



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Edson

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Edson

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Alison Peyton

Jim Rennie

8:30 a.m.

Thursday, February 23, 2017

[Justice Bielby in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. We might as well get going. I was just waiting a few minutes in case there were others to join us. We have four people registered to speak this morning, and no doubt some of them will come as their time comes up in the morning. Otherwise, everybody will have a chance to speak, but we're just going to deal with the registered presenters first.

Thanks very much for coming out. I'm Justice Myra Bielby of the Alberta Court of Appeal. I live in Edmonton and work throughout the province, but at the moment I'm chairing the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission as well. I'd like to introduce the other members of the commission. To my far left, Jean Munn of Calgary, Laurie Livingstone of Calgary. To my far right, Gwen Day of Carstairs and then Bruce McLeod of Acme.

Over the past few weeks we've been travelling the province, holding hearings such as these, and a number of people have asked me why we're doing this work and what the job of the Electoral Boundaries Commission is. So I thought that I'd start out with a few comments on that subject. This commission has been created to research and make recommendations to our 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. Of course, we'll all remember that representation by population is a fundamental principle of democracy and that that means that one person's vote should be relatively as effective as another person's vote in every election. But things have changed in Alberta over the last eight years to make that less likely to happen if the boundaries are left the way they are.

I know that this is a big room and it's maybe hard to see, but the map on my right, your left, with a big green patch at the top is the provincial map. If you look at it, you'll see that it's divided into 87 sections, not all the same size. Eight years ago they all held relatively the same number of people. Over that period of time, however, we've had more than 600,000 people move into Alberta. Our population has increased net by more than 14 per cent, and this is accurate to February 8 this month. We're very lucky that the federal census came out while we were doing our work. The 600,000 people did not move equally to all of our 87 constituencies. They tended to focus in certain areas like Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, and probably here in Edson as well. Fewer of them moved to other areas of the province. The result of that is that our provincial constituencies do not at the moment hold relatively the same number of people.

To go through this with you, we have 87 constituencies. As we know, each constituency elects one MLA in every provincial election, and we have 87 MLAs who serve us in the Legislature in Edmonton. Our population has gone up 14 per cent. If you look at our provincial map, you'll see two sets of numbers. The blue number was the population of each constituency in 2010, when the last Electoral Boundaries Commission finished its work, and the red number is the current population. There's a percentage there showing the difference above or below the current population average. For example, in West Yellowhead, this constituency, the population at the moment is 31,551, which is 32 per cent below provincial average. Even though 250 people moved into this constituency over the last eight years, that was not proportional to the number of people who moved into the province in that period of time.

Our average population at the moment is 46,697. We arrive at that number by dividing 87 into our provincial population of 4,062,609. That was further adjusted last Friday. Statistics Canada

went back up to McMurray and did a small census to try to adjust for the people who had not yet returned after the fire and found that 9,100 had not yet returned. So they reduced the numbers up there by 9,100. The Saddle Lake reserve never participates in a census. I'm not sure why. That's gone on for a long time. Indian affairs gave an estimated figure of about 2,300 people, so we added that to the number. That's how we came up with the 46,697. It's an adjusted figure, but it is the average figure. If every constituency in Alberta had the same population, they would all have that figure, 46,697.

But that hasn't happened. Our populations are quite a bit out of whack at the moment, if I can use that phrase. The smallest population in any constituency is 17,129 people, less than half the provincial average, and the largest is 92,248 people, almost twice, 97 per cent, of the provincial average over. This variation has arisen – sometimes you hear people talk: oh, it's that people are moving from the country to the city. I'm sure to a small degree that's true, but mostly these are people moving from eastern Canada into Alberta. They are people who are within the country, who have migrated to Alberta for economic opportunity, and they have made this huge swing in the number of people in our constituencies so that the smallest constituency is about one-fifth the size of the largest constituency. Another way to put it is that the vote of somebody who votes in Fort McMurray-Conklin is worth about four and a half times the effect of a person who votes in Calgary-South East, our largest constituency, and that, perhaps, is not reflective of the representation-by-population principle.

We have been asked by the Legislature to do a boundary review, and we're controlled by an act, a law, in Alberta called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It was first passed by the first provincial Legislature, when the province was created in 1905, but it's been revised from time to time. The most recent revision was in 1990. It tells us how to go about our job, and it says that in recommending changes to boundaries – and we don't have to recommend changes to every one of the 87 boundaries. I'm sure that there are some boundaries we will leave alone because a number of constituencies, particularly in the centre of Calgary and the centre of Edmonton, have grown pretty much in step with the growth in the population. They're only within 2 per cent above or below the provincial average, so, you know, they may not see as much change as some of the other areas in the province.

Where we do have to change, what we're going to look at in adjusting the growth across the province is to consider not just relative population densities. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act requires us to consider "common community interests and . . . organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Metis settlements." So we don't want to put a constituency line right through a group of people who have a common interest, one with the other, if we can avoid it, and that's one of the reasons of having these public hearings, so that people can come out. We had a great presentation yesterday in Calgary from the four Indian bands that live near what used to be called Hobbema. It's now Maskwacis. Last time a constituency dividing line went right through the middle, so they're saying: "Gee, you know, we've always been in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency, and we'd like to be together again. We have a common interest. We're all registered Indians." That's an easy example of what we're talking about here. We don't want to do that. We want to avoid doing that.

We also want to respect community and neighbourhood boundaries within Edmonton and Calgary, so if we're changing a constituency line within one of the major cities, to try to keep neighbourhoods together cohesively in different constituencies. We're to respect municipal boundaries, so we're to try to avoid, for example, cutting Edson up. We want to keep Edson in one

constituency or another, no matter what changes there might be to boundaries.

We haven't made any decisions at all. Please know that. We've only actually been doing this work on the road since the beginning of February, and we have to get through the whole province before we start thinking about any particular boundary. This is just conceptually that I'm using these examples.

The act also tells us to, where we can, use geographical features such as a major highway or a river or mountains or whatever that might suggest a natural boundary so people in a constituency can easily remember the boundaries of their constituency if they remember, "oh, it goes over to highway 2," or whatever. In addition to that, we can consider any other factor that you think is relevant to allowing your MLA to effectively represent you in the Legislature. So the list in the legislation isn't a closed list. It's open to us to consider other factors, and people have been suggesting other things that we should keep in mind as we make our decisions, when that time comes.

We've travelled throughout the province. We've had a number of hearings to this point. We will finish our hearings tomorrow. We've got Lesser Slave Lake this afternoon and Westlock tomorrow morning, and then we will go back to Edmonton and meet and come up with 87 recommendations, one for each constituency. As I said, some of the boundaries maybe don't change with this, but we'll make these 87 recommendations. The information that we're going to use to make those recommendations, to try to make clear and understandable boundaries for every constituency, is your input at public hearings, including what we hear today and also the input we've received via our written submissions.

8:40

I'm pleased to say that we have 749 written submissions, and I'm bragging about that because we pulled those in in about six weeks, and the last time the boundaries were reviewed in 2009-2010, they got 500 written submissions in the whole year. But to be honest, I have to admit that now we have a website, and people can make the submissions right on the website, or they can e-mail us a submission or do it on social media, so we've made it easier for people to make a submission now than it was prior to this boundary review.

After we come up with our 87 recommendations – and that includes recommendations as to constituency names; if we change constituencies, we may consider changing the name – those recommendations will be published. We have to publish them before May 31 of this year. They'll be posted on our website at that time, and that website is abebc.ca, and I think the Legislature will also post them on their website. We'll then invite further submissions. I expect that when people see what's actually recommended for their constituency, they might have further suggestions for us like, "Oops, you've cut through this," or "You've done the wrong thing here," or "You didn't follow the county line," or "This is a problem for us here or there." We're hoping to receive that kind of feedback.

Then we'll have a second round of public hearings in late July, early August, fine-tune our recommendations as a result of that, receive further written submissions as well if people want to make them, and before October 31 of this year file our final report with the provincial Legislature. In the normal course the Legislature will then enact legislation putting our recommendations into effect. They don't have to, but always in the past, historically, that's happened, so fingers crossed that that will happen this time as well.

Unlike on previous occasions this commission has not been given any additional constituencies to work with. The last time the commission sat – and none of us were on it at that time – the Legislature had created four new constituencies. The number went

from 83 to 87, and the commission was able to deal with a lot of the additional population to the province by the flexibility created by those four new constituencies. But that hasn't happened this time. We are left with our 87, so I have been using the analogy of saying that it's just like we have the same size of pizza; we're just cutting the pieces in different shapes this time. We don't have a larger pizza.

In doing that, the quality or parity of population in each constituency is not our only consideration, as I said earlier. While our courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have interpreted our legislation as meaning that each of us has the right to have the political strength or value of our vote not unduly diluted, the legislation permits variances where necessary from provincial average size of up to 25 per cent above or below the provincial average, up to 25 per cent above or below 46,697, and for up to four special constituencies up to 50 per cent below.

Right now we have two of those special constituencies because we're still looking at the constituencies as recommended by the last boundary commission, and those special constituencies are Lesser Slave Lake and Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. We have to adjust, at minimum, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley because it's 51 per cent below the provincial average and that's too much, so we have to at least adjust it a little bit. In our work we've seen constituencies that are above or below the mandatory limits, and we have no choice but to address those.

That constituency approach includes West Yellowhead, which is 32 per cent below at the moment, so we would have to adjust your constituency to bring it closer to 25 per cent below or right up to not below at all. We've got all the flexibility to do that, but expect that something will happen with regard to West Yellowhead because it's below the legal limit of variance right now.

In summary, our work will require us to look at each constituency in turn, look at the population in that constituency, compare it to the provincial average of 46,697, see if it's above or below, and if it is significantly above or below, decide whether there's any reason that we shouldn't move the boundaries in or out to get the population closer to provincial average.

Please know that *Hansard* staff are here and recording. Everything that we're saying here today is going to be available on our website, in audio form and in written form, within the next few days. Within the next couple of weeks all of the written submissions that we have received will also be posted on our website and can be read or reviewed by anybody.

Now, we've found – and this is an evolving process – that it's helpful to have the blown-up maps of individual constituencies available when we have these public hearings. Those maps have been posted along the walls here, so you can see what the constituency here and the surrounding constituencies look like. If during your presentation you want to recommend specific boundary changes, we might invite you to go up to the map. The clerk will hand you a marker, and you can mark your recommendation for where the boundaries should go. He'll take a photo of that, and then we'll match that up with a record of your written or oral comments during our deliberation so that we capture your actual suggestion and can understand better your actual suggestion.

On that note, it's time to start. Our first registered speaker is Arthur Helm. Is Mr. Helm present? Okay.

Then we'll move on to Clyde Corser. Mr. Corser, would you mind coming forward and sitting in front of one of the mikes there. If you could start off by telling us the constituency in which you reside.

Mr. Corser: I reside in West Yellowhead. If I could start off, I'd like to just give each of you a handout that I've prepared.

The Chair: Of course. Sure.

Mr. Corser: Thank you, Madam Chairman and commission members, for the opportunity to present to you the view from West Yellowhead on behalf of the Wildrose West Yellowhead Constituency Association. As you've pointed out, our population of 31,551 is 32 per cent below the provincial average, so we must enlarge our boundaries. We cannot expand into B.C. to the west; neither can we achieve the commission's objectives by moving further into the largely unsettled regions to our north and south. This means we must expand northeast to include Whitecourt, southeast to bring in Drayton Valley, or straight eastward toward Stony Plain. All three options are viable, and each would bring our departure from the provincial mean to within 3 per cent.

If you look at the documents I have given you, I would like to go through each alternative in more detail. I should perhaps point out at this time that there are minor departures in the numbers shown in figure 2 from the earlier written representations that I've made. Before I start, though, I would point out that I wish to preserve the recommendations I made in my revised written presentation to rename our constituency Yellowhead and to remove from it Grande Cache and the very small area of Greenview county surrounding it, which are more closely aligned with Grande Prairie. I would delete, too, the remote and unpopulated Willmore wilderness park, which should remain with its administrative centre, Grande Cache.

The core of the Yellowhead constituency, then, is Jasper national park and Yellowhead county, the settled portion of which is shown in blue in figure 1. I have used the largest possible scale to increase the clarity of my proposed alternatives, so most of Jasper park and western Yellowhead county are not shown on the map. Adding the rest of Yellowhead county to the present West Yellowhead constituency increases our population to 33,881, still 27 per cent below the provincial average, 20 per cent below if we were to keep Grande Cache.

8:50

I've developed three more realistic alternatives, that are shown in figures 1 and 2. The first is to add to Yellowhead all that portion of the western half of the present Drayton Valley-Devon constituency lying west of the North Saskatchewan River, including the town of Drayton Valley. This option is coloured yellow on the map and would increase our population to 46,509, essentially right on the provincial average. I should say that if this option is not chosen, I would reiterate my earlier written opinion that the western portion of the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency, which is part of Yellowhead county and shaded yellow and blue in figure 1, should likely remain attached to Drayton Valley – that is its natural trading centre – and it has very few people in it.

The second option that I would present is to delete from the present constituencies of Stony Plain and Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and add to Yellowhead that portion of Parkland county lying west of highways 43 and 770 plus Indian reserve 133A, the Paul band. This area is coloured green in figure 1 and would bring Yellowhead's population up to approximately 45,320, or 3 per cent below the mean.

Finally, the third option would be to add to Yellowhead that portion of Woodlands county west of range road 10, including the town of Whitecourt. Figure 1 shows this area coloured pink, and it would suggest a population within 1 per cent of the mean.

Each of the three options maintains municipal integrity where possible, takes into account distinct geographical features and the other considerations dictated by the commission guidelines. All are acceptable to us, so your final choice will rely more on population pressures and redistribution priorities associated with other constituencies adjoining the three affected by these changes. On

that basis I would speculate that option 2 is likely the most attractive since even though the constituency of Stony Plain is essentially bang on the provincial average, relieving it of the western half of Parkland county would allow Stony Plain to expand into and ease some of the population pressure from the overcrowded adjoining constituencies of Spruce Grove-St. Albert, Leduc-Beaumont, or even Edmonton-South West. That, however, is your call to make, based on the bigger picture you are developing through these hearings.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to participate in the process, and I'm happy to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I must say that we've found it particularly helpful when people have given us visual aids to support their presentation, so thanks very much for giving this to us. We'll certainly look it over closely.

I'm going to use this opportunity, though, to ask you not just about West Yellowhead but also about your neighbour constituencies for fear we don't get anybody from those neighbouring constituencies, and I don't want to lose the opportunity to ask you about them.

The most dramatic one next to West Yellowhead is Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, which is 15 per cent below the provincial average. I take your comments about taking in part of that constituency to bring the numbers up in West Yellowhead, but if for some reason as we go around the province – there is kind of a domino effect or a ripple effect from our decision, as you pointed out yourself – we find we can't accept that recommendation and that we're just looking at Whitecourt-Ste. Anne as is, if we had to move the boundaries there, not west, because we've already talked about that, but north, east, or south, do you have a view as to how that would best keep the population of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne cohesive, if you know what I mean, like people with the same type of jobs, the same type of lifestyle? What would be the best way to move? Does it matter?

Mr. Corser: Well, as I pointed out in my presentation, we really don't have much wiggle room in West Yellowhead. Looking at the map, if we were to move the West Yellowhead boundaries north, for example, realistically the only community that we could move into would be Fox Creek, I think. There is nothing, really, south of us. I've taken it as a given for the purposes of this presentation that what we will be doing will have to impact Whitecourt-Ste. Anne because we simply have no choice under the guidelines but to go somewhere.

You know, moving further north, say up into the Grande Prairie area, would be unrealistic in terms of the distances, the demographics. We are quite separate communities whereas Edson and Whitecourt in particular are very similar communities. We have strong connections, of course, through Yellowhead county, through the central part, between our current boundaries as we move eastward towards Edmonton. Both Drayton Valley and Parkland county and even the eastern portion of Yellowhead county tend to be more agricultural than we are currently, but we already live with that through our current municipal boundaries. Really, Drayton Valley and Whitecourt are sister communities to Edson and Hinton, which are the main communities in West Yellowhead now.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I'm going to ask you a question that seems like it's out of the blue, but this is another suggestion made. We've had the benefit of many people's comments, so I'd like to hear your thoughts on this, and that is to create a constituency by joining the two national parks, Banff and Jasper, and moving out through Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to make up our numbers. Would that work at all?

Mr. Corser: So the suggestion is to join the two national parks into one constituency?

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Corser: And then adjust the other constituencies further south?

The Chair: Further east, really.

Mr. Corser: That would make perfect sense to us, and of course I'm speaking here on behalf of the Wildrose, West Yellowhead. At our last board meeting one of the members jokingly suggested that we try and move Jasper into B.C. because it's our weakest area.

No, I wouldn't have a problem with that except that that would exacerbate, you know, the population problem that we have here. If Jasper were removed from West Yellowhead . . .

The Chair: No. I'm talking about Banff-Jasper and Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, kind of a T-shape there.

Mr. Corser: As one constituency?

The Chair: As one constituency.

Mr. Corser: Yes, but if Jasper, which is currently in West Yellowhead – Jasper national park and mainly the town of Jasper – were removed from West Yellowhead, then of course that would reduce our population even further.

The Chair: Oh, right. We'd be making West Yellowhead into something else by doing this.

Mr. Corser: So, in effect, are you suggesting that West Yellowhead, for example, then, might be attached to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne?

The Chair: The remaining bit of it, yes. Exactly. I mean, it's just an idea that somebody suggested, and I wanted to get your view on it.

Mr. Corser: Well, I don't have any particular objection to it although in this area the whole concept of Yellowhead tends to be considered as one unit.

Mrs. Day: Do you know what the population is in Jasper? What are we talking about for numbers there? I might have it somewhere here.

Mr. Corser: Yes. You do have it in figure 2. The census population for Jasper is 4,590.

Mrs. Day: Okay.

Mr. Corser: At least, that's the town of Jasper, which is where the vast majority of the population would live.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

I'm going to turn to my fellow commissioners and ask if they have any questions.

Ms Munn: I don't have any questions. Thank you.

Mr. McLeod: Yeah, if you don't mind. In your submission from February 16 you suggested dropping Grande Cache, which is more aligned with Grande Prairie, and bringing in the remaining Yellowhead county. I noticed on the map you gave us today that it looks like it's kind of using – what's that? – the Berland River as kind of the guide now.

9:00

Mr. Corser: The Berland River in that portion is currently the boundary of Yellowhead county.

Mr. McLeod: Yellowhead county.

Mr. Corser: Yes.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. You're trying to preserve the county guidelines, in a sense.

Mr. Corser: Yes. I'm suggesting that with the possible exception of the small corner relatively unpopulated west of Drayton Valley, it makes sense to maintain the cohesiveness of Yellowhead county.

Mr. McLeod: Do you have the population of Grande Cache?

Mr. Corser: Yes.

Mr. McLeod: I was looking at your information.

Mr. Corser: Okay. Yes. It's in figure 2 in the first section. The population of Grande Cache is 3,571.

Mr. McLeod: Sorry. I didn't see that. Oh, okay.

Mr. Corser: If we dropped Grande Cache from our present constituency boundaries, it would bring our – if we kept Grande Cache, it would bring us up to 20 per cent, which I think is probably still below what the commission would accept unless there were unusual circumstances.

Mrs. Day: So with your suggested changes, are you saying that there is a natural trade route between Drayton Valley and Hinton and Edson, or is this mainly about numbers? Like, we're supposed to kind of keep in mind the commerce and where people flow with their natural trade routes. Does that make sense there as well?

Mr. Corser: Yes. That's true. As regards Drayton Valley there would be less of a natural trade commerce between Drayton Valley and Edson – there would be a certain amount – but there would be a natural connection between Drayton Valley and the west end of what's presently the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency. I would say that in Edson, speaking for Edson as a community rather than for the constituency, we have much more connectivity with Whitecourt and, of course, with Hinton, which is now part of our constituency, than we do with Drayton Valley although we have very common industries. They have more agriculture, but we share the forestry industries and the oil and gas industries.

Mrs. Day: So the natural east-west flows – because you go out to Wabamun Lake, et cetera. If you flowed into that area, it's kind of more going east and west on the highway.

Mr. Corser: That's true, yes. There, again, they tend to be far more agricultural than we are. Here we're into the agricultural area, but we're still primarily green zone.

Mrs. Day: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Your suggestion to move Grande Cache into one of the Grande Prairie constituencies reminded me of the fact that, sadly, we couldn't get to Grande Prairie. We were weathered out. They had a nice fog up there and the plane couldn't land, so we haven't been able to get to Grande Prairie in this scheduled round of public hearings. So I'm just going to try to borrow some of your knowledge here about Grande Prairie.

Grande Prairie city is divided roughly in half, and each half is added to a rural area. I've been calling these hybrid constituencies, but some presenters call them rural constituencies. If we were to add Grande Cache to one of those two constituencies, would it be to Wapiti or Smoky? Do you know?

Mr. Corser: Well, as it sits now – and this is assuming that those boundaries aren't changed – it would be to Wapiti, I would expect. Now, I would also – looking at my map here, both Wapiti and Smoky are over the provincial average, in the case of Wapiti significantly over, but on the other hand, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley to the north, as you've pointed out, is far under, as is Peace River, as is Slave Lake. So I would expect that it would be reasonable to make adjustment in those boundaries.

The Chair: You're reading my mind. Looking at Grande Prairie-Wapiti – you might not be able to answer this question, but you're certainly in a better place than I am to know just off the cuff. If we were inclined to move part of the population of Grande Prairie-Wapiti into Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, is there a natural divide – a river, the highway, something that suggests that connection – or should we just stick the whole part that isn't Grande Prairie, of Wapiti, onto Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley?

Mr. Corser: I would be better placed to answer that question if I lived in Grande Prairie, of course.

The Chair: Of course. You bet.

Mr. Corser: But just looking at the map, perhaps the Peace River. Perhaps.

The Chair: Sorry. Forgive my ignorance. The Peace River flows through . . .

Mr. Corser: No, I'm sorry. I'm thinking along a different line.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Corser: We're moving the boundary south . . .

The Chair: Right. We are.

Mr. Corser: . . . so perhaps the main highway – I think it's still 43 there, isn't it? – that goes through Wembley and Beaverlodge and so on. I don't know where the municipal boundaries lie there, the county boundaries.

The Chair: Okay. It's just that we have to do something about Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, too, so I thought I'd just ask.

All right. Any other questions? Okay.

Thank you very much, again. This has been extremely helpful.

Mr. Corser: You're very welcome. Thank you again.

The Chair: Thank you.

Has Mr. Helm arrived?

Okay. We're a little bit ahead of time for Ms Yakula, but if she's here.

All right. Then I'm going to extend the invitation to anybody else who's here. I mean, you must be here because you're interested in the topic. We'd love to hear from you if you wouldn't mind coming up to the mike and telling us whether you live in West Yellowhead or another constituency and what your views are about moving the boundaries. Now, yesterday in Calgary we had a personal best; I got

every spectator up to the mike, so I'm hoping that would happen here today, too.

Hi.

Mrs. Peyton: Hi. I'm not sure how to address everybody, but hello.

The Chair: Hello.

Mrs. Peyton: My name is Alison Peyton. I've run the municipal, federal, provincial elections for 22 years, so I've worn many hats. I live in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne region even though I go to Whitecourt maybe three or four times a year and I'm in Edson every single day. So I am for moving the boundary lines just because I find that we use Edson more than we use Whitecourt. I've also worked in the Grande Prairie electoral region as well, so I agree with your changes for that, that Clyde presented. Yeah. I think these will be good changes. I do think there needs to be changes in the boundaries with the way I've seen the election process, the way it's progressing. So I look forward to seeing the reviews.

The Chair: Okay. You haven't had a chance to look at our map.

Mrs. Peyton: No. I've just heard.

The Chair: Right. I could hand you my copy, and you could maybe – all right. Mr. Corser is just handing you a copy. He gave three choices, three options for the area, and I know that you were in the room listening. One, two, or three: do you have any views on which would work best, as a returning officer?

Mrs. Peyton: Okay. Hold on. Can I just have five minutes to talk to Clyde?

The Chair: Yeah. Just go right ahead and take the time you need.

Mrs. Peyton: Option 2 will work well because that's my area. I do think it should be Yellowhead county, not east-west. That's your option 2.

Mr. Corser: Yes.

Mrs. Peyton: Yeah, that makes sense.

9:10

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Now, again, this may not be your area of expertise, but you're here, and we haven't heard from anybody from Whitecourt-Ste. Anne at all. Aside from these suggestions for expanding into Yellowhead, just looking at Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, it's well below the provincial average, not into the prohibited range, but it's a higher deviation, 15 per cent below. Do you have any thought about how we might move any of the other boundaries in addition to the western boundary to increase the size of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, to move the population closer to the provincial average – and if, in fact, we moved Whitecourt into Yellowhead, then, you know, we'd have even fewer people in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Any observations on what would be a natural connection? Is the constituency perhaps more naturally aligned with Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to the north or Drayton Valley-Devon to the south?

Mrs. Peyton: I would go Barrhead. That way.

Mr. Corser: Madam Chairman, if I might make a comment on that as well. I've thought about that, obviously. My proposal includes dramatic changes to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I've thought about that, and I've talked with people in Whitecourt. It seems that the logical progression for the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency, with the

exception of Fox Creek, which could be added to it – they're more closely related communities than Fox Creek-Grande Prairie. But it seems that other than that, the logical movement would be to the east. Certainly, Barrhead and just how much further east would be hard to say, but enlarge that constituency to the east and then what is now Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock could help to relieve some of the population pressure in Spruce Grove-St. Albert or the Edmonton environs, the suburbs there.

The Chair: Thank you.
Okay. Mrs. Peyton.

Mrs. Peyton: I was just saying to Mr. Corser that Fox Creek should be out of Valleyview. It's closer. I would put it in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne boundary to help with the population and spread it out.

The Chair: Sure.

Mrs. Peyton: I have worked for Lana Fjellner. She was the head boss of . . .

The Chair: Returning officer? Head returning officer?

Mrs. Peyton: Yes. Thank you.
. . . in West Yellowhead. I worked in Grande Prairie, but it was for the west part when it was elections.

The Chair: Okay. I'll ask you the same question, and, again, I know we're all just kind of not as well versed in what's going on in Grande Prairie as would be ideal. But seeing as we're here and we're not going to be in Grande Prairie right away, what's your thought on moving the Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley border down into Grande Prairie-Wapiti to pick up some population?

Mrs. Peyton: Sorry. I'm just looking.

The Chair: Sure. Yeah. Absolutely.

Mrs. Peyton: I think that would be a good move.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Corser suggested we move it down to the highway that goes through Wembley and Beaverlodge. Any thoughts on that?

Mrs. Peyton: Yes. I agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Corser: Perhaps the Wapiti River because the highway has active agricultural areas on both sides of it, but once we get further south, it moves more into the forested.

The Chair: All right. Thanks.
I'm going to ask if my colleagues have any questions.

Mrs. Day: Sorry. I'm a little confused about Fox Creek. Where do you believe it would more align with its socioeconomic position? Is it more to Grande Prairie or were you saying more to Yellowhead?

Mr. Corser: Fox Creek and Whitecourt are closely aligned.

Mrs. Day: Whitecourt. Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other questions? All right.
Thanks very much, Mrs. Peyton, for coming forward.
All right. So there's one other lady in the room who I'd love to hear from.

Ms Lyons: My name is Barb Lyons, and I am the director of corporate and planning services for Yellowhead county. I'm a resident of Edson, and unusually enough I've also lived in Grande Prairie and Peace River. To move away from Yellowhead at the moment but to talk about the Grande Prairie issue, having lived in Peace River and Grande Prairie – and it was some time ago. It was 15 years ago, and Peace River has changed quite a bit because of the expansion of oil in there. The people and the residents in Peace River travel south to Grande Prairie and work through that corridor, but the residents surrounding Grande Prairie – the Wembleys, Clairmont, Beaverlodge, et cetera – really have very little to do with going north. Their entire commerce, recreation, everything would be geared towards Grande Prairie.

The Chair: But Grande Prairie, you say, is geared toward Beaverlodge?

Ms Lyons: That corridor: Beaverlodge, Wembley, all those smaller places just north of Grande Prairie. You were talking about if you move the border south of them, to move them into that Dunvegan, you know, your Fairview, Peace River. They really do not go north. They go south. I think you would be really cutting them off not from the physical community but from the community that they would associate with. That really has got no valid reasoning behind it other than having lived there.

The Chair: No, no. Absolutely. That's great that you have. Frankly, we have to pick up the numbers in Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, so do you have any other suggestions for us?

Ms Lyons: Where is the edge? Can you go any further north?

The Chair: No. It more or less goes up to Peace River, but there's nobody who lives north of the boundary. There are no communities shown here except for a reserve that's very far north.

Mr. McLeod: High Level.

The Chair: Yeah, but High Level is not directly north. You're just right up to the border with the territories.

Ms Lyons: Yeah.

The Chair: It's not your problem to solve. I'm just exploring options here.

Ms Lyons: That's a challenge. Just looking at how people move around up there, that really is a challenge.

The Chair: Well, let's talk about maybe moving – and again, we haven't made any decisions. I'm just looking at the map and asking myself these questions. What about moving into Grande Prairie-Smoky instead of moving into Grand Prairie-Wapiti? Grande Prairie-Smoky has also got some surplus population, 6 per cent over, and it has a common boundary with Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. If we moved the border south, what would happen there in terms of natural trading areas?

Ms Lyons: I'm sorry. You're losing me. You're talking about Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley?

The Chair: Okay. You see Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley on the map.

Ms Lyons: Yeah; 51 or 57.

The Chair: If you moved to kind of the southeast corner of that and you look a little bit down on the map, you see the name Grande Prairie-Smoky. That's made up of half of the city of Grande Prairie to the far west part of that constituency, and the rest is rural land. If we move the boundary of Grande Prairie-Central Peace-Notley south there, not to touch the actual city of Grande Prairie but to pick up some of the countryside, if you like, is there any natural barrier or boundary or place that we could move south to to add a bit of population?

Ms Lyons: There's not really a whole lot of people there, is there?

The Chair: All right. So looking at Grande Prairie-Smoky – sorry for my ignorance in this area of the province – where would the largest population centre be in Grande Prairie-Smoky? Is it all rural and reserves, or is there a town there?

Ms Lyons: Well, it would be Valleyview, I think.

The Chair: Valleyview. Okay. This sounds like a long shot, but what about picking up Valleyview and adding it to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley or adding it to Lesser Slave Lake, as far as that goes?

9:20

Ms Lyons: Yeah. I guess that's possible.

Valleyview would interact, I would think, more logically with Fox Creek. You've got that corridor. People move through that corridor for work. Those are about the only places where you'd pick up any numbers, I would think.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask my colleagues if they have any questions.

Ms Livingstone: Just one. You were here to hear Mr. Corser's presentation. I don't know if his map is still on the table there, but I was wondering what you thought of the options he presented.

Ms Lyons: I do agree when he said that in the Edson area the more logical commerce-type route, I believe, is Whitecourt as opposed to Drayton Valley. However, from a county point of view of our residents, our residents are concentrated somewhat in the east, in the Evansburg area. Those people do not really consider Edson to be their commercial area. They go further east. They would go more out toward Stony Plain. I believe for medical services, et cetera, they very often go to Drayton Valley.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Among the options he presented, is there one that you think is more logical or a better choice from your perspective? He's got the option to go towards Drayton Valley, the one that heads towards Stony Plain, and the one that heads towards Whitecourt.

Ms Lyons: Dealing from a municipal perspective, when you're looking at grant funding, dealing with MLAs, et cetera, moving more to the Whitecourt area might make more sense for us.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Very helpful.

All right. Anything else, anyone?

Because you've had returning officer experience and we've only had one other speaker working for a returning officer, working at a poll . . .

Ms Lyons: I'm sorry. I haven't, actually.

The Chair: You haven't.

Ms Lyons: No.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Lyons: I mean, I have actually acted as a CAO during an election, but I've never actually dealt with the returning officer aspect of it. I have some knowledge.

The Chair: This isn't necessarily one of our considerations, but I've read reports of previous boundary commissions over the years, and sometimes returning officers do come and make observations about poll placement concerns, if you know what I'm talking about. Thinking at the moment of your experience in West Yellowhead as it still is, any observations about where the boundary should be in terms of making it easier for voters to get to the poll or easier for returning officers to set up polls?

Ms Lyons: You know, I really don't think I could help on that.

The Chair: All right. Thank you so much.

Ms Lyons: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to take a break. Our next scheduled speaker is due any time, Maria Yakula, so we'll just stand down until she appears or somebody else appears.

[The hearing adjourned from 9:23 a.m. to 10:02 a.m.]

The Chair: Hello, everyone. We'll get going again.

I understand that our next registered speaker, Jim Rennie, is here. Mr. Rennie, if you wouldn't mind coming up and taking a seat at the microphone, and if you could kick off by telling us the constituency in which you reside.

Mr. Rennie: Sure. I live in Whitecourt-St. Anne.

The Chair: Thank you. All right. Also, know that everything we're saying here today is being recorded by *Hansard* and will be posted on our website in audio form and also in a written transcript within a couple of days.

Mr. Rennie: Very good.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rennie: If I can begin.

The Chair: Please do.

Mr. Rennie: Very good. I think that it was actually in the same room the last time – I think it was 2009, perhaps – when I last presented to our electoral boundary review. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity here. I'm representing Woodlands county. I'm the mayor and have been elected for 17 years. In that time I've had a chance to see a lot of changes in Alberta, and I want to acknowledge how much – I can understand that you've got a tough job ahead of you as you try to figure out: how do you balance the differences I see mainly between rural and urban? When I look at the riding I saw in the newspaper yesterday, in Calgary, where you have 90,000-plus people, I can't imagine how you're going to pull off that balancing act, but I trust that you'll find the best ways for Albertans.

One of the opportunities I've had as I've spent a lot of time with our different MLAs over the years, travelling from side to side of Whitecourt-St. Anne – Woodlands county extends into the

Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock riding as well. Travelling with the MLAs, I've had a chance to see a few things that I wanted to share. Now, the first one, I think, is obvious. You probably all know that geographically it's very different for an MLA in rural Alberta to go from one side of the constituency to the other, sometimes as many as 200 kilometres in my constituencies, compared to a city. They have a lot smaller space although due to traffic maybe it takes the same amount of time. That's why I love rural Alberta.

The other difference, though, that I've seen – and I think it's something that's important that maybe isn't quite as apparent – is the difference that they have in the number of boards that they have to work with. In Whitecourt-Ste. Anne we have over 20 elected councils, on top of that dozens upon dozens of chambers of commerce, school boards, health authorities, ag service boards, and countless community groups. All of them want to have face time with their MLAs. As I would travel with our MLA, we'd go a hundred kilometres one way and go to a graduation, a hundred kilometres back to make a presentation to a rotary group, a hundred kilometres in a different direction to speak to a community council, and it goes on and on.

It's very, very difficult for the people in those ridings to meet the present demands, and if we were to make the geographical boundaries larger, I think it would really do a disservice to rural Alberta. That's one of the observations that I wanted to make. My request is that the commissioners would look at keeping that plus/minus 25 per cent, that I know some are considering. Why not lower that amount so that we can even out the constituencies in Alberta? The plus/minus 25 per cent works well in our constituency in that you wouldn't have to change any boundaries.

The other point that I'd like to make in front of you today is that I've heard in the past the possibility of just erasing all the lines and starting fresh and building a new Alberta with new constituencies. I hope that's not something that's being considered. I know that perhaps an NDP government, for instance, would love to see a hub and spoke type model, where you take a bit of rural and a bit of urban and move them all together, so you draw lines from the larger centres out to rural Alberta. We just don't have anything in common with the people from Edmonton other than the fact that we're all Albertans. Our issues are so much different.

If you look at our constituency, we've got a mixture of agriculture, oil and gas, and lumber. It works pretty well together. If you were to shift anything on our geographical borders for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, I'd urge you to actually put us more with groups of municipalities like Fox Creek, Swan Hills, or Valleyview, that have more of an oil and lumber focus, because we have so little agriculture on the far west side of our constituency. Leaving it the same as it is is certainly better than it would be if you were to mix us with urbans, that have very different needs from their MLAs.

I think those are all of the points that I'd like to make, just urging you to keep things at the 25 per cent plus/minus and also, if possible, to not change and mix the rurals and urbans.

The last point I wanted to maybe share was that I took part with our MP in the electoral boundary review for our federal constituencies, and we had a very strong presentation. I stayed and watched about 20 others make the exact same presentation for our constituency, and the commission came back with the exact opposite of what our recommendations were. We never see our MP now. In his constituency he's unable to drive from one end of it and back in the same day. It takes more than 24 hours to do that.

Now, that's a federal issue, and it's very big – of course, bigger ridings – but it's such a shame that they did that. That commission of the day argued with us that there are scheduled flights daily within the region, which there weren't. They were wrong, and there still aren't flights. It really has changed our federal representative's

ability to represent us because we never see him anymore. Even though he's a great guy, he just doesn't have the ability to get to all the corners of this much larger electoral boundary.

With that reflection, as I bring it forward to you, I hope that we can try our best to maintain similar geographical boundaries because we see them working in rural Alberta.

I'm open for any questions. I thank you for your time.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I'll start. I don't know if this will give you comfort or not, but no one has suggested a hub and spoke model. You're the third person who said: don't go there. I don't know where this comes from, perhaps because, I understand, they've done it in Saskatchewan. In any event, that hasn't been suggested to us as a good idea by anybody.

In relation to the presentation this morning, a previous speaker, Clyde Corser, who's here in the room, made a suggestion for reconfiguring Yellowhead, which we have to do something about because it's more than 25 per cent under. One of his options was to take in part of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and create a new constituency with part of your current constituency and part of Yellowhead constituency. I don't know whether you're willing to take a look at his map . . .

Mr. Rennie: I'd like to.

The Chair: . . . but I'd like to ask whether you think this is a good idea or not. I'm talking about the part that's covered with the blue lines.

Mr. Rennie: The pink would be a new constituency as well?

10:10

The Chair: He had three options.

Maybe, if you wouldn't mind, Mr. Corser, we'll just take a very brief break, and you folks can chat together, and he can explain his three choices.

Mr. Rennie: I think there are good ideas on the creativity side of how to solve things, and I always think it's better to come with solutions than to come in saying what's wrong. The challenge that I see with this is that to go from Whitecourt to Jasper is a three-hour drive, and that's in the best of weather. To do that, then, I think would be a challenge.

So while I respectfully say that I realize you have a challenge as to what to do with the West Yellowhead constituency, if you left Whitecourt-Ste. Anne alone, it's not broken. Doing this is going to break something, and it's going to break an MLA's riding. I'm very familiar with Robin Campbell and travelled with him when he was a previous MLA. He already had a really big constituency, just the geographical drive that's there, and we all know, you know, that the amount of snow they have in Jasper and Hinton is a lot different than we would have as we get into the lower elevations. I think Whitecourt wouldn't fit great with the geography.

The type of people between Hinton, Edson, and Whitecourt would be very similar. They have similar industries, so I can see, you know, that mixture not being a poor one. Again, I'm trying to absorb this very, very quickly, and in my 25-second analysis of it I think that including Whitecourt into West Yellowhead would be too large of a geography, and then we'd get into that same issue where you just wouldn't see your MLAs with the face time that you'd expect.

The Chair: Okay. Let's look at other options. I understand and I will keep in mind your view that we shouldn't change Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. But you are 15 per cent under the

provincial average, and we have to consider all options. In our journey and analytically, when we come to your constituency, we're going to look at all options. If we had to increase your constituency by something, if we were left in that circumstance, in your view, which direction should we go? South into Drayton Valley-Devon, north into Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock? We've already heard your comments on West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rennie: Yes. I would say Swan Hills and Fox Creek, and the reason I say that is because we're their trading area. All of those people that live in Swan Hills and Fox Creek: I would bet you that 90 per cent of them travel to Whitecourt on a weekly basis. If they do all their shopping, if they do all of their appointments already in that constituency, to visit their MLA in that constituency seems like it would be a good fit. The population of those two communities together would be about a 10 per cent – I believe the two together would add up to about 4,000 residents. It may be slightly higher than that. The nature of the people that live in Fox Creek and Swan Hills is almost bang on for the people that would be in Whitecourt – very resource based, hard working, hard playing, and extremely young demographics – which I am not sure as much so for Drayton Valley or Yellowhead county, just in that I'm not aware of their demographics.

The Chair: Okay. That's interesting. Those numbers are interesting. Just so that we know – we're trying to avoid doing anything dumb here – if we had to add a bit more of the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency, any ideas outside of those two communities?

Mr. Rennie: Barrhead would be a great fit, I think, as well. Right now Woodlands county, for instance, our municipality, runs right up to the border of Barrhead county, and we're 15 minutes from the town of Barrhead. Barrhead and Mayerthorpe – Mayerthorpe sits within the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency – are almost identical communities. I often get them mixed up myself because they have such similar backgrounds, an agricultural mix. A lot of those families that work on the farms also have oil field jobs. That's the only way we can make things work, it seems like, in agricultural practices today. So adding Barrhead to Whitecourt-St. Anne would not be a bad mix.

Adding Swan Hills or Fox Creek: that also, I think, would be acceptable, something in that sort. Maybe it's even to take a look at

taking part of Onoway and, you know, adding that to somewhere further to the east and then having Barrhead, Swan Hills, and Fox Creek added on to Whitecourt-St. Anne.

The Chair: Yes. Myself, I've always thought of Morinville as not being a natural fit with Barrhead but more a natural fit with St. Albert and Athabasca.

Mr. Rennie: I agree. I agree a hundred per cent.

The Chair: Okay. Anybody else have a question?

Mrs. Day: Could I just ask a little bit more about – so I see Onoway over here. That area that butts up toward Spruce Grove-St. Albert is more naturally – that would be an easier fit if we move that into the next riding to the east?

Mr. Rennie: I think so. The reason I say that is that I've lived my whole life in Whitecourt or just outside of it, and I drive to Edmonton a minimum of three times a week for representing the county. On those drives I've seen the traffic change immensely in that there are so many commuters from the Onoway area. They would live in the summer villages and work in – our current MLA is a perfect example. He doesn't have a house in Edmonton. I think he may be the only MLA that doesn't have a second residency. He lives in Whitecourt-St. Anne, and he drives to the Leg. every single day and drives back from the Leg. every single night even though he lives out by Onoway. I think as I drive in in the mornings that you can see the line of traffic of commuters that have chosen to live the more rural lifestyle and just make the drive into the city on a daily basis. I think for that reason Onoway and the summer villages that surround that area could be a natural fit with the Spruce Grove and Stony Plain areas.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks very much. It's been extremely helpful.

Mr. Rennie: Thank you so much, too.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

All right. Well, we have a few minutes left, but I think nobody else has registered to speak, and we're on our way to Lesser Slave Lake, so thank you very much, everyone, for attending here today.

[The hearing adjourned at 10:18 a.m.]

