



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Brooks

Tuesday, April 27, 2010
9:58 a.m.

Transcript No. 27-3-21

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

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

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

Chief Electoral Officer	Brian Fjeldheim
Deputy Chief Electoral Officer	Lori McKee-Jeske

Participants

Fred Barg
Kelly Christman
Bob Chrumka, Chairman, Eastern Irrigation District
Don Gibb, Deputy Mayor, Village of Rosemary
Martin Shields, Mayor, City of Brooks
Audrey Wilcox, Mayor, and Les Schmidt, Councillor, Town of Bassano

Support Staff

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Communications Consultant	Melanie Friesacher
Consultant	Tom Forgrave
Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

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[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 other members of the commission with me here 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've gone over every square inch of the province. 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 pleased with the large amount of public feedback received. For this second round of hearings we have already received close to 500 written submissions, and we're looking forward to additional feedback during this hearing and others which we will be doing later this week. Once we've considered this feedback and the materials that we have received, 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 the 87 electoral divisions we propose for Alberta together with the reasons for the proposals as outlined in the interim report, which, hopefully, you've had a chance to have a look at. 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.

When I speak of the census information, the 2009 municipal census data for Alberta's cities shows 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. The pattern of growth means there's been a growth in the quotient, which 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.

Having regard to the four new ridings that the province has created, Calgary will get two of these additional ridings, bringing it to 25; Edmonton will get one, bringing it to 19; the rest of Alberta will get one, bringing it to 43 divisions. This, we feel, will ensure effective representation across the province.

The factors which we have been considering in meeting the requirements of effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms have been, firstly, population. The commission has attempted to limit the variations in the average population per division. The variation of the average population per electoral division from the quotient in the city of Calgary is 4.3 per cent above; Edmonton is .7 per cent above, and the rest of Alberta is 2.8 per cent below.

We've also looked at scarcity of population. The commission recognizes scarcity of population, in particular in two of the special divisions, those of Dunvegan-Central Peace and Lesser Slave. Dunvegan-Central Peace meets all five of the criteria for a special division, and Lesser Slave Lake meets four of the five criteria.

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 community boundaries. In particular, Edmonton and Calgary have said that they do not want any of their ridings stretching outside of their boundaries.

Municipal boundaries. We attempted to respect them. This has not been possible in all cases, but we are attempting to reduce the fragmentation of municipal boundaries resulting from the existing divisions.

We've attempted to take geographical features into account, including major roads, which provide natural boundaries between communities of interest.

Understandable and clear boundaries. We've attempted to recommend clear and understandable boundaries for 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 a factor in the rest of Alberta. In recommending those boundaries, the commission has considered the area of the proposed electoral divisions, the travel distances between 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, and we must take that into consideration.

10:05

Inner-city urban issues. The inner-city urban ridings 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 people, and other urban issues.

In Calgary and Edmonton the commission also acknowledges that, while there may be only one council and two school authorities, maintaining relations with a number of community leagues or associations, business revitalization zones, and other identifiable organizations places demands on the 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 boundaries, is critical to recommending a new electoral map that will ensure fair and effective representation for all Albertans.

Before we start, I should tell you that we have received a large number of submissions from this area and from Drumheller and from Stettler, and we also received and heard numerous presentations from the Red Deer-South area. When we are putting all of these together, there is no doubt we are going to have to make some significant changes to the interim report, and we will be doing so.

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 hearings are being recorded by *Alberta Hansard*, and the audio recordings will be posted to the commission website; transcripts of the proceedings will also be available online.

There will be a bell ringing at the back notifying of the 10 minutes and 10 minutes, so that's what that is.

Ms Friesacher: The first presenter is Mr. Bob Chrumka, chairman of the Eastern irrigation district.

The Chair: Mr. Chrumka.

Mr. Chrumka: Thank you. Welcome to the Eastern irrigation district. I gather you've read the brochure on us and know a little more about us.

The Chair: Just before you start, could you for the benefit of *Hansard* give your name and who you're representing?

**Bob Chrumka, Chairman
Eastern Irrigation District**

Mr. Chrumka: I sure will. I'm Bob Chrumka. I'm the chairman of the board of directors of the Eastern irrigation district. Our head offices are here in Brooks, within the Strathmore-Brooks constituency as it exists today.

I won't need 10 minutes. I'm not known for speaking a long time.

The county of Newell, Eastern irrigation district, and Grasslands school division all have the same boundaries with Bassano, Rosemary, Duchess, Tilley, and Brooks within this area. In many ways this area acts as one community, definitely on provincial issues, so splitting up this area into three different electoral areas does not seem to make any sense. The Eastern irrigation district, therefore, asks the Electoral Boundaries Commission to reconsider their proposed electoral boundaries so that at the very minimum our municipality stays intact.

One of the key principles of democracy is good representation of the people from within the constituency. This can be difficult and almost impossible if the people within a constituency have very different issues. The present boundary of Strathmore-Brooks is a constituency made up of two distinct communities, Strathmore region and Brooks region, with many similarities. Both regions have relatively large urban centres, small towns, and villages within their counties; both have irrigation districts conveying water throughout; and both have a large percentage of irrigated agriculture and oil and gas development as their main economic drivers. These similarities result in similar opinions on most provincial issues, allowing effective representation by the MLA towards those issues.

The present MLA has to deal with more than 80 elected local authority representatives within the constituency, which is difficult enough compared to the ratio for urban MLAs, of more like 4 to 1, and large cities, which is close to 1 to 1. This would be almost impossible with the varied issues within the constituency as it's split up with the proposed new alignments.

The proposed change would see our area divided into three different constituencies, where in all cases we would be on the edge of large areas with very little in common with the rest of the new constituency. Rosemary and Gem rural areas, which would be part of Chestermere-Strathmore, would be a very small rural area compared to the population of the bedroom communities of Calgary, that have populations probably manyfold of what we would be seeing in the Gem and Rosemary areas. Representation would probably not be on the same scale. Bassano, Cassils, Rainier, and Scandia would be tied with a very large area, with their southern border being almost down to Lethbridge. Bassano people have a two-hour drive along the edge of the constituency to get to the MLA's office, in a direction that would not be their normal travel pattern for medical or any other reason.

I've read some of the other correspondence that has been presented to you people, and I'm sure that the county reeve and the mayor of Brooks are going to be repeating a lot of this, so I didn't delve into a lot of it. I'm just trying to address it from an irrigation district standpoint. The eastern side of the Eastern irrigation district would join special areas and join a very large area that would stretch

over to the Saskatchewan border and as far north as Stettler. The centre of the constituency would be an hour and a half drive from our region, in a direction not aligned with any business or medical or other normal terms of travel within our region.

As I said, I'm here today representing the interests of the Eastern irrigation district, and as such, I must point out that we feel that fragmenting the district into three constituencies will only deteriorate our voice on issues at the provincial level. We would have to educate three MLAs on our issues as compared to working closely with our neighbours in the Western irrigation district as the constituency currently sits. The current example of irrigation districts being split in the south of our province is not a position we envy. In fact, representatives from those districts often mention how jealous they are of our situation regarding our working arrangements with our counties, our municipalities, and our MLA. Therefore, the irrigation district would ask, secondly, to keep our region joined with Strathmore and Wheatland, leaving the boundaries very much as they are today so that effective representation could remain possible.

As I mentioned in the beginning, I've kept this short. I've addressed it from a district standpoint and not a community standpoint. In closing, it's not that we're leery of change; rather, we're thrilled with our current extremely productive working arrangement.

I do thank you for allowing me to make this presentation and appreciate this opportunity. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mr. Chrumka, and thanks for starting us off this morning in our discussions. I don't have too many questions. I think your presentation is pretty clear and straightforward.

I guess the one point of clarification I would raise is that when you look at the constituencies in the proposal that we circulated, the interim report, the constituencies tend to vary fairly close to the provincial average between the three constituencies that are in this area now. I think the smallest one is about 2 percentage points under the provincial average; the largest is about 8 per cent over the provincial average. That, I would say, is the general framework we're trying to work within, keeping things fairly close to a provincial average using a standard variation, probably, of plus or minus 10 percentage points, recognizing that particularly some of the northern areas are a bit larger than that.

Do you have any comment on the general principle of relative equality in population size in this part of the province, and would you have a concern with revised constituency boundaries that keep this area in one or possibly two constituencies? And those constituencies would have a population pretty close to the provincial average.

Mr. Chrumka: Well, I do appreciate the challenge you guys have had put forward to you, and I do appreciate how the populations in rural areas are declining. I mean, you have to try and make a balance of that. From a district standpoint – and, like I said, that's who I'm here to represent – it's just so much easier for us. Our population is also declining, so it is a challenge. It's just on issues in dealing with the MLAs and the government and the ministers, when we can go there with a common voice rather than trying – I used in my presentation here the examples of the southern districts like St. Mary. Some of those are split into many different constituencies. They can have constituencies where MLAs don't see eye to eye, and they're beat before they ever get there to the provincial level. From that standpoint, we see it as a disadvantage. Mainly that is our biggest concern.

10:15

I mean, I do appreciate that populations have to be split up. From what I was aware of, our existing constituency is close to what you were shooting for in the beginning. Like I said in my presentation, our initial preference would be to at least keep the county. Our county, municipality, and our Eastern irrigation district have almost the same boundaries. I mean, there's a very small deviation on those. As I said, we are a community, as you see on that brochure. We do a lot of projects together with the help of our MLA. To fragment us, as it's shown here, will draw some lines between the groups that aren't there now. It may work very well. Like I say, we're not leery of change. When something's working well, we just don't see a lot of reason to change it. That would be my concern.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks very much. No further questions.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Chrumka. What you've done and what the other presenters and people submitting positions have done is allowed us to consider in this constituency making some changes. As Madam Justice McLaughlin in the Saskatchewan reference said, you start with relative voting parity. If you want to make deviations or changes from there, among the factors you look at are community history, community interest, and minority representation. In my view, your presentation today addressed those specifically on the record, which then allows us to make a principled revision to the boundaries in accordance with the Supreme Court's decision. This two-step process of coming out with a proposal and then getting feedback on it certainly appears to be working in this case, so thank you.

Mr. Chrumka: Well, thank you for your time.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Chrumka, for coming out. More by way of comment or explanation I think there will be change to this area, and there may be change again vis-à-vis the proposal. Some of that has been driven by the need to split the Airdrie-Chestermere riding because of that significant population growth there around Calgary, so we sort of brought the population eastward. If the proposal is unacceptable, do you have, sort of, any specifics other than returning to the status quo?

I think the problem that creates for us is that these population areas of, you know, Bassano, Brooks, and Strathmore – when we look at the map, we need to look at the map not just from what's happening in this area but in the neighboring constituencies with respect to relative parity. I'd be certainly willing to look at any suggestions, but I think it would be pretty difficult for us to maintain the current riding as it is given the other factors, the increased population around Calgary and also the smaller populations in some of these neighboring ridings. So if you have any assistance you could provide, that would be great.

Mr. Chrumka: Well, thank you. To tell the honest truth, I haven't done a lot of studies and proposals towards that end. As I mentioned before, our first preference would be to maintain our municipality and our irrigation district. I mean, yes, we have a great working relationship with Wheatland county and with the WID, but, I mean, I can see the challenges that you have, too, especially with the population as it's mounting in and around Calgary. I do realize that. My utmost preference would be that our irrigation district wasn't

fragmented because it just makes it more challenging for us as a district to present our positions and to educate our MLAs. As the proposed constituencies we'd be fragmented into three, and that would be a major challenge to us.

As I said, I have examples of some of the other southern districts where what one MLA in his constituency has as a priority may not be what the MLA from the other constituency bordering that has as the same priority, and they've found challenges from that vantage point. We've never had that vantage point because our MLA has always been a very strong supporter and realized how much of an important part of the area the irrigation districts were.

As I said in my presentation, we deliver water to all of this area. Without the Eastern irrigation district there wouldn't be water in this area. The WID isn't to that same extent, but they do divert water in the city of Calgary and take it all the way past Cluny, so there is a large irrigation component of that. If we're not allowed to maintain the current constituency – as I said, that's our second preference – we would definitely hope that we could make the populations work so that at least our municipality's borders are identical to the Eastern irrigation district, relatively speaking. That would be our first preference, so we would hope that that could be maintained.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much.

I have nothing further, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Chrumka, for your presentation. I should add that yesterday we heard from Mr. McFarland, the MLA for Little Bow, and he certainly made it very clear that anything that required movement across the Bow River was going to create issues. He spoke specifically about Bassano, for example. So that message we've received loud and clear.

The only other question I would have. You had made some reference to the WID, the Western irrigation district. Is there any difference in opinion that you've noted between the EID and the WID in terms of the electoral divisions that are proposed?

Mr. Chrumka: I haven't spoken to the WID specifically. They had a public meeting here where the reeve from Wheatland came. He spoke in favour of maintaining the current constituency, but he did admit that the town of Strathmore had a preference to join a larger urban area.

I mean, everybody's jockeying for a position where they have people that have the same issues and concerns as they do. I imagine Strathmore's concerns are different. I may be speaking out of turn here, but I think the relationship between the town of Strathmore and the irrigation district is somewhat different from the relationship that the city of Brooks has with the EID. The town of Strathmore can pretty much operate irrespective of the irrigation district. They get their water from them. We're basically in a desert; they get rainfall. They aren't as totally dependent on the irrigation district as the city of Brooks would be on us. There may be a different relationship. I can't speak directly to that, but that's what the reeve from the county of Wheatland had suggested, that Wheatland appreciated being with us.

As far as dealing directly with the WID, I haven't spoken to them on this issue of the constituency boundaries directly.

Mr. Evans: Okay. I do note that we will be hearing from Reeve Armstrong this afternoon, so we'll undoubtedly hear a position from Wheatland county if nothing else.

Mr. Chrumka: Do you have a representative from WID coming?

Mr. Evans: I don't see anyone on our list. I don't recall just off the top of my head, of the more or less 500 submissions that we've had, whether there was anything specific from the WID, but we'll check into that as well.

Mr. Chrumka: Like I say, we're basically a desert. If we're not delivering water to stock ponds and to subdivisions – every hamlet, village, town in this area gets their water from us. WID has wells. They have other sources of water. Just because there's an acreage there doesn't mean it's served by the WID. If you drove through the EID and saw an acreage, they're getting their water from us. So it is a little bit different. As far as irrigation issues and how irrigation is perceived by the province, we have a lot of commonality with the WID.

Mr. Evans: Thank you for that clarification. Those are my only questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chrumka, for your submission. We've heard it, and we're going to have to take some serious consideration of what's being presented here. Again, thank you, and I'll tell both of your uncles that you spoke very well.

Mr. Chrumka: Thank you. When they come hunting, they'll let me know that.
Thanks, guys.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mrs. Kelly Christman.

Mrs. Christman: Good morning. I am a taxpayer within the county of Newell.

The Chair: Could I just get you, for *Hansard*, to give your name?

Mrs. Christman: I'm sorry. My name is Kelly Christman, Box 685, Bassano, Alberta.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Kelly Christman
Private Citizen

Mrs. Christman: This is a case of be careful what you wish for. I wrote my letter saying that I was hopeful that we would get an opportunity to speak with you, and here you are. So I have to back up my words, and I'm here to speak to you today.

10:25

My husband and I talked about this, and we just feel very strongly that the division of highway 1 cutting Bassano off from our residence is a poor choice. It will divide the county of Newell greatly, as you've heard. I hate to reiterate and sound the same as everybody else. I would like to offer one possible suggestion. I heard the previous presenter and your comments. If the status quo was not able to be kept, then my suggestion would be that Brooks, Bassano, and Drumheller be amalgamated, thereby making the cut-off somewhere on the west side of Bassano in no-man's-land, so to speak.

I'm concerned about the political shift in that all our business basically either goes east or west on highway 1. If we were to be required to be involved in the political scene, we would be heading south, which means coming to Brooks and then going south, which

to me is not going to happen. It's just not. We have no other reason to go south from Brooks. The odd time we go to Lethbridge, you know, for a very small amount of business, but most of our business is Brooks, Medicine Hat, and Calgary. So I'd like to have you take that into account.

As a middle-aged person, I've worked for the town of Bassano for 30 years, but the political scene – you know, I'm just under the water there, and I worry that people so inclined to be politically inclined would not bother if the clarity is not there.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mrs. Christman. You've heard that we've heard the realities of the current alignment of Strathmore-Brooks and that we've also heard about the issues of creating three MLA-represented areas, if we were to go ahead with the initial proposal. This may be just anecdotal, but it would be helpful to us to have you give us a little more information about the traffic patterns. Specifically, if you and your residence in Bassano and your neighbors' were to be connected to Little Bow, what's the routing and the timing that you would be looking at to move down in terms of connections into that part of Alberta? You mentioned that you would be going through Brooks, and then presumably it's a relatively straight road south from there. Are there any other inconveniences other than the fact of the trading pattern and the historical relationships east-west as opposed to north-south?

Mrs. Christman: Okay. We live one mile on the east side of highway 1. From our home to Little Bow – I assume the largest major centre would be Taber, so generally meetings would probably be hosted in Taber – we would travel highway 1 to the 36 and then south there. Socially, we know absolutely nobody. I mean, that can change, right? But historically and for any other purposes we would have no purpose to go south other than for those meetings.

Mr. Evans: And the first centre south of Brooks that would potentially have any connection with the Bassano area would be Rainier or Scandia or Bow City or Vauxhall?

Mrs. Christman: As far as business trade goes?

Mr. Evans: Yeah.

Mrs. Christman: I would suggest Vauxhall, Taber.

Mr. Evans: I see. All right. Well, that's helpful. Thank you very much. I have no further questions.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation, and thank you for coming down this morning. Just as a point of clarification in terms of political connections. You mentioned you would be having to go as far as Taber. Taber is actually in Cardston-Taber-Warner. It's not actually in Little Bow. I'm looking at the map and thinking that from Bassano, if you were to be included in Little Bow, I guess it would be more the Vauxhall area. Are you saying that you would have to sort of drive south towards Brooks to get there?

Mrs. Christman: Or we would have to go west to Cluny and then across the reserve. We could go either route. They would all be secondary highways as opposed to the major, number 1 highway.

Ms Jeffs: All right. I just wanted to clarify that.

Mrs. Christman: Sorry about that.

Ms Jeffs: No, no. That's fine. Thank you. As I said, thank you for coming.

I have nothing further, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.
Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mrs. Christman. The interim proposal offered the consideration of using highway 1 as the dividing line. In some parts of the province we've heard that there is a strong, effective working relationship where multiple MLAs are working in one area. There's a benefit, some people view, of having that system. It's clear, however, down here that the interim proposal isolates Bassano and that the appetite for the risk of adding multiple MLAs to one area is very little. Your factual presentation will help us to look at the interim report and make appropriate changes.

Thank you.

Mrs. Christman: Thank you.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yes. Thanks, Mrs. Christman. I just want to make sure that I understand your order of preferences as well. Are you saying that the highest preference for you is to ensure that the county of Newell remains within one electoral district?

Mrs. Christman: Intact, the way it is. That would be preference number one.

Dr. Archer: The communities that are attached to the county of Newell become the secondary consideration. So once the county is retained within a single constituency, what I hear you saying is that the commission can then look at where the population best fits the further alignments, and having something going up to Drumheller may be a possibility.

Mrs. Christman: Possibly. The county of Newell – and I'm going to speak from the county of Newell's point of view – is a very close-knit family. The county has provided not only for the villages and hamlets within it but also for the town of Bassano over the years and has included everybody. To fragment it, I think, would be very disruptive, possibly, from a political point of view. I do hear that possibly it could be a good thing.

I think about it from a social point of view. I wonder how economically sound it would be when you're having social events or promoting different things within your county. Do you invite both MLAs? Is that economically feasible and sound? Do the MLAs speak on a regular basis so that there is little to no overlap? I wonder about that as well. I guess that relationship could be built, but it may not be either.

10:35

Dr. Archer: All right. Thanks. I appreciate that, and I have no further questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We will be taking it into account.

Mrs. Christman: Thank you very much for your time and for coming to southern Alberta.

The Chair: It's our pleasure.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mayor Martin Shields with the city of Brooks.

The Chair: Mr. Mayor, since we are on *Hansard*, we'd ask you to give your name and your position for the record.

Mr. Shields: All right. Thank you. I'm Martin Shields, mayor of the city of Brooks. I'm glad that the committee has journeyed to our beautiful part of the country. We really think that if more people would visit it, they'd appreciate what we have here. We believe that it is a great place. As you've heard, I think lots of people are interested in our area. So we're glad to have you here.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

**Martin Shields, Mayor
City of Brooks**

Mr. Shields: Okay. Thank you. You're going to hear many of the same things, I think, today. I think you'll hear some of them with passion, which is fantastic, because it is an issue of passion for many of us. Somebody said: "Well, why is the city of Brooks in this directly? We didn't chop Brooks in half and put it in two different constituencies." I think you'll find out that there's a mentality and a philosophy in this area of working together, and it has a history and a development that is strong. So you're going to find probably some similar themes and some people that are going to express their opinions fairly strongly. I'm probably one of those, so I'll get at it.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on this significant change. I understand very well the court ruling that happened many years ago that precipitated this process, and I do agree that it should be done. It's also a very challenging task, laden with minefields, which you well understand.

The following comments outline why I believe significant change should not occur to this riding. I also believe that there are alternatives to rectify this situation and that in reality this would disenfranchise a couple of thousand of people in our region. It would also divide the representation of the very contiguous regions of the county of Newell and the Eastern irrigation district into three parts. This is not positive, nor will it be viewed as an acceptable compromise to make it work for other communities such as Chestermere or Airdrie, which I believe may be the result of what has occurred here. I think this region has been used as a balancing mechanism to resolve numbers for other areas where population has changed.

I believe the commission has ignored many of its own factors in disassembling the Strathmore-Brooks riding. The Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta has in it on page 3:

The principles of effective representation seem to the Commission to be as follows . . .

4. . . . an examination in depth of the social history, geography and demography of communities in every sense of the word.

That's a pretty strong principle. Well, I would believe that the commission is made up of very intelligent people here. I would further think that there was examination in depth in reference to point 4. I would feel, then, that it was totally ignored when making decisions about the Strathmore-Brooks constituency. What else could have created the situation?

The history of settlement from Calgary along the highway east was further expanded with irrigation north of the Bow River, going from west to east. The author David Jones from the University of Calgary has documented this historical movement and pattern in excellent books about this region, *Empire of Dust* being one of them. I would suggest that the commission review that book if you want to know the history of this area and how it happened. Excellent documentation about the history and geography here.

On page 12 of your document, community interests: “The Commission has taken into consideration community interests of which it is aware.” I’m left to wonder if the commission was not aware of the community interests of this constituency. I’m sure from the number of responses received that the commission is much more aware of it now. Complacency is no excuse. The city of Brooks council did not write a submission or make a presentation to the committee. I seriously believed that anyone would be able to see the commonality of community interests in Strathmore-Brooks.

Agriculture is supported by two of the largest irrigation systems in the country, the Western irrigation district and the EID. There is no major irrigation district north of the Red Deer River. In this constituency the oil and gas industry works mainly from Calgary along the Trans-Canada highway. The Drumheller and Hanna oil regions are served from Calgary along highway 9, which is their main connector and trading route. All I can do is assume that for some unknown reasons the commission was not aware of this pattern. You surely couldn’t have ignored it.

It’s interesting that connector roads for people and industry are mainly east-west. The only exception is highway 36, which is a connector road within the county of Newell, not a divider. It is an industry connector from the border to much further north, Edmonton and Fort McMurray.

On page 12 of your document, municipal boundaries: “The Commission has made every attempt to respect municipal boundaries.” This statement really perplexes me as the county of Newell is divided into three electoral districts. For example, 1,500 people are now basically disconnected from their social, historical, and demographic region. This is huge, and the barrier is now drastic. If the residents of Chestermere thought they were not connected to Calgary, what connection do residents of Rosemary have to Chestermere? On the other hand, rural residents in the county of Newell, i.e. Rosemary, have a connection to the rural residents of the county of Wheatland.

Page 12 of the document, geographical features: “The Commission has considered geographical features, including roads, which provide natural barriers between communities of interest.” Somewhere in my university education I’ve taken courses on political geography. This statement, I believe, if memory serves me right, is problematic. Natural barriers could be rivers, mountains, forests, et cetera. Biologists have even discussed variations in species when natural features like the Grand Canyon develop.

Well, to place roads as dividers for humans, especially in rural Alberta, is an incredibly inaccurate political geographic term. Roads and railways are connectors that bring people together. Railways in western Canada used to perform this function but seldom seem to perform it now. Roads definitely do. I find it academically problematic that the commission would use roads as dividers in the Strathmore-Brooks constituency. The Trans-Canada highway is the east-west asphalt connector of people that replaced the former ribbon of steel, the transcontinental railway.

I do not understand how such a connector can be used as a divider. It just doesn’t make sense academically. Maybe the commission ignored that part of Canadian history, or maybe the school system failed to cover that aspect when the commissioners were in school.

I’m not sure. In reality the concept of most geography in the world is that roads are connectors, not dividers. Of course, if you’ve been limiting your vision to the major streets and freeways in the two major centres, that’s what you could be referencing, but that’s not what they are in rural Alberta.

The natural boundaries on the prairies are often rivers. Currently the county of Newell has two of these: the Red Deer River on the north and the Bow River on the south. These were and still are major barriers as there are very few bridges connecting them; the ferries are gone, and ice bridges are no longer used to any extent.

Can this be resolved? Absolutely. I understand Chestermere’s reasons for not wanting to be lost in a large Calgary constituency. The mayor of that community is a very intelligent and well-spoken person. I would assume he made a great presentation. Airdrie also has a great mayor and probably has a rightful opinion to say that as they have grown, they should have their own constituency.

What I do feel is wrong is how the commission has ignored many of its own principles and guidelines and chopped a very cohesive Strathmore-Brooks constituency into many pieces. We work strongly together in this region. I believe that part of the county of Newell should not be split into Little Bow. I also believe the county of Wheatland and the county of Newell have many commonalities, and I believe that changes can be made to right this situation.

You have the expertise and the research people who can resolve the situation. I understand the domino effect when you make changes, but you’re going to hear all day long that what is proposed is just wrong for this region. The question is: will you listen? I feel that when sensible people, hopefully, the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, have had an opportunity to review the responses and suggestions from this region, they’ll be able to find a better solution.

Thank you.

10:45

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I can assure you that we are listening. There are changes coming. It would have been most helpful, though, had people come out to start with. As a reeve of a county to the west of you said: we never came out at the first hearings, and then when we saw what was proposed, there was a big turnout. He said: it’s just like when we have a planning change within the county that we’re going to make; nobody comes out until we pass the bylaw, and then everybody is there. We’ve certainly found that that is the case. We’ve had some great input on this second round, and we are listening, and we will certainly be taking it into account.

Now, having said that, Keith.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Mayor, for your provocative, passionate comments this morning, some of which really do invite a response, so I’m delighted to start us off on that.

One of the common perspectives that we’ve heard as we’ve gone around the province is from people who are in constituencies that are being proposed for change arguing in favour of the status quo. It’s been a very consistent recommendation to the commission. Part of the context for some of the changes that were proposed in our report stem directly from the demographic changes that are taking place within Alberta.

If you go back as recently as the 1995-1996 Electoral Boundaries Commission, the average constituency size at that time was 30,000. At the next commission, 2002-2003, it was 35,000. In this round it’s almost 41,000. That’s just what’s happening in Alberta. So in those parts of the province where the rate of growth is right on the provincial rate of growth, there are opportunities to accommodate

that overall growth within the size of constituencies without changing boundaries. Where that's not the case – and, you know, the population growth isn't consistent across the province – it requires boundary commissions to look at changes. So I think it's inaccurate to suggest that a commission is proposing changes for the sake of proposing changes; rather, the context in which we're working is one that requires us to be responsive to some of those changes taking place within Alberta.

A second thing I'd like to say is on the question of whether it's sensible for a commission to consider roads as boundaries between constituencies. There are lots of road that are boundaries between constituencies in Alberta. Lots of people across this province in their area are saying to us that that's the appropriate place to draw the map, to draw the line. I appreciate that in some constituencies it may be less appropriate. I've heard from you and I've heard from others within this area that the preference is to go with the county boundary and to use the river as the boundary. That's very useful feedback for us. But as a starting point I think it's inaccurate to say that roads can never be boundaries for electoral boundaries commissions. In fact, they are, and that's the case in many parts of Alberta at present, and I suspect it will be in our final report as well.

The third point I have is more of a question than a comment. Certainly, you can respond to my comments as well. As I understand the population of the county of Newell, it seems to be about 20,000 or so when you include Brooks as well. I think Brooks is somewhere over 13,000, the county of Newell around 7,000. We're looking at a constituency size of, again, about 41,000. So one possibility is to continue to look at the alignment westward into Strathmore. A real challenge for us, quite frankly, is that the growth rate around the cities both in Edmonton and Calgary is so rapid that it changes the requirement for some of the districts. Airdrie, as you were alluding to, does qualify for an entirely Airdrie-based electoral district now. That has an impact on the Airdrie-Chestermere constituency and so on down the line.

If we start from the premise of "rule 1, keep the county of Newell intact within a single electoral district," how would you rank or order the directions we go from there? I take it from your presentation that aligning that with Wheatland county and up to Strathmore would be preference 1. Someone earlier today suggested that a Drumheller connection may not be out of line, out of reason. What's your response to an alignment that brings Drumheller and Brooks together?

Mr. Shields: Thank you for your comments. I didn't say that change for change's sake wasn't necessary. I alluded to the court ruling many years ago and agreed that it should be done. I didn't suggest you were making change for change's sake. You had made some comment that I just thought you guys were making change for change's sake. No. Absolutely not. I understand the court ruling very well and know what you're doing.

As far as geography terms, when I academically understand geography terms, in the pure sense, academically, roads are not dividers but are connectors. That's where I came from on that point. I understand what you're saying as far as drawing lines.

To get to the last point, I understand that what you've said is: "Yeah. Looked at Airdrie. They deserve their own." What I believe is that as you attempted to resolve the situations around the growth areas of Calgary, that had a domino effect out to here as you attempted to balance those numbers. We got to be the end result of that domino effect. Yeah, Airdrie needs to have a seat. Absolutely. Chestermere has grown greatly. Absolutely. They don't want to be part of northeast Calgary. I understand where the mayor comes from in Strathmore. I mean, I understand their position. But I believe it's

dominoed into our area as a result of that, and you're trying to balance those numbers, and you're trying to find a way to do it.

What I'm saying, pushing back the other way, is that the Western irrigation district, the rural area around Strathmore, the county of Wheatland, and county of Newell have more commonality. I would push back that way because the natural trading areas here are east-west, not north-south. They're east-west. So the Trans-Canada highway is our connector. In the rural commonalities I would go that way, not north-south, east-west. So when you're asking me about priority: absolutely east-west and push back to get the numbers back up.

I realize, for example, that West Yellowhead still exists out there with – what? – 23 per cent variance. There's room for variance. Understand that. If West Yellowhead can be given variance – so we don't make the 41,000, but put the commonality with the people together. That would be my response to your question.

Dr. Archer: Thanks very much. I have no further questions.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Mayor, I'm not sure if you were here for the previous presentations, but again one of the issues that we look at as a commission is that we hear different things in different parts of Alberta. Grande Prairie would be a classic example. The existing city is split, and there are basically two urban and rural constituencies that have been in existence for some time. We heard from the city council that they had passed a resolution asking us to consider an urban-only constituency. As part of the interim report, and as Dr. Archer has used in the past, part of the conversation is: is Grande Prairie ready and interested in an urban-only constituency? Well, that's city council. We heard that that was not the preference in that community.

The only challenge I guess I find from your presentation is that it is one thing to be passionate; it's another to be hectoring and condescending. I would invite you to evaluate whether you're blunting your message when you add questions about whether we were well educated in school or not. It may be just a style for you.

We are trying to engage in a conversation with Albertans about where electoral boundaries should be. As you know, there are factors, all of which are weighed and balanced. In some areas, we hear that having more than one MLA on a file or in a district works for them. We've clearly heard down here that that's not the case. Mr. Chrumka has made that position on behalf of the Eastern irrigation district in a passionate manner and, again, without the hectoring and condescending tone. So I guess the only thing I'd say is: lucky for you that we've heard from a number of people in this area who have put their position forward as passionately but perhaps – maybe you're just trying to be amusing, but I find it a little bit offensive when you add the editorial comment throughout.

10:55

Mr. Shields: Well, there's no doubt from your body language. I could read that exactly. That's no surprise to me. But I do see it as problematic when you have principles that state one thing, and it seems to go in the absolute reverse direction. I understand you have to balance that. No doubt in my mind that you have to balance it. But if you say that I was condescending, my point of view is that I say what I think, and I always have. If you find that condescending and if I've offended you, I apologize for that, but I do not apologize for saying what I think, and I never have. If you say other people say it more politically correct, power to them.

You know, some people asked how to get things done. I have no problem talking to the Prime Minister of Canada, and he can talk to

me because I have no fear. Everybody puts their pants on the same way, one leg at a time. I view people as you and me. I say what I think, and you tell me back what you think, and I accept that. I know you have a tough job, but I don't apologize for saying what I think.

Mr. Dobbie: I'm not asking for an apology. I'm just telling you that I understand your message, but we disagree on the basis, so thank you.

Mr. Shields: Yeah.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Mayor. I just really have one question. On the first paragraph of your submission you talk about us disenfranchising a couple of thousand Albertans, and I wasn't actually aware we had the authority to do that. Maybe you could explain that.

Mr. Shields: I know this was discussed by the previous person from Bassano. If you look at the geography, the river disconnects Little Bow, in a sense, in my mind. Those people have to go a long ways around to get to Little Bow. Little Bow is a constituency based a long ways away from those people. You'll be Vauxhall to Vulcan through Lomond, the area that that basically works from. For those people to have an interest and participate, you basically have put a river in between. They have to go far south or north to get to that area. They don't naturally travel that way, so the interest that they will have will be lessened by dividing them from that.

Ms Jeffs: So you're concerned that the distance to a poll might be – although I think that will be up to Elections Alberta when the time comes, whatever the configuration is, to provide polling stations. But certainly not a disenfranchisement.

Thank you.

Mr. Shields: Yeah.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mayor Shields. My oratory will be more of a comment than a question, and it really does relate to the transparency of our process. Please be clear that in no way, shape, or form are we suggesting to anyone that we don't appreciate what historical connections are, nor do we have a hundred per cent knowledge of each and every area of the province. That's the beauty of having the interim report, so that we can put our best efforts forward to deal with the balancing of the growth and shrinkage factors of population in our province and the various factors that we are required to consider and other factors that through this process of written and oral submissions we become acquainted with. Please realize that this balancing was something that we've said from the very beginning we have to do. We have no alternative but to do that.

You know, there are two scenarios that this commission could have had. One, had there been no additional seats created in Alberta, that balancing, in my respectful opinion, would have been much more difficult, again, because of the population shifts and the growth of the province, as Keith Archer has referred to, in particular since 1996, and the fact that we are bound by the Supreme Court of Canada decision. That decision and factors related to that decision are incorporated into the legislation that we're operating under.

The worst-case scenario, in my view, would be that this commission creates electoral divisions which can't be supported by law, and we have a challenge that goes before the courts, and then we start all over. You talk about an inefficient process for the provincial government, for the opposition, for the commission, and for the people of Alberta that take the time and effort to make applications and submissions before the commission: it'd be a total waste of time.

So balancing is absolutely part of the function that we are undertaking. It's probably the most subtle part of the function, so when we hear a constituency say, "Well, you know, you just didn't think about us," that's pretty naive because we have thought about each and every one of the now, by our legislation, 87 constituencies. We've also had to take into account what the impacts are of the constituencies around individual constituencies.

As I said – and I'll conclude with this – the beauty of having an interim report is that people have an opportunity to look at something concrete and make comments on it. We appreciate those comments, and it helps us to make a better final report, to hopefully meet as many of the issues that are raised by Albertans who take the time and effort to appear before us as possible.

With that, I'll just say again thank you for your presentation. I know we'll hear from a number of other people from this region that will have comments similar to yours, and we are listening.

Thank you.

Mr. Shields: All right.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate what you've had to say here. We are getting a fairly clear message from a number of municipalities and a number of constituents not only in your riding but throughout the province. It is a delicate balancing we have to do, and I can assure you it will be one based on the principles that are set forth in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act and the courts. I think in the end result Albertans will not only be well served but happy.

Thank you.

Mr. Shields: Well, I appreciate your time. Again, thank you for coming to our fine community.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Deputy Mayor Don Gibb with the village of Rosemary.

The Chair: Deputy Mayor, would you for *Hansard* give your name and position and who you're representing?

Mr. Gibb: My name is Don Gibb. I'm the deputy mayor of the village of Rosemary.

The Chair: Thank you. Please proceed.

**Don Gibb, Deputy Mayor
Village of Rosemary**

Mr. Gibb: First of all, I'd like to express my appreciation for the opportunity I have of coming before this commission today and expressing the opinion that I have and the people I represent have regarding the proposed boundary changes. The members of the village of Rosemary council have asked me to come here today and share with you the feelings and concerns of the residents of Rosemary regarding the proposed electoral boundary changes. The council submitted a letter expressing many of these concerns, so I'm here today to simply re-emphasize those concerns. I'm sure that

each member of the commission has a copy of that letter, and I have no intention of simply reading it again. My main objective is to help you understand how deeply concerned we are over these proposed changes.

11:05

The village of Rosemary is surrounded by the county of Newell and lies within 35 kilometres of the city of Brooks, the town of Bassano, the village of Duchess, and the village of Tilley. During the past several years there has been a close, harmonious relationship forged between these municipalities through shared services. Examples of these are a very extensive regional water system, which is currently under construction, shared community peace officers, a shared grant writer, a shared assessment review board. We share a common school district. In addition, all of these municipalities lie within the Eastern irrigation district, which provides all of them with water.

My concern is that with the proposed changes this co-operation will be if not curtailed at least made more difficult. We are concerned about the prospect of having to deal with three different MLAs to co-ordinate future co-operative efforts. Our current MLA, Mr. Arno Doerksen, always makes himself readily available to attend any meetings we invite him to, but I cannot imagine the logistical problems that would arise in trying to schedule three MLAs to attend at the same time. With the proposed electoral boundary changes the county of Newell and, thus, all of the other municipalities lying within its boundaries will now be divided among three new electoral districts. This is certainly contrary to the fourth consideration the commission agreed they would take into account when making boundary changes as stated in the primary factors for electoral district boundaries.

Although I am concerned about all of these municipalities, my greatest concern is for the village of Rosemary because, except for a portion of the county of Newell, it will be the only one which will be part of the proposed Chestermere-Strathmore electoral district. I fear that we will be totally ignored since Rosemary lies on the very eastern edge of this district with almost the entirety of the population on the very western edge. I feel very much like Patricia Matthews, mayor of Chestermere, who told the commission that her community had no interest in being combined with a portion of the city of Calgary because the city's priorities would overwhelm the issues of communities and areas outside the city.

If one urban centre which is butted right up against another urban centre feels that way, how do you think a community feels which has a population of 388 and lies 75 miles away from the population's centre? Although I am sure every MLA does his or her very best to represent everyone within their electoral boundaries, when one very small municipality is isolated by both distance and voting power, the probability of it being forgotten or ignored is rather high.

Another consideration the commission promised to consider when making boundary changes was community interests. Since the city of Brooks is by far the largest centre in our area, many of the residents of Rosemary work there, and most do a large part of their shopping and banking there. We are therefore very concerned about what happens to transportation corridors, economic development, education facilities, and tourism in our region. We have no interest in how these things affect Strathmore or Chestermere. We want our say regarding this area, not some place that we have very little in common with.

All of the municipal leaders in this region have developed a win-win attitude towards each other's communities, and I feel that this attitude might be compromised if the proposed changes to the electoral boundaries are allowed to continue.

The village of Rosemary also takes an active role in both the Canadian Badlands association and the Palliser Economic Partnership. I happen to be a board member on both. These organizations work with communities in central and eastern Alberta and help each other develop tourism and economic growth. To separate us from other communities that belong to these organizations and bind us to municipalities that do not belong certainly seems very counterproductive.

The Canadian Badlands is currently setting up regional tourist destinations where all of the municipalities in each region help evaluate existing tourist facilities and recommend changes. The area we belong to is the Brooks, county of Newell region.

Similarly, as part of the Palliser Economic Partnership we are trying to promote a new economic corridor in the eastern half of the province along highways 61 and 36 and to open a 24-hour border crossing at Wild Horse. With the proposed boundary changes we will now be shifted to be part of the highway 2 transportation route, which makes no sense to me.

I hope that you have felt the deep concern I have for not just my community but all the municipalities in this area. It is my hope that you will reconsider the proposed changes and allow all of the municipalities that lie within the county of Newell to remain in the same electoral district.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity I've had to express my concerns and the concerns of the residents of the village of Rosemary regarding the proposed changes.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Well, thank you.

Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Deputy Mayor Gibb. That's a very clear and persuasive position that you've put in front of us. We certainly appreciate it.

Just for my own clarification, when we talk about Rosemary and your comments about how important the connection of the county of Newell is, it just kind of begs the question for me about the existing constituency of Strathmore-Brooks and whether there is the same connection with Strathmore. I mean, I took it that there wasn't because most of your connections are east from Rosemary. Is that just a matter of proximity and the fact that we are talking about all of your eastern connections being in the county of Newell as opposed to the county of Wheatland over in Strathmore? Would that be the rationale, or is there another historic factor that we're not aware of?

Mr. Gibb: I don't think there's anything historic other than the close proximity to one another. We have always been more concerned about Brooks because that's where many of the residents of Rosemary work. They do their shopping and banking there, as I said, so there's that close affinity with one another. The only time that most people would have anything to do with Strathmore is on their way to Calgary to go shopping or something.

In my opinion, there seems to be a shift over the last while in the entire province. In my opinion, the shift seems to be more east than west because of this co-operation that we're trying to develop in opening a north-south corridor on the east side of Alberta. Consequently, in my opinion, to take people who are already working cooperatively together and shift them and sort of force them over into a western part doesn't make any sense.

I'm not sure I've answered your question.

Mr. Evans: Well, you have in the sense that you've said that the county of Newell is a really important connecting point for people

in this region. Layered onto that, we heard earlier about the Eastern irrigation district as well. Those are strong indicators, to me personally, that there's some real merit in the kinds of presentations we've been having.

Thank you for that. I have no further questions.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Gibb, for coming this morning. I don't have any questions. I want to thank you for your presentation. It was very clear. We've certainly heard others today and I think are going to hear some more about the importance of the county of Newell to the communities within it. I thank you for that.

Mr. Chairman, I have nothing further.

The Chair: Thank you.
Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Deputy Mayor Gibb. The process of going through the second round of hearings is helpful for me in getting answers to this question that we hear from others. The question is: so what if the MLA for your area changes, or so what if the electoral boundaries division changes? It won't change where you shop. It won't change where you work. It won't change any of the relationships. What we've heard from you are some specific examples of why it is important. Again, the fact that there is a commonality of interest: defining these community interests is important. We learned in looking at Livingstone-Macleod that there's certainly an argument there that the foothills region of that constituency really has almost a competing interest with, say, a city like High River, and what we need to be mindful of is not putting an MLA or MLAs in a position where essentially they're disqualified because they're serving two masters with competing interests.

11:15

The actual suggestions that you've made and the specific comments would apply in the village of Rosemary because their interests are completely dissimilar to that of Strathmore and further north. Again, building that kind of record does help us justify distinctions, if necessary, on population and also understand better the communities of interest.

This process has been helpful, and the specific examples that you've given, again, are helpful for me when we go further. Thank you.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks, Deputy Mayor Gibb. Just wondering if you could comment as well on the potential we've heard earlier today regarding the linkages that exist between the county of Newell and Strathmore, on the one hand, versus the county of Newell and Drumheller.

Mr. Gibb: I suppose my opinion is slightly different than Mayor Shields'. I think that traditionally there was more of an east-west link between communities, but with the incorporation of things like the Canadian Badlands association and the Palliser Economic Partnership and the close link that those communities are developing with one another, I think the link has become more shifted to the east rather than to the west. I personally have much more to do economically and in terms of tourism with Drumheller or Medicine Hat and those communities rather than Strathmore.

I think that because of the association we have within the Canadian Badlands association, it's something that is potentially strengthening, and as I look into the future, I see some great things that can happen. Then all of a sudden this small, little community is pushed over to the west, and it concerns me considerably. I have very little in common with Strathmore or, particularly, Chestermere. I'm very concerned about that because it's too easy to ignore a community who's 75 miles to the east. I'm just deeply concerned about it.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. I certainly appreciate that point, and the fact that Rosemary is so close to the eastern edge of that proposed constituency and not within the county is something that, obviously, we're going to be looking at closely in the next round.

Thanks so much for your comments.

Mr. Gibb: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Gibb. It's been very helpful, very forthright, and we'll certainly be looking at it. Thank you.

Mr. Gibb: Thank you very much. Appreciate the opportunity I've had of being here today.

The Chair: It's our pleasure.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mr. Fred Barg.

The Chair: Mr. Barg, since we're on *Hansard*, would you for the record give your name, and then we can proceed.

Mr. Barg: I'm Fred Barg, a long-term county of Newell resident.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Fred Barg
Private Citizen

Mr. Barg: Hon. Chairman, commission members, thanks for the opportunity to present here today. I am one of those who saw the ad the first time and didn't do anything about it. I thought that there's no way that the county is going to get touched, and I didn't worry about it until it came to my attention that a recommendation for boundary changes to the Strathmore-Brooks electoral constituency is being considered. I'd like to just elaborate on the letter that I'd sent earlier.

The county of Newell No. 4 and the Eastern irrigation district have almost coterminous boundaries, and each are governed by one board or council. They have an excellent relationship and work co-operatively on many projects. Dividing the area up would be very detrimental, counterproductive, and hurtful to the citizens living in this area and now experiencing good, co-operative leadership by the county council and the EID board.

I think the county of Newell and the Eastern irrigation district have a unique and special relationship. Since they comprise almost the same area and serve the same people, they are inextricably linked. Irrigation canals impact roads, and roads affect the irrigation works. Land swaps or sales occur regularly and peacefully. Work exchanges happen, resulting in more efficiency and cost savings. County council and the EID board consult regularly. It is very beneficial having a co-operative working arrangement between these two groups.

Splitting up the county of Newell with electoral boundary divisions would be a huge step backward for this area and all the

residents living here. We would have to communicate with different MLAs about things we work together on and now work on with one MLA. The province of Alberta should use this area, the county of Newell and the Eastern irrigation district, working together in cooperation, as a good-news story and an example for others rather than tearing it apart into different constituencies.

The city of Brooks along with surrounding towns and villages located in the county of Newell have much in common and work closely together in areas such as recreational facilities, fire protection, waste management, and now regional water along with many other services. To separate these communities is reprehensible and should not be considered.

The county of Newell has many regional services currently serving the residents of the area. An example would be the Newell Foundation, which currently manages a seniors' lodge in Brooks and in Bassano. Under the current boundaries proposal these would be in different constituencies, represented by different MLAs. I believe this would adversely impact the residents and their families. Many of these receive provincial funding and work closely with our MLA. Having to keep several MLAs, possibly from a very different area, informed and cognizant of community needs and wishes would be much more difficult and very likely result in less effective representation in the Alberta Legislature.

Many of the services provided by nonprofit organizations in our communities serve the residents in the entire county of Newell. They have been set up and developed to serve this area, and funding is dependent on supporters from the whole county. Splitting it up would cause unnecessary hardship to many of these very important and worthwhile service agencies. An example of this that immediately comes to mind is the Grasslands Regional FCSS, a co-operative group from Brooks, Duchess, Rosemary, Tilley, and the county of Newell. I'm a volunteer board member of a service agency that receives much-needed and appreciated funding from FCSS. Prior to these groups working together, we needed to make five separate applications where now we do one. It seems to me that separating the area into different electoral districts would jeopardize these types of co-operative working relationships. A number of other agencies in our area would be impacted in a similar way.

Dividing the Grasslands school district makes no sense and could be detrimental to the education services now provided in the county of Newell. I have to say that I'm not familiar enough with the structure and operation of the school district, but I do not see how it could be a positive change for them.

I believe the Strathmore area is a good fit with Brooks and the county of Newell area, and it has been a good constituency that could be left intact. I believe it also adequately meets population representation in the Alberta Legislature.

Should the boundaries for constituencies be realigned under any proposal, I strongly urge that every consideration be given to keeping the county of Newell intact. Division of the county of Newell is unthinkable and must not be done. It would be a huge step backwards.

11:25

I realize electoral boundary changes do not change municipal boundaries; however, they will impact how the area interacts, functions, and is represented in the Alberta Legislature. Having two or three MLAs representing the residents of the county of Newell rather than one would seem to be less effective and knowledgeable representation, detrimental to the area, and a regressive change for the constituents of this area of Alberta.

It seems to me as though we have sufficient MLAs in Alberta at the present time and are well represented. I do not believe the

additional expenditure of time and money required to set up additional constituencies and MLAs is warranted at this time. I would suggest an improvement to the electoral system in Alberta is not primarily dependent on boundary changes, although in some cases they may be required, or on having more MLAs. Rather, current MLAs need to have the freedom and opportunity to represent and speak for and on behalf of their constituents without fear, reprimand, or retribution.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Barg. I really appreciated your presentation this morning. I was struck by the comment you have in your bullet point 1, that the province "should use this area, the County of Newell and the Eastern Irrigation District, working together in cooperation as a good news story and an example for others rather than tearing it apart into different constituencies." I think, certainly, the submissions that we have received suggest that there is a lot of pride in what's been accomplished here. You've laid out some of it in your letter, and others have as well. I agree. It sounds to me like a very good-news story here. I think the commission is communicating to people present here today that we're certainly hearing that message about the importance of keeping the county of Newell together in the next iteration of our work.

The last point that you're making in this letter, the fifth point, about the number of MLAs: of course, we have no jurisdiction over that. The legislation indicates that we are to recommend 87, and we did. That's not really our place to change that. If people have comments on that, really, the place to send those is to your MLA rather than to us.

Other than that I thought it was a thoughtful presentation and appreciate it. Thanks so much.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Barg. Again, I agree that the information you provided was useful, in particular the specific example of the FCSS problem previously, that before regionalization you made five applications, so again it would certainly help if you only have one MLA to go to for support. As I've said earlier, part of what we're considering is providing some options for Albertans to look at. It's a question of whether you want to diversify. Currently having one MLA for the region works well. That MLA is a member of the governing party. You know, there's some merit in saying: well, maybe we should diversify, not have all our eggs in one basket just in case things change; maybe one will be a cabinet minister, one won't. But here the preponderance of the information and evidence that we're hearing certainly supports leaving the county of Newell and probably the county of Wheatland with one MLA, and the specific examples, again, are very helpful.

Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Barg. This is sort of continuing on a theme, actually. This is a very clear presentation, and I do appreciate it. I think that from what you may already have heard this morning, it would be very difficult to leave the constituency as it is, but we've certainly heard some strong arguments to at least do our best to maintain the county of Newell, if possible, in the next review. I have to say that there are very regional differences. We've heard from other areas of the province where counties are only too happy to have two MLAs supporting

them, but it does seem to be the preference to work together and have a fairly united position here. I thank you for that. I don't have any questions.

I have nothing further, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Mr. Barg. Again, a very clear presentation. The only comment that I would make would be related to your comment that Alberta doesn't need any more MLAs, just to work more effectively. We certainly have heard that. But please recognize that because of the court decisions and because of the change in population – this province is becoming more urbanized. Fifty-two per cent of the population of the province resides in either Edmonton or Calgary. There are large populations around those two cities, and when you add in some of the smaller cities, you know, you're taking in a very significant portion of the population. That has an impact on how the courts have interpreted effective representation. There are other factors, obviously, but that population is going to result in a change over time in the number of urban and rural seats if this trend to urbanization continues.

It's not a warning. It's just a reality. I'm sure that you're aware of it. I just thought it demanded some clarification in terms of the last point in your presentation.

That's my only comment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Barg. There is certainly a common theme of preserving the county of Newell in one riding and the suggestion of the proposed boundaries of this new riding. We're getting a pretty clear message. Again, we thank you for your time. We will certainly have a close look at it.

Mr. Barg: Well, thank you for your consideration.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenters are Mayor Audrey Wilcox and Les Schmidt of the town of Bassano.

The Chair: Ms Wilcox, we're being recorded on *Hansard*. Could you and your co-presenter please give your names and who you're representing for the record?

Ms Wilcox: My name is Audrey Wilcox. I'm the mayor of the town of Bassano, and I represent the town of Bassano and council.

Mr. Schmidt: I'm Les Schmidt, and I'm a councillor for the town of Bassano.

The Chair: Thank you. Please proceed.

**Audrey Wilcox, Mayor
Les Schmidt, Councillor
Town of Bassano**

Ms Wilcox: I would like to thank you in advance for the opportunity for this presentation. We as representatives of the town of Bassano didn't feel during the first session last year that we needed to act due to the fact that our population meets the recommendation as outlined in the electoral boundaries legislation. Also, the existing boundaries follow the municipal boundaries of the county of Newell.

The town of Bassano felt that the set guidelines were not followed or considered regarding our municipality or county. Number 1, the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Current, present MLA: pleased with representation, understands challenges and needs in our area, one voice to the Legislature, reasonable, approachable, available. Proposed: no current connections; county will have three MLAs; not effective; time consuming to arrange meetings with three MLAs for regional projects; possibly MLAs from three different political parties; possibly three different opinions and views.

Mr. Schmidt: Can I interject there?

Ms Wilcox: Yeah.

Mr. Schmidt: With the proposed change with us being included in the constituency of Little Bow, Bassano is really going to be isolated from that constituency with that river. We feel that that boundary should be on the river as it currently is.

The Chair: I can perhaps help you there. Yesterday we heard from Barry McFarland, the MLA for that area, and he also said that the boundary should be the river.

Thank you. Please proceed.

11:35

Ms Wilcox: Number 2, sparsity and density of population. Strathmore-Brooks meets the recommendation as outlined in the electoral boundaries legislation. The proposed Little Bow population meets the recommended size as well.

Number 3, common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements. Current, community interests: hockey, figure skating, baseball, indoor and outdoor soccer, school sports – district leagues in volleyball, basketball, handball, golf, badminton – air cadets, city of Brooks indoor pool, town of Bassano outdoor pool. Proposed: no connections. Community organizations, close relationships: Kinsmen Club, Lions Club, Masonic lodge, Elks lodge, Royal Purple. Proposed: no connections.

Number 4, the number of municipalities and other local authorities. Current: Eastern irrigation district; Grasslands public schools; county of Newell, including the hamlet of Rolling Hills, the hamlet of Scandia, the hamlet of Rainier, the hamlet of Patricia; the city of Brooks; the village of Rosemary; the village of Duchess; the town of Bassano. Proposed: no familiar.

Mr. Schmidt: Could I interject again?

Ms Wilcox: Please.

Mr. Schmidt: That topic there is a big one. By splitting the county of Newell into three, we're not very happy at all with what's going to end up for the school division. We feel it's pretty significant for a rural community for the entire school division to be in one constituency if we can. On the EID as well, splitting it up: I just don't care for that much, and neither does the town.

Ms Wilcox: Number 5, geographical features, including existing road systems: highway 1 connects the entire constituency; the Red Deer River in the north and the Bow River in the south; same agricultural areas; same industry, oil and gas; clear boundaries; natural trading route, east-west. Proposed: more distanced road connection, driving 40 kilometres east to highway 36 or west to

highway 842 to connect to proposed constituency; separated through Bow River to proposed constituency.

Number 6, the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries. Current: no concerns with current boundaries. Proposed: no logical or geographical boundaries; voters will be confused with new boundaries.

Number 7, any other factors the commission considers appropriate. Current: trading area, east-west, Brooks-Strathmore. Shared services: Newell Regional Solid Waste Management Authority, one central landfill for the county of Newell; Newell Regional Tourism Association; Newell Regional Services Corporation, regional water; Newell economic development board; Grasslands public schools; Eastern irrigation district; shared community peace officer; shared regional fire chief, all municipalities in the county of Newell; regional IT initiative with county, village of Rosemary, village of Tilley, village of Duchess, and town of Bassano; shared regional assessment review boards. Proposed, trading area: very limited trading north and south. Shared services: there are none. Other: we have a really good, growing relationship with Wheatland county.

I want to thank you for listening. Do you have any questions?

Any more comments, Les?

Mr. Schmidt: I guess a question that our council came up with was: what was the rationale for putting Bassano into Little Bow? Was it strictly based on making the numbers work, or was it beyond that?

The Chair: It covered a whole broad picture of what we had to look at in terms of trying to get effective representation across Alberta, and there is some domino effect that happens when change has to be made in one area that then moves out from there. But remember that that was an interim report designed to let people look at it and then let us hear your comments. We've heard a very clear series of presentations and written presentations also that suggest a common theme that you people have just covered.

You know, we've received over 500 written submissions from across the province. Some areas are very happy. Some want some change. Some want significant change. We have heard from the residents of the county of Newell and from towns and villages and Brooks itself a certain common theme of keeping this area together with Strathmore, using the boundaries of the two rivers. We've been getting a consistent message in that respect.

Keith, have you any questions of these people?

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mayor Wilcox and Councillor Schmidt. I appreciate your presentation. I just wanted to highlight a couple of issues. Firstly, your argument is not inconsistent with lots of presentations that we've heard this morning already. Particularly the idea of keeping the county of Newell together in one constituency we've heard a number of times. I did want to highlight, though, that in some instances I think the case that you're making may be a bit overstated. I wanted to challenge a little bit of that.

I think you've also introduced information that is something that is not appropriate for the commission to take into account. For example, on page 2 of your submission, in point 1, where you are referring to the item "Requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," you suggest that under the proposed arrangement there could be as many as three MLAs for the county of Newell and that these may be from different parties. It's not relevant, I would suggest, to the commission what political parties are elected in any of the constituencies. Where that may be a challenge for you, again, it's just not a factor that informs part of our deliberations as to what are the political implications of these ridings.

The other point that struck me as curious is that in which you identify community interests in the current arrangement, and you say: sporting events like hockey and figure skating and baseball; under the proposed ridings, the community interests, there are no connections there. I assume you're not saying that the people in Little Bow don't have an interest in hockey or figure skating or baseball but that the kids in your town don't play against the kids in those communities. I just wasn't quite sure of the point you were making with respect to that issue.

Mr. Schmidt: It was just to show that for a lot of the events and things that take place in Bassano that include other areas, most of it is within the county of Newell. It's just to show that we have a lot of common ties within the county, and it's not so much going south.

Dr. Archer: Right. That's what I thought you were suggesting. Are you also suggesting here that there are strong alignments within the provincial constituency of Strathmore-Brooks, or is it a matter that these are county-based connections that exist at the moment?

Mr. Schmidt: Primarily the county. I'd have to say for Bassano that we do not want to be split from the county of Newell.

Dr. Archer: Right. Again, one of the perspectives we've heard this morning is that you could think of the issue of the recommendation to keep the Strathmore-Brooks constituency relatively unchanged as two parts of a discussion. The first part is that we've heard the county of Newell is an integrated unit, and if one had to prioritize, keeping that within one constituency is priority one. Then we've heard different opinions, actually, on where that county should be connected. Some say Drumheller is a logical connection. Some say Strathmore is a logical connection. I wonder if the town of Bassano has a view on what is the most compelling connection from your perspective.

11:45

Ms Wilcox: I would think it would be with Strathmore.

Mr. Schmidt: It would be. I'd say that the water districts we have in common, the Bow River we also have in common, the watersheds – we sit on both watershed boards – whereas going up to Drumheller, not so much, again.

Dr. Archer: Right. Thanks so much. That's all I have.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mayor Wilcox and Councillor Schmidt. I guess I'm disagreeing with Dr. Archer. I took the items you listed in 1 as examples of how, in your opinion, having multiple MLAs would not result in effective representation. You've given us a few examples, so that's what I took those as, as your examples of that.

Just a quick comment: don't beat yourselves up too much for not putting something into the interim report. It is not surprising to me that you looked at your own constituency and said: gee, it meets many of the criteria. If you start from the Strathmore-Brooks constituency and work out, you would not be changed. It is to a certain extent a question of where one starts in the province, you know, if you start at 12 o'clock or 3 o'clock or 5 o'clock, that the changes are driven.

One suggestion I've made to a number of other representatives of smaller municipalities is that the provincial organization might want

to consider having the next Electoral Boundaries Commission on its radar. The AAMD and C has meetings every year. In five or seven years it may be that the next mayor of Brooks and councillors might want to think about putting a submission in rather than waiting and responding. Again, we are, and I assume the next commission will be, looking at different options in terms of: the underlying assumptions that may have applied in 1993 or 2001 may be different now. Is it time to look at highways? Yes or no? Clearly, the answer down here we're hearing is no.

Again, the tone of apology at the start when you didn't get into it beforehand doesn't surprise me at all. It's sort of the second constituency. In Innisfail-Sylvan Lake they said: well, we have the perfect constituency; we never thought anyone would change it. So, again, you're coming from the same perspective. Don't beat yourselves up too much.

Mr. Schmidt: Thanks.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a feeling that the next commission will have quite a few more presentations in that first round from what we've been hearing.

I want to look at a bit of a geographic issue, and I think we have the map up there. If Bassano is positioned where they're positioned in Little Bow, where are your bridges to cross that river, actually? Is your route, basically, into the southern part of that constituency along highway 1?

Ms Wilcox: There are no bridges.

Mr. Schmidt: You can take highway 1 to, I guess, the Cluny highway and cross the bridge there.

Ms Jeffs: Oh, to the west. Okay.

Mr. Schmidt: To the west. Then numbers 1 and 36.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Yes. We did isolate you a little bit over there, too. Notwithstanding you also have a good argument with respect to your issues with the county of Newell, but I just wanted to clarify that.

That's all I have, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for coming.

Mr. Schmidt: Thanks.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Mayor and Councillor. Very clear examples. You've certainly indicated your connection primarily with the county of Newell, also a secondary connection with the county of Wheatland. It's helpful to us, so thank you very much. No questions.

The Chair: Thank you both very much. It was very clear, and we'll certainly be taking it into account, so thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Thanks for your time.

Ms Wilcox: Thank you for your time.

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

[The hearing adjourned at 11:49 a.m.]

