



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission  
Public Hearings

Drumheller

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1 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

**Electoral Boundaries Commission**

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## **Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Drumheller**

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Lisa Hansen-Zacharuk, Councillor, Town of Drumheller

Jackie Irwin, Reporter, *Hanna Herald*

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Mark Nikota, President, Drumheller-Stettler PC Constituency Association

Norman Storch



**1 p.m.****Tuesday, January 24, 2017**

[Justice Bielby in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks very much for coming out today to this public hearing by the provincial Electoral Boundaries Commission. My name is Myra Bielby. I'm a judge of the Court of Appeal of Alberta in my day job, but at the moment I'm chairing the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce the other members of the commission. On my far left are Jean Munn of Calgary, Laurie Livingstone of Calgary, on my far right your virtual neighbour Gwen Day from Carstairs, and, truly your neighbour, Bruce McLeod from Acme.

Since the publicity started going out inviting people to these public hearings, I've got some questions from friends and family about the purpose of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, what it does, and why we're doing it now. I thought I'd start out with a thumbnail introduction. The commission has been created to research and make recommendations to the Alberta Legislature as to whether, where, and how our provincial constituency boundaries should be changed to ensure effective, proper representation by our MLAs in future provincial governments and after future provincial elections.

This commission work is needed at this time in particular because Alberta has undergone a huge increase in population over the last eight years, since 2010, the last time a provincial Electoral Boundaries Commission sat. Our population has increased by more than 800,000 people, by more than 20 per cent, since the last provincial boundaries commission, but that population has not moved in equal numbers into each of our 87 constituencies.

We have 87 provincial constituencies. We the commission have no power to increase or decrease that number. You may recall that on the last occasion the Legislature gave the boundaries commission four additional constituencies, and as a result of that they were able to deal with their increase in population. There had also been a great increase in population between 2002 and 2010. They were able to deal with it by addressing these new folks with these new constituencies. We can't do that this time. The Legislature in its wisdom has decided to keep the number at 87.

There we have our 87 provincial constituencies as they exist now, and they were drawn in that configuration by the Legislature after receiving the 2010 electoral boundaries report. That map is also behind us here on the wall, and it shows each of our current constituencies. In blue it shows the number of people who lived in that constituency in 2010, and in red it shows the number of people who are estimated to live there now.

For example, to take Drumheller-Stettler, behind me, eight years ago there were 38,094 people living in Drumheller-Stettler, which was 7 per cent below the provincial average number then of about 40,800. However, now there's been a slight drop in population; 37,852 people live here. That's become 23 per cent lower than the provincial average because of these 800,000 people moving into other constituencies but not this constituency. I suppose none of you will be surprised to hear that most of those people appear to have moved into the cities or up into the oil fields in Fort McMurray.

We all know that each constituency has one MLA. In a provincial election the voters within that constituency will vote to choose that one MLA. There are 87 MLAs as a result of 87 constituencies in the province, and our population has undergone a considerable increase since the last time. Our average population right now is estimated to be 48,884 people. That's calculated by looking at our estimated provincial population of 4.25 million and dividing 87 into it.

Statistics Canada has announced its intention to release the 2016 federal census population figures on February 8. When we get those figures, all of these numbers will be revised to actuals, so they won't be estimates anymore. They'll be actual. We don't expect to see a huge change because the current estimates are based on the 2016 municipal census data collected from across the province by the Alberta Treasury Board. There might be some change, but the principles we're discussing today will apply whatever the actual figures are.

As I said, our population growth hasn't been distributed equally across the 87 constituencies. Because people have chosen to move into some constituencies and not others, today our populations range from 25,192 people in the constituency with the smallest population to 79,034 people in the constituency with the largest population. That variation has arisen over the last eight years because of this influx of new people. During the last boundary commission the population numbers in the constituencies that were created were close to their provincial average; 85 per cent of them fell within 10 per cent of the provincial average. But now that's no longer the case. There's a wide range of population figures in the constituencies. They've gotten out of line with the provincial average.

Our job is to make recommendations to the Legislature as to how this could be addressed, and that will involve making recommendations that some constituency boundaries change to result in a population closer to the provincial average. So for a constituency with a lower population such as Drumheller-Stettler, if we chose to make a recommendation, we'd no doubt recommend expanding physically the boundaries of the constituency to cover a larger area. If we were going to deal with a population that's over – and the only one that's over, on our map here, is Strathmore-Brooks. I'm not sure that we'd make a recommendation when it's 7 per cent over, but if we did, it would probably be to reduce the size of the constituency physically to bring it closer in line with the provincial average.

However, numbers aren't the only thing. If that was the case, we could have just stayed at home with our ruler and pencil and drawn 87 areas, and that would be that. That's kind of what they do in Saskatchewan under their current legislation, but our job is different. Under our law, which is called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which was passed in 2009, we're given other criteria that we can take into account in addition to constituency size in setting the boundaries of a constituency.

Overall, we're to apply those factors, to try to work to create clear and understandable boundaries. The factors we consider are not just relative population densities but also common communities and interests, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements. So we're to keep in mind that we don't want to split communities which are similar in interests, background, composition if we can avoid it. We don't want to split an Indian reserve through the middle or whatever if we can avoid it.

Other criteria are common community and neighbourhood boundaries. So in Edmonton and Calgary, big cities, they have all different communities in them. We're instructed to try to keep those communities together if we can. We're also in regard to smaller municipalities to try to keep the entire municipality within the boundary of one constituency or another so that the constituency boundary doesn't run right through the centre of a town or a village.

We're also to take into account geographical features that suggest natural boundaries. If you look at the map, some of those are highways, township roads, the CNR line, major rivers. To the extent that we can, we're to try to make the boundary of a constituency line up with those to assist people in remembering where their boundary is, essentially.

But that's not a closed list. We can consider other relevant factors bearing on your MLA's ability to effectively represent his or her constituency. That's why we're having these public hearings, primarily to receive your input as to what you think is important for us to keep in mind when we're considering whether the constituency boundaries here and across the province should be adjusted.

Over the next few weeks our commission is holding public hearings throughout the province to seek community input. We sat last week in Edmonton for two days. We were up to Fort McMurray, Peace River. We were to go to Grande Prairie, but our plane couldn't land. We'll have to go back there in the summer. We finished off in Red Deer. Yesterday we were in St. Paul and Wainwright, and later today we'll be in Olds. So we're moving across the province. We'll have 15 public hearings over a three-week period.

#### **1:10**

Then the commission will get together and make 87 separate recommendations, one for each constituency in the province. In doing that, we're going to consider what you tell us today and what other people have told us about whether the boundaries should be changed, and if so, how they should be changed. We'll take those recommendations, and we'll put them in a written report. We have to table that. We have to file that with the provincial Legislature by May 31. Those recommendations will be posted on our website and, no doubt, on the Legislature's website as well.

You then have a second chance to make a submission because we know that people often are able to give helpful information once they see what you're specifically recommending for their area rather than just talking in a vacuum. Those draft recommendations will be published. People will be invited to make written submissions if they like, and we're having a second round of oral hearings in late July, early August for the people who would like to come along and tell us orally what they think should be done.

Now, we have received many written submissions to this point. I'm pleased to say that the last commission got 500 written submissions in a year. We are now at 350 in the first two weeks, so we've had a tremendous response, and I'm delighted to see that. I think that is, though, I have to confess, because we have an interactive website where people can make their submission right online. They can send us an e-mail, they can use various social media platforms, or they can use the post. Happily, we've received a variety of different submissions from all over the province.

After we have our last round of public hearings, we'll get together. We'll decide whether we want to revise our draft recommendations and how. Then we'll make a final report, and that final report has to be filed with the provincial Legislature by October 31 this year. The Legislature will then consider that report, and if they do what they've done in the past, they will enact legislation implementing our recommendations. Now, we're hopeful that will happen on this occasion as well so that that legislation will be in place for the next provincial election. It sounds like we're well ahead of time, but apparently the returning officers like to have at least a year lead time on an election to be able to get everything together, so that's one of the reasons that we're doing this at this time.

I want to go over the rules with you again more specifically so that if you have any questions for us later or you want to talk about these things in your submissions, we're all on the same page sort of thing. To review, equality or parity of population is not our only consideration. While our courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have interpreted our legislation as meaning that each Albertan has the right not to have the political strength or value of their vote unduly diluted, the legislation allows for variances in

constituency size of up to 25 per cent above or below average and for a maximum of four constituencies of up to 50 per cent below average. For example, the last time around the population of this constituency was recommended to be 7 per cent below the provincial average. That was within the range allowed by the legislation, so that was accepted by the Legislature.

Even though the legislation allowed a 25 per cent swing, the last commission made recommendations which resulted in 85 of the constituencies having a variance average of less than 10 per cent. Even though we can go as high as 25 per cent, it's not a given that we're going to do that. Past commissions have tried to keep it much closer to the provincial average, and no doubt that's going to be a factor in our mind as well.

There are two special constituencies the legislation allows for, and at the moment we have two, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley and Lesser Slave Lake, both of which have populations more than 25 per cent below the provincial average. They're given special permission because they're up against the Northwest Territories border. They're in the far north. They're the largest constituencies in the province, so there's a special category that exists for them. But it doesn't mean that on this occasion we will do that. We don't have to do that, and there have been some changes. We were up in Peace River. We had a very helpful public hearing there, maybe because we were trapped at the airport and couldn't get out for nine hours. Anyway, we had a lot of information. You know, it may be that we'll be able to deal with that because there's been so much growth in Grande Prairie, which is south of it but immediately south of it. So that's an example of how things can change, and we can consider those changes in our work.

What we're going to do when we get all the information in is start by looking at the actual population of a constituency. We then look at the provincial average and see what the difference is, how much of a percentage that is. We then look at the other factors that we've gone through here to outline whether there's any reason or to decide whether there's any reason not to keep the population of the constituency close to parity. Maybe there will be for certain constituencies; for others, not. Then we'll have to decide what type of movement there should be in the boundaries of a given constituency to achieve the result that we're going to recommend.

What's helpful for us here today is not just your views on whether there should be any changes or not but also your views on how those changes should take place. For example, this constituency is very near 25 per cent under the provincial average. We have to consider all options. We haven't made up our mind in regard to anything. We're only now closely looking at your map for the first time. But if we decide we are going to change the size of the constituency, we don't want to make a mistake. We don't want to move it out and include something that makes no sense, that logically should belong in the next constituency. We don't want to miss obvious natural boundaries just because we're not familiar with the area or whatever.

We've been receiving very helpful input from people as to where they think good boundaries should be or what communities in the next constituency could logically be added to their constituency if we had to change the population and so forth. I'm hoping that when you speak, if you have those ideas, you won't be shy, that you share those ideas with us as well because we don't want to be totally in the dark if we decide, at the end of the day, that we have to make some changes.

Thanks very much for coming. We have a list of registered speakers, but we also have time at the end, before we have to go on to Olds, to hear from anybody who's here who would like to say something.

I'm going to call on our first registered speaker, Nathan Anderson, for Nathan Cooper, the MLA of your neighbouring constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Now, I know that Mr. Anderson has shyly indicated he has nothing to say although he gave me a big written presentation, that I've taken a look through here while we were waiting to get started. If I can be so bold as to summarize the contents of this, you suggest that maybe no changes be made to Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills because you're right on the provincial average, the estimated provincial average, within 4 per cent of the provincial average.

I'm going to take the opportunity of your being here to use your knowledge of this area.

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Aside from your views on your particular constituency, looking at the other surrounding constituencies, we see that Strathmore-Brooks is 7 per cent over, but Cypress-Medicine Hat is 16 per cent under, Drumheller-Stettler is 23 per cent under, Battle River-Wainwright is 25 per cent under, and then we're a little bit under in Lacombe-Ponoka and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake as well. Do you have any thoughts or observations on mistakes we shouldn't make if we decide that we have to enlarge the size of some of your neighbouring constituencies?

**Mr. Anderson:** I think Mayor Bruce probably knows our area as well as anybody, and it would be a mistake to start carving Acme apart from Linden. That is a natural trading corridor through there. If we're looking to subtract from the constituency – I would suggest that we wouldn't want to do this – if we were forced into that situation, I would start with the communities in Rocky View county.

**The Chair:** On which side?

**Mr. Anderson:** To the southeast of us.

**The Chair:** All right. If we had to grow Drumheller-Stettler, for example, do you have any thoughts as to how that might be done, noticing that directly north Battle River-Wainwright is also well under the percentage and also Cypress-Medicine Hat to the south.

**Mr. Anderson:** That is an imposing land mass, Drumheller-Stettler, and I pity the folks that have to work for that MLA. That is a large area to represent. I could not suggest how to make it bigger.

1:20

**The Chair:** Again, I emphasize that we haven't decided to make it bigger, but we just, you know, have to consider that. We have to consider all options.

Along that line, do you have any other thing that might leap to mind as to what natural communities lie on the borders of different constituencies and what might go where?

**Mr. Anderson:** Basically, we have three I guess you would call them trading corridors. Highway 2 is a fairly common trading corridor. You've got the southeast, which is, you know, Carbon, Acme, Linden, the five villages. The *Five Village Weekly* was our newspaper at one time. I would avoid including Sundre with Olds because it is a natural corridor up highway 22.

You have a very difficult job, and I completely appreciate this. I've been to the previous federal Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I, quite frankly, don't know how you make as many people happy as you do.

**The Chair:** Well, thanks for that positive thought.

Any questions from the commission?

**Ms Munn:** Thank you very much for giving us this written submission. I don't have any questions at this time.

**Mr. McLeod:** I've got one. I always have one. On your point 13, you talk about that the second factor to consider is the urban-rural divide. Can you expand on that a little bit?

**Mr. Anderson:** "Urban" is such a subjective term, right? For folks like us out on the farm, we see everybody as urban, but I think it is generally accepted that we see Calgary and Edmonton as entities among themselves. To suggest that Springbank people would have issues in common with northwest Calgary, I don't see how that's the case. I wouldn't put, you know, Beiseker in a Calgary riding. That would be a significant mistake. Their issues are not the same. Unless it's driven absolutely by a population concern – and I don't suspect that we're in that situation at the moment, but you have new numbers coming, I can't foretell what those numbers will be – to stick farming areas in the city would be a mistake. I think that's fairly straightforward.

**Mr. McLeod:** On another point, Olds, I've been through Olds quite a bit, actually. It's expanded quite a bit. Are you aware of any more expansion within the Olds area: more housing, more subdivisions going in, or any other developments over the next period of time? I'm kind of asking you crystal ball kinds of ideas, but we're also looking at that. We've asked some of the bigger municipalities to suggest to us what they're looking at out into the future, the number of homes and stuff like that. Have you any idea about that?

**Mr. Anderson:** I would not be the complete expert on future development in that area, but I know that Mountain View county has added commercial areas on the western portion of Olds over the last five years. I think it would be a mistake to in any way try to separate Olds from Mountain View county. It's the capital of Mountain View county, if you want to put it that way, Olds and Didsbury both. If there is future development, it would be within Mountain View county and would affect either Didsbury or Olds, so it would make sense to me to keep them together.

Olds has expanded commercially to the west and a few small areas to the east. I don't remember anything happening to the north although if we were to expand beyond Mountain View county, it would probably be to the north, a Bowden type, if you needed to move a small amount of people.

**The Chair:** Which constituency is Bowden in right now?

**Mr. Anderson:** I believe it's in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

**Mr. McLeod:** Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thanks so much.

Right. I should say that my fellow commissioners here have reminded me to say that *Hansard* is present. It's recording all that we're saying orally and in writing. It will be available on our website, [www.abebc.ca](http://www.abebc.ca), the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. It will be available in the next couple of days. You can listen to this public hearing if you want to, you can listen to any of the other public hearings around the province, or you can read the transcript of what has been said. Just keep that in mind. I've also put the slide, this map of Drumheller-Stettler and surrounding areas,

up on the screen in the event that you can see it a little bit better up there.

Thanks, then, very much, Mr. Anderson.  
I'll call on Jackie Irwin.

**Mrs. Irwin:** I was just registering to come to the event.

**The Chair:** Oh, okay. Well, would you mind coming and answering a couple of questions?

**Mrs. Irwin:** I'm actually a reporter.

**The Chair:** Oh, well, that's even better.

**Mrs. Irwin:** Well, then, I can record you, too.

**The Chair:** Of course. Of course. Could you let us know which constituency you live in?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Drumheller-Stettler.

**The Chair:** You report for a paper or a radio station?

**Mrs. Irwin:** The *Hanna Herald*.

**The Chair:** I want you to know that when we were in Edmonton last week, all of the reporters who were in the room were good enough to be interviewed by us. You're following along in their spirit, so thanks very much.

I'm going to ask you the question that I've asked every presenter, and that is that you're very close to the mandatory number where we have to adjust the boundaries in Drumheller-Stettler. If we had to do that to grow your constituency, in your view, does it make sense to go north, south, east, west? Which would be the best way to do that?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Honestly, it's one of the biggest areas. Our MLA has to drive two hours just to come and visit our town. Given that the government has implemented the new carbon tax, it seems a little inappropriate to ask their MLAs to drive even further to visit their constituencies when they're trying to save carbon footprints.

**The Chair:** Don't they get a special rebate, the MLAs?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Maybe, but that doesn't save the environment . . .

**The Chair:** No, no. Of course not. Of course not.

**Mrs. Irwin:** . . . which is the point.

**The Chair:** Ultimately.

**Ms Munn:** Do you think the solution is a larger number of MLAs in Alberta?

**Mrs. Irwin:** If your population has grown, in theory that would make sense. I think that, accordingly, if you add to the number of MLAs, you would have to also adjust the compensation, reduce it. I don't think that we should be paying more for more people. I think that the amount that you spend is probably pretty close to where you should be. I don't think it should be an additional financial burden on Alberta to add more in, but if your population has grown, it makes sense to add more rather than increase already huge areas.

**The Chair:** Just a follow-up question on that: what's your major roadway that goes east-west in your constituency?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Highways 9 and 12 east-west.

**The Chair:** And north-south?

**Mrs. Irwin:** North-south? Highways 36 and 21.

**The Chair:** Okay. So multiple go north and south.

**Ms Munn:** I have another question. The jagged edge on the southwest corner of the constituency: what is that? Is that a river? It's a river. Which one?

**Mr. Kreke:** The Red Deer River.

**The Chair:** You're young, and you may not recall this, but prior to eight years ago was the constituency the same shape, or was there some change made there?

**Mrs. Irwin:** How many years ago?

**The Chair:** Eight years ago, the last time the Electoral Boundaries Commission sat. There were some adjustments. I'm not holding you to this, but do you recall? For example, when we were in Lac La Biche yesterday, they said: "Boy, there were big changes. Now we're a long thin rectangle, and we used to be a square. It was a lot easier because travel distances were closer when we were physically smaller." Did similar changes happen here?

1:30

**Mrs. Irwin:** I don't know the exact direction of the expansion. I just know we grew.

**Mr. Kreke:** Coronation and Castor . . .

**The Chair:** Were added?

**Mr. Kreke:** . . . to the north, yeah.

**Mrs. Irwin:** We grew substantially, I think. I just know that our MLAs have complained about it, not just the current one but the ones in the past. It's a lot of territory to cover if you're going to do it well, which they try to do.

**The Chair:** How's the quality of your Internet service?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Well, ask us in a couple of months. It'll be better. Hanna's just getting Axia fibre optics, but there are a lot of areas in our jurisdiction that will probably never get fibre optics. It's just too expensive to lay the lines out to all the farming areas.

**Mrs. Day:** How's the wireless currently in general? Hit and miss?

**Mrs. Irwin:** It depends on the day. I work exclusively with the Internet. Our company is Postmedia, so I do my work, and then I send it in to another location, which then does more stuff to it and then sends it off to another location. There are days when I don't have Internet, and that's not the greatest on deadline day. There have been a couple of times when I've had to go to another part of town to try and finish off my work.

**Mrs. Day:** And you're right in town?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** What about cellphone access?

**Mrs. Irwin:** Hanna's a hard one. I mean, I can't speak for all the other areas. Hanna: I know there are two towers, and they compete, so there are times when your calls get dropped, but I can't speak for



the whole area. There are parts of our constituency that I haven't even been to yet.

**The Chair:** Okay. I take it that everybody has phone service if they want it, like land lines.

**Mrs. Irwin:** Land lines, yes. Cellphones: there are areas where – if you go up the hill from Drumheller towards Hanna, you lose cell service for a little while, so I'm sure there are some areas . . .

**The Chair:** There are blackout spots.

**Mrs. Irwin:** Yeah, for sure. Especially farming, and that's dangerous, with some of the stuff that they do, if there was an accident. I know that there have been times when I've been interviewing our MLA and he's been driving throughout our constituency and the cellphone calls have been dropped in mid-interview.

**The Chair:** Right. You might not be able to answer this – certainly, you might not be inclined to answer it – but is the culture in Drumheller closer to that in Cypress-Medicine Hat than it would be to Wainwright's? The type of people who live there, what people do for a living: big differences?

**Mrs. Irwin:** I'm not qualified to answer that. I don't live in Drumheller.

**The Chair:** Okay. Sure. I meant in the constituency.

**Mrs. Irwin:** You can ask someone else.

**The Chair:** Yeah. I hope I will. Okay. Thanks.

All right. Any other questions?

Thank you so much for being a good sport.

Okay. Lisa Hansen-Zacharuk. Hi. Could you tell us which constituency you live in?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Drumheller-Stettler.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** I'll just ramble this off first, and then we'll get into some questions. Good afternoon. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this afternoon. My name is Lisa Hansen-Zacharuk, and I'm not only a concerned citizen of this riding but a councillor for the town of Drumheller. I'm going to present a few concerns from the neighbouring riding of Strathmore-Brooks as well as some concerns from the riding we are currently assembled in. As I stated, I do thank you for this opportunity, which comes around seemingly every few years, the last being in 2012, when we had I believe it was Paintearth county attached on.

**The Chair:** That was the federal boundaries commission.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Federal? Oh, okay. My apologies.

I would like to start with Strathmore-Brooks. Currently that riding flirts around the average population of most constituencies and has its member municipalities' boundaries coterminous with those of the constituency. Now, it is known that this is not always the case. It would be preferred, though, to endeavour to keep Strathmore-Brooks intact. We know that on this day the average population of a riding is just under 49,000 since the most current census numbers have not been released, albeit it is felt that if geographic growth of this riding must occur to achieve the average population, the most logical growth area would be the eastern section of Rocky View county. The Langdon area is viewed as a

very fluid, homogeneous area between Strathmore and Chestermere, and moving them to another constituency would be perceived as having little disruption.

On the other hand, we have the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. Our riding has steadily increased in geographic size, now sitting at around 33,000 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 37,000, which fits within the 25 per cent variation from the average rule. When one puts into perspective the size versus the population, it starts to make sense that Drumheller-Stettler should not be expanded further. The constituents of this riding deserve an equal opportunity to access their elected representative. If the continual geographic expansion prevails, it inhibits this and could in fact change how our elected representative would service our community.

I grew up reading about vote per population, but as I grew older, I realized that this at first seems inherently fair but altogether has a negative effect on rural communities. The rural people of this province are feeling like their voice is being lost amongst the growing urban ridings, which now, in two cities alone, encompass 50 per cent of the elected officials in the Legislature.

I'm here today to ask you to consider leaving this riding, Drumheller-Stettler, at status quo. The number of miles any elected official has to make in this riding to be an effective voice for their constituents is almost obscene. If it were not for the advancement of technology, it would be near impossible to do so. I am in no way stating that we have poor representation but strongly feel that expansion of our constituency is not a benefit. We deserve a proportionate voice at the table to present our rural concerns so that we may feel as if the voice of many in the condensed areas has not been overshadowed by those in the country, using a simplified term.

As it sits, the representative split, urban to rural, is 50-50, and I'd like to think that if any adjustment would be deemed necessary, it could perhaps come in the form of condensing larger ridings that border on the edges of smaller, urban ridings. Joining portions of these larger ridings, I think, would enable more effective representation and maintain the current 87 electoral ridings and the major urban 50-50 split with rural Alberta.

Again, I appreciate your time in coming out today, and I want to leave you with one last comment to ruminate on. It's a quote by Cal Thomas, a U.S.A. columnist. "One of the reasons people hate politics is that truth is rarely a politician's objective. Election and power are." With that, I implore you to please help us maintain our rural voice.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We do have some questions, I'm sure. I'm going to pick up on your second-to-last point, in my words, not yours, because I'm not fast enough to type exactly what you were saying . . .

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** You can have a copy of that.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I would.

But just to ask my question, you suggested that instead of increasing ridings like Drumheller-Stettler in geographic size, we should leave the larger populations in the city ridings unchanged. So that would mean – and I'm asking this question because . . .

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** In the city ridings? No.

**The Chair:** You said the condensed ridings. Isn't that the city ridings?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay. What are the condensed ridings?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Condensed, for me, would be, like, Drumheller-Stettler, where we don't have the population.

**The Chair:** Okay. I'll ask my question a different way. One of the things that the Court of Appeal directed us to say – and this is before I became a Court of Appeal judge – is that if we decide to leave a particular riding well under the provincial average, even within the 25 per cent but well under the provincial average, we should have to explain why the benefit of doing that outweighed the loss of voting equality for voters whose constituencies would have to be above the provincial average as a result.

We only have 87 pieces in this pie. If we leave you with fewer than the average, we have to add those 10,000 people onto somewhere else in the province. So instead of having 49,000 people voting for one MLA, there they'd have 59,000. Each vote would not have the same effect as your vote. Or we could take that extra population and divide it among two or three ridings, but still it would underweight their vote. So we'd have to give a reason for that. It doesn't mean that there are no reasons. But instead of me speculating on what that reason would be, why in your words would it be justified in terms of reducing the power of the urban vote to leave the rural vote the way it is?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** It's not necessarily, for me, about reducing the urban vote because I don't think that would ever be the case, with 50 per cent of the MLAs already reflecting that voice. I think the biggest issue is the fact that you look at the land mass for Drumheller-Stettler, as an example, and you have one representative to represent and to make contact with that vast area. That, to me, is, you know, more of an injustice than anything. You've got higher senior populations in certain areas. It just doesn't give them the access to that representation that I feel is fair.

1:40

**The Chair:** Sure.

I haven't been clear in my question. We've got you living in Hanna, and your sister living in Calgary. If we leave your constituency at the figure it is, you would have 39,000 people voting.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** You're saying our vote would be greater than . . .

**The Chair:** Your vote would have a greater effect than your sister's vote. Why is that a value?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** I understand what you're saying there, but at the same time when I point out that 50 per cent of the MLAs already represent an urban voice, I think that that in itself might outweigh the difference, you know, a smidgen of a difference, in the weight of a vote.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Other questions?

**Mr. McLeod:** Always. Councillor Hansen-Zacharuk, I've got two questions. The first one. You said about the urban-rural kind of split – but did you imply, though, like, in some of the bigger areas, more of a hybrid, that you would go out from the city? Let's use the city of Calgary. Like, go out, more of a hybrid . . .

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Yeah. Perhaps. I mean, it's definitely not my job to say aye or nay or which way you should go. But, you know, at the end of the day, it just seems like there's a higher

condensation of ridings in those urban areas, so perhaps in order to make egress in finding or discussing the borders, it might be easier to add on a little bit more of some of the urban vote to even out – I don't know if I want to use the word "flavour" in regard to communities. But, I mean, like I said, I'm not the expert on it. It's not my job. I was asked to speak about Drumheller-Stettler and Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. McLeod:** How's Hanna doing? Is it going to be expanding? I always ask that question because I'd really like to know. Where I'm from, the village of Acme: yeah, we have a subdivision. Is it going to sell? No.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Okay. Well, again, I'm not an expert on Hanna, but I feel that perhaps Hanna might not be growing as well as it may have once, at one point in time.

**Mr. McLeod:** Okay. Now Drumheller.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** We've been fairly steady for the last 15, 20 years. We do see a population increase, but that's during the summer months, obviously, in our tourism season. You go from a population of around 8,000 to 400,000.

**Ms Munn:** If the boundaries of Drumheller-Stettler had to be changed, on which side of the constituency do you think you would find more people of a like view?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** I would tend to say the southwest, Strathmore-Brooks.

**Ms Munn:** Right on the other side of the river. How far?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** I couldn't tell you. If it's going to be based on population, I don't know what the numbers are, but that being said, I mean . . .

**Ms Munn:** At a certain point where people live in Strathmore-Brooks: they're more attracted either to Calgary or to Brooks, right?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Which is very true. I don't know. My main point is that I feel it should not be expanded because there's more than enough area for the MLA to cover presently.

**Ms Munn:** Okay.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** And the other fact is that we really don't know what the census numbers from 2016 are yet. We're going on what we think.

**Ms Munn:** Right. Of course.

**The Chair:** Some representatives in different public hearings have suggested that if the MLAs were better funded, they could hire assistants, not just somebody to answer the phone but somebody who was intimately knowledgeable about constituency work, to staff a suboffice in another part of the constituency, and that might take up some of the travel burden. Do you think that would work in Drumheller-Stettler?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Well, to my knowledge – and I don't know if it's changed – there are already three assistants helping this MLA. Would it justify having another staff member to help over and above that? I don't know.

**The Chair:** No. I'm talking about putting a different office in. I'm not sure: is your current MLA's office in Drumheller?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** We've got three.

**The Chair:** You've got three offices, not just three . . .

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. All right. Thanks.

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** No worries.

**The Chair:** Other questions?

**Mrs. Hansen-Zacharuk:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much.  
Now we've got Matthew Kreke.

**Mr. Kreke:** Hello, everyone.

**The Chair:** Could you tell us which constituency you reside in, sir?

**Mr. Kreke:** Well, I don't reside in this particular constituency, but I'm here representing Starland county, which is just to the north of Drumheller.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Kreke:** I think from me you're going to hear basically a lot of the common refrain you're going to hear over the whole day. We don't feel that the boundaries, obviously, should be enlarged. If you look at the map, they are pretty enormous already. Everybody's already made the point that it's a long way to drive. We don't see our representative probably as much as we could. That's not a shot at him. It's just that there's a lot of ground to cover there. You know, to be frank, there are a lot of different issues that go along in an area like Oyen versus where we are; same thing with Castor. We do try to get together with these municipalities every now and then, but it's a long distance to cover.

I'm not going to bore you with the whole aspect of my presentation here, but in terms of recommendations we have a representative lobbying body called the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. They made a submission to you that I'm sure you guys have read. What we've tried to do is just to put some of their recommendations in the context of the Drumheller-Stettler riding. The very first one would be consideration of geographical distances. It's been said here a number of times that it's a long way to drive. It is a long way to drive. I don't think you can adjust that map any way other than to make it bigger. You know, I don't know if you want to go north, south, or west, but it's going to be bigger.

The last speaker did allude to adequately funding MLAs. You know, I don't know exactly what the staffing budgets are, but obviously I think they could use some help if that's the intention of the commission.

You've also pointed out: avoid fracturing municipal districts. We've been shuffled around a couple times in the past. We used to be split in the old Chinook, now Drumheller-Stettler. It's easier for us when we have one person to work with. We do work with other municipalities that do find it a bit of a struggle sometimes.

Another issue that's come up is the rural ridings. We've heard, you know, the possibility that you're going to take a sliver of the northeast and extend it out. We want you to be cautious with that. It doesn't directly affect us, but any time you start throwing 20,000 rural residents in with 40,000 city residents, it's just going to dilute our voice a little bit more, I think.

The last one is – you know, we haven't talked about it much – that there are those unique variances. I know they do give over 25 per cent to a few. It should be noted that we're not under that right now. It is well within the commission's purview to keep us where we are. I know some others would have to be bigger. But another point that we have to make is that we're slowly becoming the northern area of the southeast now. That's kind of what we're becoming here. We're depopulating. We're getting bigger.

I think that by the previous commission's acknowledgement of making those areas bigger, there is a justification for keeping these kinds of areas with some kind of representation even though, like you said before, it may be a little bit unfair to somebody who is in Calgary. But let's be honest. Calgary has got 24 ridings; Edmonton has got 19. They have more ridings provincially than they do municipal councillors. I don't know how much more representation they need when you can win or lose an election based on the highway 2 corridor versus us, where it's becoming a real problem now.

That's about all my comments for now. I would leave you with a last one. Obviously, from our point of view – but this might also be different throughout the entire constituency – we favour the municipalities right to the west in terms of our trading relationships, where our residents go for medical services, where they have family, and things like that. The county of Kneehill would probably be closest to us in terms of our representation. We do see very little of the ones to the south in the Medicine Hat area and going up into Battle River-Wainwright. I mean, even in our lobbying group I don't believe they're part of our zone 2 anymore, so you're getting pretty far up into northern Alberta there.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, I'll start because you've made a new point, that hasn't been suggested by anybody before in Alberta, so I don't want to miss that. That is that you should be given a special exemption by being added to the group of four – maximum four – special constituencies. The legislation gives five criteria you have to meet before you can be considered for that, and I just want to run through those to make sure that you meet all of them because I don't know the answers.

You have to have at least 15,000 square kilometres in your constituency.

**Mr. Kreke:** I know we're there. Yeah.

*1:50*

**The Chair:** You're over that. Okay.

The closest boundary of your constituency to Edmonton by the most direct highway route is more than 150 kilometres, probably.

**Mr. Kreke:** That's true.

**The Chair:** Okay. You have no town in Drumheller-Stettler which exceeds 8,000 people in population. Close?

**Mr. Kreke:** Well, the other important point about Drumheller is that it used to be a rural county and is actually a specialized municipality, similar to what Strathcona would be. They took in a number of different municipalities when they made that one. The town proper wouldn't be 8,000.

**The Chair:** Okay. You only have to have three of these five, so don't worry yet. Do you have an Indian reserve or Métis settlement in your constituency?

**Mr. Kreke:** I assume we do, but I don't think so.

**The Chair:** The population is waving no, so I assume that's true. Okay. Do you have a coterminous boundary with Saskatchewan? Yes, you do.

Okay. So you meet the criteria for section 15 for special consideration.

All right. Questions?

**Mrs. Day:** If you could perhaps draw on our map to show us where Kneehill county is, then we'll take a picture of that and record it. That's why we have the laminated map, so you can take a dry-erase marker, and then we can visually see what you're suggesting, if it goes that far. I see it kind of stops there. Anyway, that would be helpful. Yeah.

Otherwise, thank you for your presentation. You've been very thorough.

**Ms Livingstone:** The clerk has the marker there.

**The Chair:** He's also our photographer.

**Mr. Kreke:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks. All right. Would anybody else like to come forward?

Please. If you could start by giving us your name and where you live, which constituency.

**Mr. Nikota:** Thank you. My name is Mark Nikota. I live in Drumheller-Stettler. I'm the current CAO of the village of Delia, the president of the PC Drumheller-Stettler constituency association, and the former mayor of Hanna. So if you have any Hanna questions, I can probably help you out.

I'm not going to reiterate the distance and some of the other concerns that have been brought up already, but you have mentioned many times and it has been brought up many times about effective representation. This is certainly not urban versus rural. We don't want to start a fight, and that's not why we're here. But to be effective – I know our MLAs could attest to this. I'll just throw a few statistics about what our MLA has to deal with. Right now in our constituency you have six counties or municipal districts with special areas, 23 hamlets, six towns, 18 villages, and four school divisions. Those would be all with representatives that they would have to meet with and hear concerns.

I'm pretty sure that the urban MLAs do not have those kind of considerations when they're meeting with the representatives. Now, they would have other challenges. There would be more cultural challenges and things, but given the distance and the number of kilometres of roads, the school divisions, the hospitals, there are quite a few concerns. I think that to try and expand the boundaries of our constituency would be detrimental to being an effective representative, and you've mentioned many times that that is kind of the concern.

My one recommendation if you are going to start redrawing lines is – and I know natural boundaries do play quite a part in where you draw your lines. I would think county or municipal district lines might be somewhere where you would want to make some adjustments. I kind of mentioned earlier, for example, Kneehill. In the very southwest corner of our constituency we already have a little portion of Kneehill. It is very difficult for an MLA or for that county, for example, to have their concerns heard when they have to deal with multiple representatives. That is one thing I would recommend.

**The Chair:** And that, if I can just give a little commercial here, is one of the reasons for having the second round of public hearings

in the summer. So if we do something that isn't a good idea, because we misunderstand the boundaries of a county or we end up including a tiny bit of one county or municipal district separate from a constituency, we're hoping that somebody will write and tell us that or will show up so that we can consider that when we're making our final report.

**Mr. Nikota:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you. Questions?

**Mrs. Day:** I'm going to pose you something because we've heard from all over Alberta – well, a lot of Alberta, not everywhere yet. Of course, we started in Edmonton. Some of the comments from those that are asking for more voter parity are that with today's technology there isn't any reason to worry quite so much about the distances in that we can e-mail and we can pick up the phone. There's a 1-800 number or there's a toll-free number Albertans can use, and we can talk to our MLA like that, and that should suffice and not affect what people have been saying in the rural areas. How is that from your perspective? Do you see that the world is shifting and it's just as easy to whip off an e-mail and you don't have to necessarily come into the office and see the MLA?

**Mr. Nikota:** I'll be honest. I don't necessarily see that as effective representation if you have a real concern. We see too much, I think, in social media nowadays where it's too easy to fire off an e-mail, and you get hundreds and hundreds of e-mails, and they start to water down their effectiveness. Does an e-mail or does a social media blast really have the same effect as meeting somebody face to face when you have a real concern? I don't believe it does.

That being said, especially in our constituency an MLA doesn't want to communicate just with, as I mentioned, school districts, councils. To go to a meeting, to actually hear concerns, to talk to a group of people is way more effective than to have an e-mail or a phone call. I just don't see that, especially in the rural areas, especially with some of the stuff we've already touched on, with the lack of cellphone service, rural Internet service, and that kind of thing. I just don't see that really being as effective.

**The Chair:** Would you agree that you have more links, in terms of where people shop and go for services like going to the doctor or whatever, to the southeast than elsewhere around your constituency?

**Mr. Nikota:** I would think to the west and the southwest. If you're talking hospital visits, Red Deer or certainly Calgary, the Foothills, is more our destination. I would think Drumheller would go that way. Hanna certainly goes that way. Stettler probably goes to Red Deer. The only part that would go to the southeast, probably, is more the Oyen south area. They would go to Medicine Hat more.

**The Chair:** All right. Thanks so much. Thank you very much for coming and being prepared to take the microphone.

Anybody else here who would like to speak? Now, I know you've all come because you're interested in this topic, so please.

**Mrs. Chostner:** Hi. My name is Maeghan Chostner. I live within the Drumheller-Stettler constituency. I'm here as a private citizen. I just wanted to address what Mrs. Day mentioned in terms of how technology can make you feel like you can be closer and more accessible. I would just like to maybe point out that without the demographics attached to the populations, it can be difficult to really assess the ability of a population or of a constituency to truly

not only access that technology but in a meaningful manner. I feel like without the demographic picture of this constituency, it can be difficult to better assess whether or not that's potentially possible, just to begin with. That would be just my first point.

I would also make the point that there's a lot of discussion around Alberta about the rural-urban, and I don't want to add to that because I don't think it adds a lot of value, to be frank. However, I would like to again make the point that we are not just a rural area; we are a rural remote area, and that is a whole different set of concerns and realities that don't always exist in other rural areas: the size, the demographics, the distance. The fact that we abut the Saskatchewan border is a significant challenge for those communities in the east part of this constituency.

We are a declining population and a declining industrial base. That makes those concerns. Although they are not alone, they are very challenging, and they are very real to the representatives of the towns, villages, hamlets, municipal districts, and counties which the MLA needs to represent effectively. I think that to expand the number of people and representatives he has to interact with is not the way to make effective representation.

I believe that to assist him by providing additional support has merit. However, there's something to be said for having face time with the individual whom you elected, not their assistant. I think that is an important consideration that needs to be held when discussing additional mitigations that can help with rural and remote areas because you elect a person and their platform, not their helper.

2:00

**The Chair:** Am I correct in assuming that the average age in Drumheller-Stettler would probably be higher than the average age around the rest of the province?

**Mrs. Chostner:** I would agree that it would skew significantly higher, yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms Livingstone:** I have a couple of questions.

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Ms Livingstone:** You mentioned a distinction between rural and rural remote. I'm wondering if you can expand on that. You know, we have to sort of put this into principles and criteria as we're trying to assess, so how would you distinguish between rural and rural remote?

**Mrs. Chostner:** I think that if you're looking for some background in regard to that, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties has put together quite a few white papers and discussion papers kind of speaking to that distinction. If I remember correctly, they were generally with the MMGA portion. I wouldn't want to speak out of turn, but my personal understanding of what that is is that rural remote tends to be defined by sparsely populated areas, generally with significant travel distances, significant population challenges in both demographics as well as just sheer numbers. Generally, it's a sense, I guess you could say, of being isolated, partially by choice, to be fair, but also by default through depopulation, through sheer urbanization, and through the declining industries of the areas. I think you could make the argument that there are some statistics attached to rural remote, but from my personal opinion it is a sense of isolation and decline, and I think that is felt kind of throughout on a community and cultural basis.

**The Chair:** Anything else?

**Ms Livingstone:** I don't know that you're going to be able to help me with this one, but we hear quite often from people that face time with the MLA is necessary for effective representation, and we hear about the distances in rural areas. What I'm struggling with and that I'm not sure if you can help me with – I understand the distance factor, but then because we can't add ridings, it's a zero-sum game. If I have an urban MLA who has, you know, 59,000 people in their riding, that's a lot of faces to try and get face time with. I'm struggling with: in rural we've got the distance to travel to see the MLA; in urban, if we shift that zero-sum game, then they have just an absolute number that they're dealing with. I'm not sure that you can help me with how we properly balance that, but if you have any ideas, I'd love to hear them.

**Mrs. Chostner:** I would say that, from my perspective, it comes back to community and comparable needs, if that makes sense. I can speak with some personal experience having lived in the city. I'm not from this area. I moved here. So I feel like that does provide some perspective, which I think is sometimes lacking when you don't have outside experience to provide context.

In my experience, I feel as though, for lack of a better word, in urban ridings that are densely populated, there is a trade-off that happens when you do increase the numbers. People can feel like their individual vote means less, and when you look at the numbers, that's true. That is a fair statement. My response to that would be: how different are your individual concerns from your neighbour's? How challenging would it be for you and your neighbour to work together to achieve something with your municipality or your MLA? When you get to the point when you have physically large areas with, as has been stated before by Mark Nikota, a really incredible number of elected representatives with whom you need to represent for their communities, I think you need to ask the question: how different or how competing are those people's needs that this one representative has to represent effectively?

From my personal experience, having lived in an urban centre and then having now lived in a rural-remote centre, I feel personally that urban representatives and people who live in urban areas have more in common with what they need from their MLA than someone in Wainwright would have with someone in Drumheller because there's more that separates us than just geography. There are industrial realities. There is a difference in weather, which plays into what kind of farming you do, plays into what kinds of animals you raise.

I think the other side of that, which is just the community similarities, is that there are some physical realities of living in a rural area in that most people are tied to agriculture, which makes them less able to travel, less able to get to their MLA if they need to, less autonomous. They are required to stay by their farm or their ranch to feed the animals. They can't just drive to where their MLA is to get that face time, right?

And, to add to that, the challenges of inconsistent technological advantages: you don't have high-speed, which means that you're already being disadvantaged. You don't have dependable phone service. You don't have a neighbour within four miles. There are, I think, some real physical challenges that exist, that are difficult to offset if you expand it ever more.

I really quite strongly feel that having an assistant give you face time is not the same as your elected representative giving you face time. That's not who you elected. You didn't elect the secretary, and I don't think that's a fair solution because it does lead to, in my opinion, a feeling of disrespect to those who are affected. Whether it's in an urban centre or not – I would feel the same way if I knocked on a door in Calgary and I got the MLA assistant and they took my notice and I never heard from my MLA. It wouldn't matter

if it happened in Drumheller or if it happened in Calgary. That's not a solution, in my opinion.

I don't know if that helped.

**Ms Livingstone:** I think that in some ways it did. I understood your – if I could summarize, and you can tell me if I got it wrong. In terms of the ability to bring your issues forward, I think I heard you say that with the density of population in an urban area, you've got a better chance of one of your neighbours bringing the same issue to the MLA's attention than you do with a population that's . . .

**Mrs. Chostner:** I think there are more issues held in common. I think that might be a better way to put it, from my perspective, than having larger, disparate remote areas linked together through necessity.

**Ms Livingstone:** Okay. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Any other questions?

**Mrs. Day:** You did say something that tweaked my interest a little bit. I haven't experienced this, but you made the statement about the challenge of being next to a border with another province. Can you expand on what that means to this constituency and in what way it's challenging?

**Mrs. Chostner:** I can only add my personal perspective, which is that highway 9, where I live, is kind of our main east-west corridor kind of through the centre part of the constituency. Highway 12 to the north acts as a comparable travel corridor. It is very difficult, from a personal taxpayer perspective, to feel as though you're going to have adequate representation when you are at the far end of any end of the riding. And, by default, because we abut Saskatchewan, we will be farther away from people of like-minded interests that can represent us.

You could make the argument that someone in Empress, which is approximately half an hour from the Saskatchewan border, could comparably have more concerns with a small town on the other side of Saskatchewan than it would with Drumheller. I think that the more you run into that proximity and abutment with the Saskatchewan border, as you would with northern Alberta, you run into that rural-remote reality, which is that there are fewer people, fewer communities, fewer resources available to you to be able to effectively work with your MLA in order to get representation for your needs in the Legislature. By default, by geography you have more in common potentially with your neighbour an hour to the east than you would with a neighbour two hours to the west. I guess, from my perspective, that's a real, legitimate concern that has to be addressed when you look at geographic sizes of ridings.

**Mrs. Day:** Thank you.

2:10

**The Chair:** Notwithstanding your articulate presentation – and it really has been terrific – if we found, at the end of the day, that we had to move a riding to increase the size of Drumheller-Stettler, do you agree that that should go west or southwest, or do you have another view?

**Mrs. Chostner:** I think it would be challenging to adjust the boundaries regardless, obviously. I think you need to respect the geographical limitations of the rivers. I think that is a pretty big and significant limitation that needs to be recognized. I think it's really critical to ensure that you keep municipalities held in their whole within a district. As was touched on before, it's challenging enough

to get representation, and it must be harder when you either have a toe in the door with a much, much larger riding or you have two or three people that you have to talk to. I don't think that that is a fair burden to put on municipal elected representatives, to be frank.

I would suggest that one of the things that I would think about if I was in your shoes would be how to properly address the community needs, whether it is more effective to include larger urban centres like Brooks to increase the population while maintaining consistent constituent concerns without increasing geographic boundaries or if that would, as was mentioned before, really dilute the ability of rural residents to have their real concerns heard and lobbied for effectively.

I think that you need to really balance the question of: can someone effectively represent an urban and a rural area at the same time? If they can, is that a solution rather than larger and larger and larger? Alternatively, is there a way to recognize the unique rural-remote nature of this region in its declining populations, in its changing demographics, in its reduced industrialization, the lack of opportunity provided to the residents – that is a real and ongoing concern – and to better ensure that everybody's voice is heard effectively in Edmonton based on everybody having the same or comparable needs?

I don't know if that's a good answer, but that's the only one that I really have for you.

**The Chair:** That's a good answer. Thank you so much for coming forward and sharing your thoughts.

Anyone else? Yes.

**Mr. Storch:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for coming to the rural-remote part of Alberta for this opportunity. I'm very glad that . . .

**The Chair:** If you could give us your name and constituency.

**Mr. Storch:** Oh, I'm sorry. Norman Storch. I live northeast of Hanna, about two and a half hours from here. I live in Drumheller-Stettler, obviously.

Just initially, Commissioner Day, your comment about technology: would a logical extension of your question about technology replacing face time logically, then, extend to the Legislature so that at some point we would be able to do our question period by Skype? We wouldn't really need to have people from Lethbridge or from Drumheller-Stettler driving to Edmonton. We could just phone it in. I wonder about that. I think that would be something that would be met with significant opposition. Perhaps, from that view, you could look at our consideration of technology involved in our democratic process at a local level.

I didn't really plan to come today, but I was feeding the cows this morning, and I thought: "Today is the day. It's on. I've just got to go there to make this comment." We focus a lot on democracy and the vote, putting the vote in the ballot box and that so many people should have access to so many ballot boxes, but, you know, democracy is much more than that. Democracy also includes the process of coming up to the vote.

I ran as a nomination candidate for a political party a few years ago, and that process within the constituency, that part of the democratic process requires face time. Well, of course, Donald Trump has proven to us that that isn't true either, is it? You can tweet your way to the presidential office. From Donald in the northwest corner of the constituency to Empress, which I drove to four times during the candidate process, it is right on five hours at the speed limit, and I wasn't the only candidate. I perhaps covered a little more territory than some, but I wasn't the only candidate.

When Maeghan talked about rural remote, she was absolutely correct in that as we depopulate in rural Alberta – and that’s a compounding issue. We’ve depopulated rural Alberta, but the urban centres increased in population, so exponentially it gets worse quicker. The issue around rural remote is, in my view, something that should be reflected in legislation. The chair read a few points from the current legislation. We continually fight this battle about decreasing rural population and increasing urban population: what do we do with the vote and the boundaries? Do we have more MLAs, do we have fewer, whatever?

I would like to suggest that perhaps we could look at the legislation. I know that’s not in your purview, but perhaps there could be a minority comment or something to that effect that would suggest some method of calculating representation based on population times distance, population times geography, population times accessibility. I think, if I recall correctly, that in a number of elections rural turnout for elections is often greater than urban turnout by percentage. By percentage. One could suggest that that might reflect something about the democratic process. I don’t know, but you could explore that.

If you’re here today under current legislation, you’re going to be back in eight years. It would certainly, I think, be well worth our time and effort to look forward. The trends aren’t going to change, I don’t think, in terms of population movement, so in an effort to try to sort through how best to determine these boundaries, perhaps we need to look through a different lens, I think that lens of including a third designation. We typically talk about rural and urban. The issue of rural remote is certainly one by which we could, I think, reflect more effectively on the current situation and the situation we see a trend towards more rapidly even than we did a few years ago.

I again thank you very much for coming today. I would make just one other comment, and it might presuppose a question. If we had to expand this constituency, in my opinion, if you have to do it – and I’m certainly not encouraging it – do it in a method that brings the most people in with the least area.

**The Chair:** Any suggestions as to how that be done?

**Mr. Storch:** No. Well, I think it almost goes without saying that the population, of any number, is west. It’s not north. It’s not south.

**The Chair:** Well, you’re already kind of a square. We were discussing this when we were in Lac La Biche yesterday. They’re a long, thin rectangle, and they wanted to become a square because that would reduce driving distances.

**Mr. Storch:** We’re a long way from nowhere, and that’s a curse and a blessing, right? On the issue around communications, you know, the Internet, a comment was made. Jackie commented that Hanna is getting fibre optic. You asked the question about a land line. You almost offhandedly say: well, everybody can get a telephone.

2:20

Well, if you build a new house on an acreage today in the special areas, Telus is very reluctant to give you a land line. You kind of have to throw a real hissy fit to get one, and they will typically hang their line on the fence post. If you’re driving out in rural areas, you’ll see those black lines hanging on the fence posts along the highways that have been upgraded. They don’t really want to bury land lines anymore. They’re waiting for technology, secure technology, for us all to go wireless for phones in rural areas, but then cell towers aren’t all that effective and reliable. So a land line is not necessarily a given.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Any other questions or comments?

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Storch:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. There are some of you who haven’t spoken, but I know that you’re all interested in this topic. Anyone else who’d like to come forward? Yes, please.

**Mr. Laursen:** I had to make sure that everybody else had a chance. I would be in the potentially affected expanded boundaries on this one.

**The Chair:** Okay. Your name, sir?

**Mr. Laursen:** My name is Rick Laursen. I am just south of here, on the other side of the river, so to speak.

**The Chair:** So you’re in . . .

**Mr. Laursen:** I would be in the Strathmore-Brooks one. I understood that some of the boundary changes might be considering going south, which would be me, and possibly west. I would be south and just east of here. If you looked on the map at where Dorothy is, I am just south of Dorothy. If you were going to look at expanding – is that the current plan?

**The Chair:** There’s no plan at all.

**Mr. Laursen:** There is no current plan? Okay.

**The Chair:** I promise you that before we got here today, I did not look closely at Drumheller-Stettler, particularly. I was looking at yesterday’s constituencies. We have no precepts whatsoever.

**Mr. Laursen:** No precepts, yeah.

I think I heard a little bit – I had to be late because I had to take my granddaughter to school today, so I don’t know what happened earlier – and I would echo the comment of the speaker that was up when I walked in, that rural people would probably have far more in common with other rural people. So being in the Strathmore-Brooks constituency, Strathmore has very different interests than those of us that live east of 56. If we were going to change, I think most of the people out in that area would be better served that way.

The question, then, becomes, as the gentleman that was just up said: there are not a lot of people out where I live, so are we changing anything by doing that? That would be, I guess, the question I would have for you guys, and maybe you’ve already answered it. What’s the purpose of changing the boundaries, from your perspective? I’ll leave it at: is it?

**The Chair:** Well, we’re just on the task because the Legislature assigned that task to us, and we’re obliged by law to complete it according to the provisions in the legislation. The Legislature, when this legislation was passed, believed that periodically boundaries should be reviewed to ensure that democracy continues, as required in Alberta, and that’s why we’re here. The general statement is that we want to adjust those boundaries to be able to continue to ensure effective representation by your MLA, but it’s wide open as to what might be considered when deciding what would meet that test.

**Mr. Laursen:** Okay. Then there’s a question that maybe has been asked, and if it hasn’t, it probably needs to be asked. There’s a different political climate in urban areas than there is in rural areas. There always has been; there probably always will be. I know that if there isn’t concern in this room, there’s certainly concern in the

area of the current government wanting to realign the boundaries to make it more advantageous for future elections.

**Ms Livingstone:** I'm happy to say that this is not a political process at all, whatsoever. This is a strictly independent, nonpartisan commission that is making these decisions.

**Mr. Laursen:** This commission, yes.

**Ms Livingstone:** Yes.

**Mr. Laursen:** I'm just wondering: if you look at the bigger picture, is it strictly driven by the legislation? I guess that would be my question, and you're probably not the people to ask this.

**The Chair:** Okay, but you might be comforted by this. The last version of this legislation was passed in 2009 by a previous government, but there were versions of this legislation going back for many decades. In the past the recommendations of the Electoral Boundaries Commission have been accepted virtually in their complete form by each government and embodied in legislation. We would hate to be the first commission where that doesn't happen. Now, saying that, the last time they did change one boundary name, due to a write-in campaign, when the commission didn't make that recommendation, but that's small potatoes in terms of the big scope of where the boundaries actually lay.

So it might be surprising, but actually the system seems to have worked in Alberta, where there's a commission struck, they go out and talk to everybody, they look at the movements in population, and we take it from there. The driver of this is that this legislation required this commission to be struck by October 31, 2016, which it was, the day before that, and to do our work within a year. It sets

timelines for us to meet. So that's what we're doing here. It wasn't driven by anything beyond that. I appreciate that people are concerned about political masters interpreting things in a different way, but I suggest that if you look at Alberta's history, it's worked pretty well. Your problem might be simply the population shift, which is a fact, and you've acknowledged that.

**Mr. Laursen:** That's a problem with all of rural Alberta, particularly in the populations east of highway 2 and south of Edmonton. There are a lot fewer people here than, for example, if you looked at the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills riding: smaller farms, a lot more people, probably a lot more acreages, at least, than what's out here. I mean, if you have six sections here, you're barely a viable farm. If you're in the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills area and you have a section, that's a big farm. It makes a big difference.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Any other questions?

Okay. Thanks very much.

All right. Other presentations, other thoughts, other comments? Okay. Well, if you think of something later on that you'd like to bring to our attention and it just didn't come to mind right at the moment, please don't hesitate to write in. The easiest way to do it is to go onto our website at [abebc.ca](http://abebc.ca), and you can make your comment right there, or you can e-mail it in or send it in by social media or by post. Every one of those pieces of information will be considered by us in making our recommendation.

That said, thank you very much for coming today.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:28 p.m.]









