

To me, on the urban side you don’t have nearly the same pressures that you would for a rural MLA. You’re dealing with the one government, the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary. Usually your residents’ concerns are going to be: my roads aren’t happening, my sidewalks. Those are then city councillors’ issues, not the MLAs’ issues.

When you get to the rural side – and I’ll use West Yellowhead – you have the town of Edson, town of Hinton, town of Grande Cache, town of Jasper, and the west half of Yellowhead county. Each one of us has five different municipalities that the MLA has to deal with. We have five completely different issues, different main streets, if you want to call it. I mean, the rural MLA by far is going to be a lot busier accommodating all these different areas as opposed to your urban side just focusing on one 10-block-square radius, let’s call it.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks. We certainly have heard from others that the intensity of the experience is different for different constituencies. Thank you.

Mr. Soroka: I think that’s where my concern is. Representation by population doesn’t mean that you can’t represent twice the amount of people when you’re dealing with a smaller area. That’s why we’re concerned that using representation by population isn’t an effective way to govern Alberta.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much for your presentation. I don’t have any questions, I don’t think – you’ve been very clear – really just more of a comment. I’m thinking we need to get you into a room with some of your urban cousins, who might take issue with some of

your statements. As Mr. Dobbie has said, certainly we hear that the issues are very different in the urban ridings when they talk about the diversities and the inner-city issues in some of them that we deal with. But we do appreciate your comments. Obviously, it's wonderful to have the AAMD and C come and provide a position to us on this. That's very, very welcome. Thank you.

Mr. Soroka: Well, I'd like to make a comment back. I guess if I was an MLA in the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary and I had basically two-thirds of the population in those two cities, when you have representation by population, I'd be strongly opposed to changing that idea as well.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Mr. Soroka. This is going to be a comment about cities and something that we've started to think about as a theme, and that is the ability of an MLA to deal with the urban area and not just to think of it as an urban area. Rather, if an MLA is dealing with an inner-city area, where there are new Canadians, where language is an issue, where social services are another issue, it may well be that that demand justifies having a smaller population than the quotient as opposed to the suburban areas of urban Calgary and Edmonton in particular, where there aren't as many issues that those individuals would be coming to their MLA to deal with. Therefore, perhaps the justification for a higher-than-quotient number there, which might assist us in dealing with particularly those rural areas further away from the bigger centres where, again, just on a different scale but like the centre of the cities, there are many, many issues, and it's difficult to effectively deal with those folks and give them effective representation.

Has the AAMD and C ever thought about that? If they haven't, maybe we could just ask you to think about it with your colleagues and give us the benefit of your wisdom on that.

Mr. Soroka: Actually, you're right; we have not addressed that concern. Mr. Evans, that's a very valid point. I think that was the point that we were taking. Like you're saying, in your bedroom communities – let's call them that – in Edmonton I think your demands on your MLA are going to be significantly less as opposed to your high-pressure points. That's a very good and valid point. When you're dealing with certain areas within your urban side, yeah, certain MLAs probably are going to be busier than others. That's where this board has to bring up those kind of challenges. I don't know how to determine that right now, but that is a good point. I'll bring that back to my board.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks very much.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Soroka. Just one comment and one question. On the comment side I'd just like to provide you with an indication of the data that we're working with because I think it may conflict with the understanding of the population distribution around the province that you're referring to. The data that we're working with are a combination of the federal census data of 2006 and then some updated municipal census data, some of which go up to 2009. It all depends on when the municipalities did the census. Those data suggest that the population in the two cities of Calgary and Edmonton together are about 1.8 million, and the population in the rest of Alberta is about 1.7 million. So it's not really a two-thirds, one-third difference; it's almost a 50-50 split between those two cities and the rest of Alberta. That's part of the context that we're bringing to our deliberations.

Now, the question is a question I asked one of the previous presenters. It has to do with any advice you may have for us in those instances in which there is an urban centre that is too large to be a single constituency but too small to be two constituencies. That presents us with the possibility – and let me use Grande Prairie as an illustration, with a population of just over 50,000 – of creating one constituency that is almost entirely urban or perhaps entirely urban and another constituency that is mixed urban and rural. A different strategy would be in a sense to split it in half and have two constituencies that are both urban and rural. If there was a general approach that you'd like to see the commission take on that issue, what would you advise us?

11:10

Mr. Soroka: Okay. You posed two questions. One is on the numbers side. You said I've said two-thirds. You're right; with Edmonton and city it's not two-thirds. I think that when you include all the cities, though – you know, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie – you start looking at that the majority of the population in Alberta is all urban side.

When you start talking about creating a new urban constituency of Grande Prairie, now, once again, we're going to suffer from the rural side. We won't have that same representation because we have another urban riding. Yes, it's rural-urban, but technically it's still urban according to us. We now start losing another voice. We have another MLA that encompasses Grande Prairie and is trying to focus in on a huge area as opposed to shortening that area by half.

Currently we have Grande Prairie roughly cut in half, you know, east and west. To me, to stick with that scenario, it's probably going to be much more effective for an MLA to try to represent that than to try to represent a circle around Grand Prairie and try to cover that whole entire area when you have one MLA that can fly from Edmonton to Grande Prairie in an afternoon, visit his constituency, and go back to Edmonton the same day. If you have the rural riding right around Grande Prairie, I think it's going to be very challenging for that MLA to try to see all his residents in that area.

Does that answer your question?

Dr. Archer: Oh, yeah. Very clearly.

The Chair: Well, thank you very, very much.

Mr. Soroka: Would you like to have my speaking notes?

The Chair: Well, we would. Particularly, we'd like to give them to the staff so that we can get copies of them. Please, we'd like to have any further comments. If you could e-mail them to us or fax them, we'd very, very much appreciate it. I used to be their lawyer, the AAMD and C, so I know. It would be very good.

Mr. Soroka: The only problem is that our next board meeting is the 14th of October.

The Chair: Well, you tell them that I suggested that they call it early.

Mr. Soroka: Okay. Thank you to the board. Where would you want me to put these?

The Chair: Right here. Again, thank you so much for coming. Are there any other presentations?

There being no further presentations, we will adjourn and get on our plane for Red Deer. Thank you all.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:13 a.m.]

