



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Peace River

Tuesday, April 20, 2010
6:08 p.m.

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

Dr. Keith Archer
Peter Dobbie, QC
Brian Evans, QC
Allyson Jeffs

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening. My name is Ernie Walter, and I'm the chair of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce you to 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, then on 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've examined every square inch of the map of Alberta. I know I speak for all of us when I say 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 am very pleased with the amount of public feedback we've received. We've received just about 500 written submissions, and we're looking forward to additional feedback during the hearings that we have yet to conduct. We will be issuing our final report in July of this year.

What I am pleased to tell you is that we will be in our final report setting out the areas, boundaries, and names of 87 electoral divisions we propose for Alberta. I can tell you that the foundation of our decisions has been effective representation for all Albertans. In undertaking the work, the commission has been guided by the requirements of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, relevant decisions of the courts, advice received at our 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 1995-96 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, bringing it to 19; and the rest of Alberta by one, providing it with 43 divisions. This, we felt, 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 effort 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 variations 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 0.7 per cent in Edmonton, and minus 2.8 per cent in the rest of Alberta.

Scarcity of population. The commission recognizes 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 consideration community interests of which it is aware.

Community boundaries. The commission has attempted, as requested by the municipalities, to respect 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 descriptions previously used.

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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 issues.

Other Calgary and Edmonton issues. The commission acknowledges that, while there may be only 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've briefly reviewed our recommendations, we are anxious to hear from the public. We are available for anyone who would like to come forward and make a submission or would like to come forward and tell us what they think. We had a packed house here last fall and not that many in Grande Prairie. We have a packed Grande Prairie tomorrow and not that many here. If anyone would like to come forward and give us their thoughts, we'd be more than happy to hear them.

If there isn't anyone, we will simply adjourn and wait an appropriate time to see if we have anyone who does want to come forward. In the meantime we are adjourned. If there are any informal questions you want to ask us, feel free.

[The hearing adjourned from 6:17 p.m. to 6:59 p.m.]

The Chair: Thank you. It is now 7 o'clock, and we have no further presenters and no one else who is prepared to present at this time. We will now adjourn. Thank you all for coming.

[The hearing adjourned at 7 p.m.]

