

9:04 a.m.

Tuesday, April 13, 2010

[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. My name is Ernie Walter, and I am the chair of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I would like to introduce you to the other members of the commission here with me today: Dr. Keith Archer of Banff on my far right, next to him Peter Dobbie of Vegreville, then to my left Allyson Jeffs of Edmonton, and next to her Brian Evans of Calgary.

As you are aware, the five of us have spent the last seven months reviewing the electoral boundaries of our province, and I can tell you that we have examined every square inch of the map of Alberta. I know I speak for all of us when I say that the commission has found it both very interesting and challenging to weigh the concerns and relevant factors put before it during the preparation of the interim report. I would like to note that we are very pleased with the large amount of public feedback received. We have received well over 470 submissions and are looking forward to additional feedback during the hearings. Once we have considered this feedback, the commission will issue its final report by July of this year.

With that, I am pleased to touch on a few of our findings and recommendations setting out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 electoral divisions we propose for Alberta together with our reasons for the proposals as outlined in the interim report you have hopefully all had a chance to read. I can tell you that the foundation for our decisions has been effective representation for all Albertans.

In undertaking its work, the commission has been guided by the requirements of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, relevant decisions of the courts, advice received during the first round of public hearings and in written submissions as well as the latest census information available to us.

When I speak of the census information, the 2009 municipal census data for Alberta's cities shows that there has been a consistent pattern of growth since the 2001 census. Fifty-two per cent of Albertans currently reside in Edmonton and Calgary. Using the 2009 official population list, the total population being considered by the commission is 3,556,583. Given this pattern of growth this means the quotient, or provincial average population, has grown by 10,100 since the 1995-1996 commission and is now at 40,880. So, essentially, the Act directs the commission to divide the province into 87 electoral divisions with a population within 25 per cent of this provincial average in a way that will ensure effective representation for Albertans.

Taking into account available population information and factors affecting effective representation, the majority of the commission concluded that the redistribution of the 87 divisions should allow for the following increases: Calgary by two additional divisions, bringing it to 25; Edmonton by one additional division, bringing it to 19; and the rest of Alberta with one additional division, providing it with 43 divisions. This would ensure effective representation across the province.

Now, the commission is required by law to divide the existing Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo division. Its population is more than 88 per cent higher than the quotient, and the law prohibits the commission from recommending a division which has a population more than 25 per cent above the quotient.

How did we come to make the recommendations outlined in the interim report? In our efforts to respect the requirement of effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the primary principles and factors which have guided the commission's recommendations are:

Population. The commission has attempted to limit the variation in the average population per division. The average population per electoral division from the quotient is from plus 4.3 per cent in

Calgary, plus .7 per cent in Edmonton, and minus 2.8 per cent for the rest of Alberta.

Scarcity of population. The commission recognizes the scarcity of population in the two proposed special divisions of Dunvegan-Central Peace and Lesser Slave Lake. The riding of Dunvegan-Central Peace meets all five criteria for a special division, and Lesser Slave Lake meets four of the five criteria.

Community interests. The commission has taken into account and consideration community interests of which it is aware.

Community boundaries. The commission has attempted, as has been requested by municipalities, to respect community boundaries in Calgary, Edmonton, and other areas.

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Municipal boundaries. The commission has made every attempt to respect municipal boundaries. This has not been possible in all cases, but the commission has attempted to reduce the fragmentation of municipal boundaries resulting from the existing divisions.

Geographical features. The commission has considered geographical features, including roads, which provide natural barriers between communities of interest.

Understandable and clear boundaries. The commission has attempted to recommend boundaries which are clear and easy to understand for the residents of the areas. In addition, the commission is using digital mapping technology to describe the boundaries rather than the extensive written legal descriptions previously used.

Distance and area. This is primarily an issue in the rest of Alberta. In recommending those boundaries, the commission has considered the area of the proposed electoral divisions and the travel distances involved both within the division and between the division and the Legislature. In addition, MLAs have to maintain relations with more than one school board, more than one municipal council, and several community and business organizations.

Inner-city urban issues. The commission acknowledges the submissions stressing that inner-city urban ridings generally have their own challenges such as a large number of linguistic and cultural communities, a disproportionate number of people dependent on social programs, increasing numbers of new immigrants and aboriginal peoples, and other urban area issues.

Other Calgary and Edmonton issues. The commission also acknowledges that, while there may only be one council and one school authority, maintaining relations with a number of community leagues or associations, business revitalization zones, and other identifiable organizations places demands on the time of a city MLA.

Now that I have briefly reviewed our recommendations, we want to hear your views. We believe that what we hear from you, the people 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. I will now call on our staff to call the first speaker. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then 10 minutes for questions and answers with the commission.

The commission's public meetings are being recorded by *Alberta Hansard*, and the audio recordings will be posted to the commission website; transcripts of these proceedings will also be available online.

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

All right. We will now wait for a little bit for our first presenter.

Ms Friesacher: There are no speakers scheduled this morning.

The Chair: We're going to adjourn. We'll stay here for an appropriate period of time in case somebody does turn up.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:30 a.m.]

