



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Red Deer

Friday, January 20, 2017
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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Red Deer

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Melodie Stol, Mayor, Town of Blackfalds

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[Justice Bielby in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Again, I apologize for the late start to the meeting today. Thank you very much for your perseverance and patience in remaining or coming back later or what have you. We were stuck in Peace River. There was an ice fog there, and we had to wait for the fog to lift before we could get out. That just made us a little bit later.

In any event, we're delighted to be here in Red Deer. Let me introduce us. I'm Justice Myra Bielby. In my day job I'm a judge of the Court of Appeal of Alberta, but at the moment I'm chairing the Electoral Boundaries Commission. My fellow commissioners are Jean Munn, on my far left, from Calgary; Laurie Livingstone, also from Calgary; and then on my far right, Gwen Day from Carstairs and Bruce McLeod from Acme, so people from central Alberta. Together we form the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Now, since we started our work in earnest, in the last few weeks I've had a number of questions about what the Electoral Boundaries Commission is, why we're doing this, why we're doing it now, so I thought I'd start with a brief introduction. The boundary commission is set up by something called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which is an act of the Alberta Legislature that was passed in 1990 and requires a commission like this to be set up every eight to 10 years to look at the boundaries of provincial constituencies and to make recommendations, if necessary, for the adjustment of some of those boundaries to reflect the entitlement of every Albertan to have their vote in an election worth relatively the same amount as every other Albertan's.

But it's not just a mathematical exercise. We are required to and happy to consider other factors as well. Basically, our overall task is to ensure that provincial constituencies are structured to allow effective, proper representation by MLAs in future provincial elections.

This commission is particularly timely because Alberta has experienced a huge increase in population since the time of the last Electoral Boundaries Commission, about eight years ago. Our population has increased net by more than 20 per cent since 2010 notwithstanding our recent economic climate. We have more than 800,000 new Albertans since the last time the Electoral Boundaries Commission did its work.

So what exactly are we going to do? Well, Alberta has 87 provincial constituencies. This commission has no ability to increase that number or to decrease that number. Had that desire been present, the Legislature would have had to do that before it struck the commission, so we can't change the number. Our job is to look at that map of Alberta and see that it's divided into 87 pieces. Eight years ago each of those 87 pieces had roughly 41,000 Albertans living in them.

Each of those constituencies elects one MLA, and of course the voters are the ones who elect the MLA. Our population has increased by 20 per cent, but here's where the crux of the matter comes. The 800,000 and some-odd people who moved into Alberta obviously didn't move equally or proportionately into each of the 87 constituencies. More of them moved into some constituencies like Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South than moved into some other constituencies in the province. The average population now: if you take the average estimated population of Alberta and divide it by 87, you get 48,884 people. That's the average of each provincial constituency estimated against our estimated total population of about 4.25 million.

Now, I say "estimated" because Statistics Canada is not going to release the 2016 census population information until February 8, so

we've started our work based on estimated population figures provided to us by the Alberta Treasury Board. But on February 8, when we get the updated information, that will be substituted for the figure you see there, 48,884, and also for each of the figures in red on these different constituency maps you can see on the wall. I don't expect the population change will be dramatic, but we'll get actual figures instead of estimated figures.

What do these maps mean? If you look at the one to my immediate left, Red Deer-South, the red figure, 51,627 people, is the current estimated population of the Red Deer-South constituency, and it's 6 per cent higher than the estimated provincial average of 48,884. Last time, eight years ago, the population in this constituency was 45,898 people, and it was 12 per cent higher than the provincial average of 41,000. That's the same for each of these maps.

For the current constituencies, the ones that were used in the last provincial election, or the blue ones, those are the numbers that were used to create the actual constituencies that exist today, but the red numbers show the population increase in each of these constituencies.

It's interesting to observe, I think, that in virtually every constituency in Alberta, no matter how far north, there has been an increase in population, but it hasn't been to the same degree in each area. Our growth hasn't been evenly spread among all the constituencies. Today our populations range from an estimated 25,192 in our most lightly populated constituency to 79,034 in our most heavily populated constituency. That constituency is almost twice the provincial average because it's grown so quickly in the last eight years. This variation has arisen because, again, the people who have moved into Alberta haven't moved into constituencies proportionately. Eight years ago it was, more or less, relatively the same in all of the 87 constituencies, but now, if you like, it's gotten out of whack because of this unequal move of the new population.

The job of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, our job, is to make recommendations to the provincial Legislature to ensure that each constituency continues to have effective representation. So how are we going to go about that? Well, our overall goal is to create clear and understandable boundaries. That doesn't mean that we're going to recommend changes in every constituency – that's, I'm quite sure, not going to happen – but it's also quite possible that we will recommend changes in some constituencies because of this huge range of population, which perhaps puts in jeopardy the principle that it should be one Albertan, one vote, having more or less the same weight all across the province.

The things that we have to take into account, though, are not just a mathematical exercise. If that was the case, we could have sat in Edmonton, taken out a ruler and a map, and, you know, moved the boundaries around so that everybody had exactly 48,884 people, and our job would be done. But the Legislature has instructed us to go out and consider other things as well. We can modify that mathematical consideration of relative population densities by considering things such as common community interests and organizations, including those of First Nations and Métis settlements. One of our primary concerns is that we don't want to inadvertently move a boundary that cuts a community, a village, a town in half or doesn't respect the border of Red Deer if we could have easily not done that. That's one of the reasons that we're coming out and visiting Albertans all across the province, to receive their input as to not only whether boundaries should be moved but, if we have to move them, where the adjustment might best be done to have the best positive effect. So we have to consider community and neighbourhood boundaries. We don't want to slice through a neighbourhood when we're looking at one of the cities, where there

are many neighbourhoods. We don't want to ignore the municipal boundary of any community, including smaller communities.

Where possible, we want to respect geographical features that suggest natural boundaries. That's why so many constituencies, in part, have a boundary that follows a major highway or a river or something else that might help constituents remember where the edge of their constituency is.

In addition to all of that, we want to receive your input – and we're delighted to see so many of you having come out today to perhaps give us your input – in relation to the effect of those factors and anything else that you think is relevant to our decision-making, because this isn't a closed list. Over the next few weeks, three weeks in total, our commission will hold public hearings throughout the province to seek community input to assist us in developing our recommendations.

4:10

Now, thank you to the seven people who have registered to speak today. Each of you will be limited to 10 minutes, and then five minutes are available for questions from the panel. That's because we want to get to hear from as many of you as possible. If we have some time available still at the end, we'll hopefully be able to hear from some other people who haven't registered, but we'll just have to see how that plays out. If you don't get a chance to speak today and you have something to say or you think of something later on that you want to say, please don't hesitate to send in a written submission. The easiest way to do that is to go to our website, which is at www.abebc.ca. On the website you'll find a place where you can put your written submission right on the website and send it in or an e-mail address you can send it to. You can do it by Twitter or other kinds of social media, that are, frankly, a little bit beyond me, but we are getting submissions in, and of course we take submissions by post.

I learned today that we have received to this point 350 written submissions, which is terrific – the commission that sat last time received 500 submissions in the course of a year – and it may be because we do have these electronic and digital platforms that people can write to us on. Nonetheless, we're getting a good response from people who don't come to the public meetings or who maybe do but think of something they want to say later on.

After our three weeks of public hearings are finished, we'll consider the recommendations or the suggestions made by everybody at these public hearings and also each of the written submissions and take those into account and, in going through the provincial map, which is behind me, look at each one of the 87 constituencies and come to 87 specific recommendations. In other words, we'll make a recommendation about each one. For some, that will be to make no change, but we'll consider each one.

After we finish that, we'll prepare a written report. We have to file that report with the Legislature by May 31 of this year. The report will be posted on our website, and I'm sure it'll be posted through the Legislature as well. Then we go into inviting input on the actual recommendations. After that time, you can read the recommendation for your constituency or generally. You might have a response to that. We invite you to write and give us a response. We're planning a second round of public hearings in late July, early August to receive people's input on the draft recommendations. Then the commission will get together, and we'll decide if we want to make any resulting changes or alterations or brush up any of the recommendations. Our final report will go to the Legislature by October 31. The Legislature can then consider it and decide whether it's prepared to implement those suggestions, and as a result they will become the boundaries of our constituencies for the next election. I should say that ever since this

legislation was passed, the recommendations have always been implemented, so I'm really hoping that we do a good job this time and don't spoil that record.

Just to repeat, we can't change the 87 constituencies number. Our number is 87. Some people not understanding that have written in and said: well, you can solve the issue with the extra population by just making new constituencies. Of course, to do that, you take land away from existing constituencies. We can't grow the size of Alberta geographically, so that's not a solution even if it had been made available to us.

As I say, equality or parity of population isn't our only consideration, but it is maybe our starting point on this journey. The Supreme Court of Canada has interpreted our legislation as meaning that each one of us has the right not to have the political strength or value of our vote unduly diluted. That said, this legislation permits variances from the provincial average of up or down from the 48,800 people by up to 25 per cent and up to 50 per cent for currently two exceptional constituencies against the northern boundary of the province. That said, previous commissions haven't considered that to be a licence to just go right up to that 25 per cent variance without, you know, worrying about it. Last time 87 per cent of the constituencies, our current constituencies, had a variance of less than 10 per cent from the mean of 41,000 people. Our current constituency boundaries were designed on the basis of keeping largely within 10 per cent of the provincial mean. It's likely that we will attempt to respect the provincial average to the extent that we can because that is a fundamental underpinning of the representation by population idea that's behind the right of every citizen to vote.

So what's our job? Our job is to start with the current actual population of a constituency. To again look at Red Deer-South, we'll take the 51,627 number, as modified by StatsCan. We'll compare that to the average of 48,800, as modified by StatsCan. We'll see maybe that it's 6 per cent above the provincial average. Then we'll see if there's any reason not to change a boundary to reduce it to something closer to the provincial average.

Some of those reasons are the reasons that we discussed: that we don't want to cut through a neighbourhood; we want to honour, respect the boundaries of the city of Red Deer; we want to consider special communities of interest within Red Deer that we don't want to divide; we want to honour natural boundaries if we can to find a constituency against a natural boundary. But Red Deer-South, as you see, is part urban, part of the city of Red Deer, and part rural. Part of that constituency is rural. That would also be true of Red Deer-North. We've been calling those hybrid constituencies, part rural and part urban.

If we thought that we should try to reduce that 6 per cent number and get it closer to the average, we have a number of options available, taking all these factors into consideration. We'd like to hear from you folks as well who are speaking as to what you think would be the best way to do that. Should we move in some of the agricultural land and get closer to the city boundary, or is it a better idea to move something from the north down because it's all industrial? I mean, I'm just, you know, talking about different choices. These aren't suggestions or anything like that.

But we definitely don't want to make any mistakes by cutting off a neighbourhood or a community that should logically be part of one constituency and not the other because we just didn't hear about that, so we're particularly keen to hear about your recommendations in that regard. If in fact you do have a recommendation when the time comes for you to speak and you want to move a boundary, we'll give you a marker and invite you to go up and show us where you think the boundary should be. Then the clerk will take a photo of that, and that photo will become part of the record of this

hearing, and we'll have it in front of us when we come to making our decision.

You should also be aware that *Hansard* is here, that everything that's said today is being recorded by *Hansard* and will appear on our website in a day or two. You can listen to it orally if you want to listen to the audio of the hearing, and there will also be a written transcript, so you can read through the submissions in that regard as well. That will all be public, so know that what you say will become public in that way.

That said, I think we'll get started. The first speaker on our list is Barry Cook. Mr. Cook, if you wouldn't mind coming forward and having a seat in front of the microphone and telling us which constituency you live in before you begin.

Mr. Cook: My name is Barry Cook. I live in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead, Mr. Cook.

Mr. Cook: I just would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts. I appreciate your time and effort and realize that you have a very tough job ahead of you. I'm glad that I'm sitting on this side, not that side of the table.

You've answered a lot of my concerns right in your opening speech. I would like to say that in our own constituency we don't have a living in Millet. We don't have a lot of connection with a lot of the constituency. Most of the people that live in Millet work in Leduc, Edmonton, Nisku, and we shop in Leduc or south Edmonton, so we really don't have any connection at all with Camrose and find that it's a hassle to even try and communicate with that part of the constituency.

4:20

To the south of Wetaskiwin we have the four bands reserve. That's an even split between there and Drayton Valley, and we have Drayton Valley just about coming to within a few miles of the Millet area. I have relatives that live within four or five miles of Millet, and they're in the Drayton Valley constituency, which they have no connection to at all. We have a very big constituency to the west of us, Drayton Valley-Devon. As I said, it's very hard. I realize you have a hard job to undertake, but I would hope that we could end up in a constituency that we have some trading connections with.

The Chair: So would you think your natural connection would be more with Leduc-Beaumont?

Mr. Cook: Yes. Leduc for sure. We don't have too much with – but I believe that when you look at the numbers, that's already probably a very big constituency, mainly because of the influx of people living in that area. The only suggestion I would have is – again, you've already answered that. At this go-around you can't come up with any more constituencies. It's too bad you can't go back to the round building in Edmonton and suggest it. Because of the great increase in the number of people that have moved into this province, we have to look at some time coming up with another number other than 87.

The Chair: Well, just if I could respond to that. That is a way to solve the problem, but it's not the only way. If you look at federal constituencies, they're much larger, and MPs manage to represent their constituents. Also, in the larger cities, Edmonton and Calgary, the municipal ward average size is larger than 49,000. I know that would have been an attractive solution this time around, but I'm

confident that even though we can't create extra constituencies, we can improve things.

Your suggestion, if I may say, is exactly the kind of thing we were hoping to hear, that Millet is more naturally aligned with Leduc than it is with Wetaskiwin. I mean, that makes sense to me. I'm not making any promises. We haven't had any discussions before now about what we're going to do with any of these constituencies for sure, but when we come to consider your constituency, we'll definitely take that consideration into account.

I'm not playing *Let's Make a Deal* here, but what about Drayton Valley, which is also a candidate – it's a little bit below, not much, but a little bit below the provincial average. You said that Drayton Valley comes very close to Millet. What's your view of . . .

Mr. Cook: We have no connection at all with Drayton Valley.

The Chair: No connection. Okay.

Mr. Cook: In fact, I would say half of Millet wouldn't even know how to get there without looking on a map.

The Chair: Sure.

Any questions? No?

Mr. McLeod: No, I'm good.

The Chair: Okay. All right. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Cook, and thanks for going first.

Mr. Cook: Thank you for your time, and good luck.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next person on our list is Melodie Stol. Could you start off by telling us what constituency you live in?

Mrs. Stol: Yes. Good afternoon. I am Melodie Stol. I'm a resident of the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency, and I'm also the mayor of the town of Blackfalds.

The Chair: Welcome.

Mrs. Stol: Thank you. First of all, thank you, of course, for the opportunity to make this presentation at the public hearing.

The town of Blackfalds has been one of Alberta's fastest growing communities, having experienced a population increase of 8.5 per cent in the single year between 2015 and 2016, and we are home to a total now of 9,510 residents. Since the year 2006 Blackfalds has grown 101 per cent compared to the provincial average of 25 per cent.

We are currently, of course, situated within the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency, and that is the reason for my presentation today. It is our wish that in whichever constituency that we are placed, it would be called Blackfalds-Lacombe-Ponoka in this situation. We do see many ridings in Alberta with three names and one right here on the wall, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, acknowledging the three major populations centres of that constituency. We would like the same consideration be given to Blackfalds. Blackfalds, in fact, has more population than the town of Ponoka and is not acknowledged in the constituency.

We further could have some confusion as federally we are grouped with Red Deer now and provincially we are grouped with Lacombe-Ponoka. So by having Blackfalds' name in the constituency, our residents will be able to identify easily what their constituency is. When you talk about boundary redistribution, Blackfalds, federally at least, is often moved to different constituencies to help round out a number.

It would be our request that in this boundary we do not get moved. We rather like being grouped with Lacombe and Ponoka as a constituency. We have many partnerships with the city of Lacombe and the town of Ponoka, including our regional water line, our regional waste-water line project that we're working on, and a number of other initiatives whereas with the city of Red Deer we almost are in a relationship where, especially in water, waste water, and public transit or Bolt transit, we're a purchaser. Blackfalds and Lacombe have partnered together, for example, on transit. We purchase that service from the city of Red Deer. While partners, I see our natural alignment to be remaining with the city of Lacombe for a healthy constituency that way.

That's really all I've had to present, that Blackfalds really would like to see its name in the constituency, that it's about time with our tremendous growth in size. We're not anyone's bedroom community anymore. We're a successful, thriving town, and that acknowledgement should happen.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that. I'm going to ask you a question that you didn't address, but I hope you'll bear with me. Looking at our map of Lacombe-Ponoka there, we see at the moment that the population estimated to be living there overall is about 9 per cent below the provincial average. Again, we haven't made any decision at all, but we have to consider all options when the time comes, and one of those options would be to move one of your boundaries so that the population size becomes a little closer to the provincial average. For example, you butt up against Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, which is also about the same size below the provincial average, but it then butts right up against Red Deer-North, which is well above the provincial average, just to show some of the considerations that we have to take in mind. Do you as mayor of Blackfalds or just as a resident have a view as to which would be the best way to move a boundary to increase the size of the population in your constituency?

Mrs. Stol: That's a really difficult question. Blackfalds, though – I'm not sure. Which population numbers are you using?

The Chair: The red ones.

Mrs. Stol: Yeah. But what year did those come from?

The Chair: That's estimated to be July 2016.

Mrs. Stol: July of 2016. That's probably our current number. Blackfalds is unique probably within all of the constituencies about our growth rates. Sylvan Lake probably has the same thing. That 9 per cent, in my opinion, is going to come down as Blackfalds grows. In the one single year we grew 700 residents, so this time next year – and we still issued probably 140 building permits in 2016, so those will be new residents in 2017. You can extrapolate. From 130 new homes we'll have another 300 residents. Every year Blackfalds continues to grow. So if you end up moving us with Red Deer or some grouping with Red Deer, we could end up – Blackfalds' growth is kind of its cushion. How about I say that? So I'd rather stay in our own constituency and try and grow that constituency, which you're seeing us do.

The Chair: I don't think you're at risk of being moved out of that constituency but rather the constituency growing rather than shrinking, so it's more a question of: what do you think? If we have to do that, which way should it grow? Where do you shop? Where do you go to the doctor? Where do your kids play minor hockey? You know, what's your natural connection there?

4:30

Mrs. Stol: Well, our natural connections are Blackfalds. Our public school students are part of the Wolf Creek school division, and therefore our high school students are bused to Lacombe. That's a big provincial issue that we're dealing with, working with Alberta Ed with Wolf Creek to expand additional high school programming in Blackfalds. So our public school division goes through Lacombe. Our Catholic school division, however, goes through Red Deer.

Then, like I said, things like our regional water pipeline: that's a collaboration between Ponoka, Lacombe, and Blackfalds purchasing water through a pipeline from Red Deer. Our Bolt transit is Lacombe and Blackfalds working together to purchase transit service to those two communities. Our regional sewer line project, which we are working on: city of Lacombe, town of Blackfalds. I'm sorry; I'm remiss to say that in most of these the county of Lacombe is our partner as well. I would be remiss not to mention that. We have lots of working arrangements with the city of Lacombe. We have some working arrangements with the town of Ponoka, being far north, and we have some working relationships with Red Deer. We also have some working relationships with Sylvan Lake.

We have embraced our role as a regional player in Alberta. However, when I'm looking at the constituency, I have to think about voters and their habits and how they connect to Blackfalds. That's in part why I asked you to add the name of Blackfalds to wherever you end up putting us because people should be able to identify easily what constituency they are through the name.

The Chair: Okay. Questions?

Ms Munn: I would like to call upon your knowledge of the local area. If we look at that map of Lacombe-Ponoka, down on the southwest corner we see the city of Red Deer, yet there is a space between the city of Red Deer and Lacombe-Ponoka, where Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is actually the constituency. I suspect that's the Red Deer River that's creating that boundary.

Mrs. Stol: Red Deer River, Blindman River.

Ms Munn: Right. Okay. So if Lacombe-Ponoka had to get a little bit bigger, would it be appropriate to move the boundary to the city of Red Deer? I mean, you've got that little piece up there surrounding the city of Red Deer sort of.

Mrs. Stol: It's difficult because the city of Red Deer is now annexed, I believe, up to the Blindman River to its north, so that's actually the legal boundary of Red Deer. Although in that area you may have acreages or industrial development, over the next five, 10, 15 years you're going to see different development plans, I believe, come from the city of Red Deer. Again, that's not my city. I may be speaking out of turn here, and someone from Red Deer could correct.

Ms Munn: Okay. So that boundary of the municipality of Red Deer might not be correct anymore?

Mrs. Stol: I believe the physical boundary of the city of Red Deer is just right about to the Blindman River, is it not? Is anyone here? People are nodding. Yeah.

Ms Munn: It is. Okay.

Mrs. Stol: Yeah, I believe. So they are right to the boundary now.

Ms Munn: Okay. It's good to know.

Unidentified Speaker: That little bridge? There's a small community in there.

Mrs. Stol: Like Linn Valley or something like that? Burbank. Okay. So Burbank is in Red Deer. Or is Burbank in Lacombe-Ponoka? Burbank: there's a community of acreages there that's in the city of Red Deer that probably could be assigned to Blackfalds, but I don't know how many – I mean, you're talking about 150 people perhaps. It's not a . . .

Ms Munn: It's still important.

Mrs. Stol: Yeah.

Ms Munn: Do you think the people there, though, if they're on urban acreages, would be more likely to connect with Red Deer or with Lacombe-Blackfalds-Ponoka?

Mrs. Stol: I don't know. It will really depend on the individual. I mean, there's a lot happening in this area. We have a large petrochemical plant and the NOVA site, so lots of people, you know, work there and are connected. That definite "How do you connect to a community?" has really changed over the last 20 years, right? At one point Blackfalds could say that 75 per cent of the people of Blackfalds commuted, but it wasn't commuted to Red Deer. They worked in Fort McMurray. They work in oil field servicing positions throughout the north and all of central Alberta. They work at petrochemical plants at various locations. They even work at Nisku and commute.

It's hard for me to speak on behalf of people of Burbank, saying: what would you connect to more? I know that as Blackfalds' role we've been trying to be a stronger centre for people to connect to, and that has then translated into its success and its growth.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Stol: Nothing for me, Bruce?

Mr. McLeod: Well, Mel, I could. Okay, then, I'll throw something out here. We've heard during our journey across the province about the urban-rural kind of mix. Some have said: don't mix. Others have said that they should be separated. Obviously, when I look at Lacombe and Ponoka, there's a lot of rural, there's Blackfalds, and there's Lacombe. Does that mix work for you, as you said earlier, as kind of a hybrid because that's part of your community? Does that work? Have you got thought on that one?

Mrs. Stol: I think that as it sits now, our community does work well. I mean, we take a lot of time to work with the people of the county of Lacombe. We take the time to work with the people of the city of Red Deer, the town of Ponoka. You know, we're working with everyone in that area. How our actual current constituencies mix works for us. I guess the fear is that if you move Blackfalds maybe into some type of Red Deer-North configuration, Blackfalds gets swallowed up by that.

Here we've now kind of established ourselves as an equal partner with the county of Lacombe and Ponoka. We've done a lot of work over the last 10 or 15 years to make ourselves an equal partner. It's disconcerting to think that we might get swallowed up by a true city interest. That's not to say that we don't work well with the city of Red Deer on a number of initiatives, but I think that when you're looking for that legislative voice, you don't want to be overshadowed. No one likes to be the little spoon. Everyone wants to be the big spoon. We try to all be the same-sized spoons. That's why I think Lacombe-Ponoka and ideally Blackfalds-Lacombe-Ponoka would work well.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you.

Mrs. Stol: You're welcome.
Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Stephen Merredew. Good afternoon. Could you start by telling us the constituency you reside in?

Mr. Merredew: Yeah. My name is Stephen Merredew. I'm currently the president of the Alberta NDP electoral district association for Red Deer-South, number 76. By population it's one of the most underrepresented districts in Alberta. Red Deer's significant population growth over the past decade has meant that the current population of Red Deer-South is significantly above the current recommended average for all electoral districts, meaning that a single vote in our riding carries significantly less weight than not only every rural vote in the province but also less than many other urban ridings.

The gut reaction might be to simply carve out small parts of this urban-only riding and add them onto surrounding rural districts with lower populations, which is problematic in its own right and ultimately even unfair to citizens in both urban and rural districts. I would argue against such a division of citizens with otherwise like-minded interests.

For example, in Red Deer if one were to carve out the westernmost but, interestingly, still very close to the city's core neighbourhoods of West Park and Westlake, poll numbers 1 to 8, and simply add them onto the neighbouring district of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, the diverse needs of these neighbourhoods, including a large number of college students, would be lumped in with the residents of rural areas and small towns.

A similar problem occurs if one were to simply slice off some of the newer neighbourhoods on the southernmost boundary of our city and add them onto the same rural riding surrounding the city. Forcing an MLA to balance the needs and issues that are unique to each geographic and social setting of urban and rural areas within their riding needlessly adds complexity to an already delicate role as a community leader.

An example of the pitfalls of combining urban and rural areas within a single district has been seen most abundantly in recent federal electoral decisions, in which most of the provincial district of Red Deer-South was combined with several rural communities, stretching as far south as Carstairs and as far west as Sundre. Candidates from all parties had to frequently decline invitations during an extremely long election period, such as forums, making it very difficult for citizens to meet their candidates face to face and hear from them directly.

For the time being perhaps a more equitable approach involves using natural boundaries to divide the city, including using Ross Street in its entirety from the eastern terminus at city limits, to its end point at Taylor Drive in the downtown core to divide Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. As campaign manager for two campaigns in that provincial election, I can speak to the confusion of local residents in that eastern neighbourhood of Deer Park, which was divided between the two ridings and was very noticeable as they contacted us looking to find out who to vote for.

4:40

The Chair: Okay. Could I interrupt you?

Mr. Merredew: Sure.

The Chair: I don't want to throw you off, but it would be great and it would really help us if you would take the marker that our clerk

is going to give you – just right now he’s giving it to you – and go up to our map and mark where Deer Park is there.

Mr. Merredew: Sure. It’s that little jog in the boundary there, sort of right where the numbers are on the map, on the left there where it says “Red Deer-North.”

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, I don’t think we need to worry about the laminate. We’ll just write right on it. We’ve been having this laminate here so we can erase it for the next time.

Ms Livingstone: The only problem is that it might go right through onto the wall.

The Chair: Oh, it might go right through on the wall? We don’t want to be expelled from this hotel. Okay. All right.

Mr. Merredew: Right now?

The Chair: Yeah. Sure. Would that be okay? Or you can do it at the end if you want.

Mr. Merredew: I’ll finish up. I think a lot of people in the room probably know about that neighbourhood.

The Chair: Yeah, but you won’t be with us at the critical time, so that’s why I need to write it down.

Mr. Merredew: Okay. Fair enough.

Furthermore and ultimately, we would like to urge the commission to go in a slightly different direction with that and recommend an increase to the level of support provided to all MLAs, rural and urban. Such additional support in both financial and tactical terms is not only justifiable but long overdue as these increases have not been made in several years. This will mean that the Legislative Assembly must revise and enhance the formula for providing this support with the goal of allowing all MLAs to more effectively represent their constituents and their unique circumstances in rural, urban, and suburban constituencies throughout our province.

Again, I thank the commission for taking the time to hear from citizens from all across the province and especially from our city and region. Specifically, I’m thankful that these meetings were timed in such a way that allowed people such as me who work full-time in jobs that don’t allow a lot of flexibility a chance to present with minimal disruption to their routines and schedules. I look forward to the report of this committee, aiming to further strengthen our representative democracy, and I wish the members of this committee well in their work and look forward to seeing the results.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks. I’ll use my prerogative as chair to ask the first question. Looking at Red Deer-South on the map, it is somewhat of a hybrid constituency now because there are two large undeveloped areas, one to the south and one to the east.

Mr. Merredew: True.

The Chair: Looking at the numbers there, it appears that the population is currently 6 per cent above the provincial average. Again, we haven’t decided to do this, far from it, but if we found we had to reduce the size of your constituency, would it make more sense to move in those rural areas and make the constituency boundaries run more contiguous with the boundary of the city, or do you think some other suggestion would work better?

Mr. Merredew: To the best of my knowledge, the current boundaries do follow the city boundaries. The area on the immediate south edge of the constituency with no streets on it really, in white, just above where it says “Innisfail-Sylvan Lake”: that’s the area that contains the Centrum, the large hockey arena, and things like that, which aren’t likely to be redeveloped and substantially gaining population.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Merredew: Then the larger block of white there is where the city landfill is – right? – so again not likely an area to see a lot of population growth in the immediate future. The area to the east, though, is slated for some developmental work, and in fact they’re building a ring road just along the far eastern edge of that, where all the streets are. You know, that is land that the city has tabbed for future population growth, so I’d imagine that any new neighbourhoods in there would feel a stronger connection to the city that they’d be in as opposed to a rural area. That being said, there isn’t a lot of acreage development out in those areas currently, so removing that probably would not change the population very much.

The Chair: Okay. If we felt we had to do something, what should we do to reduce the population in Red Deer-South?

Mr. Merredew: Well, we’re stuck between a rock and a hard place because there are no additional seats to be expanded, right? The 87 number is staying put. So, as I said, perhaps to provide more support to MLAs to hire staff in their offices and things like that, to recommend that the Legislative Assembly allow them to better serve their constituents would perhaps be the best recommendation.

None of the neighbourhoods, as I mentioned, are the most likely suspects, right? Like, I live in West Park, and I know that’s a neighbourhood with a lot of students. I can’t see it having a lot of attachment to a rural area. It’s a core neighbourhood. The area immediately along the far western edge of Red Deer-South is Westlake, which is a brand new suburban neighbourhood. You can see it from the highway from that area. Again, its attachment to a rural area would probably be minimal, and it’s Red Deer College as well, which is, you know, a major part of our city.

The Chair: Questions?

Ms Livingstone: Can I ask just one quick question?

Mr. Merredew: Sure.

Ms Livingstone: I’m just trying to sort of summarize your submission. At this point do you feel like it is better for us to allow the two Red Deer ridings to exist with higher than average populations? That’s a preferable solution to moving pieces and mixing it with the surrounding rural areas?

Mr. Merredew: If those were the only two options, then I think it probably would be preferable to maintain them as just two ridings, yeah.

Ms Livingstone: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions?

Mr. McLeod: I just have one.

Mr. Merredew: Sure.

Mr. McLeod: You were talking about that east area there. Do you know of a development plan for that particular area? Is it slated a year from now, two years from now? They do this every eight to 10 years. Sometimes we're also looking out a little bit to see what's going to happen just to kind of project to a certain degree. Do you know of anything specific that's going in that one area to the east there?

Mr. Merredew: To the best of my knowledge, it's still in the very early planning stages. They're just kind of developing a master plan, but I'm also not very involved, you know, directly in municipal politics. I don't sit or anything like that.

Mr. McLeod: I just wondered if there was something on the books.

Mr. Merredew: The funding is in place, and the construction has begun on the ring road on the east edge of the city, which, I believe, is kind of the first piece they were looking to do.

Mr. McLeod: All right.

Mrs. Day: I'll just venture in here a little bit.

Mr. Merredew: Sure.

Mrs. Day: So what I heard you say was that you're okay with the plus 6 per cent. The weight of your vote versus the weight of one other person's vote is about equality and fairness, and I think what you started out with said something a little bit different than if you left it at 6 per cent. You're going to grow. I mean, obviously, there are growth plans, right? By eight years, 10 years out from now, that number is going to be way more than plus 6 per cent.

Mr. Merredew: That's a delicate balance that ultimately you folks have to strike, and it's certainly an issue that there is perhaps a little bit of under- or overrepresentation in various ridings in the province, but I think that the larger issue is keeping like-minded communities intact and communities that have connections to each other directly. Neighbourhoods in a city have a much greater connection to each other than they would to some town 20, 40, 80 kilometres away. Again, the difficulty I saw from being quite involved in the last federal campaign was that you'd take your candidate to an event in Sundre, and there are only three candidates there – right? – out of the six on the ballot or whatever. At almost every event that we went to, there was always one candidate who, you know, for whatever reason couldn't be there. I know that we had to decline invitations with the candidate I was working with as well.

Mrs. Day: You just physically couldn't get there.

Mr. Merredew: Because of just the distance. I mean, every town wants to host something for their residents, which is good and admirable, but juggling that kind of schedule with a candidate and getting those candidates out to those areas, especially when they're working full-time or other things like that, is very challenging, right? To break up a city into like a pie shape kind of format radiating out into rural areas, I think, would make democracy more difficult, ultimately.

Mrs. Day: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Anything else?

Before you go, then, if you could go up and show us. Is it Deer Park, you say, where the constituency line between Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South cuts the neighbourhood in half?

Mr. Merredew: Correct. Yeah.

4:50

The Chair: Thanks very much.

All right. Our next registered speaker is Robert Duiker.

Mr. Duiker: The matter of the presentation: who's controlling the mouse?

The Chair: You'd like to put it on our screen?

Mr. Duiker: Yes, please. You have it in the computer already.

The Chair: Oh, great. Okay.

Mr. Duiker: There are more copies than you need, I think.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks. Here's the clicker.

Mr. Duiker: Thank you.

The Chair: What constituency are you from, sir?

Mr. Duiker: I'm from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Duiker: I'm also the president of the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre Progressive Conservative Constituency Association.

Let's see. Hopefully, I get this right. It doesn't show everything, but this is just words, anyway. By the way, thank you very much for, you know, taking time out of watching wall-to-wall inauguration coverage and doing something as noble as this.

The Chair: This is where democracy is really happening.

Mr. Duiker: Yeah. That is precisely right. You may tweet that out.

I took a much different approach than what we're dealing with here. I started thinking as if I was you. So where this is sort of what I would call an atomistic approach, where we're starting with, you know, the knowledge of our local constituencies and cutting it up, I started with the province and worked my way through.

The first thing. You know, like you mentioned earlier, you started with a jurisdiction of 49,000 and just added them up until you got to the opposite corner, drawing lines across the province, and then noticed that there were an awful lot more lines in the province, and some that you mentioned such as mountains and rivers and other geographic features and some that I think also need to be taken into account such as highways and railroads, which have become bands of commercial activity and cultural activity – so they all need to be, then, taken into account.

I won't get all the way through this, by the way, so I'm hoping that you will receive this, also, as a written submission for whatever I don't get done. Is that all right?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Duiker: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to go a little faster here. I want to start with a list of concerns that I would have if I were you. These are the most populous jurisdictions in the province. Of course, you see that the most pressing concern of all – you can see in red the most pressing concerns. Calgary-South East has a very, very high population of over 79,000, and you might have a higher figure now. I'm not sure. That's sort of, you know, problem number 1, concern number 1.

Concern number 2 is jurisdictions with 20 per cent or more below the average population, and there we see, you know, Dunvegan-

Central Peace-Notley at slightly over 25,000 and just a little over half of the average that we're seeking.

Then the third concern is large jurisdictions with an area over 20,000 kilometres, and you'll see that the jurisdiction that I live in is on that list. We, you know, kind of move from the whole to the part a little bit, from my perspective and from, I think, the perspective of people in our constituency.

Then the last concern is the urban-rural balance, and that's been mentioned here. But I think that people in our riding would be probably almost unanimous in saying that we don't want to be part of a riding that is anchored in Red Deer or even Sylvan Lake and therefore dominated by people in those areas.

Our riding has three major population centres, I guess. They're in the name. I'll mention the name later. You might consider it funny when I get to my recommendations. In my role as the president of a constituency association I find often that the people in those more remote areas feel rather separated from the operation of the constituency association. Lately I've been driving because there was a campaign going on. You may have heard of it. I've been driving out to places like Rimbey and Sundre and trying to – and that's been a really good opportunity to meet with people and to form some relationships that simply we did not have. So there's sort of part of the problem. The problem isn't just MLA representation; it's the opportunity for other parties who are not represented, who don't have an MLA to also organize and therefore for democracy to be furthered or to be enhanced. You can tell I'm not reading this word-for-word because that would – you have the words.

I'm proposing that we identify seven zones. As I went through the various things that need to be addressed, I identified seven zones which contain several electoral divisions that include the electoral divisions with the highest and lowest populations and looked at the adjacent jurisdictions to find out where to best move the lines. I'll just go through the zones. The most pressing of the zones is Calgary because it contains many of the largest, but it also contains some that are below the average. I'll get to that in a minute.

The other thing I propose regarding these zones, something that's different than what we've done here, is local delegations. Once you establish a zone, there are five or six or seven or whatever number of jurisdictions that are just going to have to – the outside boundary of them is protected. Internally, MLAs and other people in the delegation have to work out the intricacies because, just like we found today, the local people are the ones who know, you know, first of all, where the population is, which is why I couldn't do it, where the other lines are that we haven't identified. Even in the written report I didn't mention lines around school divisions, and I think I had a few more.

For example, our school division. I work in a school that includes Drayton Valley. My experience ties us to Drayton Valley, but one of the problems that we have is that school divisions are also – what we need is a school division boundary commission because our division is shaped like a U or a C. It depends. If you look at it sideways, it's a C. We have two other jurisdictions that run right down the middle. We have schools in the middle of our jurisdictions which are not part of it. Maybe getting the lines together – we should take the lines that are actually in the worst shape, which probably are those, not the electoral lines. Certainly, that's digressing, and I'll stop that now.

I'm proposing that that is a process, and I already kind of mentioned the process there, and I've prioritized the zones in terms of importance, and I think I can defend the prioritization as we go forward here.

Also, I'll throw in a few other considerations. When you move jurisdiction lines, we're also running the risk of having more than

one or zero MLAs in the same jurisdiction, so that causes complication, let's say.

I'd throw a few others there. Low-cost technology upgrades are needed to make large constituencies work, and that's something that we haven't done that well, binding people with technology, and maybe the province has a role to play in that. I'm not sure. Apparently, technology is becoming a basic right.

Recognizing economic corridors like highway 22. I talked to a few people, and that's something that I didn't think of at all, you know, as I looked at it – but almost everybody I spoke to did – that highway 22 is in Rocky Mountain House, where I live. It is the business corridor, and it is probably the one that we want to maintain. We don't want to enhance the road to Red Deer and keep commerce, you know, have people shopping there and buying there. The only road we want to enhance is the north-south corridor.

5:00

And this is the funny part, that completely contradicts what we heard earlier. Names ought to be 20 characters or less, bearing in mind that I have to sign that name sometimes at the bottom of letters – you know, president of the constituency association of the Progressive Conservative Party in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre – and my hand gets tired. Short names, I think, would be a good thing.

Anyway, you can't read this on the screen – you have it there, but even there it's hard – but the point, really, is simply to say that I tried splitting up Calgary into zones to address and wound up with the entirety of it being a zone. Here's a map of Calgary with all of the constituency associations. The average in Calgary is 52,266, which is, I think, reasonably close to the 48,884. You don't need necessarily to increase the number of constituency associations within Calgary. You can simply, creatively, and with, I guess, a great deal of determination move them around somewhat. I think that we would agree that that's within a decent margin.

But here are the locations of the four really big ones. Now you can read the four big ones there, the actual population figures of those. Which is which? I can tell you that Calgary-South East is in the southeast. Three of them are over. They're all more than 20 per cent above the average population. Now, if you look at the entirety of Calgary, though, you see that these five are within 2 per cent of the city average, the 52,000 figure. They almost form a line across the middle. I tried, you know, to use the top and the bottom as two different zones. Unfortunately, the north group, above the yellow ones, has an average of 55,000 and something and the lower ones an average of 50,000 and something. The calculator will help in this case.

At some point there needs to be sort of a point of leakage through there. I first suggested Calgary-Fort, which is the yellow one on the far right, and I describe here how to split up Calgary-Fort. You know, 30,000 will go south, and 21,000 will go north. But there's another option. Calgary-Currie might actually be a better option when I looked at it later. I didn't work that out because I did that this morning, and I was supposed to be working on my job.

Now zone 2. Edmonton is way easier. There is Edmonton-South West, which has a very high population, but there are two adjacent jurisdictions that are low in population, which could give us an average of 51,572 if you brought those three together. I make them the highest priority. Here is just showing more detail of Edmonton. Here is the whole city of Edmonton on the left, with those three jurisdictions and a little bit of zoom-in on the right, trying to bring that average as close to that number as possible.

In general, the cities are the highest priority because they are many of the most populous ridings in the province, but also none of

the problematic, geographically large constituencies of over 20,000 square kilometres are found in them.

Then we get to zone 3. I'll probably conclude with zone 3 – and you can just read the rest – because this includes the jurisdiction in which I live. I tried to deal with this being as unbiased as possible because, you know, my heart's desire is really not to change my constituency at all and just deal with everybody else's instead. But when I looked at it, it was really Banff-Cochrane that messed this up for me. We haven't talked about Banff-Cochrane here. Because of the way we're doing it, it's outside of the context of this conversation. You know, it needs to be reduced because it's one of the really high ones. It's 63,990, 30 per cent over the average. As I worked with it, I kept making the zone bigger and bigger.

Maybe I can't explain everything about that zone, but I basically came up with eight constituencies. If they worked together, if those MLAs all sat down together at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood and worked it out, if they were obligated to report back to you with something that includes an equitable split – to me, those people know their communities, hopefully, and you make a rule: no minority reports; you agree; that's it; figure it out – that, to me, seems like something that can work, and they would bring in their local people, you know, to help advise them.

That's kind of the whole thing.

I'm just going to jump right to the very last slide of the summary here. I made all these nice maps. You've got to at least look at them for a second. Isn't that pretty? I worked hard on those. Those are some of the other zones. They're in your report, but people behind me won't get to see them. There are the other zones. This is a difficult one because the areas are so large. For anybody who would like it, you can ask me for the report, and I'll send it to you.

Here's the summary: address the imbalance in population by creating seven zones; local delegations will come together; urban and rural areas remain separate; Calgary is the highest priority and the greatest challenge; and the land area of ridings over 20,000 square kilometres should not increase.

I'm sorry. I was probably over my 10 minutes.

The Chair: That's just fine. I'm going to just make a statement and ask you a question. The first statement is that we don't have authority to delegate our job to a committee, so you're looking at the people who are going to redraw the lines that go into the recommendations to the Legislature. That's our job. That's what we signed on for.

I'm going to ask you the same question I've asked every person who's come to a public hearing so far in this process. In looking at your constituency, we see it's 14 per cent below the provincial average population at the moment. Not to suggest that we've made any decision, but if we found we had to increase the size of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to bring it closer to the 48,800, aside from your seven-zone proposal, if for some reason we just decided to look at it in isolation, how should we move that boundary to best effect a result that would allow effective representation?

Mr. Duiker: I probably wouldn't have said this if I hadn't been hanging around with Sundre people lately, but I'd probably say: extend down to Cremona, south of the riding, on highway 22.

The Chair: What would that take you into?

Mr. Duiker: I don't know the population of Cremona. Cremona is not that big.

The Chair: Okay, but just looking at the map there, is that south into Banff-Cochrane?

Mr. Duiker: Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I can't see the line of the one below. I think that's on or very close to a boundary between . . .

The Chair: Banff-Cochrane and Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Duiker: Yeah. Isn't there another one in there? For some reason I thought there was another jurisdiction in there, but I reserve the right to be wrong.

The Chair: Sure. I don't want to offend anyone from Cremona here, because I don't know it that well, but I bet it doesn't have 8,000 people living in it.

Mr. Duiker: Yeah. So I guess that would nibble at it.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Duiker: You know, I guess I would stick to the highway 22 corridor, to climbing north and south. I think that putting Drayton Valley in it would be overextending, and I don't know if that represents the community well. Like I said, I probably have more connection in Drayton Valley because I'm an educator than maybe the typical person in Rocky Mountain House or elsewhere in the riding.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks.
Questions?

Ms Livingstone: I don't have a question, but I just wanted to say thank you very much for all the thoughtful work you put into this. It's a lot of work and the kind of thing that can be quite helpful as we move forward to our deliberations. Thank you.

Mr. Duiker: Thank you.

The Chair: And a new idea as well.
Any other questions?
Okay. Thanks so much.

Mr. Duiker: You're welcome.

5:10

The Chair: Okay. Ray Reckseidler. Thank you so much. Which constituency do you reside in, sir?

Mr. Reckseidler: I reside in the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constituency.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reckseidler: Just before I begin my presentation, I was asked by Mr. Roth whether or not I had made a presentation to an Electoral Boundaries Commission in the past, and I indicated that I had several years ago at the federal level, and we were successful. So at the conclusion of this presentation I'm hopeful, as you had mentioned, Madam Chair, earlier at the opening, that we are successful this time, too.

Let me begin. Good day to you, members of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission panel. It is an honour and a privilege for me to engage in the democratic process of governance. My name is Ray Reckseidler, the mayor of the urban municipality of Delburne. If you're wondering where Delburne is, Red Deer is approximately half an hour west of us. I have been endorsed by my council and invited by the good people of division 1 of Red Deer county to speak for them at this hearing. I stand before you today on behalf of the citizens of the municipality of Delburne and division 1 of Red Deer county. Together, the area is home to close to 3,000 residents. Again, as I mentioned, I am honoured to speak on their behalf.

This presentation will focus on two tenets. First, the first tenet deals with the inclusion of Delburne in the constituency surrounding the city of Red Deer and within the municipality of Red Deer county. Second, the second tenet is to have the name “Delburne” included in the naming of that constituency. I will give reasons for both.

In regard to the first tenet, historically the municipality of Delburne has always been included in the Red Deer county geographic area, and since 1905 the municipality of Delburne has been part of either the Red Deer or Innisfail constituencies in the province of Alberta. I cite this information from a book titled *A Report on Alberta Elections: 1905-1982*, which was prepared as a report by Kenneth A. Walk, who at that time was the Chief Electoral Officer, and published in December 1983.

Currently the constituency is named Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, and the publication I’m referring to is this booklet here. The reasons for wanting to remain in our current constituency are as follows. Our trade, our commerce, our professional services are all engaged westward. Home building and maintenance, medical services, educational designations are all to the west. Legislative and government links and mutual agreements with municipalities are all to the west and specifically with Red Deer county. There are other reasons that could be cited here, but suffice it to say that the above are significant for this particular presentation.

Other factors that play an important role in the placement of Delburne and division 1 of Red Deer county in the same constituency are as follows: the location of the Red Deer River, which has served as the north and east boundaries of Red Deer county; secondly, the highways and road grid systems are all linked with the city of Red Deer; and thirdly, housing for seniors such as assisted living and extended care are located most conveniently in either Innisfail or Red Deer city. So, panel members, it is apparent that the almost 3,000 citizens of Delburne and division 1 collectively are strongly desirous of remaining in the current constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Moving to the second tenet, there is a strong need to recognize publicly the valuable contributions the eastern portion of Red Deer county is making to the overall growth and prosperity in matters such as economic development, small-business growth, broadband amenities, tourist attractions, and agribusiness. Our fine people think it is time for Albertans to know more about us. One way to do so would be to give this area a much higher profile.

Let me again refer to the book mentioned earlier, *A Report on Alberta Elections: 1905-1982*. Many constituencies have added municipal names to constituency titles – for example, Banff-Cochrane, Bow Valley-Empress, Pincher Creek-Crowsnest – as established in the municipal elections of 1967 and more recently the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constituency. We need to look only to the constituency maps on the wall to see that they’re more than just one name.

In the leaflet distributed to Albertans via the mail recently, the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission indicated that it will consider – and you’ve referred to it, Madam Chair and members of the panel – population figures, common community interests, existing municipal and natural boundaries, effective representation, and personal thoughts or input. It is hoped fervently that this presentation has addressed those considerations.

The idea of adding the name Delburne to the constituency title has been broached to political parties and municipal leaders, all of whom support the idea as a means of giving this region a higher profile. I would add that the municipality of Delburne is the largest urban community in this region.

Equal representation by population is a major consideration for the commission. We all understand that, and we agree. However,

the commission has the mandate to undertake other considerations, as has been expressed to this audience.

In closing, I thank the members of the commission panel most sincerely for hearing the wishes and hopes of almost 3,000 proud Albertans. I humbly and respectfully ask the members of this panel to consider these two tenets in your deliberations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I’m going to ask the panel for any questions they might have, but I’ll start off with my standard question. Looking at Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, it looks like the population right now is about 10 per cent below the average figure for populations.

Mr. Reckseidler: Correct.

The Chair: If we ultimately decided that we had no choice but to recommend an increase in the size of the population, which would require us to move one of your boundaries, do you have any view as to how that should be done?

Mr. Reckseidler: I can’t be specific in which direction, but I can be specific – we would have no connection if we were to be placed to the south or to the east because of the river, Red Deer River, being a natural boundary. Legislatively we have established a very, very strong relationship within Red Deer county, and we believe that we would wish to stay there. As I said a few minutes ago, that Red Deer was half an hour west of Delburne, I was being a little facetious. Delburne is approximately the other direction, east of Red Deer.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any questions?

Mrs. Day: I’m curious about growth, as the mayor of Blackfalds mentioned. Currently you’re minus 10 per cent in the full region, but is Delburne experiencing some of this growth in Alberta? Are you annexing from the county?

5:20

Mr. Reckseidler: I’ve been living in the village of Delburne since 1972, and it had a population of about 415. In the census taken in 2011 we are presently at 830. We look forward to the release of the population on February 8. We anticipate we will reach well over 900, so we’ve increased about 8-plus per cent over the last five-year census period.

Mrs. Day: Okay. That’s great. Just curious about your growth.

The Chair: All right. Just building on that, a question arising: are there any subdivisions of new homes such as we heard was the situation in Blackfalds?

Mr. Reckseidler: Yes. We established a golf course in the early 1990s, and as a result, there was strong interest to develop a residential area. We have annexed two quarters to the east of Delburne. So there is room for growth, and we anticipate that we will continue to grow.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any further questions?

Mr. Reckseidler: It’s nice to see you, Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: It’s nice to see you, too, Ray.

The Chair: Thanks so much, sir, for your presentation.

Mr. Reckseidler: I just wonder if I could give a quotation before I step aside.

The Chair: Please do.

Mr. Reckseidler: I'm going to read this.

Our lives are not determined by what happens to us but how we react to what happens to us; not by what life brings to us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. It's a catalyst: a spark that creates extraordinary results.

We look forward to it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you for those good wishes.

All right. Gareth Scott. Hi. If you could give us the name of your constituency.

Mr. Scott: Lacombe-Ponoka.

The Chair: Welcome.

Mr. Scott: Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here. It's a great pleasure to see all the people that have come out today and are participating in this democratic process. I took a little different approach to what I wanted to talk about here. There are enough stats around and people giving you great information that I don't think you need my stats other than that I would say that on the population numbers that you have here, there are some guidelines, I believe, on population, lower numbers and higher numbers, within . . .

The Chair: Yes. There's a 25 per cent maximum spread allowed by the legislation, except for those two big ridings right up against the Territories border, but last time most, 85 per cent, were within a 10 per cent variance, currently 85 per cent.

Mr. Scott: So there's another number that I recall, 37,000 and 61,000. What is that number used for within that commission legislation?

The Chair: That number doesn't appear in the legislation, and I haven't heard that range myself.

Mr. Scott: Okay. I'd like to convey thoughts of the constituents of Lacombe-Ponoka. In particular, when I move through the constituency, there are a lot of concerns about politics and partisan politics and so on, but really they're concerned mostly about jobs, education, health, and those types of things. When talking about Blackfalds, Blackfalds is an integral part of the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency. I was asked by the MLA, Mr. Ron Orr, to convey his support for the change to the name Lacombe-Ponoka-Blackfalds. We have a strong association with Blackfalds in all areas: education, health, transportation, and commerce. It only follows that because of the great job that they've done there in Blackfalds developing their neighbourhoods, their businesses, and encouraging population growth, I think that the mayor is correct: the population in Blackfalds is higher now than it is in Ponoka. I think that the recognition of their good work needs to be put into the name of the constituency.

As far as moving anything in the constituencies, if you look around us, if you look around the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency, there's really no room to move us anywhere or increase or decrease without great confusion with the boundary lines. Normally I think that we have respected the municipal boundaries as we have made divisions. I understand that there are within the city of Calgary and Edmonton some very out of balance, maybe, populations, but here

in Lacombe-Ponoka, we're 9 per cent below. Rocky Mountain House and Sundre is 14 per cent below. The only one that is over, possibly, is Red Deer-North. Moving Blackfalds into the Red Deer-North constituency would be like putting somebody in there as an afterthought. Blackfalds commerce is really to the north of them. It's not to the south of them.

I strongly and on behalf of the MLA Ron Orr do ask you to consider changing the name of Lacombe-Ponoka to Lacombe-Ponoka-Blackfalds.

Mrs. Stol: It'll be alphabetical.

Mr. Scott: You see, already we've got the lottery going. Which is first, and which is second?

Mrs. Stol: They're all alphabetical.

Mr. Scott: Yeah. I know. I realize that.

The Chair: I can see why she's mayor.

Mr. Scott: Yeah.

Division of areas is important in the things that I talked about in education, commerce, and municipal affairs. Further moving boundaries outside of municipalities to include two different municipalities causes MLAs more consternation because now when they're representing, they have to represent two different agendas, so it exponentially raises their commitment to move around, to have to be places, to have to present things. The MLAs, regardless of what folks think, work very hard. For the amount of money that they make, you wouldn't get me to do it. I can tell you that we need to support the MLAs regardless of what party they belong to. They represent us. I don't think there's any place here in this exercise for partisan politics or political agendas. I think that Albertans are tired of people telling them what's good for them. They want to be able to tell their representatives what they'd like to have.

Once again, I would like to thank you for allowing us to present here today, and I'd like to thank the people once again that came here today, in particular our mayor from Blackfalds. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I can't let you go without asking the same question I ask everybody, but I'll refine it a little bit. I take your point that you're surrounded by constituencies that are all below the provincial average if you just look at the ones that are right up against Lacombe-Ponoka. But you don't have to go very far before you get to Red Deer-North, which is 21 per cent over, which you yourself have said maybe is too high. Just looking at that now, what's your thought? Again, we haven't made this decision. Before we were having this conversation, I didn't even know about this tiny strip between the two constituencies. How would it work, in your view, if the boundary of Lacombe-Ponoka was extended right up to the boundary of Red Deer-North?

Mr. Scott: Well, I think that, like you said, the river is the boundary now, so I think that the city of Red Deer-North is already annexed up to there as the extent of their boundary. They're basically on the Blackfalds town limit there.

The Chair: Okay, but aside from that. We're trying to represent respecting municipal boundaries. With the bigger cities we can't always do that, so sometimes we just have to look at neighbourhood boundaries. Looking at this map of Red Deer-North, I see that big, white part, which I'm guessing is the industrial area in the north part of Red Deer in part. Definitely, I'm not asking you to answer this if you don't want to, but is there anything in that which might more naturally fold into Lacombe-Ponoka than something else?

5:30

Mr. Scott: Well, I don't know that that's the case. There are similarities in the businesses that are there and the developments in the industrial area, like, all of them, but I don't think that that's going to net any difference in the population. It's their businesses, and I don't think that would effectively change the number of residents.

The Chair: Not that many people living in that area.

Mr. Scott: No.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Mrs. Day: I was curious about – I mean, you have a fairly large riding already, and you seem to know your MLA quite well. Are there two offices in this riding, or are they just in one office?

Mr. Scott: No. They're just in one office, in Lacombe. I know he has some space in Ponoka that, he told me, he had rented from time to time. I know that he moves around that constituency. I wouldn't do what he does. Not a chance.

Mrs. Day: Yeah. Just curious. You have better connection corridors, perhaps, than some other large ridings in our province.

Mr. Scott: That's the case. He is taxed at times, running to the north, but I don't think that there's really anything that can be done about the populations.

Mrs. Day: Thank you.

The Chair: Anything else?
All right. Thanks so much.

Mr. Scott: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Our last registered speaker is Jeff Rock. Hi. If you could start by telling us what constituency you're part of.

Rev. Rock: Certainly. My name is Reverend Jeff Rock, and I live in Red Deer-North.

The Chair: Thank you. I was hoping we'd get somebody from Red Deer-North. Go right ahead.

Rev. Rock: I just want to say first: welcome to Red Deer. It's great to see a panel of folks, especially on this auspicious day of the American inauguration. It's a country that has gerrymandering to the extreme. It's quite refreshing to be at a nonpartisan democratic committee talking about electoral boundaries. I think it's a sign of who we are as a Canadian people in the province of Alberta, right here in central Alberta.

Since the last time that this commission was called, in 2009-2010, there's been substantial growth in central Alberta, but there's also been a redrawing of the federal boundaries. I was the Liberal candidate in 2015, the 42nd general election, in the federal riding of Red Deer-Lacombe. While I lament that the federal commission split Red Deer into two federal ridings, what we call rural ridings – half rural, half urban – they did do a wise decision by making a very clear boundary throughout the city of Red Deer.

For the federal boundaries, if you look from west to east, you start pretty well on highway 11, all the way through most of the riding except for a small chunk out near Eckville, and that continues all the way to highway 2. There's a small dodge south on highway 2 to the Red Deer River, and the electoral boundary continues on the

Red Deer River to Ross Street, cuts through Ross Street entirely through the city, has a short jog north on what's 20th Avenue, which is just a small country path, really, but will eventually be a ring road around Red Deer, and then continues along highway 11 to the far eastern edge of the boundary.

In the provincial boundary, which is almost identical, there are a few different distinctions. One is along Cronquist Drive. There's a jog away from the Red Deer River on that boundary. There's also, on the far eastern side of the city of Red Deer, a chunk of the Deer Park neighbourhood along 39th Avenue that serves as a boundary. As you've noted even in the few minutes that I've been here, Red Deer-North is oversized, and that is a fairly sizable chunk of population in that Deer Park area.

I would encourage this commission to parallel as much as possible, not only in Red Deer but around the province, the boundaries of the federal commission that was conducted a few years ago to simplify things because there are residents in Red Deer who live in Red Deer-North but are in Red Deer-Mountain View, which is a nonanalogous riding. I think that, obviously, you have to do some population balancing. I think that can be done in the Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South ridings on the other edges rather than on that Ross Street boundary, just to simplify things.

That pretty well concludes my comments. I have highlighted on a map the areas that concern me if that's helpful. I see you have some really big . . .

The Chair: That would be great.

Rev. Rock: I'm happy to leave that with you as well. I have written remarks, too, that are pretty well verbatim what I said.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. If you could pass those, maybe, to our clerk, who's going to take them from you.

Just to my question that you all know by now. You've got roughly 10,000 people above the provincial average. I understand that you are not suggesting we move the boundaries so that some of them are moved into Red Deer-South, because it is also above the provincial average. Do you have any suggestion as to which of your other three boundaries, north, east, or west, should be moved in to reduce the size of Red Deer-North geographically?

Rev. Rock: Again, if you look at those sort of industrial areas that are on the west and the north of the Red Deer-North riding that could easily be taken out: not much population. There are, however, quite a few acreages that are in what's known as the Balmoral district. I see that there aren't many included there in that area, but that would, you know, carve out some population. And those houses along Cronquist Drive are quite large mansions, really.

The Chair: And that's to the east?

Rev. Rock: That's on the southern tip, just south of the Red Deer River. You know, that would probably affect a few dozen people as well, but there would be ways to do it.

I just think that because that Ross Street division and the river division of the federal ridings are so strong and clear, it would be nice to have a very strong and clear provincial boundary as well.

The Chair: Thank you.
Any questions?

Mr. McLeod: I've asked this before, and I'll ask it again because you live in Red Deer-North. Timberlands: have you any knowledge of what the prospective development would be in that north, sort of east area up there?

Rev. Rock: The plan for the city is that that is the primary development area that will be developed over the next few years. Part of that is that the city cannot really develop west as there are water issues across highway 2, can't really develop south because we have garbage dumps there. The agricultural land to the east is very valuable and is not slated for development. So that northeast corner is first, and then second will be what's known as the Hazlett Lake development, which is north of highway 11A on the north side of the edge of the houses there. Red Deer-North is slated to be growing over the next few years more than Red Deer-South.

Mr. McLeod: Do you have a number, by any chance?

Rev. Rock: I don't. I just know that anecdotally through city zoning that's been going on in Hazlett Lake and the building happening . . .

Mr. McLeod: Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you, but they call that Timberlands or something?

Rev. Rock: Timberlands and Clearview and Garden Heights are the three areas up in that corner.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions?

Okay. Thank you so much, Reverend Rock. It's been great to hear from somebody from Red Deer-North.

Rev. Rock: Well, thank you for being here. Cheers.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. We have a few minutes left. Yes. Would you please come forward, sir.

Mr. Hart: Hi. I'm Doug Hart. I'm from Blackfalds, Lacombe-Ponoka, but I'd like to speak on behalf of another group. I co-chair the Alberta NDP rural caucus. I would like you to think of me as a rural guy as opposed to an NDP guy, and I want to speak on behalf of about 500 members of our rural caucus.

I understand the challenge that you face. You have a mission to make everybody's vote count the same, and you have guidelines within which you must operate: 25 per cent is the outside edge of what you can wiggle with, but 10 per cent was the benchmark the last time we had the boundary consultation.

I would like to talk as a Ponokan who grew up in a small town in Alberta and over the last 60 years has seen our community rise in population by about 20 per cent. Contrast that to Edmonton, that over the same time period has grown from 130,000 to 1.3 million if you include all of the suburbs, about a 700 per cent increase in population.

5:40

Now, I'm going to make a case on behalf of rural Albertans, and I want to make clear that I am not pitting rural Albertans against our urban brothers and sisters, but I want to remind this commission of some important factors. People talk about the GDP all the time. We talk about economy, and we talk about job creation. There's another important measure of our economic health, and I use it in concert with the GDP because every time there's a divorce, every time there's a murder, every time there's a death, every time there's a pestilence or drought, the GDP goes up because it's economic activity for a doctor or lawyer or somebody or the truck driver or the tow truck driver.

Exports are another good measure of economic health. In 2015 Alberta exported \$220.4 billion in product, \$220 billion in product. Oil, gas, petroleum products, agriculture, and forestry made up 92 per cent of the \$220.4 billion in product exported from Alberta. All

of that product came from rural Alberta, and the profits were spent in Edmonton and Calgary and Red Deer and Grande Prairie, et cetera. At the same time, schools have been closed in Benalto, Mirror, Satinwood, just in central Alberta. Continuing care beds are under threat in all rural communities, and we've heard about how people have to take their elderly seniors to cities to have them looked after.

My appeal is this. I understand how difficult it is for you to struggle with the limitations within which you must operate, but I would invite you, on the strength of keeping rural Alberta priming the economic engine of this province, to extend a little liberty to rural communities, on the strength of the distance that people, the MLAs and elected officials, need to cover in order to adequately represent their constituents. Schools are being closed. Continuing care beds are being closed. Libraries, ag societies: they're all floundering. In order for rural Alberta to continue to be the economic engine of the province, your job is to make sure there's a social infrastructure for us to continue to do that.

I would add just a couple of comments related to my own. Incidentally, I can send you a PowerPoint of those figures that I gave you because I included them in the strategic planning workshop that we had for our rural caucus in October, and I'm happy to share those with you. Just in terms of the observation – Jeff Rock talked about the importance of having provincial boundaries, where possible, line up with federal boundaries. I would like to point out one little wrinkle, I think, in our current boundaries. The four bands at Maskwacis fall into Red Deer-Lacombe in the federal constituency, but in the provincial constituency they're part of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I think there's some importance in looking at aligning also indigenous communities, where possible, so that the federal representation and the provincial representation also line up.

The Chair: Sorry. That was Wetaskiwin-Camrose provincially and which one federally?

Mr. Hart: Red Deer-Lacombe federally.

The Chair: Thank you.

Unidentified Speaker: I'd like to add that they are also part of Drayton Valley.

Mr. Hart: And they're also part of Drayton Valley. There are five bands, and I think four of them are in one constituency, and one band is in . . .

Unidentified Speaker: No. It's four bands, and one band is split.

Mr. Hart: Oh, okay. Is that the . . .

Unidentified Speaker: The Samson band. Ma-Me-O Beach is . . .

Mr. Hart: Yeah. The one at Ma-Me-O Beach: is that a part of the Samson band?

Unidentified Speaker: Sure.

Mr. Hart: Oh, I didn't know that.

The Chair: So a constituency boundary runs through Ma-Me-O Beach?

Mr. Hart: No. Part of the Samson band, he's saying, is included in Drayton Valley-Devon.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah. And part of it's in Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Hart: Part of it's in Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Hart: No questions?

The Chair: Well, I have to ask you my questions so I can always say that I've asked this of every person. You've heard it. We're looking at the map of Lacombe-Ponoka. If we found, notwithstanding your able submission, that we had to do something to reduce the population variance there to a degree, do you have a view as to which way it would be better to move the constituency boundary outward?

Mr. Hart: Notwithstanding my condition that you exercise latitude in that 10 per cent or 25 per cent, it would have to be north to include Maskwacis in Lacombe-Ponoka. I think there are about 6,000 voters there.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks so much.
Does anybody else have any questions?

Mr. Hart: No. I was clear.

The Chair: Okay. All right. Thank you.
We have time for one more person.

Mr. Shoup: Can I make a couple of brief comments?

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Shoup: I've listened to the discussion today about . . .

Ms Livingstone: Sorry. Can we get your name and riding?

Mr. Shoup: Marvin Shoup, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Shoup: As a resident of Sylvan Lake some of the natural things in Lacombe, Blackfalds, Ponoka – extend that out to include Bentley, out to highway 20. That would probably pick up about 2,500 people just with that simple boundary change to the west. For Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, because we're undersized, too, we could go up range road 30 to include Eckville and Rimbey, which adds roughly 4,000 people to our constituency.

I heard the one gentleman talking about Banff-Cochrane being oversized. Take a bigger portion of that to compensate for Eckville and Rimbey, which are currently in the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency. Take a little bigger chunk there. That way, we get more closely aligned. Sylvan Lake has become the commercial centre for Rimbey, Bentley, Eckville. We're naturally aligned with them, but they're not in our riding at all.

The Chair: Okay. Could you just go through those town names again?

Mr. Shoup: Okay. You can see where the boundary goes on the east side of Gull Lake. That would be extended to highway 20 to the west, which would then take in Bentley and the summer communities of Gull Lake, adding 2,000 to 2,500 people to that riding. Innisfail-Sylvan Lake: if we take in Eckville, Rimbey, and then back to highway 20, which is naturally aligned with that, we pick up about, I would say, roughly 4,000 people. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: even though they lost those 4,000, they would pick it up from Banff-Cochrane because that's probably the only place they can go anyway to get higher populations.

The Chair: Thank you. That's exactly the sort of exercise we're going to be going through in a few weeks ourselves but all the way around the province because, of course, this all has to work out. You know, it's a ripple effect from one constituency into the next.

Okay. Thank you.

Any questions, panel? Thank you.

Yes, ma'am. Please come forward.

Mrs. Aucoin: My name is Gail Aucoin, and I live in part of the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre area. In the last election the boundaries took us out of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and moved us to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I've got to tell you that I didn't even know it until we went to vote, and it was like: what do you mean I don't go to Sylvan Lake? I mean, we live very close to Sylvan. We shop in Sylvan. We doctor in Sylvan. Like the gentleman ahead of me said, if you move the boundaries towards Eckville and that, that would take us – like, we live on the west side of 781, which makes us Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and the east side of 781 is Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

The Chair: So if we were to take Mr. Shoup's recommendations, you'd be back into Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Okay. Thank you.

Any other questions, panel?

All right. Anybody else?

Well, I'd like to thank you very much for coming out today. Again, our apologies for being an hour late, essentially, and asking you to stay an hour beyond the originally scheduled time, but I myself think that this has been incredibly worth while to hear from all of you and to have so many of you register to speak and then others come forward to speak.

I'd encourage you to think about this, and if you have any further thoughts or additional thoughts, please just write us a line or two, abebc.ca. We'd love to hear from you.

Thanks very much.

[The hearing adjourned at 5:50 p.m.]

