



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

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Peter Dobbie, QC
Brian Evans, QC
Allyson Jeffs

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9:01 a.m.

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. My name is Ernie Walter, and I'm the chair of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce you to the members of the commission with me here today: on my far right Dr. Keith Archer, next to him Peter Dobbie of Vegreville, and on my immediate left Allyson Jeffs of Edmonton.

As you are aware, the commission has spent the last seven months reviewing the electoral boundaries of our province, and I can tell you that we've examined every square inch of the map of Alberta. I know I speak for all of the commission when I say that we found it both interesting and challenging to weigh the concerns and relevant factors put before us during the preparation of the interim report. I would like to note that we are very pleased with the large amount of public feedback. We have read well over 470 written 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'm pleased to touch on a few of our findings and recommendations setting out the areas, boundaries, and names of 87 electoral divisions we propose for Alberta together with the reasons for our proposals. 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 at the first round of public hearings, and written submissions as well as the latest census information available to us.

In speaking of the census information, the 2009 municipal census data for Alberta's cities shows that we've had 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. Essentially, the act directs the commission to divide the province into 87 electoral divisions with a population within 25 per cent of the provincial average in a way that will ensure effective representation for Albertans.

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

In arriving at our recommendations for effective representation as guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the primary factors which have guided the commission are:

Population. The commission has attempted to limit the variation of the population per division. The average population per electoral division from the quotient is from plus 4.3 per cent in Calgary, plus .7 in Edmonton, and minus 2.8 in 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. 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 community interests of which it is aware.

Community boundaries. The commission has attempted, as

requested by the municipalities, to respect the community boundaries in Calgary, Edmonton, and other areas.

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 division and the distance travelled both within the division and between the division and the Legislature. In addition, MLAs, to maintain relations with more than one school board and more than one municipal council and several community and business organizations, have an added burden.

The commission acknowledges the submissions stressing that inner-city urban ridings generally have their own challenges such as large numbers 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 issues.

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

Now that I've 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'll now call on our staff to announce the first speaker. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then 10 minutes for questions and answers.

9:10

This is all 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.

We would ask that each presenter who is participating here this morning identify themselves for the record prior to starting their presentation.

Ty Lund, MLA
Rocky Mountain House

Mr. Lund: Good morning, members of the commission, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Ty Lund, and I'm currently the MLA for Rocky Mountain House. I'm not sure what all you have. I've got copies of the proposal.

The Chair: I think we have the important points.

Mr. Lund: The definition of the boundaries?

The Chair: That's right. Then we have the two maps plus the larger map, and we have an additional one also.

Mr. Lund: You've got the map that I'm proposing?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Lund: Okay. That's good, then. Thanks once again.

In the Legislature back a little over a year ago – as a matter of fact, Thursday, March 19, was kind of an important day for two of us, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake and myself. It was our 20th anniversary in the Legislature. The Speaker had a little ceremony and made a little presentation to us. He put a few things kind of in context. I'm not looking for sympathy; I really want you to appreciate a very large constituency and what it means as far as the constituents are concerned, their ability to meet and interact with their MLA.

The Speaker said:

The area of Prince Edward Island is 5,640 square kilometres . . .

The riding of Rocky Mountain House is 23,188 square kilometres, four times the size of Prince Edward Island. Prince Edward Island has 27 MLAs. Hon. members, just one other interesting point about this: both of these members . . .

And he was speaking of both myself and the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

. . . have averaged 80,000-plus kilometres per year in travel for the last 20 years. If the circumference of the earth is just above 41,000 kilometres, that means that each year for the last 20 years both of them have gone around the world twice. That's 40 times around the world. If you'd been able to average 100 kilometres per hour in your car, which is impossible, that meant that they've spent at least 800 hours per year in their vehicles coming back and forth to Edmonton and then finding their constituents because both represent extremely diverse, sparsely settled constituencies, and then when they find them, they have to work [with them]. That's a minimum of 800-plus hours [per year]. If they've each worked 50 hours per week, that's 16 weeks. That's four months per year just to and fro, Edmonton to their constituencies and within their constituencies.

As I said, I want you to think of that in context of what that means to the constituents trying to meet. Quite frankly, I know there's a thinking out there that somehow the new technology – e-mail, et cetera – takes away the need for this contact. I plus many of my constituents like to see the colour of your eyes. That's just the nature of people.

One of the things that bothers me: the overall turnout in elections. Part of the reason for that, of course, is that constituents feel removed from their members of the Legislature. It gets even worse the larger the area that you're covering. I want to point out section 15(2), the conditions that would need to be there in order to have an electoral division that is below the normal amount of population. Then subsection (a):

the area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 20,000 square kilometres or the total surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15,000 square kilometres.

Subsection (b) doesn't apply to the Rocky constituency and/or the one that I'm proposing.

(c) There is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 8,000 people.

That one applies.

(d) The area of the proposed electoral division contains an Indian reserve or a Metis settlement.

I have in the Rocky constituency three Indian reserves.

(e) The proposed electoral division has a portion of its boundary coterminous with a boundary of the Province of Alberta.

Of course, this Rocky Mountain House constituency does go out to the B.C. border, not for a long stretch, but certainly it meets that criteria.

So what we're proposing – I'm just going to quickly go over the

additions to what we currently have. Quite frankly, it would have been my preference that we don't change them, but I'm realistic and realize that we're probably going to have to.

If you look up in the northeast corner, up above Gull Lake, you will see an area within the county of Ponoka. Currently the Rocky Mountain House constituency comes in just a little ways south Rimbey, goes north just a little ways west of Rimbey, then back east to highway 20, and then goes on right up to the boundary of the county of Wetaskiwin. What we're proposing was to come over to a point two miles west of the fifth meridian, then straight south down to Gull Lake, follow the east shore of Gull Lake until you reach the boundary that we currently have, and then proceed on south. The boundary, then, from that point on across Sylvan Lake is similar to the boundary that we currently have. But at a point two miles west of the township line we would go south and hit highway 11 and then go east to highway 761, then west to highway 766, then south down to the Red Deer River. That area that I've just described west of Sylvan Lake and south is new to the area that we currently have.

In there around Sylvan Lake there's a peculiar thing in the boundaries of the county of Red Deer and the county of Lacombe. The county of Lacombe runs along highway 11A for about four miles, and it's only one mile north. It's a strange boundary, and it causes a lot of difficulty. Why the counties haven't settled it out I don't know. I've seen times when, for example, in the spring with road bans the county of Red Deer will have a ban, but there isn't one in the county of Lacombe, so those people that live up in the county of Lacombe don't have access into the area.

That's just an anomaly, and for some reason we've followed that in the existing boundary, but we're proposing to change that for just a short stretch there. It's probably only about four miles, and there are not many residents in there. It's really confusing come election time, and right now I was hesitant to propose that change because currently the people in there realize that when it comes time to vote, they know where that line is, and we're going to change that now. But it just makes sense that it would be different than what exists today.

Once we get down to the Red Deer, we come down to the Garrington Bridge. From there on in the county of Mountain View we follow the existing line, so there's no change in the county of Mountain View, but there are those changes in the county of Red Deer, the county of Lacombe, and the county of Ponoka.

9:20

I'm just going to then go quickly over some points. Incidentally, these three things you have are what I sent out to all of the municipalities, the school boards in the proposed area so that they knew what I was going to be proposing. I got some responses back, and you may hear from some of the other people. I don't know who all is going to either write and/or make a formal presentation.

I'm proposing that we would change the name to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency. The reason for that is that even currently, today – Sundre is in the Rocky Mountain House constituency – people don't recognize that Sundre is a part of the Rocky constituency. To identify both Rimbey and Sundre gives people an understanding of the size of the constituency when people are within it. Then, as I pointed out earlier, it meets four of the five variances.

Keeping the trading areas together as much as possible. Now, this is important because when we talk about trading areas, what really that means is that when there are functions in the centre – like up at Rimbey right today, because Rimbey is not in the Rocky constituency, I don't attend many functions there albeit that if you just go a little bit south and a little west or north, you're in the Rimbey

constituency. The important thing about this and one of the reasons we're talking about moving it is that when you go to a function, if it's in the trading area that's all in your constituency, you're going to see a lot of the people that are in your constituency. They see you, and they have a chance, if they've got an issue or there's something they want to discuss with you, to do that.

Especially in these large constituencies it's difficult. There are a lot of evenings, on weekends particularly, when there will be three events in various towns or villages. With the distance you can only go to one, really. Armistice Day is the one that really causes a problem because everything is at 11 o'clock on the 11th day, and currently we have five Legions. Now, I've got to admit that if Rimbe comes in, then we've got six Legions. Well, you might get to two. What we often do is that we'll go to one in the morning and then try to get into one of the others in the afternoon because a lot of the Legions carry on past 11 o'clock.

When we look at what we're proposing, the Rimbe trading area is pretty much included. We looked at moving over and coming down on the fifth meridian but then discovered that there is a fairly large subdivision up here in the northeast part of Gull Lake, and quite frankly those people tend to go to Ponoka as opposed to Rimbe albeit that Rimbe is closer. It's just the nature of that trading pattern; they tend to go over to Ponoka. So I say that for Rimbe the majority is included but certainly not quite all.

Then, Eckville and Bentley are the same situation. In what we're proposing, the Eckville trading area is pretty well totally within the boundaries. Because of where they're situated, Bentley has a lot of trade with Lacombe, but it's fairly good there. Then when you get down to Sylvan Lake, I must admit that this is cutting their trading area. There's west of Sylvan, where we're proposing to come with the boundary. For a lot of those people Sylvan Lake is their trading area and south of Sylvan. It's splitting there, but unfortunately I don't know how you capture all of them in every case. Sundre is pretty well totally within the trading area, and of course Rocky Mountain House is totally in it.

We followed the municipal boundaries where possible, and of course all of the county of Clearwater is in. We've used the boundary of the county of Ponoka with Wetaskiwin. We do split Ponoka. Down around Sylvan Lake we used the boundary between the county of Lacombe and the county of Red Deer. Next, south there, you'll notice we've gone along some numbered highways, and as we get further south, we've used the Red Deer River as a boundary.

Then I can't brag about where we are south there. There are a couple there that I've questioned all along why the line is just where it is, but I left it alone. There's a stretch that goes just one mile west of a major road. I don't know why it was ever drawn that way, but that's the way it was, so we didn't attempt to change it this time simply because this whole thing about where you go to vote: people get annoyed when you keep changing the boundaries when it gets to election time. We have got no problem as far as people from the adjoining constituencies and/or adjoining municipalities contacting us. Back in my first term all of this area around Sylvan Lake – well, as a matter of fact, Sylvan Lake was in the constituency along with all of the summer villages around Sylvan. So we still have contacts in there that phone, and that's fine. That's not the problem.

I think I've covered pretty much. Well, keeping the common interest; that is, the types of industry, types of work for the public and those types of things within an area: that's pretty much taken care of.

I think that would be my presentation. I'd be only too happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Lund. Have you had a chance to calculate the population of this constituency in the event that the commission accepted this set of recommendations?

Mr. Lund: Yes. And I'm confident this is on the low side. The reason I say that is because what we did was we took the polls and the voters in that poll. Now, I don't know exactly the relationship between the number of people and the number of voters. I don't know what that ratio is, but I can just tell you that in conversation with the mayor of Rimbe, he said the population of Rimbe is about 2,300 people. The poll says 1,640. So that one I thought was a little higher because that's a little over 1.4 times. I don't know. Maybe that's what it runs, but I doubt that it would be quite that high. So using the poll numbers – we didn't put in any factor – currently we have 34,230, and we're adding about 4,600, and I'm confident that number is low.

Dr. Archer: So likely around 38,000 or thereabouts?

Mr. Lund: It would be 38,800, so that would be, well, about 2,500 short of the mean, which means about 5 per cent.

Dr. Archer: Right. Would it be accurate to characterize, I guess, maybe a simplistic characterization of the proposal as saying: move Olds, with about 8,000 people, out of the constituency, and move Rimbe into the constituency? There are a few smaller communities around both of those, but that's pretty much what we're talking about.

Mr. Lund: Yeah. And there is some rural around it, as you've indicated. I'll tell you one of the things that I've mentioned to Richard Marz is that if you've got a college in your constituency, that's a high demand. They have events on every weekend, and they want to see their MLA there. I get invited to quite a few of them even though it's not in my constituency. It was so hard to tell on the map whether the line actually had the college in the Rocky Mountain House constituency or if it was in whatever that other one was to the east. But I think that if you've got a college, that should count for quite a bit when you're talking about the population because it's a high demand for the MLA.

9:30

Now, it's a great place. I enjoy it every time I go there, but the fact is that it's very time consuming, and if you put a town like that, with a college, in with a town like Rocky Mountain House, which has somewhere around 7,500 or somewhere in there, if you put those two together that distance apart, I think you're asking for trouble because it's absolutely impossible unless they give me a helicopter, and I don't think they're going to do that.

Dr. Archer: On the question of the size and the travel requirements in this constituency, in looking at your proposal versus the interim report of the commission, my sense is that the size is probably pretty close. Whether the commission accepted your recommendation or went with its original proposal or, for that matter, went with the status quo, Rocky Mountain House is always going to be such a large geographical constituency because the western portion is just so sparsely populated and much of the population seems to be along the highway 2 corridor.

Mr. Lund: There's no question that the population is east of

highway 22, the bulk of it. And you're right; the geographic area isn't changing much by what I'm proposing here, and that isn't by accident. Granted, there are more people in the area that the interim report suggests, but areawise it's pretty close to the same. The thing with the interim report is the concentration of population in Olds and around Olds to the west and that, furthermore, you're splitting the trading area of Olds as well. There was the issue of the size of Olds and the college, and I can't tell for sure if the college was in or out. It doesn't really matter. The fact is that if you're that close to the college, they're going to expect you to be there. Then the distance between the two major centres is over an hour's drive. I'm not sure about Rimbey. I talked to the mayor. I'm hoping that he had a chance for his council to make a decision. Whether they want this, I don't know. To be honest with you, I know that with their trading, you know, they tend to go to Lacombe. That's basically what happens. Years ago those were the trading areas. To some extent it's melded, but certainly there's still a lot of it.

Now, the school boards. What I'm proposing here now – even with the interim report as far as the school boards are concerned, it didn't change, although I don't think the Red Deer Catholic regional comes down as far as Didsbury. They've got Olds, I'm pretty sure, but I don't think they have Didsbury.

Dr. Archer: That's it for me. Thank you.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Lund, for the presentation. We received a submission from the Edmonton, Calgary, and rural Progressive Conservative caucuses that was under a letter from Doug Horner. That's our submission 334. In that there's a map of the proposed changes, that accompanied your notes, about Rocky Mountain House. I see today that what you've provided us is those changes in text format in terms of where we go. Did you have a copy of the submission that went in from the caucus?

Mr. Lund: No. I didn't see what he sent in. I saw what they were suggesting, and I pointed out to him a couple of minor changes. Now, quite frankly, I've forgotten exactly where they were because they were quite minor, but I just remember this call it almost a mess around Sylvan Lake, that they had the lines in the wrong place. I pointed it out, and I didn't know whether they changed it before they sent it in because I didn't see. Things were happening so fast. We didn't see it. Is there anything major there?

Mr. Dobbie: Well, no. Again, I'm just wanting to make sure if there's a preference, then. The material you've provided today in terms of, generally, the eastern boundary of the constituency is your preference. If there's any discrepancy between that and what came in submission 334, the material you're presenting today is your preference.

Mr. Lund: It's my preference, and if the one they presented is not consistent, then it's a mistake they made.

Mr. Dobbie: Have you had discussions with people living in the adjacent proposed Innisfail-Red Deer and Sylvan Lake constituencies about this border between the two constituencies?

Mr. Lund: Like I mentioned earlier, I sent to all four of the counties that are involved what I was going to be proposing. I spoke to the one councillor in the county of Ponoka, that is currently in the Rocky Mountain House constituency, because I didn't know whether his

boundary was over pretty much where this boundary is. I didn't know where he was, but he said that, no, this boundary that we're proposing as the boundary for the constituency is about halfway between his east boundary and the east boundary of the member that – so it doesn't follow exactly.

I talked to the reeve of the county of Lacombe. Incidentally, he happens to live just a ways north of Eckville, so he was in agreement. He was going to take it to his council, and I don't know whether they passed a motion to support it or just what they did. They're well aware of it because I sent them this after. Then I talked to I guess it's the mayor now of the county of Red Deer, and he didn't express any concern. Once again, I don't know whether the county put anything to you folks in writing. I never saw anything, so I'm not sure. When you get down to the county of Mountain View, they were happy to leave it where it is today.

We talked to the town of Sundre. I think you got a letter from them. They passed a motion to follow what we were proposing here. The county of Clearwater and the town of Rocky prefer what we're proposing. In the town of Eckville the mayor told me that she thought this was a better proposal. I never got anything in writing. I was hoping, and I said that to her, that she'd take it to her council and get them to discuss it. The same thing happened at Bentley. The mayor of Bentley said she preferred this, but I haven't seen anything in writing, so I don't know what her council said.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. I noted that at the start of your presentation you talked about the factors set out in section 15(2) of the act that would allow us to consider this constituency to have a significantly lower population, but in fact the proposal that you're recommending would have a minimum of 5 per cent lower population than the current provincial average, so you're not asking for this constituency to be a special consideration electoral division.

9:40

Mr. Lund: The only reason I threw that in was because the current boundaries would have – now that moves it to probably 10 per cent or more. I just wanted to put that on the table. What happens too, though: we have to look east, at the constituencies east, at what changes. If we don't do anything, then what happens along highway 2? We go quite a long way, and that's the high-growth area, and Sylvan Lake is high growth.

What happens if I were to ask for the boundary not to be changed at all? Then there's going to be more difficulty out here to the east. I think we have to be realistic that these things are going to change. Currently we're about 9 per cent under if I remember right. In that discussion paper you sent out early, before the process started, I think that's what it indicated. I didn't think it was that far, but it was close. What we're proposing now should bring it to around that 5 per cent.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. Just so you know, last night and certainly in the written submissions from the central Alberta area we were being given fairly consistent feedback that we may have not properly considered the trading patterns and that the proposed changes to the existing constituencies tend to be disruptive. We're needing to look at whether there's a need to make those changes. Again, the information you've provided is helpful, particularly your help in terms of the actual population you would see in the proposed changes.

I did want to comment that it's helpful for us to hear an experienced MLA's position on the number of hours involved in dealing with the constituency because there certainly are divided opinions within the province as to how much weight should be given to the

ability to effectively represent larger constituencies. Certainly, we're seeing, I guess, a divergence of opinion, so it's important to get your comments on the record.

Thank you. Those are my questions.

Mr. Lund: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson Jeffs.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Lund, for coming this morning. I'm not going to keep you here too much longer. I'm going to ask a couple of questions about the trading areas, and I'm looking at the points that you shared with us this morning. In terms of Sylvan Lake you're saying that part of the Sylvan Lake trading area will be included although the town of Sylvan Lake would not be in the riding as you've proposed. What parts of the trading area that are part of Sylvan Lake are you proposing here?

Mr. Lund: There's an area to the west of Sylvan. What we're proposing – the line is two miles west. Now, there are people west of that. Their children go to school in Sylvan, and that often has an even bigger impact than the amount of business that the residents may do in Sylvan. Then when you come south of Sylvan, once again, where we're proposing to come down highway 761, in a lot of that area the children go to school in Sylvan, and it is their trading centre. But as I indicated earlier, to try to stay away from it, we'd have to almost come all the way west, follow the county of Lacombe line, and then go south, where we currently are.

Ms Jeffs: There is a bit of crossing over of the two provincial boundaries with respect to trading area and schools and networks and so on, and that's not a problem at present.

Mr. Lund: Yeah. Well, of course, it's the same school division, Chinook's Edge, that covers that whole area, but when you get further west, it's Wolf Creek. It's unfortunate. What I was hoping for when we set up those divisions, when we amalgamated them, is that we would have gotten rid of some of those because it's an odd thing down here west of Sylvan. The county of Lacombe for some reason comes about five, six miles south of highway 11. There's a strip that comes down there, and it's in a different school jurisdiction.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. But it sounds like folks are prepared to live with that at this point. Even if it's not ideal, it's a trade-off.

Mr. Lund: Well, even today we've got that anomaly. I don't think you can draw lines that are going to always hit every one of these situations. I don't think you can do it.

Ms Jeffs: No. Similarly with Sundre, I think we heard quite a bit last night that there's quite an east-west trading area, sort of Sundre, Olds, and going to Trochu, Three Hills. Sundre is currently in the Rocky constituency, and that would stay substantially the same. You're capturing about the same amount.

Mr. Lund: Yes. See, Sundre is within the boundaries of the county of Mountain View. The boundary of the county of Mountain View is the James River, which runs into the Red Deer River. We're following the Red Deer River down to what's known as the Garrington Bridge on highway 587 and then following from there down south with the existing boundary.

Ms Jeffs: If I'm understanding correctly, Rocky would share the county of Mountain View with the neighbouring constituency. It's not completely contained in either one.

Mr. Lund: No. The county of Clearwater is rural, but we've got a portion of the county of Mountain View currently today, and that wouldn't change under my proposal.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. Just one more. I'm looking at Rimbey. What's their sort of normal trading pattern? They like Ponoka, did I hear you say?

Mr. Lund: No. I'm saying that we looked at the fifth meridian as an east boundary. I didn't realize about this big subdivision in the northeast corner of Gull Lake. As a matter of fact, I've never been down there, but I'm told that it's a fairly large subdivision. They trade, apparently, over in Ponoka. I don't know exactly the line where the children go to Ponoka versus Rimbey, but it's over in that area.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you. Those are my only questions.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Lund. This has been most helpful, particularly the maps and the information you've provided us with. We will certainly take that into consideration when we do our final report. Thank you again for attending.

Mr. Lund: Thank you. I'm sorry we didn't show up for the first round.

The Chair: Well, you showed up for this round, and that's equally important.

Now we'll have a short break here. We'll take a break for a few minutes, and then we'll reconvene for our next speaker.

[The hearing adjourned from 9:49 a.m. to 10:08 a.m.]

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Mr. Jim Allison.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Allison.

Jim Allison and Martin Bumstead Private Citizens

Mr. Allison: Yes. To begin, I think I should read the letter that I submitted first.

I would like to thank you for providing me with a copy of the proposed new electoral boundaries and the opportunity for me to provide input on the same.

I have been a provincial returning officer for the past five elections and I do have an understanding of the problems relating to the creation of election boundaries. All returning officers face similar situations as that of the Boundaries Commission, that of creating polling areas for the electors while keeping a balance of voters within each area. It is also the responsibility of the returning officer to ensure the polling stations be located within the subdivision of the electoral subdivision and is conveniently located for the electors.

That's as in section 52 of the Election Act.

I assume that the committee would also have this also as a priority.

I did not expect the committee to make such radical changes to the boundaries as has been proposed for the corridor area in the south central area of the province, in particular the area between Airdrie and Ponoka. This seems to be the only area within the province which uses the major traffic route in the rural areas as the

boundary line for electoral divisions. It should be pointed out that one of the major differences between urban communities and rural communities . . . is the fact that the towns within the counties become the center of the travel area, while urban communities are generally bordered by major traffic routes or by natural boundaries.

Traditionally electoral divisions generally conform to county lines which makes sense as the counties themselves are political divisions, governing areas which share common interests. To divide these governing areas removes this common bond and makes these local governments ineffective and virtually useless. The Boundaries Commission has acknowledged and respected the community boundary lines in the urban areas and as such, they should acknowledge the boundary lines in the rural areas, this in turn would help to create a better representation in the Legislature for the citizens located [in these rural areas].

It would appear that the committee has felt it necessary to create a new electoral district named Sylvan Lake, however by doing so it has apparently created an imbalance of population in the Rocky Mountain House electoral district. In order to correct this, the boundaries of [Rocky Mountain House] were extended east and south which adversely affected the boundaries of electoral divisions of Lacombe-Ponoka, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and Foothills-Rockyview, Electoral Divisions causing a patchwork of boundaries which split up the traditional communities and natural trade areas having common interests.

With the proposed boundaries, the County of Mountainview has been eliminated as a political entity with portions divided between three different Electoral Divisions with the major population areas split apart from each other thus creating a very ineffective local governing arena in this area of the province. This does not appear to be contrary to the parameters of the Boundaries Committee.

It is understood that a balance of population in the Electoral areas is essential, however consideration should also be given to the voting public by ensuring convenient voting areas are available and that these people's votes are not diluted by divisional boundaries. There must be a better way to divide this area which would respect the existing local governing areas. As the addition of the newly proposed boundary area called Sylvan Lake appears to have created the variance in the balance of population this area should be re-examined to see if a less intrusive division can be made. There appears to be a number of options available to the committee, which would be more acceptable to the residents of this very large area and would eliminate the considerable confusion which is a certainty to occur at the polls during the next election if these boundaries remain as proposed.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my observations.

I'd just like to add that I'm not going to suggest to you where any boundaries should be. I just think that there are places that they shouldn't be, and I don't believe that highway 2A should be used as a dividing system. It's improper. If you take a close look at the map, you'll see that using that highway 2A as the dividing line, you've split the counties. Every county from Airdrie north to Ponoka has been split in half.

The divisions being made are just really unacceptable. You've pushed people across. By doing this, voters will truly be ineligible to vote within their county areas. They may be just a mile off the highway, and they're into a whole different area. Didsbury is the county seat, and it's just off in a little corner all by itself. As a matter of fact, if you look on the map, every county seat has been divided in that area. I just don't think that that's a proper way.

I might also add that I think, if this does go through, there's going to be a great deal of confusion at the polling stations that are involved. Traditionally the traffic flow is all toward the centre. I'm sure you're all aware of that, that historically, when the province was first settled, that's the way they were. These towns sat on the rail line, and that's why they became centres of the area.

10:15

The Chair: Now, would you identify yourself for the record?

Mr. Bumstead: Martin Bumstead. I was returning officer for Calgary-Currie for I think it was the '93 election. At that time we had a new set of boundaries to deal with, so all the poll maps had to be redrawn for each constituency, which was quite a time-consuming job. Even then there was something of a backlash from the voters. Each office got lots of phone calls saying: well, we've always traditionally voted in this school, and now you're sending us way over there. That doesn't go over very well with the voters. We were always given instructions to be very careful how we carved up our territory in terms of creating polling subdivisions. Splitting municipalities or splitting towns is going to create a huge amount of confusion. From what I can see, the electing public are not going to be very happy with this.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming.

Mr. Allison, your point is well taken. I don't know if you've had a chance to look at some of the other proposals that have come to us, but certainly we have heard. I gather that the town of Sylvan Lake likes the new riding of Sylvan Lake, but other than that it's not gone over extremely well. We have had some other proposals come forward making many of these points. Have you had an opportunity to look at some of the proposals that have come forward?

Mr. Allison: Yes, I have. Essentially, as near as I can see, they're just suggesting that it remain as is. I don't think I've got enough facts for me to tell you how the boundaries should be. You know, there are a lot more. But one thing I am sure of is that to split the counties up, not using the county lines as a guide, is not the way to go about it. It's trouble at the polls; it's trouble everywhere. Unfortunately, we won't see it until the election is called, and that's when the trouble will start. I would suggest that for any changes you make, make sure they're going to be the right ones because it's going to affect an awful lot of people.

I'm sure you're aware that, just as an example, for the boundary for Didsbury, which I'm familiar with, one corner cuts through the town to the north. There's a subdivision to the north that will be voting in the Rocky Mountain House-Olds area. The other boundary is a mile to the east of the town, and they'll be voting in the Innisfail-Red Deer area. The third one is voting in the Carstairs-Rocky View division. To me I just say: goodbye, county of Mountain View. It's being completely wiped off the map. I was approached just last week by a fellow who asked me where he'd be voting. He lives east of the highway. I said that I had no idea where it would be because it certainly wouldn't be in Didsbury. He's been a resident and a voter for 50 years, and he says: it's no sense me voting; my vote won't even count.

Ms Jeffs: With respect, I don't think we've actually wiped the county of Mountain View off the map. I don't think our powers extend to that degree. But I understand what you're saying, that we haven't followed as closely the boundaries for that county. We have heard some representation on that, that it's creating a lot of concern in the area.

Mr. Allison: Well, it's not only Didsbury; it's all of the counties there. Especially to use the line right through the county seats to me is not a very good idea.

Ms Jeffs: As a general principle, I think, we've heard a lot about alignments that would go more east-west than north-south. It sounds like that would be in concert with what you're suggesting here.

Mr. Allison: Well, I'm saying that the whole travel area is set up there. When the province was settled, they settled at the railway stops and went out both ways, so your natural trade patterns are east-east. Your counties are east-west. All the travel within goes towards the centre of the area, which is the same if you go to the eastern part of the province. The CN line is what established there, and you've got the same travel towards the towns in that area because that's where the people went for their groceries, doctors, everything else that goes with it.

Mr. Bumstead: Grain elevators.

Mr. Allison: And the elevators, which are disappearing rapidly.

I just would like to say that this is very stressful for people, and I've never seen so many comments being made. I'm being blamed already for the boundaries. One lady told me that I must have had something to do with it because who else would they check with.

Ms Jeffs: Well, by all means, shift the blame back to us. We'll take that.

Mr. Allison: I'm afraid it doesn't go back to you. It goes to the fellow that is at the head of the government, and he's getting blamed for many things now.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you very much for that. We are taking that input under consideration.

I don't have any other questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. As the chair said when he welcomed you, it's vital that we get this kind of feedback, and the fact that you're both here as experienced, apolitical, interested people making representations is very helpful to me in understanding another dimension of why we should look at the changes. It's the first time that we've had as clear a historical analysis and perspective on the division of the counties. We've heard individual representations, but I've found it very useful to hear your thoughts about the corridor itself.

The good news is that it appears that with the comments we've heard from the city of Red Deer, not creating a 'rurban' riding, that Red Deer could be two constituencies slightly above the norm, and the consistent voice we've heard from individual constituency associations, that have all echoed your thoughts that the east-west existing arrangement is superior, I'm certainly convinced at this stage that we have to very carefully look at the proposed changes. Certainly, as a resident of a county I'm very aware of the challenges that would be created. The fact that you're coming here with experience as returning officers really does add quite a bit of weight to what you've told us, and I appreciate you taking the time to do it.

I have a question for you, Mr. Allison, about the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency as it is now. I haven't heard from my uncle who lives just south of Didsbury, but I imagine that next time I see him, we will. In your view, is the existing constituency in a workable configuration?

10:25

Mr. Allison: There are a few cosmetic things that could be better. Where I would suggest is the area down around Drumheller, which is right in the far southeast corner. It's in the Kneehill county. There's that little area there. I'm trying to think of the name of one of the towns in there. Due to the Red Deer River, there are great coulees in there, and that little isolated corner would be better served if it was put into the Drumheller area. All of the trade area goes that way anyways. There are sections within that area where to go two miles, you have to travel 20 miles by road just because of the coulees and that. It could be much better served if it was put in.

There's another portion out west of Water Valley that goes into the Banff-Cochrane area. The residents have access only through Water Valley towards wherever they're going. The last two elections there's been a polling station set up in Cremona to gather the votes out of the Banff-Cochrane area. To me it's very unfriendly for the people that have to do that. They would be better off to vote at Water Valley, where there's a polling area set up for that. I just think it would be much easier if they were included in that area. I don't imagine it would number more than a few hundred people, so very few.

I would also like to see the portion in and around Sundre returned to the county of Mountain View because in '97 Sundre was included in the Rocky Mountain House division. That area is serviced completely by Mountain View. The phone service, the postal service, everything goes through, again, towards the railhead. Long-distance calls are nonexistent in that area, but they certainly are to Rocky Mountain House. So, really, the trade area is out of balance there, too.

Those are my own comments on where I could see it as beneficial to that area.

Mr. Dobbie: Well, we have heard specific suggestions from returning officers in the past, and those are helpful. I know you don't want to be telling us what to do, but at the risk of getting it wrong in terms of looking at your proposal in the southeast corner and then, I take it, the southwest corner of the constituency, if you could e-mail us within the next 14 days or give us a map that would say where you would propose to draw that line, it would give us some assistance. If you'd look at your constituency and say: if I was going to take off that southeast corner, here's a logical point.

Just following up, we are certainly alert to the issue of not dividing counties, to the extent that we can, and it looks like we have an opportunity to improve on what we've proposed. We also, though, have to balance the relative size of the constituencies. It's difficult to have any credible argument that would treat some of these constituencies as being different. It seems like everybody wants Sundre because it helps to balance the population. So I'm aware of it. We may not be able to accommodate that request.

Mr. Allison: To be honest with you, I don't want Sundre, but I think that that's where they belong. It is kind of out of the way, but it belongs more in the county of Mountain View. As I say, that's where all the equipment comes from to clear the roads and to do all the things, which you're aware, that happen in the county. Having said that, poor Sundre.

Mr. Dobbie: Again, those are my questions and comments. Thank you very much.

Mr. Allison: Well, I'll certainly get back to you with a map. I'll have to get a map I can draw on. I've always felt that that little

pocket down in around Drumheller is badly placed, and part of that is the way it is following county lines down there.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mr. Bumstead and Mr. Allison. I'd like to just provide a little context for the work that we've done in the interim report and certainly appreciate your reaction to our proposals. For us the starting point was, notwithstanding the fact that there are four new constituencies in Alberta, the dramatic growth in constituency size just, really, over the last decade that we're dealing with. You know, when you bear in mind that the ridings that were put in place in '95-96 were still in use in the 2001 election, less than a decade ago the average size of constituencies was 30,000. We're dealing with average constituencies of almost 41,000. That's a real challenge for this boundaries commission and will continue to be a challenge, I think, for Alberta boundaries commissions in the years ahead.

While we were mindful of the desire to try to keep counties within a single electoral district, sometimes the requirement to move towards a reasonable degree of equality in constituency size led us to cut some counties in half or in some cases cut them more than once.

I guess one of the ideas that we were working with is that recognizing that the growth has been much stronger on the highway 2 corridor, we could try to limit the geographic growth in some of the constituencies if we pulled them a little bit closer to highway 2 and picked up some of the larger communities. Rocky Mountain House was a good example. If you pull it over a little bit and include Olds, suddenly, without much change in the territory of the riding, you include 8,000 more people.

Given the fact that we're dealing with a need to increase the population of constituencies quite considerably and we were hearing from a number of people in the first round that we should try as much as possible to limit the growth in geographical size of constituencies, that was the solution that we came up with. The response that we're getting is people saying: you know, that may not be the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative may be to have a number of constituencies smaller, geographically straddling highway 2 rather than being divided by it. So you'd have relatively smaller constituencies up and down the highway. But the flip side is going to be inevitably that there's going to be geographical growth in those constituencies east and west of that.

It's interesting because at these meetings we've been hearing a consistent message that we should try to keep the constituencies around highway 2 intact. I'm quite curious to see the kind of reaction we get when we go out to the more distant areas in the province, east and west, where I suspect the push-back may well be to try to hold the line on the growth in the geographical size of constituencies. We heard it this morning from one of the MLAs, who read us a brief excerpt from *Hansard* in which the Speaker was making reference to the challenges that MLAs face in larger and larger constituencies.

10:35

I suspect that over the next number of commissions this will be a dialogue that continues because the challenge is not going away. The issues that you're identifying I think are really important, to try to respect those trading patterns, but we also have to try to balance the need for reasonably sized constituencies for those MLAs who are in areas both on the western and eastern parts of the province. I hope that gives you a little bit of a context of where we are coming from with our interim report. I suspect we'll continue to have these conversations as we move through to the final report.

Mr. Allison: I do understand that, but I also understand that people

living out in these more remote areas expect that they're going to have to go farther. The ones living within the area don't expect to be pushed out. When you talk to people out in the isolated areas, it's just a matter of fact, and it's by choice that they're living there. They want to be living there because they are away from people. It's just a fact of life, and I don't think you'll ever get a balance on size. As a returning officer in a rural area I'm faced with that, too. I have some areas that are six townships for one polling station. That's a great deal of territory to have to cover. Even at that, there are less than 200 people within those six townships. I have no problems with anyone there. The biggest problem is finding people to work the poll there.

Dr. Archer: I have no questions. It was more just that comment.

The Chair: Well, thank you both very much. We will certainly take into account the information you've provided us with, and anything further in the next two weeks that you can give us would be appreciated. Thank you.

Mr. Allison: Okay. I'll just send a map to Edmonton.

The Chair: Yes. We have a website.

Mr. Allison: I'll probably do it by mail.

The Chair: Now, at this point, Melanie, is there anyone else before our start this afternoon?

Ms Glasford: I do have some comments.

The Chair: Yes, ma'am. Would you like to come forward? For the record, ma'am, could you give us your name?

**Margaret Glasford, Director
Alberta Lake Management Society**

Ms Glasford: Yes. My name is Margaret Glasford. Mr. Chairman and commission members, I am here as a resident of Alberta. I live in Alberta. I live in Red Deer, and I also have property at Gull Lake. So these electoral boundaries that, actually, Mr. Lund has talked about and even Mr. Allison a little bit do have interest to me.

I am retired, and actually I don't even remember how many years ago it's been because I've become involved in environmental and conservation stewardship simply on a volunteer basis. I do have a big interest in lakes, and I am a director of the Alberta Lake Management Society.

First of all, I just wanted to say that I was glad to hear Mr. Lund mention the fact that, as everyone knows, we have a very low voter turnout in Alberta. That's very frustrating as a citizen, to see the results of an election but to realize that not everyone has voted or most of the province has not voted, so I think that really has to change. Alberta is suffering some political problems now, and hopefully that can be changed. So this is good, that these boundaries are being looked at and evened out with the work that you're doing.

Also, as Mr. Allison and Mr. Bumstead were saying, you have to make it easy and straightforward for people to be able to vote, definitely. Then, of course, you all brought up reasons why these boundary changes are proposed now. I think they're sound, but what will need to be done is that people will have to be let know well ahead of an election and even during the election time where they're going to vote so that on the day they're not just left wondering where to go and, therefore, don't vote. That's one thing.

Now, what brought me to the table is lakes and the issue of lakes. I can now see why this Sylvan Lake riding that has been proposed, of course, the town of Sylvan Lake would like. I imagine the residents all around Sylvan Lake would like it, too, because the lake is all included in one riding. It's the same for Gull Lake in that it would be most helpful, too, if it could be completely in one riding. I'm saying this because if you are looking at adjusting these lines now, it might be a good idea to consider this.

The lakes in Alberta now are facing a number of pressures as to the quality and quantity of water in the lakes. That mostly comes from proposed new developments as well as existing older developments and what they are doing.

If you have Mr. Lund's map that he's showing of his jurisdiction, you'll notice that the line goes down the east side of Gull Lake but right along the east side. That's a little bit confusing in that there are a number of residential subdivisions along that east side, but that line cuts some of them off. Some are on one side, and others are on the other side. I believe that Mr. Prins himself, the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka, lives just on the east side of the line, so he's barely in his riding, but that's secondary to what I'm saying. It would just be so much better if the lake itself could be more clearly in one riding or another so that issues that are facing the lake – not just negative, positive and good things – then could be covered by one MLA.

There are a number of lake stewardship groups now that are forming, and they would like to work with the MLAs. Many of them already do. It would be more straightforward, as I keep saying, if the boundary would more clearly contain the lake or not contain the lake rather than having just this east boundary come down that one side of the lake. It's just not clear.

The Chair: Thank you.
Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I understand you, you would like to see that boundary move a bit east to capture those residents. Or do you have a preference for which riding it resides in?

Ms Glasford: I don't necessarily have a preference except that I know that the Lacombe-Ponoka MLA is more familiar with the lake. I would like to see it come down more to the west. Mr. Lund was saying that he wanted to include Rimbey. Perhaps it could come just down on the east side of Rimbey. Now, I know that's going right through the counties of Ponoka and Lacombe. Then Gull Lake would be more clearly in the other riding.

10:45

Ms Jeffs: So you feel that having it all in one riding provides a better focus for the stewardship groups. We hear sometimes with communities of interest that they like having two MLAs because for whatever reason they feel that works better.

Ms Glasford: Yeah, it can. But I guess just going from Mr. Lund's remarks, his riding is huge. He doesn't get to a lot of things because it's so big. I know from events that we've had, I don't remember him ever being there, but I also can't remember how many times we invited him either.

I really do want to keep it to lakes in general, but this is just a specific example. I'm not talking about people; I'm just saying that what would be easier would be to have it this way.

Ms Jeffs: And that's something we should take forward in your submission: looking at the lakes in general, if they can be completely contained within a riding.

Ms Glasford: Yeah. I understand what you say. It is nice to have two voices instead of one. But my favourite word today: straightforwardness.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you.

That's really the only question I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms Glasford. I live in the county of Minburn, and on my wall I have a county map that breaks down the sections quite clearly. I can't tell from the information we have where the summer villages might be, and it would be of assistance to us in evaluating where to make changes if you could take the time to get a portion of your county map.

Again, at this stage we would simply be guessing as to where the best line might be. If we end up with a line west of the lake, we can pick a line. If we end up with a line east of the lake, we can do the same thing. An informed decision would be helpful, so your input or your group's input as to if we were going to go down this darkened range road is appropriate or not. Generally, if we had a west boundary on the lake, we'd likely need to stay above Bentley and carve out Bentley. So your input, if you can do that for us, as to where it should go – not today, but if you could get that to us – saying: here are my preferred lines.

Ms Glasford: Okay.

Mr. Dobbie: At least we'd have something from someone who knows the area to work from.

I certainly was listening to Mr. Lund and was wondering how you could carve out those subdivisions on the east side of the lake from the electoral district. So a little more homework, if you're prepared to do it, would be helpful to us.

Thank you.

Ms Glasford: Oh, yes, I most definitely will. So I send it to . . .

The Chair: The staff will give you the website and the addresses and that.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Ms Glasford. Now, the closer you look at this area, the more it seems like it's going to be an interesting challenge to draw the lines in ways that suit the community best. The proposal that we received from Mr. Lund not only has the proposed boundary on the east side of Gull Lake, but then once it comes south and heads west, it divides Sylvan Lake in two. I suspect the reason for that is to try to keep the town or the village of Sylvan Lake outside of the Rocky Mountain House constituency and to try to keep Bentley in that constituency. Because things are so tightly compacted in that area, I guess I would just reiterate Peter Dobbie's request. You know, if you can help us navigate this in a way that seems to make sense and takes into account subdivisions that are either currently in place or proposed, that would help us a lot because, again, I think there's a lot happening in this relatively small area.

Ms Glasford: Right. Okay. I guess the line coming south could turn west on the north side of Sylvan Lake, which is Rainy Creek Road, I think, or whatever now. Yeah. I'm just not sure what all the people of Sylvan Lake would think about that. I'm just making our suggestion.

Dr. Archer: Sure. One potential dividing line is the county line

between Ponoka and Lacombe, at least on a north-south basis, but I'm not sure where the east-west line should best be.

Ms Glasford: It goes right through – oh, the Lacombe-Ponoka line actually goes right through Gull Lake. You know, this map, I'm just looking at this. This is wrong. It's got Gull Lake labelled as Sylvan Lake.

Dr. Archer: I think that's just the proposed constituency name.

Ms Glasford: Oh, I see. The whole thing. Okay. Good.

Both lakes are cut by county lines. Gull Lake is in Ponoka on its north end and Lacombe on its south end. Sylvan Lake is, again, in Lacombe county. Its north end is in Lacombe county; its south end is in Red Deer county.

Mr. Dobbie: Everyone wants access to the water.

Ms Glasford: Yeah. I just wonder how the counties would feel about that. Well, this electoral division, that's a different thing.

Anyhow, that's how it goes for lakes. I actually feel that those dividing lines aren't doing anything for the lakes because we always have to go to two counties for any bylaw changes that are going to be made or whatever, make submissions to both counties or one or the other. It's hard to keep track of what both counties are doing sometimes. We're not talking about the county boundaries, but that's where I'm talking about the straightforwardness: one lake clearly in one riding.

Dr. Archer: I probably should at least make note of the point that with our proposed constituency of Sylvan Lake, all of that lake area – Gull, Sylvan, the surrounding communities – is incorporated within the single electoral division.

Ms Glasford: Yeah. I guess that works out for you population-wise.

Dr. Archer: Yes. The populations work, and I take your point to be that water management issues are better facilitated by that kind of alignment.

The Chair: Anything further, Keith?

Dr. Archer: No, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, ma'am. We'll certainly look forward to any further information you can bring forward to us and thank you for being here today.

Ms Glasford: I will. Thanks for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you.

Melanie, do we have anything further at this point?

Ms Friesacher: No.

The Chair: All right. We will then adjourn till 1:30.

[The hearing adjourned at 10:53 a.m.]

