



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Wainwright

Monday, January 23, 2017
7:03 p.m.

Transcript No. 10

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Justice Myra Bielby, Chair

Gwen Day
Laurie Livingstone
W. Bruce McLeod
D. Jean Munn

Support Staff

Robert H. Reynolds, QC
Shannon Dean
Aaron Roth
Shannon Parke
Tracey Sales
Janet Schwegel

Clerk
Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Administrator
Communications Officer
Communications Consultant
Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Wainwright

Public Participants

Gerald Aalbers, Mayor, City of Lloydminster

Marie Isaman, Town Secretary, Town of Hardisty, speaking for Deputy Mayor Donna Buelow

Rod Krips

Todd Pawsey

Ron Plett

Bill Rock, Mayor, Village of Amisk

Kevin Smook, Reeve, Beaver County

Wes Taylor, MLA, Battle River-Wainwright

7:03 p.m.

Monday, January 23, 2017

[Justice Bielby in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks very much for coming out this evening and showing such interest in the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Let me introduce myself. I'm Justice Myra Bielby of the Court of Appeal from Edmonton, but at the moment I'm chairing the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce the other members of the commission. To my far left are Jean Munn of Calgary and then Laurie Livingstone of Calgary, and to my far right are Gwen Day of Carstairs and Bruce McLeod of Acme.

Now, since we started advertising our work a few weeks ago, I've had a number of people say: "Gee, I saw your name in connection with the Electoral Boundaries Commission. What does that mean? What are you doing, and why are you doing it now?" So I thought I'd start with a thumbnail introduction about the work of the commission. The commission is created 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.

Okay. That sounds good, but what does that mean? Well, we have a problem, probably a happy problem, in that in the last eight years Alberta's population has increased enormously, by over 800,000 people, by more than 20 per cent of our population, and that's net of any outflows due to the economic downturn or otherwise. That inflow has resulted in our provincial constituencies, which were roughly equivalent in size as of eight years ago, now being out of whack, with the smallest of our constituencies about 25,192 people and the largest 79,035 people. So that's a huge swing and a huge change from just a few years ago.

To go over the principles – sorry; this PowerPoint is behind my head, but I have my able assistant here. She's going to be my Vanna, and we're going to try to make this all work.

Ms Livingstone: It's my fault if the slides are out of order.

The Chair: Alberta has 87 provincial constituencies, and this commission this time has no power to make any changes to that. We can't increase or decrease the number of constituencies. If you were involved eight years ago, you will recall perhaps that at that time the Legislature added four new constituencies – it went from 83 to 87 – and that, to a degree, addressed the large population increase they had experienced at that time. But we don't have that opportunity this time. We have to deal with 87 areas, and our job is to divide up the 87 constituencies that are shown on this map here and leave them either as they are now or change the shape somewhat to increase the population or decrease the population in each one. There still have to be 87 when we're finished.

Needless to say, each constituency elects one MLA to the provincial Legislature in each election, and as I said, Alberta's population has increased by more than 20 per cent since the last time the Electoral Boundaries Commission sat. In 2010 the average population of each of our 87 constituencies was 40,880. That figure was arrived at by taking the provincial population and dividing it by 87. Now, with an estimated population of 4,252,000 people, if we divide that by 87, we get 48,796, a growth of 8,000 people in each of our constituencies.

Now, we've just been using estimated figures based on information given to us by the Alberta Treasury Board, but we're expecting to have the population figures from the 2016 federal census made available to us on February 8. Once we get those actual

figures, we'll amend all of our figures and all of the figures on the maps to the actual figures, but I don't expect that there will be a huge change.

Our problem is exemplified, I guess, if you look at – you probably can't see it, but just trust me. There's a map of your constituency, Battle River-Wainwright, on the wall there, and in the blue below the name of the constituency is the population figure from last time the boundaries commission met and is the population figure on which the current constituencies were formed. It shows that you had 38,533 people in Battle River-Wainwright, about 6 per cent below the provincial average at that time. Now, you've had a drop in population. You've got 36,905 people on estimate, but because the provincial average population has gone up, you're 25 per cent below the provincial average based on these estimated figures. For Vermilion-Lloydminster, in the event that anybody is here from there, it's the same idea. Last time you were 11 per cent below the provincial average, and now you're 17 per cent below the provincial average.

That's happened because the 800,000 and some-odd people who moved into Alberta didn't move into each of our constituencies in equal amounts. They didn't distribute themselves equally over the province, not too surprisingly. Most of them moved into the cities or Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and as a result of that, we've developed this variation in constituency size.

Our job is to make recommendations to the Legislature as to where and how constituency boundaries should be moved to make sure that each Albertan has effective representation by their MLA. You may have heard the phrase "representation by population," which is often interpreted to mean that every person's vote should be relatively equal in effect to every other person's vote, and that's the overall goal here. But in undertaking this task, it's not just a question of numbers. If it had been just numbers, all we would have had to do is sit down in Edmonton with a pencil and a ruler, figure out what the population was, move the ruler around, and we'd have our 87 pieces. No, there are lots of other considerations which our legislation tells us to take into account as well.

7:10

Our legislation is something called the provincial Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It was passed in 2009, and it arranged for the creation of this commission – every eight to 10 years there's a commission – and it sets out what the relevant considerations should be for the commission in addition to numbers. We're going to try to establish clear and understandable boundaries for all constituencies. Relevant to that is, first, of course, relative population densities, then common community interests or community organizations, including those of First Nation reserves and Métis settlements, then existing community or neighbourhood boundaries within Edmonton or Calgary, and existing municipal boundaries elsewhere. We're going to try to avoid dividing up a village or a town, certainly inadvertently, and we're going to try to honour municipal boundaries to the extent we can. Where there are geographical features that suggest natural boundaries such as rivers or major roadways, we're to take those into account.

Of course, we have in this constituency the natural boundary of the border with Saskatchewan. That's an obvious one. Everybody here probably knows that the eastern boundary of your constituency is the provincial border. We have to take that into account, obviously, too. We can't go into Saskatchewan. I'm sure they wouldn't be happy if we attempted to grab some of their voters.

This isn't a closed list. In addition to all of this, you can tell us – and I hope you will tell us – about other things that you think we should take into account in determining what it means to allow all of the 87 MLAs in the province to effectively represent their

constituents. You're not limited, by all means, to talking about your own constituency. The whole topic is wide open.

In the next few weeks we're going to hold public hearings throughout the province to seek community input such as yours to assist us in developing our recommendations. We started last week in Edmonton. We moved through Fort McMurray, Peace River, where we got weathered-in at the airport and had a memorable nine hours and ended up having to delay our meetings in Grande Prairie. We finished the week off in Red Deer. We're doing similar hearings this week and a future week. At the end of the day, we'll have had hearings in 15 different centres.

Many thanks to those of you who have registered online to make an oral presentation today. We're going to keep everybody who registered to 10 minutes, with a further five minutes at the end of your presentation in case the panel wants to ask you any questions. We should have a few minutes at the end so that anybody who hasn't registered but would like to speak to us can come forward and take the mike and tell us what you think we should do.

In addition to oral submissions at the public hearings, we've invited written submissions. We've been gratified by the response. Last time over the course of the year they got 500 written submissions. In the first two weeks we got 300 written submissions. So we've had a good response, but in fairness I think that's because in addition to receiving them by post, this time we're accepting them by e-mail. There's a place right on our website where you can share your thoughts. We have Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, so there are other social media sites on which people have been submitting their thoughts to us.

We're going to consider all of these submissions. The five commissioners will meet together with a big map in Edmonton in a few weeks, and we'll start working on our recommendations. We'll make 87 individual recommendations, one for each constituency. That doesn't mean we're going to make a recommendation to move the boundaries in each constituency. I'm sure that for many constituencies we'll recommend that there be no change, but we'll at least talk about each constituency. We're obliged to file our report with our recommendations with the Legislature no later than May 31, 2017.

Then we have a second go-round. You'll then have a chance to look at what our recommendations are. They'll be posted on our website and also, I'm sure, on the Legislature's website. We'll be inviting further written submissions at that time. Often people are more comfortable making a submission when they see a specific proposal. They may not know what to say now, but once they see that there's a proposal, they may have a response. We're hoping people will write in if that's the case. Then we'll be having a second round of public hearings toward the end of July, beginning of August to receive any further input on those specific recommendations.

The commission will then meet again, decide whether any changes should be made or what changes should be made to our interim recommendations, prepare a final report, and that report has to be filed with the Legislature by October 31 of this year. In the normal course the Legislature would then consider those recommendations and pass legislation implementing them. They don't have to. The discretion remains with the Legislature as to what they're to do with constituency boundaries. In the past the Legislature has accepted and implemented the recommendations of various Electoral Boundaries Commissions, so we have high hopes that that will happen on this occasion as well.

As I said earlier, equality or parity of population in each of the constituencies is not our only consideration. Our courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have interpreted our act to mean that each one of us has the right not to have the political strength or

value of our vote unduly diluted. This legislation, nonetheless, allows variances where necessary for constituencies to have populations of up to 25 per cent or below 25 per cent of the average population or, for a maximum of four constituencies, up to 50 per cent below the average population. However, that said, the last time, in 2010, 87 per cent of the constituencies ended up with a variance below 10 per cent of the average. Even though we have permission to vary for up to 25 per cent, that's not something that we're going to do lightly. There are two special constituencies, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley and Lesser Slave Lake, which are more than 25 per cent below the provincial average. They fall within that special category because they're in the far north, where the population is pretty sparse.

In doing our job, what we're going to start with is the actual population in a constituency. To use this constituency as an example: 36,905. We're going to compare that to the average constituency number, which is 48,880 some odd. We're going to see that there's a variance there, probably in the range of 25 per cent. We're going to then see if there is any acceptable reason not to move the boundaries out to increase the size of this constituency to bring the number of people closer to the average and similarly for your surrounding constituencies and for all of the constituencies. Of course, if we move one boundary, then that has a ripple effect on the next constituency – right? – because that would move some of their population.

We do have these maps that we've hung up so that you have a chance to see what your constituency exactly looks like while we're here and talking about it.

With that, I'd like to call our first registered presenter forward, Todd Pawsey. Mr. Pawsey, if you would let us know where you live and what your constituency is, that would be terrific.

Mr. Pawsey: I have also brought individual copies if you guys would like to have them.

The Chair: Sure. Absolutely. My assistant here tells me that this is your constituency over my head, so that's terrific. Thanks.

Mr. Pawsey: Thank you very much. I currently live in Castor, which is just to the south. It's in the Drumheller-Stettler constituency. However, this constituency is my home area. I'm from Edgerton, grew up in Edgerton, lived and worked in Wainwright, played hockey in Wainwright, and all those fun things.

Thank you very much for allowing us to speak tonight. One of the things I'm hoping is that the material and information that you guys get from this series of presentations – we know that the game is that when you give your report to the Legislature, well, let the political games happen then. I hope that we can have a chance to perhaps get things right at this level. What "right" may mean to an urban person is different than what it means to a rural person.

The drift of my presentation here tonight is more so from a rural perspective, not a political stripe, as you would speak, so that's how I'm kind of looking at it. Being a process person, I look at it from the aspect of organizational effectiveness and what works, a checks and balances system. Some of where I may stretch might be outside the purview of the actual boundaries discussion, but it comes to the governance of Alberta and how we can look at what a vote means in terms of sending a representative to Edmonton. I'm just asking for a little bit of leeway and if I could challenge some thoughts. By all means, if you have questions at any time, feel free to grill me back instead of, you know, waiting until the end. Thank you.

7:20

With that, what I'd like to talk about is that the representation in the governance of Alberta could go beyond just the scope of rep by

pop. What I'm trying to make a case for is that in an area – I didn't know the numbers, but I knew it was pretty close – where you may be less than 25 per cent or on that 25 per cent over/under bubble, there could be other factors coming into play. One of the things I don't like sort of being pigeonholed into is: "We've always done it that way" or "We've never tried it another way." I just hope that we have some open minds in terms of what's the best version of governance for us. If you look at it, no democracy is perfect. The whole rep-by-pop situation – look at the situation in the States, where they have an Electoral College where the most populated states cannot dictate who's President. They have a geographical area, so their more sparse areas still contribute to the election of their President.

What I have to say is that rural Alberta is as different to urban Alberta as western Canada is to eastern Canada and Ontario and Quebec versus Alberta and Saskatchewan, and having one region dictate or control the governance of a region as vast as Alberta presents some interesting challenges for governance. The federal system at least has a check and balance of a geographical second House. I'm not going to get into the whole discussion on the usefulness or lack thereof of the Senate in today's Canadian parliamentary system, but what I'd like to do is – there's a check and balance. That check and balance has failed us as well.

I recently had – and I put some other points there – a discussion on Alberta governance from a rural and urban perspective, that even within the Legislature things could be changed around if you had a nonpartisan urban caucus and a rural caucus and talk about a double majority so that legislation that comes out of that House has to pass a majority of urban caucus members and rural caucus members, nonpolitically affiliated, to get good governance. Therefore, a low-income social housing bill couldn't be defeated by rural MLAs that have zero impact or effect just in the same manner that perhaps a, how should we say, wonderfully thought out and impeccably crafted farm bill could be passed by urban MLAs that have never stepped foot on a farm or wouldn't know the difference between a harrow and an air seeder. We have a real split, a dichotomy in urban and rural thinking, and that's one of the things that we wanted to have a look at.

A second means beyond the set of inputs of rep by pop not be the only area. One of the things where I'd like to expand this – and I've got the numbers here. Same thing: 4.2 million Albertans, and we carve out 87 areas, give or take. You know, that roughly allowable plus or minus 25 per cent: we know we have rural areas that push the 25 per cent boundary. We have a large province with cities, mountainous regions. You guys were stuck in Peace River. You know how vast the north is. We have ridings in constituencies in this province that are larger than some European countries. One MLA: that's a tough job. If we are the only people-based rep-by-pop system, the one-dimensional approach maybe doesn't totally serve us better.

Where I was going on this is that if we take a look at provincial property assessment as an example and economics of rural-urban life, a difference there, in many cases rural assessment – and I'm combining industrial, residential, farmland, et cetera – outweighs or may be higher than urban assessment. Now, I'm going to say that in the county where I work – I work for a county – our total assessment just of our county alone is 10 times that of our three urban centres within. Ten times. We have a council of seven. They have a combined council of 17 of the three centres. There are 24 councillors for just one county. If you take a look at, for instance, this constituency here, you've got MD of Provost, MD of Wainwright, counties of Beaver, Flagstaff, parts of the county of Camrose. You could have up to possibly 50 to 100 municipal councillors represented by one MLA. In Edmonton, on the other

hand, you have 12 aldermen, 19 MLAs. Who has already better access to government in terms of policy direction? Yet the impact, the economic impact of decisions that come out of the Leg. for us in rural Alberta is staggering.

If you took a look at per capita property assessment and put it into a per capita figure, our population per capita figure dwarfs those of many urban areas. It's just a point that I'd like to consider, that when these rural MLAs represent areas with a much higher assessment, we're subject to pretty severe economic impacts of votes. Therefore, if there was ever a reason to say that this 25 per cent less than the average is justifiable, what we bring to the table in terms of contribution to the provincial economy, contribution to the wealth of the province I think should be factored in. It's worth considering.

I do have some points specifically on the boundaries and stuff. That's my last page that I'll close off with. Basically, that's where I look, the areas with 25 per cent fewer people on average, but what we're bringing to the table in terms of industry and economics warrants, I think, that our representation to be maintained is justified.

In 25 years of working in rural Alberta myself for an MD or a county, I've seen the disputes between urban centres and rural MDs over cost sharing and disagreements from recreation, policing, fire protection, and many others. I've also seen great regional agreements, that people worked together in those areas. But one factor remains: rural Alberta area governments have a much higher expense threshold and scale than what urbans do. For instance, in a county with a \$50 million budget, \$40 million of that is going to be for public works: roads, bridges, expenses. It's a different life and different means of operations in rural Alberta than it is within city boundaries. Cities have different responsibilities, too: highways, everything with them; transit, everything with them. We don't deal with those types of issues, but we have our own different issues.

Rural areas are also far more expensive to govern provincially, to represent provincially. That's where I would stress to not make larger ones in the rural areas because that's going to make it more expensive. I'll use a couple of comparisons I've got here. If you use Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Glenora, or Edmonton-Mill Woods – I'm just using them as examples – most of the people in Edmonton-Centre can walk across their constituency in 30 minutes, and I'm not talking speed walking or marathon walking. I'm just talking that they could take a stroll, and in probably 30 minutes they could walk across their riding, which in some cases might be 20 blocks.

Three rural areas here – Vermilion-Lloydminster to the north, this one, and Drumheller-Stettler to the south – are probably two and half to three hours to drive from one end to the other, and in wonderful weather like this you can imagine from November to March what representing these areas is like. This is just our area here. If you go up to the north, like you said – Fort Mac, Wood Buffalo, Grande Prairie, the Peace area – we don't have the luxury of taking a bus. We don't have the transit, although someone has mentioned that we probably should look at that. In some large, expansive areas MLAs have to have two or three suboffices. That gets expensive for us to be represented at that scale.

An MLA town hall meeting in Mill Woods would have thousands of people living within a five-minute drive of that hall. If you were to have a town hall meeting in this constituency in, say, Sedgewick or Edgerton, you would have people driving hours just to perhaps reach hundreds of people. That's how vast we are, and we're not even one of the more sparsely populated ones, as you guys will see and have seen already. You can attest to the size of Alberta. We are a unique place.

The thing about rural Albertans is that we don't demand many things. We accept many things, but we don't demand many things.

We just prefer to be treated fairly and decently. We already live with and accept a governance system that, unlike our urban neighbours, gives us large travel distances to health care centres, even further travel distances to health care specialists, our extraordinary wait times for fire departments, ambulances. I had it told to me that if you're, for instance, in Chauvin, an ambulance is going to take 80 minutes to respond for an ambulance call there. How is that fair? EMS is a whole different ball of wax. I'm just saying that we put up with these.

It gives us reduced policing patrols, response times for break-ins in rural Alberta. When the economy turns down, what happens? We hear about these stories of Saskatchewan farmers arming themselves in their combines and grain trucks. That's not far away, and I can't say that I haven't heard rumours of some Albertans doing the same because things can happen in rural areas, where you know there is no police coverage. It makes our children travel tens and dozens of miles to go to school. As rural schools get closed, they get consolidated and bused into larger centres. The list goes on. You could talk about running to town for groceries, banking, hockey games, et cetera. I would say: please don't remove or reduce our ability to be represented and add onto that list, where it makes it harder.

7:30

I think our right to access our government rep and MLA should be no different than for someone in an urban riding. We already accept the fact that we may be an hour to go see his constituency office. We accept that, but let's not make it any more by making larger rural ridings. That's part of what we face, part of what I think rural Alberta brings to the table.

A couple of specific points on where the Battle River-Wainwright boundaries would be. The formations of highways 13 and 14 in this constituency have been historic. This is going back. I'm even going back to, like, my father's involvement and stuff like that in provincial politics, way back in the '70s and '80s. Highways 13 and 14: that's our corridor. I've played hockey in all of those centres. I've golfed and played ball in all of those centres. That's just natural; even some of our leagues used to be organized along there.

Viking and Kinsella, while they're on highway 14, are conspicuous by their absence. If you take a look at that dip right there in the middle of the map, I mean, it was chunked out of there. You may go back, if you wanted to, to the notes from the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission meeting and find out perhaps why, but I'm not sure that all the reasons are going to be contained in there because I've had it on good notice from a previous MLA that there were some differences between the MLA here and the MLA to the north, and there was some boundary drawing as a result of some issues there.

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you because I don't want to miss this point. I'm not familiar with where Kinsella is. What constituency is it in?

Mr. Pawsey: With Viking, it's in Vermilion-Lloydminster. It's inside that block that's chunked out there.

In much the same manner, the boundary line is right at the bottom of the town of Tofield, which is also on highway 14. Usually, for a lot of people up here, it's the last pit stop before we hit Edmonton going into the city. We've played hockey there. I've coached in there. It's part of the area. But, again, like you said, there's a ripple effect with boundaries and how that may affect the constituency to the north. With Tofield, one of the things that you could look at is bringing it back in with Viking and Kinsella.

If you brought them in, then that brings into the discussion things in the west end, going to Bashaw, because Bashaw is even closer to my area, where I'm at now. Bashaw is on the west end of the constituency, and I can tell you they are very closely related to the Wetaskiwin-Ponoka area in terms of everything that their community does. So that's something to consider.

On the north side of Camrose, the west end, the little chunk out is the city of Camrose, right smack dab in the middle. On the northwest side of this constituency, where Camrose is, if you go northwest to Camrose, it's still in here, and you've got Hay Lakes and New Sarepta. They're in separate constituencies, but realistically they're five minutes apart. So that's something.

The Chair: They more logically should be with Camrose-Wetaskiwin. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Pawsey: In that area. At least, whatever constituency New Sarepta is in, Hay Lakes could be in the same. That's a possibility. You know, again, it's all give-and-take. It's crunching numbers. It's moving, like you said, strings on a map, drawing pencil lines with a ruler. Those are just some of the specific ideas as far as boundaries.

I just hope that the whole discussion of what rural Alberta brings to the table in terms of representation and governance and that – you know, there are always ways to evolve our own system of governance. Rep by pop is the cornerstone, but where we have these large discrepancies, maybe other factors need to be factored in for, say, an area that has less than 25 per cent. You've got areas that may have closer to 50 per cent or 40 per cent because of their sparseness, but what do they bring to the table in terms of resource development or industry? An impact of a vote can be just as significant and serious to them and their residents as it is if you're in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

That's basically the gist of my presentation. I hope that I've maybe – I don't know – struck some chords or had some thinking outside the box kind of go along, and I appreciate the chance to present this. I actually thank you guys for the amount of miles and hours that you're going to put into seeing all corners of this great province.

The Chair: It's already been very interesting.

I'm going to kick off with the first question. It's totally off your topic, but because you live in Drumheller and we're going there tomorrow, I don't want to miss the opportunity to ask a living Drumheller constituency resident while I've got one. Just looking at the numbers I've got, Drumheller is at 37,852, so it's about 12,000 people below the provincial average. It's 23 per cent, so it's very close to the border as well. Have you given any thought to the boundary? We haven't made up our minds on anything. We haven't any preset view. We haven't any thoughts. Actually, because this is our second week on the road, we're just now for the first time looking seriously at your area. If it turned out that we found that we had no option but to vary the borders of Drumheller-Stettler, have you given any thought to how they could be varied, just as you've run us through the very helpful ideas you're offering for this constituency?

Mr. Pawsey: Well, I'm just trying to look up there to see where their western boundary goes. I can kind of see a little bit of the line there, which kind of looks like it's highway 21 or something – I don't know – going down there. Drumheller-Stettler is a little bit unique in the fact that you have all of the special areas contained within. You have special areas 2, 3, and 4. Special area 4 is, like, over in the Consort-Oyen area, against the border. Special area 3,

then, comes from there, I guess more from Oyen, Youngstown. Then 2, I believe, is Hanna. Like, that's the Hanna area.

I would say that the bulk of the population, when you look in the Drumheller-Stettler area, is basically on highway 12, which is the Consort through Castor and Stettler highway. Then you go down to highway 9 or whichever highway – I'm not sure – goes from Hanna over to Oyen and Youngstown. Then from Hanna it cuts through north of Drumheller and turns in. Like, highway 9 goes through Drumheller. That's a pocket there where you have the northern half of that constituency already having, I would dare say, probably 75 per cent of the population.

All you have to do is drive from here to Taber. When you go south of Hanna at Cactus Corner there, there's a reason that there's a sign there that says: no services for the next 108 kilometres. When you're riding a bike, you have to watch your gas and make sure that you're either making it from there or you're filling up at Cactus Corner. It's an area that is pretty sparse. I mean, in some cases they don't even really need fences on the side of the roads because the pronghorn antelope don't use them anyway, and there's no cattle. It's a pretty sparse area.

If you go over to Oyen and south, down through the MD of Acadia, or you get down there on the back side of Brooks, north of Medicine Hat, that whole area is pretty sparse. Then you're coming up against I think it's Strathmore-Brooks, the constituency to the south. Now, there you're getting a little bit more into some more of the populated areas. There is a huge expanse of unpopulated territory there, so that one might pose some interesting things for you.

Honestly, I know the north part of that constituency. I don't know the south part. I've been in Castor for nine years, and I work in our county, and that's kind of where we are, so that's about the extent of my expertise.

The Chair: Okay. Other questions?

Mrs. Day: If we came up where that jog out is in the north, is there a population there, really? Is there a little village or anything? I know there are probably some farmers there, but is there a population there? Will it make a difference to your numbers?

Mr. Pawsey: In the blot around where Viking is absent? Yeah. You've got Viking and Kinsella, and Viking is a good part of Beaver county. You're going to have some residents there within Beaver county. I'm just guessing by their hockey town rating, their size. I think Viking is 1,200 or 1,300. I think they're bigger than a thousand. Kinsella is probably more of the village size. I don't know those numbers, but you would have some population there within that area of the map.

Mrs. Day: Thank you.

The other thing I would suggest. I would be curious. We have a laminated map at the back. If you wouldn't mind just drawing on that, and they'll then take a photo of the suggestions and keep them on file. When we're looking at them, it helps. You had a lot of words, and I'm sure they have that really well recorded, but it would be nice to see it visually if you wouldn't mind.

The Chair: We've got a laminated map of the county back there. Aaron, our clerk, is going to give you a marker. If you go and add the parts that you've suggested to bring up the population, he'll take a photo of that before he erases it at the end of the meeting, and that photo will be attached to your submission as part of your submission, okay? We'll have it to look at when we come to our deliberations.

7:40

Mr. Pawsey: One last little thing that I just kind of skipped over and would like to mention. If you also look on the very southwestern corner, there's a little jog where the Battle River goes up and then jogs over and then comes back down, right by the word "Ponoka." That is township road 410. If you were to go straight across to the east, you would include the village or town of Donald, which is also very much attached to that whole Bashaw-Forestburg-Daysland-ish kind of area. It's not a deal-breaker, a game-breaker, but it would end up with a lot more in population. You know, it's as important, I guess, as Bashaw. Then, again, you're going to take that out of Drumheller-Stettler. Like you said, there are ripple effects no matter what you do. But, definitely, when you're talking about corridors and communities and those that work together and play together, all that kind of stuff, Donald is as much a part of that strip from Bashaw as any other place.

Mr. McLeod: A quick question. You talked about Viking-Kinsella. Would that split a county up? Would it be in a different county?

Mr. Pawsey: No. Actually, I don't know the exact county boundaries, but I'm going to guess that it probably would be more inclusive of Beaver county.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. How about the south part?

Mr. Pawsey: I think you already have a bit of a split there with the county of Stettler. Some might be in this one; some is down there. But with Donald, yeah, there might be a little bit out of the north tip of the county of Stettler. That is where Donald would be.

Mr. McLeod: It's just that we've had one presentation that said: try not to split counties up if you could.

Mr. Pawsey: And that might be part of the tip of the county of Stettler, because I know we're talking about regional waterlines right now.

Mr. McLeod: All right. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other questions?

All right. Thanks. If I may say, your suggestions about the constituency boundaries are particularly helpful for us because we're not familiar, certainly, with the area like you are. When we get back and we're having our meeting and we're going through everything, if we've got specific suggestions, it'll be particularly helpful to us, so thanks very much for giving it that careful thought.

Mr. Pawsey: Okay. Thank you for giving us all the opportunity to do this. It's been interesting. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. All right. Mr. Ron Plett. Hi. Could you tell us where you reside, in which constituency?

Mr. Plett: For sure. My wife is sitting right behind me, and the two of us are from Vermilion-Lloydminster. Thank you very much for the opportunity to come, and we invite you back to Lloydminster next time.

My wife and I have lived on the prairies all of our lives. We've lived in Alberta for over 40 years. Half of our time in Alberta has been spent in the more urban areas, including the large urban areas. The other half of our Alberta years has been spent in the more rural regions, as we are now. We live just outside of the city of Lloydminster on a farm.

Somewhat like the previous presenter, yes, representation by population is very important. I read some of the comments online,

some of them very interesting. It's an important part of our democratic society that we live in. But I'd like to suggest, as you already heard, that there is much, much more to our population's representation in Edmonton than just population.

You used the word "effective" in your little card you mailed to us. Actually, it was quite a big card. You read it. It was up on the screen a couple of times. You emphasized a lot of stuff. I did read the legislation, but I didn't study it super closely. You talked about a lot of stuff in there, but you did mention that you have the right to go plus or minus 25 per cent. I'm sorry you didn't talk about that a bit more because that is definitely one of the four that I saw on there, so please keep that in mind.

Let's move on to some specific points and go from there. Today over 50 per cent of Alberta's ridings are urban, yet 90 per cent of Alberta's resource revenue comes from non-urban ridings. Alberta's non-urban regions subsidize urban benefits. So I ask: please do not reduce our non-urban proportional representation in Edmonton.

Number two, we are thankful. We are thankful that in our non-urban riding we have a secondary educational institution like Lakeland College. We're thankful that we have very good basic health care in our region. Yes, we acknowledge that all of Alberta's regions benefit from the major educational institutes, the research that's done, the medical facilities, and even the big shopping malls that exist in the urban ridings. We benefit from them. However, where does the funding come from for our health and so on? On average it takes all of Alberta's personal income taxes, all of our corporate taxes, and, in the average year, most of Alberta's non-urban resource revenue to pay for our education, health, and social programs. Again, the non-urban areas help the urban ones. So we're asking: would you please help us?

By the way, I'll give you a copy of this, and you'll see that I've done some homework, I mean, not quite as much as my learned colleague from – man, oh, man, he was impressive. But I have researched some of it, and I've referenced some of it.

Number three, in our case our mid-west region's road system is battered every day by heavy truck traffic hauling natural resources to market. That's because our oil is heavier than average and cannot be readily pipelined, especially in our region. The Alberta government collects resource revenue from this oil, and when we ask for some extra money back to help maintain our roads because we have to have more trucks than average, the answer comes back: no. This is disappointing. Without strong regional representation who is going to stand up for us? Who will?

Number four, resources, and here comes a little bit of a definition of what I classify as resources. Alberta is largely made up of four blocks. Our resources include agriculture, forestry, mining, and oil and gas. Those are the base drivers of our first-world economy and our first-world standard of living. They're all produced in the non-urban areas of Alberta. Yes, urban industry is super important, but those industries exist to the extent that regional resources first create a base economy. Eroding our rural voice by shifting and manipulating electoral boundaries takes away fair representation from the very Albertans who make up the basic building blocks of our province's and our nation's economy. So I ask you to consider this.

Those of us in the non-urban ridings desire to see Alberta's economy distributed throughout the province, and this takes a lot of promotion, a lot of hard work. Without fair representation in Alberta's Legislature who's going to effectively promote our regional interests and our economic development?

Number six, we welcome all Albertans to come and share the lakes and rivers and forests of our non-urban regions, but, again, who in the Alberta Legislature can best represent the people living in those regions? We need strong representation, too, in Edmonton

because we are left responsible to maintain the environment that those areas are located in.

7:50

Number seven, the creativity and adaptability of people in the rural areas have contributed greatly to Alberta's provincial economy, to Alberta's environmental protection, and to our overall corporate success. Diverse ideas are often driven by individual regions. Ideas that work in one region don't necessarily work in all regions. But as we work together co-operatively, without one region dictating to another, we encourage progress for all Albertans.

An example of that would be the rural initiative that's, to this day, benefiting all of Alberta, the ALUS program, which was initiated out of the county of Vermilion River. The ALUS, which stands for alternative land use services, helps to improve our drinking water quality, it helps to manage runoff water, it helps to manage flooding, and the financial benefits of it stay in Alberta. Strong rural understanding and representation is important to help projects like these continue to develop for the benefits of all of Alberta.

Lastly – and you heard a little bit about this already – this is a little bit of a political comment universal to all of us as Albertans. When we look at the federal electoral scene, we in Alberta often decry the lack of representation we have in Ottawa. So let's practise what we preach right here at home in Alberta and make sure that non-urban regions have strong representation in the Alberta Legislature.

Again, in conclusion, I ask you: please do not reduce our non-urban regional proportional representation in the Legislature. Your support with this will help to promote co-operativeness; it will help to promote harmony and hope for all of us as Albertans.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I assure you that we haven't made our mind up. We haven't even, with all respect, given this area particular thought until we're here for the first time right now. But I've asked everybody who's presented, last week and this week, the same question unless they happen to answer it during their presentation like the last presenter did. So I'm going to ask you that question, and if you don't want to answer it or can't answer it, just fine, but, I mean, I don't want to miss the opportunity to ask you. Looking at our map here we see that Vermilion-Lloydminster has, estimated, 17 per cent lower than the provincial average. If we found that we had no choice but to move a boundary, to increase the size of the population within the constituency, do you have any suggestions for where we might do that?

Mr. Plett: The first answer, oh, already has been presented, but I happen to know about it personally because of how I've worked within it, and that is the Viking-Kinsella block, that dangles down into the Battle River-Wainwright constituency. It would, I think, in many ways, more naturally fit in with Battle River. Here's a suggestion for you. Why don't you just do that? Then that puts us within the region, very close; both of them will then be within your 25 per cent limit, and you're good to go.

The Chair: If it were only that simple. We've got the rest of the province to do, too, you know. It's all a ripple effect; one ripples over to the next one.

We don't want to miss suggestions just like that one, which we wouldn't have known about unless somebody mentioned it here.

Questions? Any questions? Okay.

Thanks so much for your presentation.

Mr. Plett: You're welcome.

The Chair: Rhonda Nickerson is next. Ms Nickerson? Okay.

Donna Buelow. Sorry; I've massacred your name.

Mrs. Isaman: Hi. Deputy Mayor Buelow is from the town of Hardisty. I'm the town secretary. She has laryngitis, so she's asked me to come here with her as a support person and also to speak on behalf of her. Thank you for being here today. I want to recognize Wes Taylor, our MLA, and any other elected officials that are present as well as Donna this evening.

In preparation for this opportunity to address the commission, it was necessary to understand their recent past. The interim report from 2010: it's noteworthy that the list of presenters included several of the members of the Legislative Assembly, multiparty constituency associations, municipalities, school authorities, and many private citizens. I know that you've all had a chance to review that report, I'm sure.

The final report from June 2010 acknowledges that related to the thoughts and ideas that were shared, both the written submissions and the presentations, the perspectives, just like today, were generally related to the residency of the presenters. We're not going to sit here in Battle River-Wainwright and talk to you about Edmonton, and Edmonton is not going to talk to you about us. Keeping that in mind, it's paramount to remember that the purpose of the right to vote is protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights. It's not equality of voting power; it's the right of effective representation, which you said in your introduction.

As part of the presentation in the 2009-10 commission the AAMDC stated that "rural constituents are located hours away from their representative and increasing these distances will only make representation more difficult." We know that. The interim report also identified, perhaps rather unexpectedly at the time, that residents in rural ridings anticipate the presence of, even have a personal relationship with, their MLA whereas residents in the more urban or metro ridings neither expect it nor desire that relationship the way it's done in rural Alberta.

Further in that report it says – pardon me. No, it did not say – this is not a quote, but while not specifically noted, it is alluded to in the report that due to the vast area in their domain, school authorities in rural ridings contend with the challenges of having two or more members, and those members have the challenge of representing four or more school authorities. A most odd element is how that fact is stated in the report. It declares that while urban members have fewer school authorities, they are challenged – this is a quote – by "maintaining relations with a number of community leagues or associations, business revitalization zones and other identifiable organizations." What is not stated is that rural members have the very same challenges in addition to the multiple school authorities, including Elks halls, Legions, all those community groups that want a little piece of their attention.

The interim report clearly identified the significant demands from constituents in the urban ridings as "dependent on social programs, increasing numbers of new immigrants and aboriginal people" and the capacity of constituency offices to deal with the concerns of constituents, and this needs to be addressed. The final report supports that, but I don't see where that's been addressed since that time in 2010.

The final report from 2010 again acknowledges that while "not possible in all cases . . . the Commission attempted to reduce the fragmentation of municipal boundaries resulting from the existing divisions." That specifically noted that "the recommendations respected the boundaries of both Calgary and Edmonton" with the acknowledgement that existing boundaries from the previous commissions are even more important now with the work of the MGA review declaring the importance of partnerships and

collaborations to value and support and make way for the continuity of that work.

The use of the 25 per cent quotient, while representative of the population base, does not address the similarities in neighbouring metro and urban ridings which currently have a single MLA to represent them. The conversations about the rural, urban, metro divide are often the same, with each of us expressing, "They have more say than us" or "We have less say than them." The thing is – the "theys" and the "thems" and the "wes" and the "theys" – we're all Albertans, and we all need to be fairly represented.

It's worthy to consider that this commission has a capacity to recommend a total redesign of the boundaries and still be respectful of the partnerships and collaborations that exist. I recognize that the first presenter had some really great ideas, as Todd usually does. This is a new one. The work that began south and north of highway 13 between secondary highways 855, 881, and 872, currently known as Flagstaff county, is dependent on one voice in government.

8:00

This important region rests at the very edge of the current Battle River-Wainwright. Any shift in the boundaries to that area needs to be thoroughly investigated, please. The demographic of this region more closely aligns with the neighbours to the north and east, so Vermilion-Lloydminster, rather than to the west, that area by Camrose.

Looking at the current boundaries map and considering the commission's own population counts from the 2011 census and a 2016 estimate, the drop in the Battle River-Wainwright population was more than 2 per cent, as, certainly, was recognized by the introduction. Upon further review, Battle River-Wainwright is the only one of the 87 that showed any decline for the '16 estimate. We're the only one.

The findings of the 2009-10 commission stated that due consideration was given to the importance of population as a factor in "effective representation,"

but no term of reference was provided for due consideration. It's likely that the deliberation at that time given to population was the most significant, and I hope that isn't always the case for this commission.

From the final report:

Future Commissions will need to consider . . . the reaction in central Alberta [as] indicative of the impassioned responses that can be expected.

Again from that report:

The Legislative Assembly needs to seriously consider how the urban/rural perspectives will be addressed in the future. The Commission believes that this is a province-wide issue which will have to be addressed, probably before the next Commission . . .

this commission,

. . . is appointed.

While we as a municipality have sought to find out if this province-wide issue has been addressed by the Assembly as recommended seven years ago, we've been unable to find that report. As late as this morning the Legislative Library had found no report or summary prepared by the Legislative Assembly or government or any discussion paper that addresses this urban-rural perspective as it relates to the electoral boundaries. So if you find that report, I'd love to read it.

The work that's done with a Flagstaff county organization called Flagstaff intermunicipal partnership – significant work has been done since 2007. They are moving forward with the aid of funding through Municipal Affairs, significant dollars, and any division of Flagstaff county would be detrimental to that really progressive work. It's our understanding that the province is looking at the work

being done through the Flagstaff intermunicipal partnership and the project as a template for regionalization, and that piece of regional governance is really going to be the future, the progress of all these small rural ridings.

We haven't talked about this. I'm sure you're going to ask the same question. I think that the town of Hardisty would recommend that if the boundary has to move based on that 25 per cent, it move in the northeast rather than the southwest. Having said that, highway 12 with Stettler, that's in the Drumheller region now, is a good fit, too, to expand ever so slightly to the northeast, and that little drop in the most western, southern part of that boundary might make sense just in terms of the demographics of those populations. They make sense with us in Battle River-Wainwright, but then you're just having to push everything else north, right?

So good luck, and thank you very much.

The Chair: We won't let you get away without marking your suggestions on our map, too, so that we understand them and later we can follow them.

I'll ask if any of the other commissioners have any questions.

Mr. McLeod: You talked about a regional partnership group. Can you go through the people that are in that again? I missed it.

Mrs. Isaman: It's Flagstaff county, and it's the municipalities within that county. It would be Killam, Sedgewick, Hardisty, Loughheed, Strome, Daysland, Forestburg, Heisler, Alliance, and all of Flagstaff county. They have a municipal space as well. Strome and Galahad have both very recently given up their village standing and are now part of the county. They made that decision. It went to their residents, and they voted that the work of the Flagstaff intermunicipal partnership and also the specific project – there's a website called Flagstaff United that has lots of information. I believe that town council plans to submit a written report as well, so I'm not going to leave my chicken scratch notes here with Donna. They will submit that for sure, and they'll include the link to that Flagstaff United website.

The Chair: Okay. That'd be great. Anybody here who after we're finished today thinks about other things that they think they should have mentioned or what have you: please, any time before February 8 send us a submission on our website or by e-mail. That would be very gratefully received.

Mrs. Isaman: Thank you for the grace to let my voice speak. I tried to be soft and gentle, but . . .

The Chair: Oh, no. You know, I have to confess that I didn't quite catch your name.

Mrs. Isaman: Oh, that's quite all right.

The Chair: The anonymous woman.

Mrs. Isaman: Nobody in this room explain that situation. I'm here in stature. I'm not wearing anybody else's hat.

The Chair: Okay. Don't forget the map at the back.

Okay. Has Rhonda Nickerson appeared?

Then we'll go to Wes Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you and good evening. It's kind of an honour to be here. I'm the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright. I live here in Wainwright, so I have kind of a good feel for it, and as I've driven around since the election, like you say, I have a better feel for this community than I had before.

The objective I think for yourselves and everybody else is to make sure that everybody is fairly represented, and that's what my concern will be tonight, making sure that we're going to have fair representation throughout our riding. You'll have to make a decision on how you're going to make it so it's going to be fair for all 87 ridings. The challenge for you, I think, is quite immense, so thank you for taking this on and thank you for letting your names stand and go forward.

I'm here, you know, just to represent the constituents regarding the proposed boundary changes. There was a 25 per cent, as I understand, plus/minus that you can have as the change, but we want to make sure that within this change we have an effective government. It was said many times already – and in fact I could pretty much just say "ditto" to what everybody said and get up and walk away because they've done such a great job in presenting.

My riding is about 225 kilometres one way as I kind of drive it – and I have that feeling of it – and about 150 kilometres the other way, and roughly 17,500 square kilometres in the riding itself. That's quite a bit of travel that a person has to take in. There are about 46 communities that I'm privileged to be able to go and visit. They're not towns anymore, but they are still a community. They might have a 100th anniversary celebration, they might have a parade, they might have some other celebration that I've been invited to, so there's quite a bit of travel that's involved in this whole process. There are also 23 towns that are still active with their municipalities, and there are six counties, with Provost, Wainwright, Flagstaff, Beaver, Camrose, and Wetaskiwin that all have a bit of it.

The geography presents many issues, particularly in respect to engaging with the constituents and to have to meet with the local councils. Frankly, there are a lot of local councils and a lot of councillors that you meet with on a regular basis. I'd be happy if you'd be able to keep that in mind as we go forward.

8:10

Travel time: it's a challenge, especially around holidays. As an MLA part of your job is to go and visit. July 1 is a particular one. A lot of people want to see the MLA come to their town to celebrate. Especially this year, being the 150th year, I'm getting a lot of requests to go to different communities. Last year I went to Provost, which is on the east side, and then I went over to Edgerton. After Edgerton I went and spent the evening in Wainwright. I can't spend a lot of time in each community, but effectively on these kinds of days that's all you have time for, perhaps two or three, maybe four communities out of all the communities I just mentioned, and your time has run out. If you're trying to make it all the way from Provost to Bashaw, Killam, or to Daysland, that's not going to happen if I'm going to include other communities like Chauvin or Edgerton and whatnot.

Despite the size of the riding, what we have as an advantage, I think, is that we're fairly homogeneous in the nature of our constituents. For the most part they are engaged in agriculture or the oil industry, so I can understand what the concerns are. The riding as it sits: the concerns are fairly similar, and you can relate to them. That's a helpful thing for me.

That brings me to the next point, the integrity of the existing boundaries. We don't have to keep it exactly the way it is. When we talked about that before, we talked about putting in Viking and putting in Kinsella. That's very logical to me as I'm driving back and forth to Edmonton. Anybody that travels up and down highway 14 goes through Viking and Kinsella. It's just a natural one. I could just stop there. It would be that simple. That does not add anything more as an MLA. It doesn't add anything more for travel time because it already exists in part of my travels.

Tofield, as you go further up the road, highway 14: on one side they've got the golf course. That's my part of the riding. The actual town is not part of the riding. Would it take much more to include Tofield, and would that take much more time as an MLA to have to work with the people in that part of the constituency? No. That's a simple way to add that on to there.

The Chair: Can I interrupt? Which constituency does Tofield belong to?

Mr. Taylor: We're talking about Battle River-Wainwright, but we're talking, again, about Vermilion-Lloydminster when you're talking about Viking and Kinsella. Then it's – now I got to put my glasses back on. Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, Jessica Littlewood's riding, has Tofield in it.

The majority of the constituents say that they're not in favour of what would be termed a rural riding, so we're taking in the rural and the urban ridings and the city-rural mix. Right now we have a fairly good mix, like you say, with the population and the people and the thought processes. The local decision-making by local people is far stronger and a better way to manage resources, aspirations, and expectations within what we currently have. While the riding is large, the issues and mindsets of the citizens are often shared, and to expand into a rural riding would create more problems than it would solve.

The most recent census – I'm sure you're well aware of the censuses – showed that just over 50 per cent of Alberta's population lives in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. As such, the cities are at most entitled to, in my opinion, 44 out of the 87 seats – right? – which they currently have. For the people that are in the cities, for them to go 10 minutes this way or 10 minutes that way, they've met with all their riding. For us it's, you know, two to three hours before I can go from one corner to the other corner. For me to stop in each town: it doesn't happen that you can do that in one run. You have to make this a several-day approach.

Then town council meetings are another kind of a concern. Because town council meetings happen on either Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, you can't just try to mix and match and get more than one done at any given time.

I'm trying to be brief with this. In short, like I said, I would like to see the boundaries, if we're going to expand, expand into those ones. As I'm driving up highway 21, I go past Hay Lakes, and then there's New Sarepta, that's just five minutes to the north of Hay Lakes. It would seem like a natural kind of part to include. Going back to the previous comments, I'm travelling from Forestburg to Bashaw. Then I travel through the Drumheller-Stettler riding, and there is on that same road Donalda, but Donalda is not part of my riding. It just would seem a natural boundary. When you talk about boundaries that seem to be natural, when you talked about Saskatchewan, well, highways make a natural boundary as well. That's why I talk about Donalda, I talk about New Sarepta, I talk about Tofield – Tofield goes down highway 14 – and Viking and Kinsella.

Those are, I guess, my main concerns and my main solutions. I think the presenters here tonight are all in kind of agreement that that's kind of what this probably should look like, and it would probably bring our population up to that 25 per cent or less, which would meet and qualify what your concerns are.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Questions?

Ms Livingstone: I had just one. When I have the opportunity to have MLAs in front of us, I try to give them the opportunity to

answer things that other MLAs have said. We've heard some themes coming out about sort of the resourcing of MLAs in rural areas. When we were up in Peace River, the MLA for the area said that distance isn't as much of a concern for her if her constituency is properly resourced so that she could have multiple constituency offices and things like that. Is that something that would help you or satisfy any of your concerns about the distances within your riding, if you had the opportunity for multiple offices?

Mr. Taylor: Well, multiple offices for myself would probably be almost more problematic if I have too many because then I have to manage those resources in more than one place. For myself – I'm speaking just on a personal basis – I would rather go meet with the people in those ridings, whether it be Killam, whether it be Hardisty, whether it be Bashaw, and have town hall meetings or meetings with the councils and have fewer people to have to manage.

Ms Livingstone: Yeah. I imagine there's an element of sort of the nature of any given riding that factors into that, but I wanted to just get MLA input there.

Mr. Taylor: Okay.

Mrs. Day: I had a couple of questions for you. Thank you for your presentation, first of all, and being here tonight with us.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

Mrs. Day: You mentioned – how many municipal councils do you work with? I didn't catch that.

Mr. Taylor: The municipalities? We have about 23 that we work with.

Mrs. Day: Twenty-three municipalities.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Towns.

Mrs. Day: Okay. Maybe that's why I missed it. It was larger than I heard before.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. If you put it that way.

Mrs. Day: Then if you added four more – anyway, I was going to have the office question, too. But the other thing that we've heard in the city ridings, of course, is: rep by pop and having equal weight to the votes in the city as opposed to those in the rural areas. Your short answer to that would be – okay. So this person is saying: "Democracy is the most important, and having democracy, we need to have equal votes. My one vote in the city should be the same as the rural vote in weight. Right now you have 25 per cent difference." How would you answer someone that would say, "well, that's not fair" or "that's not equal"?"

8:20

Mr. Taylor: That's a really good question because, you know, there are certain things that I would take from both sides. One of them is that – and it was brought up here – the heart of Alberta really is in rural Alberta. We're producing all the food that sustains the province, the grains, the meat that we need. We have all the oil, the forestry, the mining. That all happens outside of the cities, but it makes the reason for the cities to exist. What we do plays a super important part of the role that makes Alberta actually function. They're saying that they would like to have – I'm not quite sure if they want more say because they have more population or they have more than one eighty-seventh of the say. Is that what you're . . .

The Chair: It just means that the basic principle is that every Albertan's vote should have the same effect as every other Albertan's vote. If you move away from that to deal with some of the concerns that you've addressed such as the distance issue, travel, the cohesive nature of your community, that sort of thing, it leaves the city dweller with a vote that's less effective than yours. For example, somebody who lives in Edmonton would have a vote 25 per cent less effective than somebody who lives here because if the person in the Edmonton constituency was right on the constituency average – Glenora, as I know that right off the top. Let's say somebody lived in Glenora. Their vote wouldn't be as effective as yours because it would take more people in Glenora to return their MLA to office than it would in Battle River-Wainwright. So our courts have said – my court, well before I was on it – that if an Electoral Boundaries Commission does that, they should explain why the rural vote is worth the sacrifice of those people in Glenora, whose votes aren't worth as much.

Mr. Taylor: For us to be as effective as they can be in the cities is far more difficult because of the travel time. For me to get my message out, to meet with the town councils, to meet with all the individuals that are involved: it's not the same. We're not talking apples and apples or apples and oranges. We're talking about two different things altogether when you're talking rural and you're talking urban. I could set a town hall meeting if I was in the city, and you could have everybody show up there quite easily if they wanted to, but it's not practical when you're coming out to a rural riding to have that. You have to have multiples. To be able to say that their vote is less or their representation is less – it's harder for us to give that representation just because of the distance we travel. So I almost feel the opposite of what they're feeling.

The Chair: Thanks.
Anything further, Gwen?

Mrs. Day: No. I just wanted to put that out there . . .

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, I understand.

Mrs. Day: . . . because we've been everywhere – right? – and at least a couple of days in Edmonton, so we're hearing different things in different areas. It's just a really good conversation. Thank you for attempting that one.

The Chair: Anything else?
Okay. Thanks so much for coming. We're particularly grateful when MLAs come because, of course, they have first-hand experience with some of these issues. Thanks very much.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you.

The Chair: Now, we have a few more minutes left, so is there anybody else here who would like to come forward? The man in the blue shirt at the back, first. Please, sir, if you'd come and sit at the table and give your name and say what constituency you reside in.

Mr. Rock: Good evening. I'm Bill Rock, the mayor of the village of Amisk. I have an answer for your question to our MLA. Being a mayor, if I phone the Premier's office and I would like to go for coffee, usually security will meet me at the door as opposed to our mayor of Edmonton. If he phones over to the Premier's office, I'm sure that he gets granted an audience. That's equal representation.

For the small towns we have to resort to dealing with our MLA. As you heard from our MLA, Mr. Taylor, we're in a situation where for him to visit all of our town councils just once takes 29 nights

out of his year. Now, in Edmonton that would mean an MLA would have to visit council once every 19 years. As small municipal officials we have to deal more with our MLAs because we deal more with provincial budgets than the cities do. A good example is: if highway 14 doesn't get plowed, they phone the MLA's office; if Jasper Avenue doesn't get plowed, they phone the city office. It's the different levels and sizes and responses of governments across the province. With very good luck our MLA works with us, you know, very well, and so did our previous MLA.

That's where we're at.

The Chair: Forgive me. Which constituency is Amisk located in?

Mr. Rock: Battle River-Wainwright.

The Chair: Thanks.

Questions?

Okay. Just because I've asked this of every single person, if we had to increase the geographic size of Battle River-Wainwright, notwithstanding the brilliance of everybody's submissions here tonight, do you have any further suggestions for how we might do that?

Mr. Rock: The northern boundary along highway 14 totally makes sense, including the town of Tofield. The other one: if you look at the southwest corner, along the Lacombe-Ponoka area, there's a highway that crosses there and a county. If you cut that off and then took in all of the city of Camrose, you would make up your numbers very simply.

The reason the city of Camrose fits into Battle River-Wainwright quite so well is that a great many of the people that work in the city of Camrose live in the Battle River-Wainwright constituency, and a great many of the people that retire to the city of Camrose are out of the Battle River-Wainwright constituency. The people are already familiar. I know all this because I campaigned in Camrose and Wetaskiwin, and I've worked all up and down Bashaw. A lot of the people from the Bashaw area go down to Stettler to shop. You know, if you're looking at shopping and highways, those are the ones. That highway 12 is a good cut-off.

The Chair: Okay. Would you happen to know or just give us an estimate of about how many people would live in this constituency but work in Camrose?

Mr. Rock: In four of the businesses I deal with in Camrose, a hundred per cent. Like, I think one out of about 27 people that work in those businesses actually lives in the Camrose constituency. Even the people that own businesses in Camrose live in Battle River-Wainwright.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. That's an interesting suggestion.

Mr. McLeod: Quick question. The city of Camrose is urban, and all these rural folks move in there. It's almost a hybrid. I've heard a lot across the province about the rural issues: keep them separate. I've also heard: well, bring them together if you can, if it's a good fit. Are you suggesting that the city of Camrose, being a large urban area, is a good fit with the rurals?

Mr. Rock: It is in a sense. The city of Camrose is a retirement town. If you look at the demographics of the population, you'll see that Camrose probably – I think the last time I looked, it's, like, 53 years old as opposed to . . .

Mr. McLeod: Fifty-three isn't bad.

Mr. Rock: Right. But if you look at the average of Alberta, it's, like, 31.

The Chair: Would you care to speculate on the average age of its sister city, Wetaskiwin? I'm guessing it's a lot younger than 53.

Mr. Rock: Wetaskiwin is a lot younger, yes. Wetaskiwin is a better fit in Leduc-Beaumont or Drayton Valley – what is it? I can't remember what the other name is.

8:30

Ms Livingstone: Devon.

Mr. Rock: Devon. There we go. Like I say, I campaigned over there. Camrose and Wetaskiwin have nothing in common. They will not drive from Camrose to Wetaskiwin or Wetaskiwin to Camrose for anything.

Unidentified Speaker: Welcome to rural Alberta.

Mr. Rock: That does not mean we don't go to Hardisty.

The Chair: What you're suggesting, perhaps, is that people would rather go to Edmonton than to go to either of the other cities, Camrose or Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Rock: Yes. Like I say, Camrose is a retirement town if you look at the size of it and where the people come from, and a lot of them are from Daysland and surrounding areas.

The Chair: All those dairy farmers.

Mr. Rock: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

Now, there was another gentleman who had something he'd like to say.

Mr. Krips: Thank you very much, panel. My name is Rod Krips. I live in Viking, which is in Vermilion-Lloydminster, and I work for the town of Daysland, which is in Battle River-Wainwright. Just to add to some of the comments by the lady Marie, who didn't want to be identified . . .

The Chair: You've outed her.

Mr. Krips: . . . Marie did say something about the regional partnership that's in Flagstaff county, and I commend Marie for those remarks. I would just like to add a couple of comments on that partnership. As they mentioned, the towns and villages that were working on this project very hard for the last two years and some of the municipalities – namely, Heisler, Forestburg, Galahad, and Alliance – are on the very south end of Battle River-Wainwright. I wouldn't like to see, for example, the Drumheller-Stettler boundaries raised north because that would then cut into the Flagstaff county municipalities, and it may complicate some of the work that we've already done.

Also, I'd like to say a few comments about the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency and the town of Viking. Just for the record, the town of Viking has approximately 1,038 people. Since I've lived in Viking, since 1975, Viking has been represented by at least three name changes in the constituencies. I may have missed one. We were represented by Vermilion-Viking, Vegreville-Viking, and now Vermilion-Lloydminster, and the people of Viking are getting tired of being moved around. They're saying: "Just leave us alone. We like where we are in that constituency, and there's really no reason for us to be moved again into another constituency."

Viking is part of Beaver county, which includes the towns of Tofield on the west, Viking on the east, and the villages of Ryley and Holden. I know those towns and villages work very hard together, have lots of shared services agreements, and it seems to be working well. As with the county of Flagstaff, those constituencies work well together as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Okay. I'll turn to my fellow commissioners. Any questions?

No. Thank you so much.

All right. Yes. Could you come forward, sir?

Mr. Smook: Good evening. My name is Kevin Smook. I'm the reeve of Beaver county. In Beaver county we have the pleasure of being represented by four different MLAs. Mr. Taylor spoke earlier for Battle River-Wainwright. Dr. Richard Starke represents Vermilion-Lloydminster. Jessica Littlewood represents Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and there's a little tiny sliver on the very west end of Beaver county which is represented by the new Municipal Affairs minister, the now, I believe, Hon. Shaye Anderson from Leduc-Beaumont. He has maybe a mile or two of the very west end of our county. So we deal with four different MLAs. We're not unique, I don't believe, necessarily throughout the province, but it does present a little bit of a challenge.

My intention is not to upset the previous speaker, but the boundary: if you were to include Viking, with 1,038 approximately, and Kinsella, which is a hamlet in Beaver county – they had 40 people last census – and possibly Tofield, which has 2,182 people, that would bring it up over 40,000, I think, up over 41,000. I'm not sure what the magic number is, but it might move you back into the numbers it could be.

I won't take a whole lot of time, but to echo some of the thoughts from before, we're faced with the challenges, the pride of producing agriculture and oil and gas. We don't really have much forestry, I don't believe, in our region, but we certainly have some mining, which generates revenue and wealth for all of Alberta, but it also costs a lot of money to maintain the infrastructure that is required for that sector.

While I recognize that one of the questions from Commissioner Day was asking about that representation – I understand in a sense where the urban people would be coming from, but, by golly, when you have to travel and take a day off work just to see your MLA, if you're lucky enough to because the MLA will be all over the place by virtue of the sheer geography, it really puts rural Alberta at a disadvantage when the ridings get too large.

The Chair: A couple of questions.

Mr. Smook: Certainly.

The Chair: Do you have Internet connection throughout Beaver county?

Mr. Smook: Yeah. It's hit-and-miss, in parts, not solid. In the hamlet of Bruce we were at BRAED, Battle River Alliance for Economic Development – they were in Bruce at our community centre there – and they were going to promote their nice new website but couldn't get a Wi-Fi signal or a cell signal there. So there are areas where there are some drops, for sure: Bruce, Kinsella, primarily the smaller ones, and then out in, you know, the areas that are a little less populated. I myself live northwest of

Tofield, and we're fine. We have high-speed, but it's Wi-Fi out of a private company.

The Chair: Okay. If you could do our job, would you put Beaver county all in one constituency?

Mr. Smook: Yes.

The Chair: And which constituency would that be?

Mr. Smook: Well, I would guess, the way the highways follow and the county follows – basically, Beaver county straddles highway 14 going from, maybe, about seven miles west of Tofield all the way down to a little past Kinsella. That whole section straddles highway 14; it might make sense as part of Battle River-Wainwright. I respect the fact that people are sick of changing their – not allegiances, you know, but: “Where do we vote this time? What’s going on?” I understand that. Maybe we can get this right once and for all.

8:40

The Chair: Okay. I should say that I don't think polling stations have to follow constituency lines. Those schools are still there.

Mr. Smook: Yeah, I understand. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay. No, no, not at all.
Okay. A question? Anybody?
Thanks. You've been very clear.

Mr. Smook: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Would you mind going to the map and drawing a circle around Beaver county?

Everybody else who hasn't spoken yet came here tonight for a reason, and my guess is that you have thoughts and opinions on this topic, or you would have done something else this evening. I would encourage people who haven't spoken yet to come forward to the microphone and tell us what they think.

Mr. Aalbers: Good evening. I'm Gerald Aalbers. I live in the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster. I've recently been elected mayor of the city, but I've also got the unique opportunity to sit before you having lived in five different provincial constituencies in the last 25 years: Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Wainwright, Grande Prairie, Rocky Mountain House area, and, lastly, Vermilion-Lloydminster.

The Chair: Are you the mayor of Vermilion or Lloydminster?

Mr. Aalbers: Lloydminster. My main concern – and you addressed it earlier – is that the last thing, as the mayor of a city, would be to be divided. Now, that's not easy for me to say versus Mayor Iveson, who was discussed, in Edmonton. As you can appreciate, dividing our constituency through the centre of town – our city is already divided: two constituencies, two provinces, and two MPs. I can relate when people are bothered by the representation discussed by many folks already in this presentation.

I believe that you've already indicated by what you had mentioned – the natural lines have been drawn, partly by the good Lord, in the way the land has been contoured by rivers, followed by municipalities, which were here long before the cities, in many cases, or a much larger version of them. So if you're able to follow: the first speaker, who spoke about special areas 2, 3, and 4, the county of Paintearth, the county of Stettler – and the county of Starland, I believe, basically consists of the Drumheller-Stettler

riding. Those are a trading area, again, a vast area that follows the rivers, in many cases, and things like that. When you look at the Battle River-Wainwright constituency – and I believe everyone has spoken well, and I'm not going to disagree with anything – it makes sense to work with the counties because as municipal leaders we are being asked to work more and more on intermunicipal relationships with our fellow neighbouring municipalities, urban and rural.

Now, we talk about that urban split being Edmonton and Calgary mainly, but it exists in Lloydminster. We are an agricultural, oil and gas community with professionals and an urban base, but we're tied to the rural neighbours very closely. We want to work with the rural neighbours. I think everyone can appreciate that we're going to go a lot farther working together than apart, so making divisions sometimes isn't the best way, in this case, to split an urban-type arrangement.

Now, I'm using the city of Lloydminster and speaking only on my behalf. I'm not here speaking on behalf of the taxpayers, simply as the mayor.

In the case of the Vermilion-Lloydminster riding, could we go a little further north, again, following some of the natural trade routes and the natural boundaries that have been established already through the counties and MDs and the improvement districts? The recommendation I really encourage you to look at is those trading areas, as have been mentioned, highways 13 and 14 for Battle River-Wainwright. It fits the natural bill where people progress and travel, be it through schools, through business, or through whatever family relationships. Our roads all lead to Edmonton and Calgary throughout the province, north and south. It's just one of those natural corridors for a better part of the province.

You know, Grande Prairie: I won't talk about that because that's . . .

The Chair: Okay. Before you leave your own constituency, I'm just looking at my map – and I appreciate that it's not the best here – and it would appear that if we moved north, we'd be moving into Lac La Biche, St. Paul.

Mr. Aalbers: Yes. You would need to take a look at that because there's a natural boundary there. We have the North Saskatchewan River. Now, business lines do follow a little bit. Elk Point, as an example: I'm not sure where it lies. It's closer to St. Paul, as an example. I think you'd have to ask those folks for an opinion, to be honest. It's: how far do you sort of have the natural corridors? We have a couple of First Nations in there, and they act as a good divider, so working with them and ensuring that their people give you some direction as to where they see their business, medical needs, and things like that. I think that's what we need to look at, where those trade patterns really are.

The Chair: So those First Nations reserves are right now in the constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. We could bring them into Vermilion-Lloydminster. Is that what you're suggesting?

Mr. Aalbers: It's a possibility. Again, I'd hate to impose something on someone without having some input from that part of the world. I believe you're going to St. Paul, so you'll have a chance to ask.

The Chair: We were there this morning.

Mr. Aalbers: Oh, certainly. Okay.

It's a matter of finding that happy medium with Bonnyville-Cold Lake, because there's a natural trading pattern there, and that leads to St. Paul. That might be a little bit of a slice that way versus going to Lac La Biche and looking at that and just trying to contour it.

One of the challenges – and we talk about federal constituencies, some of the last dividing of the constituencies of the federal government. It sort of reminds me of Vermilion-Lloydminster in one way, that the federal constituency starts in Lloydminster and finishes in Athabasca, and you can appreciate the distance travelled there by the MP. It would be nice to cut it in square blocks. We can't do that, but to follow some sort of natural progression would make the most sense to me.

The Chair: Thank you.
Any questions?

Mr. McLeod: Just one. One of the questions we have asked: when you're looking at the city of Lloydminster, is there development coming up in the next couple of years? Do you see new housing, new whatever? I know the economics right now, but I've got to ask the question.

Mr. Aalbers: We certainly do. We certainly do. We have projections out for the next 50 years that we're definitely going to grow and grow substantially.

Mr. McLeod: How about the next eight years?

Mr. Aalbers: The next eight years: well, that would be a crystal ball, but I believe that we expect, just like most Albertans, that the economy will start to recover. The oil and gas industry will recover, and that will lead to some economic growth then. What percentage? Optimistically between 1 per cent and 2 per cent, I would think, and depending on the price of oil – everybody is a genie – would it make 3 per cent? It's a possibility. But I suspect we will see some growth, and we are going to see growth on both sides of the city, so it's growing into both provinces and into the rural area.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: As mayor you'd know if there were new housing developments approved on the Alberta side of Lloydminster. Anything there?

Mr. Aalbers: We have a great deal of property if any of you folks would like to come and join us. We'd love to pay an opportune charge to our real estate folks, and we could certainly line you up with some great property. We are extremely slow. We're not stopped, but we're a little slow.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Aalbers: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Anything else?

Mrs. Day: What would the population be in Lloydminster proper?

Mr. Aalbers: Well, let me give you some numbers. As a city we are 32,000 people. From the government of Alberta we are 20,000 people. From the government of Saskatchewan we are 12,000 people. But the city is 32,000 people strong. We'd like to help people understand that it's the most interesting place in Canada. It's two MLAs and two MPs trying to make things happen, and that's very challenging. I can really relate to the boundaries and how things are divided. It makes it very difficult for a municipal government in our province or in the province of Saskatchewan to get any legroom. We're really dealing with that 32,000 every time we do something as a city, but due to the constraints and provincial boundaries the province of Alberta recognizes us as a 20,000-person city.

The Chair: Anything else? Thanks so much.

All right. We have time for one more person. A second thought?

Mr. Plett: Yes. My comment is with regard to Onion Lake. They follow the natural boundaries and business attribution. The First Nations group of Onion Lake: you should go talk to them. My wife and I work there a fair bit. Most of it is located in Saskatchewan. However, the Alberta portion and actually the entire community consider themselves part of the Lloydminster business community, as a matter of fact so much so that even on the Saskatchewan side they follow Alberta time throughout Onion Lake. I would encourage you to go ask them directly.

8:50

The Chair: How many people live there?

Mr. Plett: The reserve has a population of about 6,000 to 7,500, but only about 4,000 live on the reserve, and then you have to divide it between Saskatchewan and Alberta. On the Alberta side I'm guessing hardly a thousand, maybe even 500.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else? All right.

Well, thanks very much for coming out and showing interest in our work. Again I'd like to remind you that our report with our interim recommendations will be up on our website and probably the Legislature's website before May 31. I hope you'll take a look at our recommendations, and if you have any further thoughts, write us or come out when we come back to this area in late July, early August.

Thanks very much.

[The hearing adjourned at 8:51 p.m.]

