



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Edmonton

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Edmonton

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10:31 a.m.**Monday, January 16, 2017**

[Justice Bielby in the chair]

The Chair: Hello. Good morning. Thanks very much for coming out today. My name is Justice Myra Bielby. I'm a judge of the Court of Appeal of Alberta, but at the moment I'm also chairing the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce the other members of the commission: Jean Munn from Calgary, Laurie Livingstone from Calgary, Gwen Day from Carstairs, and Bruce McLeod from Acme, Alberta.

Now, over the past few weeks – maybe they got our flyers in the mail – my friends and neighbours have been asking me: “Why are you having the Electoral Boundaries Commission? What is the purpose of it at this time?” So I thought I'd start out by saying that our work is to research and make recommendations to the provincial Legislature as to where and how our provincial constituency boundaries should be changed to ensure effective, proper representation by our MLAs in future provincial elections. Representation based on population is a fundamental democratic principle, so constituency boundaries have to be varied from time to time to ensure that populations are relatively equal from one constituency to the other.

The commission's work is particularly needed at this time because Alberta has experienced just a huge increase in population since the time of the last Electoral Boundaries Commission, only eight years ago. Our population has increased net by more than 20 per cent since 2010 notwithstanding the recent economic climate in the province.

We haven't tried out this PowerPoint in this room yet, so you're my guinea pigs, but here we go. Yay.

Alberta has 87 provincial constituencies, and we, this commission, don't have the power to increase or decrease that number. Only the Legislature has that power, and it decided for whatever reason not to make any changes this time. So we're obliged to make recommendations as to how the province should be divided into 87 constituencies.

It has been divided in the past. You see a provincial map over there on the side, and it shows the current divisions, our current constituencies, and it shows the population figures in blue for the last time the Electoral Boundaries Commission did the work, and then you can see the current estimated population for the constituencies. So you can see the change in each individual constituency by looking at this map.

Now, needless to say, each constituency is entitled to return one elected Member of the Legislative Assembly to sit in the Legislature, to represent it in the next election. The voters elect one MLA. As I just said, our population has increased by more than 20 per cent since 2010, the time the last Electoral Boundaries Commission did its work. In 2010 the average population of each of our constituencies was 40,880 people, but today that average is an estimated 48,884 people. That's a result of dividing 87 into the province's current estimated population of about 4.2 million.

Statistics Canada has announced its intention to release the 2016 federal census population figures during the first week of February 2017. That's our good luck because we didn't know that when we started out on this work, but that will give us accurate and up-to-date population figures by the time we have to prepare our report. We feel that the estimates, which were prepared by the provincial Treasury Board based on the 2016 municipal censuses in Alberta, are reasonably accurate, so we're not anticipating a huge change in figures between now and the first week of February. But just know that when those updated figures come out, we will be updating our figures as well.

Now, the reason for our work is that while we've had an influx of people into the province over the last eight years, they haven't all moved equally over the 87 constituencies. More people moved to certain constituencies than to others, so even though eight years ago constituencies had relatively equal populations, today the populations range from an estimated 25,192 people in our smallest constituency to 79,034 people in our largest constituency, and that variation has arisen, in large part, as I say, because those who have moved into Alberta haven't moved equally into each area of the province.

Our job is to make recommendations to the Legislature as to how and where constituency boundaries should be moved to ensure that each Albertan has effective representation by their MLA and to ensure that the democratic principle of representation by population continues to function in our province. Our goal is to create clear and understandable boundaries for all constituencies, but we're not just limited to the arithmetic, numbers. If we were, there wouldn't be the need to have these meetings. It would just be a simple calculation.

The legislation that governs us has directed us to consider other things as well, and we're hoping that people who are making presentations will particularly address some of these criteria as to what we should take into account, including adjusting constituency boundaries, if we have to, to better reflect the needs of Albertans. So the factors that we'll consider: first, relative population densities; second, common community interests and community organizations, including those of First Nation reserves and Métis settlements; existing community and neighbourhood boundaries in Edmonton and Calgary; existing municipal boundaries elsewhere in the province; geographical features that suggest natural boundaries such as rivers and highways – ideally, you don't want to have a constituency straddle a river or straddle a major highway if you can avoid it – and finally, of course, your input into each of these factors and any other factor you believe we should take into account in doing our work.

Starting today – you're our first one, so thanks so much for being brave to come out and be our first public hearing – we're going to be travelling around the province holding public hearings to seek community input to assist us in developing our recommendations. Many thanks to those of you who have registered to make oral presentations today. Now, while generally we only are able to hear people who registered in advance so that we make sure we have enough time, in fact, possibly because this is our very first hearing, we have a couple of extra slots here this morning, so if somebody else wants to speak at the end who hasn't had a chance to speak and hasn't registered, we probably have time to hear from you. So just keep that in mind as you're listening. But, of course, anybody can stay and listen to what's being said.

In addition to these public hearings, we're receiving written submissions as to how our constituency boundaries should be set through our website at www.abebc.ca, by e-mail, by social media, and by regular mail. I'm pleased to say that we've had a really good response in written submissions. When this was done eight years ago, there were 500 written submissions in total received throughout the entire year. So far we've received 300 in the first two weeks of operation of our website, so we're pretty pleased that there's been so much interest in making those submissions.

Know that we'll consider each of the submissions, written or oral, in preparing our interim report, and we have to file that report with the Legislature on or before May 31 of this year. It'll be published. It'll be posted on our website, and it will make specific recommendations as to size, boundaries, and name of each of our 87 constituencies. After that report is made public, you and other

members of the public will know what's being proposed for your particular constituency or any constituency that interests you.

We'll then receive feedback as to what our recommendations are. We're having a second round of public hearings in July and August to receive your thoughts on those specific proposals, and of course we'll also consider further written submissions on those specific proposals. I'm told that some people feel more confident in responding to a specific proposal rather than just making general comments, so there will be an opportunity to do that as well in the summer.

Then we're going to consider those recommendations in preparing the final report. We have to table that report with the Legislature no later than October 31, 2017. Then the Legislature may enact legislation changing the boundaries and the names of the constituencies to reflect our recommendations. They're doing that at this time because it's required by the legislation but also, apparently, because the returning officers need a lot of lead time to prepare for the next election.

10:40

Why are we doing this? Where does this come from? Well, there are two pieces of legislation, two acts passed by the Alberta Legislature over the past 100 years, that control the process for setting boundaries. One is called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act and the other the Electoral Divisions Act. Those acts set out the rules that I talked about here on the PowerPoint and talk about the rules that we'll be applying in our work.

To review, equality or parity of population isn't our only consideration. While our courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have interpreted our legislation as meaning that each one of us has the right not to have the political strength or value of our vote diluted, our legislation permits variances, where necessary, of up to 25 per cent above or below average and in special circumstances for up to 50 per cent below average. That said, previous commissions have been able to bring in their recommendations with variances much lower than the 25 per cent maximum, and that's our goal as well.

In summary, legal interpretations of our legislation direct us to consider the current actual population in a constituency, compare that to the adjusted average of 48,800, and then decide if there's any acceptable reason not to move the boundaries of the constituency in or out to increase or reduce the geographic size of the constituency so that the constituency population approximates 48,800.

Today we'll be looking at Edmonton in particular, but you're not limited to talking about Edmonton constituencies or the surrounding constituencies. We're anxious to hear whatever you have to say about anywhere in the province. I would ask, though, that if you believe there is a good reason to move a boundary, it would be very helpful for us if you could tell us how you want that boundary to be adjusted and why. Do you want it moved north, south, east, west, what have you? We've even got a visual aid here. We're trying this out. We've got a laminated map of the city over there, and we've got some markers. Our clerk is going to set some markers out. If you think a constituency boundary should be moved, you can go over there and show us how it should be moved. He'll take a photo of it, and that'll become part of your submission.

For example, one of the first submissions we received was from a man who lived in a rural area. He said: "Gee, our constituencies make no sense. They don't follow the county boundary. If you follow the county boundary, the population wouldn't be that much changed, but because it doesn't follow the boundary, we've had problems with this and that." So I said: "Yes. That's a great idea." You know, we'll think about that when we come to adjusting the

boundaries of that constituency, and we've filed it away under the name of that constituency.

If you have specific suggestions, please let us know. You can tell, I think, more or less, whether your constituency has the potential for having its boundaries adjusted by looking at the actual population in your constituency at the moment and comparing that to the 48,800 figure. If you have, like Edmonton-South West, 63,000 people, you might think: "Well, gee, maybe we're a candidate for having our boundaries adjusted so that we can come down closer to the provincial average. When that happens, where does that extra part of our constituency go? What other constituency does it join and vice versa?"

There you have it. That's what we're hoping to hear about from you today.

It's now my pleasure to call on our first registered speaker. Looking at my list, that would appear to be Al Kemmere. Thank you, Mr. Kemmere. Where would we like Mr. Kemmere? At the table there.

There's a *Hansard* reporter present. Your submissions will become public. They'll be made part of *Hansard*, so it would be really helpful if you would start by giving your name, the constituency you live in or the community you live in if you're not sure as to the constituency. Keep in mind that you have 10 minutes, and then we'll ask you some questions perhaps. We're a little bit more flexible this morning because we have some extra time.

Thanks very much.

Mr. Kemmere.

Mr. Kemmere: Well, thank you. Thank you to the commission for going through the process provincially that you are. It's no small task to try and disseminate all the different information that's coming forward.

My name is Al Kemmere, and I am here under a different situation. I do live in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, that is just north of Calgary, but I'm here representing the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. We are the provincial agency that represents all rural municipalities in Alberta. We thought it would be great that we'd give you a little bit of a rural overview early in the process so that you could have an understanding.

I'm going to challenge your IT person if I could. Rather than have the Edmonton map, would it be possible to show the map that you showed of all of Alberta? If not, I won't waste your time doing it. It just gives the magnitude of the different ridings and stuff, the different sizes. There we go. Perfect. That looks great. Thank you.

As I stated, I'm representing the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, commonly referred to as AAMD and C. We represent 64 municipal districts, and then we also represent five specialized municipalities throughout the province. We cover the province north to south, east to west, the municipal jurisdictions. We represent about 18 per cent of Alberta's population and 85 per cent of Alberta's land mass.

Again, thank you. We appreciate you giving us the time and taking the time to listen to both us and all the other presenters that you're going to see over the next few weeks. You've been given a rather daunting task, in my view, but a very important task because this is the core to a lot of our democratic processes. You're tasked with trying to find the ends to this process by going through all the different approaches that people are going to be offering to you. You've referred to past decisions, and you've referred to some of the framework, so I'm going to have to skip through some of my stuff because you shared with us a lot of our presentation already.

We're going to focus a lot on what is effective representation and our interpretation of effective representation. That can mean a lot

of different things to a lot of different communities. Our key intent is to try and find value in that effective representation by looking at population, by looking at community characteristics, community identity, and geography, and I think you've identified all those in your opening comments.

Effective representation in rural Alberta is an important item. The population of rural Alberta is growing but not at the same pace as what it is in urban municipalities, and you've identified that as an item. Without additional seats being added to the Legislature, this means the commission will have to re-evaluate some of the rural areas and the urban areas as far as representation. This has concerns for many of our members and rural Albertans generally. We would like to emphasize the important part of effective representation, and we believe that means the ability to have your voice heard and understood by elected officials.

In rural Alberta this means that constituents must be able to discuss issues of joint concern with their elected officials. It means MLAs must be able to connect with their local people, with their local constituents. It is also important that MLAs have a sense of important aspects in their communities and to some degree have a shared experience with their constituents. The constituencies being too large becomes a problem.

To reflect on population and population densities, rural constituencies are large in nature, but expanding the current boundaries would only make the problem that we see in representing rural Alberta a bigger challenge. Presently we've had our members identify to us often that it takes them four hours one way to get to their MLA's office and then four hours back the next way to get home. That makes it a challenge for them to get in touch with their MLA through face-to-face contact. Likewise, the same challenge lies with the MLA to get out to the communities that he or she represents. It becomes a bigger and bigger issue the larger the constituency is or the larger the geographical features that are in his or her way to get to their areas.

10:50

I know there have been comments in the past about rural broadband being a tool, you know, Internet being a tool to connect with your local people in your constituencies. The unfortunate part is that in rural Alberta the more remote you get, the harder it is to use that technology to get in touch with your people. It is an ongoing challenge. I know there are improvements coming to high-speed Internet. We need to make sure that if those challenges are being met, the government also in the local offices within Edmonton has the same access to that so that they can use those technologies as it moves forward.

One of the tools that has been used in the past few years is the blending of rural and urban communities into ridings. Electoral boundaries are intended, to a certain degree, to reflect community differences, and in the past this has been achieved by maintaining separation between urban and rural communities. I'm going to clarify that when I say urban and rural, I consider most small towns in my context to be rural. To me, urban is the larger cities and the blending of rural and urban that way.

In the past there also have been other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere where electoral boundary adjustments have included rural ridings, which combine both rural and urban residents. In some instances, particularly around metropolitan areas, this makes the task of effectively representing all residents extremely challenging for elected officials, particularly when populations of rural and urban are not balanced. That's our key. We understand that there will be a need to have what we'll call rural ridings, the blended rural and urban, but the best representation would be to make sure that when the population is looked at, those ridings have

a fair balance of rural and urban so that that MLA has a balanced representation.

One of the other challenges that our members and the people we've talked to in the rurals have pointed out is the cost of trying to manage the large constituencies. You can see some of the larger ones in the north and in the eastern part of the province. Often it takes running multiple offices. What we ask is that ultimately – and this will be a government decision, probably, not yours, but it could be a recommendation – we make sure that those MLAs from those massive, large constituencies be adequately funded so that they can run multiple offices if they need to so that they can have better access to their constituencies and to their constituents. It would go a long way to avoiding the fracturing or the disparity that happens with that major distance challenge.

Our last point is – and you've identified it – identifying municipal boundaries. We realize that in many cases you will have no choice but to run your riding boundaries on the best mechanism. But by best intentions, try not to fracture too many municipalities into multiple ridings. If you could have as much harmony between the ridings and the municipal boundaries, it would make culture and community a lot easier to deliver for that MLA.

To wrap it up, we would just like to again thank you. We look forward to the core outcome that you have here and your next stage in this whole process. This is vital to our democratic process. It is important that we do this review and at the same time we consider the size of the rural ridings in your discussions and try and make sure that we don't create an environment where the rural ridings would just become much, much larger and almost unmanageable.

With that, I'll leave it to you and thank you again. I'll deal with any questions you have.

The Chair: I'll start off with a question just on your last point. You urged us to avoid dividing, say, counties and municipal districts into multiple constituencies if possible. Do you have an example to give us as to where that's happened in the past?

Mr. Kemmere: What I'll go back to is the 2010 presentation that we presented at that point, where we had the one community within Mountain View county, which is my home. It was the town of Olds. The town of Olds is only 8,000 people, and their first proposal showed that town being divided three ways into three different constituencies. I don't think that that was going to serve the community aspect of a constituency to the same extent as the final boundary line was, as they used a little bit more geographical features. So my county is actually in two ridings, but it is manageable because they use a geographic feature to make that work. The Red Deer River was what they used as their line, so to speak.

Those things are unavoidable. We realize that, and all we can say is: best efforts to try and use those geographical features if you need to but understand that some of our counties are rather large, too, and you're going to have no choice. Just the minimization of it would be what we're looking at.

When I say rural, I don't have the authority to speak on the towns, but I think this concern would be one of the towns' also, not to split towns and villages into multiple ridings. Ultimately, I know there will be no choice in some of that, but minimization, I guess, would be our point.

The Chair: Thanks. That was very helpful.

Mrs. Day: Thank you, Mr. Kemmere, for your presentation. I'm just curious: with, for example, the MLA in your area, do you think what he has currently is harmonious in the different people that he

represents? Could you give an example of how it's working in Mountain View now?

Mr. Kemmere: In Mountain View county we are one of the counties in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. The riding actually touches three counties. It's the northern part of Rocky View and then Kneehill county and Mountain View county. I believe, you know, we are a strong agriculture community, and in whole the riding is able to represent that. Oil and gas is a key culture in our communities. All are about affected the same. Being the northern part of Rocky View, they've got very much similarities with Mountain View and Kneehill counties in the culture aspect, so I think it is well represented. The west part of our county is split off, and it is in the riding that goes up through Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. But, again, that's a separate culture, and it fits more with that climate and that culture and the community aspect that's out there. I think there are 11 towns represented in our riding and three counties. I believe it's well represented that way.

Mr. McLeod: Al, thanks for your presentation. You mentioned the one that was about a four-hour drive each way for a face-to-face. Can you identify that for me?

Mr. Kemmere: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. That's why I wanted the map up. You can see that in the northeast corner of Alberta there we have Mackenzie county in that area. But even if you look at central Alberta east, along the Alberta border there, all the way through to central Alberta, that constituency there covers Stettler, Brooks, and north up to, I believe, Wetaskiwin. From corner to corner, to drive from one town to the other, it's a three and a half hour drive. I drove it the other day on other business. If the MLA is situated in one of those corners, it becomes that challenge, and that's without the fact that you've got rivers that could impede your ability to go where you want to go in a straight line, so to speak.

There are about four of them on that map that are probably that profound. You know, if there are adjustments to be made, we ask that if they are going to be made larger, you'd still consider those other factors, the community and that ability to have that specialized variance in some of those situations. The large ridings that are there right now: we are just hoping that we don't see them larger or more larger ones, but we understand the challenges.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: So you've got in the northeast in the Fort McMurray area Mackenzie county, in central Alberta the riding that covers Stettler, Brooks, north of Wetaskiwin, and you said there were two others that had long driving distances.

Mr. Kemmere: If you look into the area that covers – well, the county of Greenview is within that riding, so that's up against the Rocky Mountains there. There is a significant task to get from Hinton through to Fox Creek and areas like that. The map really identifies, you know, the size of some of these constituencies and the challenges that would create the problems.

The Chair: Thanks.

Ms Munn: I'd like to ask you about your comments with respect to designing hybrids. You said that you wanted us to pay particular attention to balancing the rural-urban mix. Are you talking about population?

Mr. Kemmere: Yeah, I would say from a population point of view. I'll use, if you don't mind, a couple examples that come to mind. If you take the city of Grande Prairie, the city of Grande Prairie could

be covered in one riding, but in order to allow stronger representation of that area, they split Grande Prairie into two, and it's got about a 50 per cent urban-rural mix in each one of those ridings. The challenge of the rural situation is when you're up against the larger cities, where you've got such massive populations. If you get a population mix that's 5 per cent, 10 per cent only rural and the balance being urban, there is a risk of just having trouble having that MLA be able to represent those aspects equally.

The rural environment: we understand the need for it around the mid-sized cities. It's just around the metropolitan cities where it seems to have created challenges, not only here but in other parts of Canada, too, when it was attempted.

11:00

The Chair: So if I can summarize, around Edmonton and Calgary you're suggesting that we go slow on creating hybrid constituencies.

Mr. Kemmere: Yes. That would be a good comment. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you so much.

All right. We can turn to our next speaker if she's ready to go, Ms Chantelle Hughes-Kreutzer. We're a little bit ahead of time. She may not be here yet.

Is there anybody else who's here today who'd like to tell us anything just as a result of having listened to our discussion here or anything else which you think might be helpful for us to know in regard to constituency boundaries?

Anybody have any questions for us?

You're making it very easy for us to have our first morning here.

Hi. We're a little bit early, but are you comfortable coming forward now?

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: Sure.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: I was hoping to watch for a few minutes.

The Chair: As I said in the intro, nobody wants to be first. While we're fully subscribed this afternoon and this evening, we had some extra time this morning. I think everybody wanted to come and watch us in action before they put their toe in the water. While we have a 10-minute time limit with five minutes for questions, we have a little extra time this morning, so we won't hold you right to that 10-minute limit if you need a little extra time.

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: Sure. Can I approach and provide you with the presentation?

The Chair: Of course. You bet.

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: Thank you. All right. Just to introduce myself, my name is Chantelle Hughes-Kreutzer, and I'm representing the Edmonton-Mill Woods NDP. Just to start off here, we wanted to come and speak to the commission because I'm very, very lucky to live in an area that was created in the 1970s, is quite diverse, and it was really at the time almost a social experiment. We saw a chance for the city of Edmonton to come together and really build a community that was socially, economically, and physically quite unique at the time. Here and now we have Mill Woods, and it still is very unique. It's very diverse. The neighbourhood I live in is 50 per cent, you know, single-family dwellings and 50 per cent diverse incomes. We see community housing, we see co-ops, and we see apartments. It's kind of like that throughout the whole constituency. It's a very unified constituency, and it has a long

history together. I'm going to talk a little bit about that and then kind of what we're proposing.

On the first page there was just the introduction, and then the second page that you'll see is the map of Mill Woods itself. It is in the south part of Edmonton, and to the right side of that map it just talks about all the different community leagues that are in that area. It is an area that has a lot of quality, affordable housing, and it really has its own identity. It has very, very strong community leagues, and they've been active since the 1970s. They're involved in many, many different activities within their community leagues. There is a lot of unity there, there's a lot of history there, and there was a lot of planning there.

Just to kind of move forward to the population estimates on the next page, when we looked at the census in 2011, it put our population at about 41,000 people. Then when we looked at the boundary commission's numbers, it looked like there's about 48,000 people showing on that estimate. It's an area that is older neighbourhoods. There's not a lot of infill or new development going on. So while that number puts us right in line with other constituencies, the census numbers maybe don't kind of jibe with that. There's not new growth and development happening; there are not new areas happening, that kind of thing. In fact, when we look at the 2016 city of Edmonton census for that area, it puts us at about 38,000 people. So there's a little bit of a discrepancy there, and we actually don't think that there has been an increase of about 7,000, 8,000 people. We think that it's been either holding steady or even had a slight decline.

If you flip on to the following page, we've actually just broken down by community the different population amounts. You'll see the totals for the community. In 2016 the city of Edmonton shows that there are 38,667 people. There were 41,000 in 2014 and 39,000 in – right? Those numbers are pretty static.

What we are actually proposing, if you flip to the next page, is to bring a bit of unity back to this constituency. If you can remember a few slides back, where we had the community leagues kind of shown, mapped out there for you, on the left is what we've currently got, and on the right is what we'd kind of like to see.

We have a couple of community leagues that are divided. If you look at the bottom there, where it says Knottwood, Knottwood is divided by a road that's pretty substantial, and it's really confusing for people who live in that area. It is a community that shares schools. It's a community that has a certain traffic flow throughout the area, and half of it's really cut and represented by different MLAs.

We're really proposing to bring those two communities, the ones of Ekota and Menisa, into the Knottwood community area there – and that would bring some unity back to the constituency – and then, to the right there, under Ridgewood, to bring Bisset back into the constituency as well. There's quite a bit of confusion. As I said, there are major roads that divide up the constituency, so we have challenges like the Ridgewood area, where Canada Post is delivering multiple MLAs' information, and they're not quite sure who's representing them. We're actually looking to bring that in to provide some unity, not only from a community point of view but, for information purposes, Canada Post's, when we're trying to communicate with the area. It's just a natural fit. We've got shared heritage, and we've got shared communities there. By adding those three communities – Bisset, Ekota, and Menisa – that would bring our numbers up to 47,000. It would bring us more in line with kind of the provincial average, and it would be a really natural fit for the area.

The only other thing just of note here is the very last page. We kind of have some little yellow markers here showing where we want those two communities added. This was kind of more of a suggestion or an idea. You'll see that the Edmonton-Mill Creek constituency runs right overtop of Edmonton-Mill Woods. That's all a commercial area. What's happening right now is that the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek is representing a large commercial area that lies directly north of Edmonton-Mill Woods. It's just a suggestion, an idea. Maybe we do want to include that commercial area so that it's represented by an MLA that's just a little bit closer. It is an area that the people of Mill Woods would naturally use that's just north of the area. Really, we're just looking at bringing some unity to the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency there.

I'm just looking to see if I've missed anything here.

Just to summarize, you know, we're very lucky in Edmonton-Mill Woods to have this long shared history. We know that we are a more mature neighbourhood – there hasn't been growth in this area – and that we'd like to get some unity back by bringing Ekota, Menisa, and then Bisset back into the Mill Woods constituency association and then even just looking at using 50th Street as that boundary to the north. One thing that is interesting about Mill Woods is those major roads. We've got 91st and 75th and 50th streets that really are clear boundaries within the constituency, so 50th would really be a natural boundary for us.

One other thing of note that I know I didn't put in my presentation: the three communities that we're looking at adding to the constituency share schools, share community leagues, and, you know, they've got the shared roads as well. Really, it would be a real natural fit for us.

That's my quick presentation to you. Any questions?

11:10

The Chair: Just the one. Looking at your map on the second-last page, when you're looking at the larger yellow area that addresses that commercial area that you'd like to have included, do you have any idea what the population of that area is? I know it's largely commercial, but are there any residences?

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: That's a good question. My understanding is that it's all corporate. I can find that out for you and provide that information if that's something you would like to know.

The Chair: Well, hopefully, when we get our Canada census figures, we'll have all that.

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: Yeah. We'll have a better sense of that.

The Chair: I just wondered because you . . .

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: It's all corporate, but you're right. Sometimes you have a couple of little residences tucked in old places.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions?

Mr. McLeod: Chantelle, you call it commercial. Has it got a designation so that when the census comes out, we can actually find it? Like, Mill Woods would come out, and this is whatever. Is there actually a designation for that?

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: I don't know that. I know that physically when you go to that space, it's all industrial and commercial. It's a good question.

The Chair: Is there a sign or a label when you enter it? I have a mental picture of it.

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: Yeah. I'm just trying to think of what would be a road that everybody would know. Let's say that you're driving north on 91st Street. As you cross the Whitemud, you're immediately into a commercial area. Is there a sign on it? Not necessarily, but there is – as soon as you cross the Whitemud, it's very clear that you're now into a commercial, stores, and retail area. There was the train area there as well. Yeah. I'm sorry. I don't know if there's a name for it.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: Anything else?

Mr. McLeod: Very good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's actually extremely helpful. Not wanting to suggest that any submission isn't very welcome, but something this specific would be very helpful because I'm concerned – of course, we're all concerned – that as we get to individual constituencies later on in our work, not all of us might be as familiar with them as we'd ideally like to be. Thanks very much.

Is there anything that you'd like to say generally about our work of considering whether constituency boundaries should move in the province to bring them more in line with creating the same population in every constituency to the extent possible?

Ms Hughes-Kreutzer: I think that it's very challenging when there are huge shifts in boundaries because you get a sense of unity within constituencies. They start to build for the future, and then once those start to change enormously, you do kind of break up those communities a little bit. I think that if you can look at where the population growth is going and where you want to end up so that there is some unity there over time, you'll start to see those community groups working together in coalitions. They're collaborating more. They're sharing information. They've got some shared history. I think that's really important. Then you've got the new areas, and if they can be included, you know, gradually and can come in and build some history as well, I think that's important.

I think, you know, the consultations you're doing will hopefully reflect the diverse nature of all our constituencies throughout our province. The challenge sometimes, too, that I've run into is that the rural-urban split can be very, very difficult as well. Sometimes you see rural areas that have very different concerns and needs than the urban areas do, and that can be challenging. It can be a bit of friction between voices within constituencies. I think that just being mindful of that shared history, being mindful of, you know, natural boundaries, and then being mindful of different needs and structures within the constituencies is very, very helpful.

I just see from one of my notes here – and I just wanted to add this – that in the previous boundary commission consultations the Liberal constituency association for Edmonton-Mill Woods actually made these exact same proposals, so it is something that has been proposed before by other parties as well. I think, as we've just talked about, unity and history is important, too.

The Chair: All right. Thanks very, very much.

Okay. Well, we could take an early lunch, which I suppose some of us would welcome, but you've all come out this morning, and thanks very much. I'm sure you must be particularly interested to have that happen.

Is there anybody who'd like to come up and say anything or make any suggestions or ask any questions?

Yes, sir. Would you come up to the mike? That'll help our recording system. If you could just give your name and where you live.

Mr. Zinyk: My name is Ken Zinyk. I'm from Edmonton-South West, where we have a much larger number than the average. Now, I want to thank you for the opportunity, especially as a last-minute person. I was going to submit mine online.

The first thing I want to see, coming from the city, is equality, representation by population instead of, you know, accepting right from the beginning that 25 per cent off is good. I think that even a 10 per cent variance is sufficient, but 25, 40 per cent, from the point of view of the urban voter, is unfair.

The second thing: I agree with the Legislature that we shouldn't increase the number of MLAs past 87. I've talked to people, and when I was discussing proportional representation, they said: well, that's a good idea, but we don't want more MLAs or MPs. I understand the first speaker and other speakers from the rural areas who want to have their voices heard, but I think there's no excuse for putting fewer rural voters in a constituency because in a modern age, with the Internet and cellphones and Skype, it's easy to reach anybody.

I wanted to talk to my previous MP, James Rajotte, a couple of times. Well, he called me from Ottawa. I don't see what encumbrance it is to an MLA to call people in Edmonton or, just as easily, call someone in Fort Vermilion. I know that they're four hours away from the office, but you don't have to meet them face to face. We have grandchildren in B.C. whom we talk to on Skype once a week, and you can see the person.

I grew up in a rural area, and I know that in the '40s and '50s there was a farm family every half mile. When you drive there now, there's no one in the rural areas. The farmers have, you know, 10,000 acres, 30 quarters. The population in rural areas don't live on farms. They live in towns, and with some of those larger towns it's hard to see that there's any difference from the cities. They have the same curved subdivisions and the big box stores, so they're just kind of urban but out in the country.

I'd like the boundaries commission – and I'm sure you do this – to pay more attention to the population trends. If you see a constituency, let's say up north somewhere, that's been declining and declining, you can be quite sure that over the next 10 years it's probably going to continue to decline. The rims of Edmonton and Calgary are putting on those thousands of people, so we've got to remember that. Maybe instead of making a constituency like Edmonton-South West – that's a chunk where large parts are on the rim – could we kind of make them pie-shaped into the city so there are only smaller portions on the rim? I think you've done this, by looking at the maps, where the previous urban constituencies on the rim of the cities are given smaller numbers to start with.

11:20

I just had a few minutes to look at the map when my wife and I got in. Now, it's going to be hurtful to some people, but I would suggest taking the Peace River Dunvegan constituency and the Lesser Slave Lake constituency and combining them because putting them together would be about 50,000.

Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater has 38,000; Lac La Biche-St. Paul, 38,000; Bonnyville-Cold Lake, 40,000. Together, those three make around 110,000 people. Divided by two, that's 55,000. So why not combine those three and split them into two?

The Chair: Sorry. Which three? We've got Peace River and Lesser Slave Lake. What are the other three?

Mr. Zinyk: Okay. Those are two that I suggested go into one. Then I said: Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Bonnyville-Cold Lake. They're all northeast of Edmonton, and they're all touching each other. I would suggest splitting those three into two.

Thank you for your acceptance of my kind of last-minute . . .

The Chair: I'll start off with just a couple of questions.

Mr. Zinyk: Sure.

The Chair: Picking up on your last suggestion of combining these bigger constituencies into two, one of the concerns I might have in mind is that there is a relatively poor east-west roadway system in the far north in Alberta. If you combine Peace River and Lesser Slave Lake together, have you considered whether there are highways that would allow the MLA to get to each area of the constituency, or does some of Lesser Slave Lake have to be approached through Fort McMurray?

Mr. Zinyk: No, not through Fort McMurray. From Lesser Slave Lake I think it's highway 2 that goes through High Prairie across to Grande Prairie and McLennan and then north to Peace River, so there's kind of a T-shaped highway system that could combine those areas.

One of the previous speakers spoke about Grande Prairie being divided in two. Well, it's up to you how you'd solve that. In the northeast highway 28 runs through most of that area.

There, again, I fall back on modern communication: the Internet, Skype, cellphones. I know that MLAs want to get out and push their programs or visit these people, but if you're calling the MLA with a complaint, just dial up the number.

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to take you to my second question, which is completely different, and that is on the recent decision of the city of Edmonton to annex the area from the southern part of your constituency right up to the northern boundary of the airport. I don't know how many people reside in that annexed area. I looked back at the census from 10 years ago, and it said 143, but every time I drive to the airport and look right, I see an enormous number of houses being built there. Do you, sir, have any idea of how many people will be added to the city of Edmonton as a result of that annexation?

Mr. Zinyk: I don't know. I agree with you. Every time I look around, there's a new neighbourhood. So you have to look at the census and maybe even look at the development plans.

The Chair: Okay. So aside from knowing exact numbers, we agree that there are quite a few. You don't like the thought of having your constituency just on the boundary of the city, but with this growth and annexation there would be even more people that, at least nominally, would be added into Edmonton-South West, so something might have to be done.

As an alternative – and I'm not rejecting the pie shape; every option is open on the table, believe me – and just aside from the pie shape idea, making different pie-shaped constituencies, do you have any other thoughts as to how the boundaries should be adjusted in the Edmonton-South West area to accommodate this annexation?

Mr. Zinyk: Well, then, I would suggest that we – what can I say? – go with less than the average that we're thinking; go with 40,000

for that area. Include some of that annexed area. Maybe split Edmonton-South West; you know, take three-quarters or half or whatever. If you put it at 40,000 and then take some of the annexed area, within 10 years I'm sure that there'll be 60,000 in that constituency, so it'll be over. That's the best that I can suggest for that.

Maybe the pie shape was not so good because, like, the people from Mill Woods don't want to be cut up, and the same thing with Riverbend and so on. So I take it back; the pie shape was not a good idea. Smaller chunks, lower populations to start with: I guess it comes back to my idea of taking into account the population trends. That's probably the best we could do.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks.

Any other questions?

Mrs. Day: Thank you for your presentation and for being willing to speak to us off the cuff.

Mr. Zinyk: Thank you very much for listening to me. We just came to watch.

Mrs. Day: I just had one question for you. Do you currently know how many constituencies in Alberta have been allowed from the last decision, in 2010, to reach the 25 per cent variance? Do you know how many are allowed at this point?

Mr. Zinyk: No. I've looked at Wikipedia and I looked at the maps here, and there are some pretty big variances. I know that it's your job to try to solve that. Good luck, and I hope that you're thinking equality.

Mrs. Day: Well, thank you. Currently I believe that there are two. I think that the act allows up to four, but I think that currently the last one, in 2010, allowed only two to be at that great a variance.

The Chair: Just to specifically talk about that, there's a special provision in the act for remote areas. They allow up to four constituencies, as Mrs. Day was saying, to be actually up to a 50 per cent variance. Now, we only have two at the moment, based on the recommendations last time. They're the very ones that you identified. Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley is 40 per cent lower than average, close to 50 per cent, and Lesser Slave Lake is 38 per cent below average. In the past the Legislatures thought: well, maybe we have to make this exception because of difficulties of travel or whatever. You're suggesting that maybe that time is past. I mean, we have a discretion to not do that. I'm sure that when we go to visit them later this week, they'll have something to say on that, too.

I have looked long and hard at this map – it's the second from the left there – which has all of the variances in our current constituencies and all of the variances that were permitted the last time. I think – and I don't want to put words in Mrs. Day's mouth – that the last time it actually wasn't such a big number of variances but for these two far northern constituencies. It's just that the population growth has been huge but irregular, and that's why we've got these big variances today. I don't know. Am I saying the wrong thing? Okay.

Mr. Zinyk: Just one more thing. The Fort McMurray constituencies: I think one is 27,000, and one is 60,000. I think that all you've got to do is move the boundaries somewhere in the city, and that could be fixed.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Zinyk: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much again for just being spontaneous and willing to share your thoughts, which have been extremely helpful.

Anybody else inspired by that? Yes, ma'am. Your name and your constituency?

Ms Acheson: My name is Liz Acheson, and I'm in Edmonton-South West also. I'd just like to address the huge population that we have represented in Edmonton-South West and Edmonton-Ellerslie. In conjunction with what the previous speaker said having to do with amalgamating – the number of constituencies is apparently not going to change; there are still going to be 87 – if some of the amalgamation were to go ahead, there's easily a place you can see in Edmonton-South West, which is way over the number, in my opinion, and Edmonton-Ellerslie, which is, correspondingly, across Calgary Trail, that is a perfect place, I think, to add in a new constituency. As you've already noted, the population growth as you go south, out towards 41st Avenue, is just colossal. Edmonton-South West, I believe, was only formed – wasn't it? – in 2010. It's already, you know, far exceeded the population growth that probably was apparent or projected at that time. I think that there's room.

I can only speak for Edmonton because that's what I'm familiar with, but I can see right there on the south side that there's a huge issue. Somehow or another – and maybe if there were an amalgamation of some of these smaller communities, then it would spare up another seat, and we could make another constituency on the south side of Edmonton.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Day: If I may ask, if you have something specific in mind for that, I would love to see you go and draw it on the map for us if you have specific lines.

Ms Acheson: I can show it to you on my iPad.

The Chair: We would love you to use our laminated map to justify the trouble we went to get it. I'm just joking. If you could just take your iPad and maybe just draw it on the laminated map there for us so we can take a picture of that, and then we've got a record of it.

11:30

Ms Acheson: Right now?

The Chair: Right now. You bet. Thanks very much.

Okay. Just looking at it – and we will have a photo of it, so I don't have to describe it in words, thankfully – you're basically looking at the two large constituencies of Edmonton-South West and Edmonton-Ellerslie and proposing to divide them into three with a new one in the middle, essentially, so that you'd have three constituencies closer to the 49,000 in each one even though that centre constituency would cross highway 2. Would that be a problem in your mind?

Ms Acheson: No, I don't believe so because, I mean, we're talking about people who have distances to go in the city. It's no distance.

The Chair: The culture of the community on each side of highway 2 is relatively similar?

Ms Acheson: I would think so.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Anything else? Anybody? Okay.

Thanks very much, Ms Atkinson. Yes, sir. You had a . . .

Ms Acheson: Acheson.

The Chair: Acheson. Sorry.

Ms Acheson: Just the district on the west of Edmonton: the same name.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Smith: Good morning, Madam Chair. My name is Mel Smith. I'm the mayor of the town of Redwater. I came initially this morning just to listen, to hear what we may be looking at. We've heard a couple times now about the importance of keeping as many rural seats as we can and, then, the need for it. I mean, we've heard that there should be equal representation, and that's probably so as long as we can have an equal voice.

I mean, I just listened to Mr. Zinyk a minute ago talk about how rural Albertans should be irrelevant, and I certainly didn't have a very good feel for that. But he did bring something up that probably does make sense. When you look at Athabasca-Redwater-Sturgeon, we're at 37,000. We're split into three constituencies, also. If you brought Sturgeon county completely into that, we'd be a little over 50,000, and that certainly does make sense – relatively easy to do also. I just thought I'd bring that to your attention.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Did anybody else have a question for Mr. Smith? All right. Thanks. Any other . . .

Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Hay: Good morning. My name is Michelle Hay, and I'm in the Edmonton-South West constituency. My comments and concerns or questions are not really relative to my constituency per se, but it builds on the comments of some of the other folks in terms of population growth. Through my day job and my own interest I know that there are growth plans that are in place for the capital region area as well as for the Calgary metropolitan region, and I'm just wondering how the Electoral Boundaries Commission is planning to use the population growth, as we've highlighted today, with the annexation of Edmonton into Leduc county. How will you account for what is projected to be population growth so that we're learning some of the lessons from eight years ago in this go-around about the effects of population growth?

The Chair: Well, that's a good question. How would you suggest we use them?

Mrs. Hay: I didn't hear in the presentation at least that they were going to be referenced, so do you have access to those growth studies that have been done and where the growth is projected to go? Those should, I would think, inform some of the decisions around creating – you know, like a coffee cup allows room for your cream – these electoral regions with some room for growth based on what we know to occur. I know that growth goes different places because of those reasons, but that's the exact thing that those studies have tried to grapple with.

The Chair: Studies done by the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary?

Mrs. Hay: No. They are done by the Capital Region Board, the CRB, in the Edmonton metro region and the Calgary Regional Partnership, CRP, in the Calgary metro region.

Ms Munn: Can they be forwarded to us with a submission to the website?

Mrs. Hay: I would assume so. I don't work for either of them. I'm just aware of them, but we can certainly see how we can get those submitted to you or talk with those folks. I think that would inform the work.

The Chair: That would be great. I mean, I think this is a perfect example of why we should have public hearings because I had not heard of those at all, so we wouldn't have known if you hadn't come and told us about them. If you could send us a link or some way we could get a hold of them, that would be terrific.

Mrs. Hay: You bet.

Mrs. Day: I'm aware that most cities also have growth plans and annexation plans, et cetera, so we had discussed some of that. As well, taking into consideration what projected growth is – I'm not sure if it's one of our listed mandates; however, where it's going and what the future plan is for those, especially the larger two cities, is really good information for our understanding.

Mrs. Hay: I would suspect it's a lot harder within a particular municipality to say whether they're going to end up in Rutherford or Mill Woods or Castle Downs because people move where there's housing or where jobs are and those kind of things. But certainly on a more regional basis you're going to understand that we're going to go from 2 million people to 4 million people, and, you know, where are they likely going to go? They're going to follow employment areas, so where are those employment areas? I think that's a body of work that's had government support and had government funding, and it's had 24 municipalities in the capital region area coalesce and agree to what that looks like. It might be useful information.

That's all I have.

Mrs. Day: I have a question.

The Chair: Yes, of course.

Mrs. Day: When you heard presenters earlier about rurban – I say that correctly – in these areas where it's dense city yet there's a projected area that's vastly farmland at present, would you think that that would be an appropriate mix of rurban because it has a projected plan in mind in that district? I heard that term.

Mrs. Hay: It may be. I think your work that lies before you is not easy, trying to solve the rural-urban dichotomy. I've been working with it for a decade now. It's fun. I don't have a good answer for you there, but I do think that there's some consideration to be given by representation by population, which I understand is the foundation of democracy, and, you know, rural municipalities and their voice and the interests that they represent.

I have a particular personal penchant for the importance of agricultural land. I don't want to be the country or the province or the county that messes up feeding the world in the next 20 years because we're one of the only exporters of agricultural product, right? I think that just because only 10 people live on this piece of land, it doesn't necessarily represent its value on a globalized scale. I don't know how you're going to reconcile that. I don't have any good answers or suggestions for you, but it's not – you know, we look at it in that rub point between this rural wants this and this urban wants that, but I think that the actual issues are a little bigger than how many people live there.

I don't have a good answer for you in terms of a suggestion, but that land mass does many, many things for many, many people beyond just the few people that populate it.

The Chair: If I may say, that's a perspective that hasn't been expressed in any of the written submissions I've read yet, yet it's a very powerful one. Thanks.

Mrs. Hay: You're welcome.

The Chair: Anybody else?

All right. Well, we'll stop, then, a few minutes early, but we're going to start again this afternoon at 1 o'clock in this room. I invite you to stay and come back and join us at 1 if you'd like to. Thanks very much.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:39 a.m.]

