



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission  
Public Hearings

Slave Lake

Thursday, February 23, 2017  
2:28 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

**Electoral Boundaries Commission**

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## **Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Slave Lake**

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Mark Francis, Superintendent of Schools, Aspen View Public Schools  
Everett Gottfried, Councillor, Wabasca, Municipal District of Opportunity  
Nancy Sand, Trustee, Northwest Region, Aspen View Public Schools  
Kenneth Vanderwell, President, Lesser Slave Lake PC Constituency Association



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[Justice Bielby in the chair]

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

Over the last few weeks since we started this work, a number of people have asked me: "What's this all about? Why are you doing this? Why were you created?" In short, our job is to research and make recommendations to the Alberta Legislature as to where and how our provincial constituency boundaries should be changed to ensure continued, effective, proper representation by our MLAs in future provincial elections. What that means, as we'll all remember, is that a fundamental principle of democracy is that every adult gets to vote and that every vote should be worth relatively the same amount as every other vote.

Eight years ago, the last time the Electoral Boundaries Commission did its work and legislation was passed to adjust provincial constituency boundaries, that was more or less the case. If you look at, for example, the three maps of the local constituencies that we've got posted on the wall there, you'll see in blue the population in 2009-2010, when this was done, and in red the population now. The numbers at the right are the difference between the current population and the provincial average population.

If we look through Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, for example, while they have a relatively constant population, 1,500 fewer people now than eight years ago, now they're much further below the provincial average than they were because the population in most other places in the province has increased quite a bit in that period of time. We have a similar example here in Lesser Slave Lake. Eight years ago we had a slightly larger population, but at that time Lesser Slave Lake was only 29 per cent below the provincial average. Now it's 41 per cent below the provincial average.

The reason this has happened is because of the huge increase in population in Alberta. In the last eight years our population has increased by more than 14 per cent, and more than 600,000 people have moved into the province. A little bit of that population increase has resulted from natural growth. People have been having babies, having more babies than people have died, but the bulk of the population is migration from eastern Canada, and that group of people hasn't moved in equal quantity to each of Alberta's 87 constituencies. They've focused on certain constituencies.

Just to take it step-by-step, we have 87 provincial constituencies, and the map up on the screen shows the outlines of those constituencies. It's the same map in colour behind Mrs. Day's head there. These are the constituency boundaries right this minute, and they were set based on the recommendations of the boundary commission eight years ago. We all know that each constituency is represented by one MLA in the provincial Legislature, and every adult in Alberta who can vote votes for the people who are running for that position in their constituency, chooses one, and we end up having 87 MLAs in the Legislature in Edmonton.

Our population, again, has increased by more than 14 per cent since the last time this was looked at, and our current population in the province is 4,062,609. That's adjusted a little bit. Statistics Canada announced their 2016 census results February 8. They then

went into Fort McMurray and did a little bit of an update on that census because of the people who had not yet returned to the community. The population has lost 9,100 people who haven't come back yet. So there's a small adjustment to that number.

In any event, divided by 87, our average constituency size, ideally, at the moment will be 46,697 people. Eight years ago it was 40,800 people. So that's another way of looking at how much we've grown in the last eight years. The trick, though, or the key or the problem is that the growth hasn't spread equally around all of our constituencies.

When the last boundary commission's recommendations were accepted by the Legislature, the result was that more than half of the constituencies in Alberta varied by less than 5 per cent from the provincial average of 40,800, and 85 per cent of the constituencies varied by under 10 per cent from the provincial average, so it was pretty close. But now our range has grown from the smallest constituency, Fort McMurray-Conklin, 17,129 people, to the largest, Calgary-South East, 92,248 people. If there was a provincial election today, somebody voting in Fort McMurray-Conklin would have a vote that is relatively four and a half times as effective as a person voting in Calgary-South East. So even though the law required this review to be done at this time, the population increase supports a look at the constituency boundaries as well.

Now, that law is something called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It was first passed by our provincial Legislature just after the province was founded, about 1905, and it's been updated and changed from time to time. The last time there was a substantial change was in 2009. It sets up the mechanism for establishing a commission every eight to 10 years. It set the date as October 31, 2016, by which we had to be established, and we were established by then. It sets out the composition of the commission and our obligations to report and what we're supposed to take into account.

That legislation says that our job is to make recommendations to the Legislature to ensure that each Albertan continues to have effective representation in the Legislature. In doing that, we have to consider a number of things, and they're outlined in the act. It's not just relative population density. If it was just population numbers, we wouldn't be doing public hearings. We'd just sit down with a ruler and a provincial map and draw out 87 pieces of Alberta that each had the same population. But that's not the job.

2:35

We have to start by considering population, but then we also have to consider common community interests and organizations. The idea is that when forming a constituency, you want to keep together people who are similar in culture, background, the way they earn their living, basically who have the same set of needs that their MLA can then take to Edmonton to the Legislature, if possible, so that the MLA can focus in on one set of hopes and issues to take forward.

We're to try to keep in mind common community interests and organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements. The idea is not to divide Indian reserves and Métis settlements in half. We had, for example, representation yesterday in Calgary from two representatives from what used to be called Hobbema but is now Maskwacis. The last boundary commission divided them right in half, so they were coming to say: gee, you know, we'd really like to come back together. We certainly were interested in what they had to say on that point. That's an example. We don't want to do that sort of thing by mistake or inadvertently.

With that in mind, we're also to try to keep together community and neighbourhood boundaries in Edmonton and Calgary, so big cities. They're all divided up into neighbourhoods, with

neighbourhood associations or what have you. We're to try to respect those if we can. We're also to try to respect the municipal boundaries of towns, other cities, villages. We're to try to avoid, for example, dividing up the town of Slave Lake and to keep that one complete. I mean, it's not likely that we would, but there are some constituencies, there are some towns and cities that might be close to a border, and we want to keep that in mind and not divide them up inadvertently.

Also, if there's a geographical feature that would be a natural boundary to a constituency such as a major highway or a river, we're to keep that in mind when forming the recommendation for the constituency so that if we have a natural barrier like that, the people who live in the constituency can more readily remember where their constituency is exactly. They can say, "Oh, yeah, we're everything east of highway 2," that sort of thing.

But those aren't the only things that we can consider in doing our work. While we have to consider those factors, the legislation leaves it open as to what other factors we consider if we think they're relevant. The real test is: what's going on right now in Alberta that helps or hinders an MLA's ability to represent his or her constituents or helps or hinders the constituents' ability to get a hold of their MLA to advance their views or whatever?

So we're travelling the province to try to invite people to come forward and provide us with input on what they think is relevant to their current situation. We'll then use that information to sit down, the five of us, and make a list of 87 recommendations to the Legislature, one for each constituency, in relation to any changes to the border of that constituency. Our goal is to work to create understandable and clear boundaries for every constituency. That doesn't mean we're going to move the boundaries of every constituency. Some constituencies have grown very consistently in line with the growth in the province. There are a surprising number of constituencies that have populations that are very close to 46,697 right now, primarily in the core of Edmonton and in the core of Calgary. Obviously, they don't maybe need as much attention as the ones that are dramatically out of line.

We've been holding public hearings throughout the province for three weeks. Our last day will be tomorrow. We'll consider all of the representations received during that three-week period, and we'll also consider all of the written representations we've received. We have gotten 749 written representations in six weeks. I'm kind of proud of that. Last time they got 500 in the course of the whole year that they were doing the work. But I have to admit we've made it really easy this time. You can make the submission just on our website. You don't have to mail it in. That, plus e-mail and Facebook and some social media submissions, has made it easier for people to share their views with us.

Once we've come up with our recommendations – and they're interim recommendations – we'll file them with the Legislature. We have to file them by May 31 of this year. Then we'll post them on our website, [abebc.ca](http://abebc.ca), so everybody can take a look at them and see what we've recommended in relation to their own constituency or other constituencies.

There's then a second round of public consultation. We'll invite people to write in to give us their thoughts if they see any problems with what we've suggested, and we're really hopeful that people will bring problems to our attention, small as well as big, so that we can avoid some of these little mistakes – like, last time they cut Tofield in half; I'm sure they didn't intend to do that; hopefully, we won't do things like that – and to just try to keep all of those things in mind. There may be, of course, some big, more philosophical comments as well on our work.

We then have an opportunity to change our recommendations, to fine-tune them with respect to the further representations, and make

a final report to the Legislature no later than October 31 of this year. Then in the normal course of things the Legislature would pass legislation changing our constituency boundaries to line up with our recommendations so that we'll be ready for the next provincial election.

Now, that election is well in the future, but apparently the Chief Electoral Officer likes to have at least a year lead time to be able to work to set up the polls and reorganize things, and I guess that's one of the things that the Legislature considered in the past when it created this schedule of reporting and so forth in the act.

This time, unlike last time, the Legislature hasn't created any new constituency numbers to allow us to deal with the new 600,000-plus Albertans. In 2009-2010 the Legislature increased the number of seats from 83 to 87, so the commission had four new seats that they could insert somewhere in the province – in Calgary, Edmonton, and rural areas – to pick up some of this extra population. This time the Legislature chose not to do that. There's nothing fundamentally flawed with that. I mean, I suppose that, arguably, you can't continue to indefinitely increase the size of the Legislature, and in comparison, say, to the size of federal constituencies, 46,000 people is much smaller than 106,000, which is the size of the average federal constituency when they were last examined. In fact, 46,000 is smaller than the municipal ward size in each of Edmonton or Calgary, and we assume they have effective representation.

It's not so much, you know, that not having an additional constituency to use to do our work prohibits us from doing our work – I don't think it does – but it does mean that we have a pizza the size of Alberta and we have to make 87 pieces out of that pizza, but each one of those pieces isn't going to be the same size because the population isn't evenly distributed.

Equality or parity of population isn't our only consideration, as I said earlier. Our courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have interpreted our legislation as meaning that each of us has the right not to have the political strength or value of our vote unduly diluted, but they also upheld the legislation's ability to permit variances, where necessary, of up to 25 per cent above or below average and, for a maximum of four constituencies, up to 50 per cent below average. Now, this is of particular interest here in Lesser Slave Lake because you were one of the special constituencies that fell within that exception last time. There are only two of them in Alberta. One is Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, and the other is Lesser Slave Lake. You can see from the information on the wall that you were both more than 25 per cent below the provincial average last time.

We have no choice but to do something in relation to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley this time because it's more than the 50 per cent allowed below the provincial. It's just below, but we still have to do something to add some people to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. In relation to Lesser Slave Lake we're not legally required to do anything to add population, but that doesn't prohibit us from considering the possibility of expanding the size of your constituency to pick up some additional population if that worked out in terms of all the other considerations, communities of interest and so forth, that we were just talking about a moment ago.

It's important for us particularly, I think, to be up here in your exceptional area to see what's important, in your view: whether we should keep the boundaries the same; whether we should change them; if we change them, what you think should happen in relation to your neighbouring constituencies, because, of course, there's a ripple effect. Once you change one boundary to pick up or reduce some population, the immediately next constituency is affected as a result of that, so it goes all over the province.

When we start our deliberations next week, our job is going to be for each constituency, one at a time, to look at the actual number of

the population in the constituency as set by Statistics Canada in the 2016 census, released February 8 – so it's current information – compare that number to 46,697, and if there's much of a difference up or down from that number, to consider if there's any acceptable reason why we should not move the constituency boundary to get closer to the average population number.

2:45

For your constituency here in Lesser Slave Lake there's not such an impetus to try to get you toward average, but we still have an obligation to consider the representation-by-population principle. It's still open to us to move the boundary, probably south – but I'm open to your suggestions – to pick up some more population if that can reasonably be done. I don't know whether it can be, so that's one of the reasons we're here and one of the reasons I'm particularly glad that you're here, too.

Now, we have *Hansard* staff here. They're recording everything that's said. Everything that we say will be posted on our website within a couple of days, audio recording and a written transcript, and, of course, will be available to anybody who wants to read it then. The 749 written submissions we received will be posted on our website, hopefully, by the first week in March, so they'll also be available to the public. Again, keep in mind that we're just on the journey to making some interim recommendations right now. Once we make those, they'll be up on the website, and you can look at them and see if they cause you any difficulty. If you want to comment on those, again, you'll have another chance to do it in writing or through public hearings over the summer.

To try to help your discussions – maybe it will or maybe it won't – we've posted on the wall these large maps of your constituency here and your neighbouring constituencies. If you want to suggest a boundary change, our clerk will give you a marker and you can mark on the map where you think the boundary should be moved to. We'll take a picture of that, and then we'll have that picture when we're meeting to consider your constituency so we don't forget what you said or, you know, if we can't remember exactly what you had in mind at that point.

With that said, I'm going to call on our first speaker, Kenneth Vanderwell. Mr. Vanderwell, would you mind coming forward and sitting down in front of the mike? It would be really helpful if each speaker could tell us what constituency they live in.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** You betcha. Thank you, Your Honour and commissioners, for the opportunity today. My name, as you mentioned, is Ken Vanderwell. I'm a long-time resident of Slave Lake. My family moved here in 1971 and my grandparents worked here in the 1950s, so I'm very much a native, I guess, of the area. I'm also president of the Lesser Slave Lake PC Association.

I'm making a submission to the commission today in support of leaving the existing boundaries of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency where they happen to be right now. There's a fear that this constituency could be split up and added to existing constituencies to the east and to the west of us. Indeed, our small population, as you had mentioned, a base of around 27,000 – I'm glad to see the new numbers there – is only 41 per cent of the provincial constituency average, which could lead one to that conclusion. However, I believe that there are a number of reasons why the constituency should not be altered.

The first reason is the geographic properties of our area. The bulk of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency is roughly contained within the boreal forest area of the province. Indeed, when you look at provincial forestry maps, this area is included in what's called the green zone and is recognized as containing provincial forest resources such as lumber, pulp, OSB, and other forest products that

have been developed by companies across the constituency from Slave Lake through to High Prairie. In addition, oil and gas development within our borders is well documented and occurs on the same land base. The boreal forest is a largely remote area. It's suited for resource development, and it should be kept intact.

At both the west and east flanks of our constituency the green zone gives way to the white zone, which contains agriculturally suited lands for the farming sector. We see that when we get over towards Smith, and we also see that when we get over towards High Prairie. On the south flank the constituency gives way to the geographical differences of Swan Hills. If you came from Edson today, I believe you probably came through Swan Hills.

**The Chair:** We flew.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Oh, you flew. There you are.

**The Chair:** We must have flown over Swan Hills.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** You would have flown over Swan Hills, a very high part of our province, of course.

Then Lesser Slave Lake itself and the tourism and fishing it affords are kind of in the lower middle of the constituency. Heading north, we encompass our First Nations and Métis friends and their communities, all within this boreal forest that we call the Lesser Slave Lake constituency.

The second reason that I believe the constituency should not be altered is access within the area. Unlike rural farmlands in the white zone of the province where there may be a road every mile or two, our constituency has many kilometres between the communities and the major centres contained within it. Métis, First Nations, people of our constituency are oftentimes quite isolated from each other due to the travel corridors and highway accesses across our areas. With the main shopping and the main trade and the main medical centres being in High Prairie and Slave Lake, many constituents actually travel in excess of an hour to access the services that are contained in the two major centres. Highway 2, of course, runs across our constituency from the east to the west. It services Slave Lake and High Prairie. However, we have highways 88, 754, and 750. They basically run north-south through roughly the middle of the constituency. They service Wabasca, Red Earth Creek, and the various First Nations and Métis settlements.

The third reason I believe the constituency should not be altered is our large aboriginal population and the Treaty 8 trading and traditional land areas. This constituency currently contains a First Nation and Métis population of 54 per cent, and their interests and their influences are best suited and represented by a single representative. I would submit that splitting up the constituency would have a negative impact because First Nations and Métis are a large social sector that have done business largely within the traditional constituency boundaries. The main trading areas are Wabasca, High Prairie, Slave Lake, and indeed there is a very long history of established trading patterns, traditional lands that they've lived on for hundreds of years, and this is best maintained by keeping the constituency whole. The large First Nations and Métis population on reserves and settlements around the constituency should not be split up as they surely do identify with each other. They're related to each other and the traditional areas within the constituency they have lived on for generations.

The fourth reason that the constituency should not be altered is the already large physical size of our area and the ability of our poor MLA to appropriately serve the people of the constituency. Thankfully, in a past electoral boundaries review our constituency size and shape was altered and brought down, I believe, from the Northwest Territories to where it was before, so it used to be

actually quite a bit worse than it is now. It is very important for our MLA, our representative, to do face-to-face meetings with constituents, and an overly large constituency areawise makes this very, very difficult.

In closing, I would submit that the Lesser Slave Lake constituency should be considered to be one of the special areas, continue in that vein, and notwithstanding the low population should be left as it currently is due to the four reasons outlined above. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Well, I'm sure we have some questions, and I'm going to kick it off.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Do you know whether the 54 per cent figure you gave for the population of this constituency having aboriginal roots is still accurate given the new figures that we now have from the 2016 census?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** I do not, Your Honour. I believe that it probably would be higher than that due to that population growing faster than the Caucasian population in Canada.

**The Chair:** All right. Another question. I'm sitting here, and we should have asked this in Peace River, but that was our first stop, so I wasn't as focused on this area as maybe now as I've had more time to reflect. If you look at the map to the far left and you look at the boundary between Lesser Slave Lake and Peace River, there's a little jot out midway, you know, in that northern section, if you see what I mean.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Is that a reserve? Is that why that's there?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** I would have to go over and take a look there.

**The Chair:** Please do.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Yes. That would be the Garden Creek settlement.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** That may be an access issue.

**The Chair:** I was wondering. Is the road from Peace River rather than from Slave Lake?

2:55

**Mr. Vanderwell:** When you look at the access road going up through the middle of the constituency and then off to that side, it may be an access issue, and they decided that they were better served in that constituency.

**The Chair:** So that's not an issue as far as you're concerned in Lesser Slave Lake?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** No.

**The Chair:** All right. We've also heard that there's no east-west road connecting Fort McMurray with Lesser Slave Lake until you get down to about Barrhead. Is that correct?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** East-west road? Well, it would be basically highway 2, running from Athabasca down through Slave Lake,

High Prairie, and then over towards the western part of the province. Barrhead is further south by Westlock.

**The Chair:** Okay. But you still have to drive, essentially, out of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo or Conklin into Athabasca to get up to Slave Lake?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Yes. That's right.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Again, for me that really does speak to the boreal forest in the green zone that so many of the resources in this part of the province are in.

**The Chair:** You may not know the answer to this, but we've just been speculating about why there is no road. We've heard that it would only take 50 miles to complete that connector road. Is that because of difficult terrain over that 50-mile area? Do you have any idea?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** I believe that the crossing of the Athabasca River is the main issue of getting a road from the east to the west and further north in the constituency.

**The Chair:** All right. Now, I understand completely your remarks that you don't want to have the boundaries of the constituency moved, but we have to consider all possibilities, so when we come to look at your constituency, we will consider those possibilities. I'm going to ask you the question. If we had to move the boundaries to add some additional population to your constituency, where is the next closest town that has any number of people that we could consider adding?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Well, from my viewpoint, that would be the Athabasca area.

**The Chair:** Athabasca itself. Looking at Athabasca there in the southeast corner of the riding, totally aside from the fact that it's also underweight a bit, how far south would we have to go to pick up Athabasca?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Athabasca is about 80 miles, so about . . .

**Unidentified Speaker:** About 120 kilometres.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** About 120 kilometres.

**The Chair:** Would you mind taking the marker and drawing that line on the map, about 120 kilometres from here?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** And just estimating, how many people live in Athabasca? Any idea?

**Unidentified Speaker:** The town of Athabasca is just under 3,000, but the immediate area around the town is approximately 8,000.

**The Chair:** Including that 3,000?

**Unidentified Speaker:** Including that 3,000, yes, ma'am. That's according to the 2016 Municipal Affairs population numbers just released.

**The Chair:** Okay. We will have the federal census numbers. Apparently, there is – well, we've seen it on a test – a computer program that we can move across the province, and it'll tell us



exactly the population in each area, so we will be able to use the 2016 census figures in coming to our conclusion because we're required to do that when they're available, but the municipal census gives you a good idea, I would think.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** I had a question, Your Honour. Given that the population of the constituency has reduced since the last census, does the commission take into consideration some of the events that have happened within the town of Slave Lake, where a large portion of the population did not return after the 2011 fires and so on and so forth? Also, the economy: a lot of folks perhaps have moved away while the census was occurring, and they may come back when the oil patch activity picks up again.

**The Chair:** Well, obviously, that's something we're thinking about in relation to Fort McMurray. I apologize for having to ask you this question. Approximately how many people left Slave Lake as a result of the fire that haven't come back? Do you have any idea?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** I believe about a thousand people left.

**The Chair:** And you don't know how many exactly have come back?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** By that I mean that about a thousand people did not come back after the fires.

**The Chair:** Okay. The homes, apartments, whatever, that were burned as a result of the fire: have they largely been rebuilt?

**Mr. Vanderwell:** All except one major apartment block were rebuilt.

**The Chair:** Do you have good roadway access to Athabasca? I'm guessing yes.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** We do. It's highway 2.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

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

Okay. Thank you so much for coming. That's terrific. You've been very helpful.

**Mr. Vanderwell:** Thank you, Your Honour.

**The Chair:** Okay. Our next registered presenter is Chris Brown. Is Mr. or Ms Brown here?

Okay. We'll move on to Nancy Sand and Mark Francis.

**Mrs. Sand:** Thank you for allowing us to provide our input today.

**The Chair:** Could you tell us which constituency you live in?

**Mrs. Sand:** I live in the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. Mr. Francis lives in the Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater constituency. We're representing the Aspen View school division, and we take in three different districts.

**The Chair:** Is that all in one constituency?

**Mrs. Sand:** Three. Our main division office is in Athabasca, and then we have schools in three different constituencies.

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

**Mrs. Sand:** I'll hand it over to Mr. Francis, and he'll give our presentation.

**The Chair:** Certainly.

**Mr. Francis:** Good afternoon. I apologize for being late coming in; there was a funeral that was crossing the highway, so we got held up there.

**The Chair:** No problem at all.

**Mr. Francis:** Thank you very much for letting us come and present. As Trustee Sand has indicated, we're from Aspen View public schools. We are a school division that spans over three different constituencies, including a very small piece of Lesser Slave Lake with the community of Smith; and then Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, which is Athabasca, Thorhild, Smoky Lake; and then a little, tiny piece, over in Vilna, of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding.

There are two points that we would like to make. We're not here to recommend any specific boundaries; I think it's more on the philosophical side. The first point we'd like to make – I saw it in your presentation, and you addressed that – is that when you look at, you know, where to draw the boundaries, you look at municipalities. One thing that school boards have long contended is that we're the forgotten level of government. So what we would like to encourage the commission to do is that when you're looking at those boundaries, look at school divisions as well and if there's a natural ability to group school divisions. We recognize that our school division covers over 10,000 square kilometres. We recognize that it can't always happen, but we would strongly encourage the commission to look at that as well.

The issue is that we are rural, and we want to make sure that our voices – you know, one of the primary jobs of our school board is to advocate to our MLAs and the provincial government, and sometimes, when we have multiple constituencies to represent, it's a little difficult. So as you consider redrawing, if there's a natural movement to also align the school division boundaries, we would strongly encourage that.

The only other matter we'd bring forward is that our school division has done a lot of work with other rural school boards, and we're advocating very strongly with the provincial government around maintaining rural voice. We are contending that there are some very distinct rural issues in education that need to be heard, and any movement away, you know, as we shift population – our student population dropped by just over a hundred kids this year, and we're projected to drop by another hundred kids next year. As that population shifts towards the cities, which is where it went – we are now able to track where students move to, and they're moving to the cities – as we lose that base, we also lose voice.

We recognize that quite often the education issues that are discussed at the provincial level are distinctly urban issues, things like population growth, things like English as a second language learners. Those are the things we hear in the media on a regular basis as education issues, but those are urban education issues. We would encourage the commission to also consider, as you indicated in your presentation, that there are unique geographic issues, that there are unique population issues. The elected trustees represent one of those groups. We have very distinct rural issues that need to be heard, and we would hope that the maintaining of a strong rural voice is done when the boundaries are redrawn.

3:05

**The Chair:** Okay. I wonder if you might do this for me. We don't have Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater up on the wall, but if I give you my small map, would you draw your school division on the map?

**Mr. Francis:** Sure. And if you would like as well, I can give you a copy of all the Alberta school divisions.

**The Chair:** Yes. That would be perfect. Thanks so much.

**Mr. Francis:** But I would have to draw them on there as well.

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

**Mr. Francis:** It's very small.

**The Chair:** Are you all the blue at the top?

**Mr. Francis:** No. We're actually just above the city. We're the counties of Athabasca, Smoky Lake, Thorhild, and a small piece of Lesser Slave River in Smith. Okay. That's the constituency, but we want the school division as well, right? Do you want Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater?

**The Chair:** Aspen View is what you're representing, right?

**Mr. Francis:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay. I see where it is. Thanks.

Now, we've heard by discussion with the previous speaker about: if we had to see Lesser Slave Lake grow a little bit, we have the possibility of adding Athabasca and its environs to this constituency. I know you live there, sir. Do you think that the community in Athabasca is similar in culture and economic base to the community in Slave Lake?

**Mr. Francis:** Yes. Now, I'm answering as a citizen of Athabasca, not as the superintendent of schools representing the board of trustees.

**The Chair:** No, no. But you're here, and we haven't had anybody else ever from Athabasca, so it would be lovely to hear.

**Mr. Francis:** Yes. Actually, I come to Slave Lake for hockey games for my children on a regular basis. You know, obviously, the pulp mill in Athabasca is a major employer, as is forestry here. Oil and gas are very similar. There are a lot of similarities, yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. Just looking at Athabasca otherwise, we see that it's 19 per cent below the average. Now, that doesn't mean we have to adjust the population, because it's not 25 per cent below, but as with Lesser Slave Lake we at least have to consider that possibility. So just in the spirit that the culture in Athabasca is not too dissimilar from the culture in Lesser Slave Lake, if we had to increase the size of the Athabasca school division to pick up, say, a school division – see, now you've got me thinking of schools.

**Mrs. Sand:** That would be great.

**The Chair:** That would be great. Yeah, I'll just bring those kids here.

**Mr. Francis:** Yeah. We need some more students. If you have the power to do that, please do so.

**The Chair:** If only. Do you have First Nations students? Do you count them?

**Mr. Francis:** Yes, absolutely. A significant population, yes.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay. So if we had to move the boundaries of your constituency out, what would be the most logical direction to do that in?

**Mrs. Sand:** Just to widen our boundaries?

**The Chair:** In any way: north, south, east, west.

**Mr. Francis:** One of the things I would observe is that when we consider school division issues, our issues are more similar to Westlock or Slave Lake than they are to Morinville or the area immediately in Sturgeon county, what we would call a rural school division. They are, of course, a rural area, but they're a growing area that's attached to a city, that's right next to a city. As a constituency we would have more in common with Slave Lake than we would further south to Edmonton.

**The Chair:** So if we were going to reconfigure this area generally – and just to confess all, we just came from Edson, where we heard that they're way under in their constituency, and they're talking about moving into perhaps Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock from that end – a possibility might be to move in and pick up part of it from your end as well. Does that make sense?

**Mrs. Sand:** It would be west.

**The Chair:** Yeah. You'd be moving west, and they'd be moving east into the Barrhead area.

Okay. Do you have any feel for how many people live in Westlock?

**Mr. Francis:** The town of Westlock is just over 5,000, and then for Westlock county, I could tell you exactly in 30 seconds.

**Mrs. Sand:** That's a huge farming area.

**Mr. Francis:** Westlock town is just over 5,000, and Westlock county is another 7,644.

**The Chair:** In addition?

**Mr. Francis:** In addition to the town of Westlock, yes.

**The Chair:** I'm not suggesting that that's not a good idea, but do you have any natural connections with Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? It's more to the west, but is there any town or community to the east that you might have a natural trading area with or that people come from there to shop here or anything like that?

**Mr. Francis:** I would say that with Lac La Biche, Athabasca and Lac La Biche have quite a bit of connection. On the other end of our school division Smoky Lake and Vilna would have a far greater connection to St. Paul. That would be where many people go on that end of the constituency. We're split – and I'm not recommending splitting us down – but there is a difference. I mean, I think that in Athabasca we would typically – with Westlock there's quite a strong connection, but on the other end it would be more towards St. Paul.

**The Chair:** Okay. We haven't made any decision at all to move any boundaries, but we obviously have to do some boundary shifting in the north, and we would like as much information as possible. We've heard from other places in our travels that to get a constituency more square than rectangular is easier on the MLA because driving distances are shorter and so forth. Perhaps there are some possibilities here. I don't know.

With that, I'll turn to my fellow commissioners and ask if anybody has any questions.

**Ms Munn:** I do have some questions. The constituency of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, running long, north and south:

where along that line is the focus? If Athabasca is kin to Lesser Slave Lake and you keep moving south, where would you say that the kinship ends? Where, moving south, would you say that people are more likely to be going south rather than north?

**Mr. Francis:** I would say that it would be around Thorhild, the county of Thorhild. People would start moving south towards Redwater and Westlock whereas Athabasca, being a larger centre, you know, is more a stand-alone community.

**Ms Munn:** So Thorhild?

**Mr. Francis:** Yeah, and then Vilna in the southeast as well. The county of Smoky Lake is part of that constituency as well. That would be very closely connected to St. Paul.

**Ms Munn:** Right.

**Mrs. Sand:** I think Vilna is on the Lac La Biche side. Smoky Lake is on our side, and then there are the two large reserves.

**Mr. Francis:** Can I approach?

**The Chair:** Sure. Please.

**Mr. Francis:** Smoky Lake would be in here, and they would drift to St. Paul, which would be this way.

**Ms Munn:** Right. So where do people quit drifting south?

**Mr. Francis:** The county of Thorhild. Is that Thorhild there?

**Ms Munn:** That's Boyle.

**Mr. Francis:** That's Boyle. So Thorhild would be down here. I would say the county line is approximately here, I'm guessing.

**Mrs. Sand:** Currently we have three MLAs.

**Mr. Francis:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** Any other questions?

**Ms Livingstone:** I have often found that asking who people's kids play hockey against is the most telling of which communities relate to each other. You mentioned that your kids play hockey against Slave Lake. Who else is in the hockey circuit for kids in your area?

**Mr. Francis:** Believe it or not, it's not the closest towns, either Lac La Biche or Westlock. Actually, we head towards the Whitecourt area.

**Mrs. Sand:** Jasper, Edson, Hinton.

**Ms Munn:** Really? For hockey?

**Mr. Francis:** Uh-huh. My wife and I put on 1,800 kilometres going in opposite directions with two kids last weekend.

**Mr. McLeod:** I've got one. In your presentation you talked about three different constituencies. We've heard some issues raised about dealing with three MLAs. Are there issues there, or are there not?

**Mr. Francis:** I don't want to say that there are issues. Obviously, the communication is harder and more difficult. We are in a situation where most of our students reside in the one constituency, so MLA Piquette, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, where the bulk

of our students are, would probably be our primary contact. What that lends itself to is the forgotten wings. If we have an issue with Smith, the hamlet of Smith, which is in the municipality of Lesser Slave River and in a different constituency, it's a unique issue that is a very tiny piece of this constituency. It just increases the ability. We wouldn't have as close a connection with that MLA because it's such a small piece of their current role.

3:15

**Mr. McLeod:** Yeah. Those were some of the issues that we heard. Connecting with the MLA was one of the problems.

**Mr. Francis:** Yeah, absolutely. That's why we would really encourage, really, the grouping of like school divisions with like issues or areas with like issues. What our position is is that as the trustees advocate with the Alberta government, our issues are very, very different. Liaising with an MLA that may be representing a larger area, a more rural area, they may not see the same thing on the reaches of a constituency.

**Mr. McLeod:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. Anything else?

Thank you so very much. Very helpful.

All right. I'll now open the floor to anybody else who is here who would like to come forward and make a statement. Sir, you in the back.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Yes. Do I need to come up? I am allowed up, or are you just going to record this?

**The Chair:** Please. *Hansard* is here recording everything.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Well, Clarence can join me, too.

**The Chair:** Sure. Okay. If you can give your names and the constituency you live in.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Okay. My name's Everett Gottfried. I'm with the MD of Opportunity. I sit on council for Wabasca, Alberta. This is Clarence Cardinal. He sits with Calling Lake council for the MD of Opportunity also. We're talking about the lines and the borders here. Calling Lake is a little bit north of Athabasca. It's a First Nation community mostly, cottage country a little bit, too, in the summertime. Their community would like to join Lesser Slave Lake. If you're, you know, talking about the boundaries and all that, it would be more beneficial that Calling Lake be part of Lesser Slave Lake rather than going to Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater right now.

**The Chair:** Okay. Could I ask one of you, then, to take the marker there – we'll just hand it to you – and draw the . . .

**Mr. Gottfried:** Well, the line is already there. This gentleman added Athabasca.

**The Chair:** Okay. So if you added just Calling Lake but not Athabasca, it is just in the same place?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Let's see here. Calling Lake is right there and then our MD. I'll use our border roughly. Our MD of Opportunity border probably goes something like this, and there's the community of Athabasca somewhere down there. There's the MD of Opportunity there. If you are considering taking Athabasca and moving it in a different direction besides Lesser Slave Lake, we suggest not taking Calling Lake with it.

**The Chair:** Okay. Just looking at that little square that you've drawn on there, north of the community of Calling Lake is there much population up until you get to the current border of Lesser Slave Lake?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Calling Lake's population . . .

**Mr. Cardinal:** It's 500.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Yeah. It's mostly First Nation. Then after that would be Wabasca, where I live, and our population between the MD and Bigstone Cree Nation is probably about 5,000. That's quite a bit of a difference about an hour and a half up the map there, but it's a First Nation community also. Most of the Lesser Slave Lake region: anything north of Slave Lake would be First Nation, too. That's why Calling Lake would make sense to be in a First Nation region.

**The Chair:** Sure. If we added that square to Lesser Slave Lake, would that add about 5,500 people, then, to the constituency?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Probably not, but it would be part of your numbers. I mean, maybe you could grab some squares somewhere else, but at least it would be part of where it should be.

**The Chair:** It would add something.

**Mr. Gottfried:** We don't know if it's an advantage or a disadvantage because right now we have two MLAs, right? We have Danielle Larivee, ours in Wabasca, and then Calling Lake has . . .

**Mr. Cardinal:** Colin Piquette.

**Mr. Gottfried:** I don't know if that's an advantage, to have two MLAs like that, or if it's a disadvantage. I don't know. But it seems like whenever we're in talks, it's kind of like they have to go to theirs and we have to go to ours kind of thing.

**The Chair:** Right. But it would be better to speak with a common voice for all First Nations people.

**Mr. Gottfried:** It would be, yeah. It is a First Nation community. Most of Lesser Slave Lake is, too, besides the town of Slave Lake.

**The Chair:** Okay. While you're here, looking, then, at the rest of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, not just the square you've drawn but maybe the northern part of that constituency as it currently exists, are there other First Nation communities?

**Mr. Gottfried:** There are First Nation people in Athabasca but not the majority of the population, no. Calling Lake is a First Nation community, and that would probably be your only one in that area that I can think of. Eh, Clarence?

**Mr. Cardinal:** As far as on the east side, yeah.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Unless you want to talk reserves and stuff like that, but I don't think that there are any real reserves nearby besides the one in Calling Lake.

**Mr. Cardinal:** No. Just the one.

**Mr. Gottfried:** The next one would be probably near Lac La Biche.

**The Chair:** Okay. You may not know the answer to this, but seeing as you're here, are there any First Nation reserves on the other side of Lesser Slave Lake in Peace River or in Dunvegan-Central Peace-

Notley that might be consistent with the population of people in Lesser Slave Lake?

**Mr. Gottfried:** I can't think of any First Nation there. I think they're mostly in Lesser Slave Lake already except Calling Lake.

**The Chair:** Okay. So just totally aside from being a First Nation person and being a resident of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, if we had to move the boundaries of that constituency to pick up some population to bring it closer to the provincial average, aside from the conversation we've just had about Calling Lake and Wabasca, which way do you think would work the best: to go further south, to go further east, to go further west into Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock? What do you think?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Well, it's Calling Lake, obviously, to the Lesser Slave Lake.

**The Chair:** Right.

**Mr. Gottfried:** If you're picking up Athabasca and you need that population, I would go with his suggestion, too, and put Athabasca in there. I mean, we're not representing Athabasca here so . . .

**The Chair:** But arguing the other way . . .

**Mr. Gottfried:** If you needed that population, I would suggest taking it to the Lesser Slave Lake.

**The Chair:** Okay. But if we need to add population to Athabasca instead of taking it away, should we grab some of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock or Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Probably the Lac La Biche area, I think. It's kind of that they're more connected, I think, like the gentleman suggested, too. They are connected communities somewhat.

**Unidentified Speaker:** Agricultural.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Agriculturally, yeah. They're a little bit of distance apart from each other, but they're similar towns, too. Lac La Biche is a larger town, though. I'm not sure of the population, but they do have a lot of oil field business there kind of. Fort McMurray supports them a little bit.

**Ms Munn:** So the north part of the Athabasca constituency: what I've heard is that it's more aligned with Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Yeah.

**Ms Munn:** The south part of the Athabasca constituency, once you get below Thorhild, is more aligned towards Lac La Biche.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Probably. Yeah, I would think so. But, like I say, I'm not representing them either. I know you guys are going to decide in the end, but I think Calling Lake as a First Nation should be part of Lesser Slave Lake. It just makes sense.

**The Chair:** Just before we end this, because you know more than I do for sure, I've always thought, actually, Redwater was more similar to Morinville, Legal, St. Albert, kind of part of that French-Canadian, Métis history.

**Mr. Gottfried:** I think it is. Yeah.

**The Chair:** So if we had to move something in the southern part of the constituency, is Redwater as good a match with Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater as everything else in it?

**Mr. Gottfried:** I would say so. Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay. What about Sturgeon? It is, as you say, rural. It's kind of part of St. Albert, the watershed of St. Albert. Do you think it's the same kind of community as Athabasca and the other communities in your constituency?

**Mr. Gottfried:** I don't know. I'm not sure. I think Sturgeon is more like city related in being close to the city and all that. Yeah. That's like Morinville and all that, right?

**The Chair:** Right.

**Mr. Gottfried:** No. They're not the same. There are differences there, I believe.

**The Chair:** My husband used to teach at the Sturgeon high school, so you see I want to get that little bit of good word in there with our school folk here.

Okay. Mr. Cardinal, what do you think about the comments about Redwater or Sturgeon? Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Cardinal:** I guess our common factor in trade is that, for example, when we go and pay for our traplines, we go to Athabasca, and they make it a point that: oh, your trapline is in Slave Lake district. Our college, for example – what do you call this college?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Northern Lakes College.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Northern Lakes College and Northland school division. They're all within our area, and for the MD matters that we deal with within that, we border Athabasca county. From there on it's MDs north, and we deal with all the MD services and so on in Wabasca.

**Mr. Gottfried:** That's our main office. Our main office for our district is Wabasca.

3:25

**Mr. Cardinal:** It's our main direction.

Plus our reserve is dealing with Wabasca. Their headquarters is in Wabasca, so it makes more sense. As far as convenience, cultural, historic, trapping, and so on, we're more – because from the county line and the MD line it's all farm related towards Athabasca although we trade to, we go to Athabasca.

**The Chair:** If we moved Calling Lake and the reserve into Lesser Slave Lake, would that affect your ability to do trade in Athabasca, or would that still be okay?

**Mr. Cardinal:** No. It wouldn't have any effect.

**The Chair:** Now, I'm going to ask you a question which is outside of this. I hope you don't mind, but we don't have many First Nation people, so I don't want to miss the opportunity. When we were sitting and we started out in Fort McMurray three weeks ago and heard about the people in Fort Vermilion and how they didn't have an all-weather road, then we got talking a little bit about how we could help them get to the polls when there are provincial elections coming up, which isn't directly within our mandate, but, you know, that's one of the aspects of constituency design, and they're so remote. Then we were thinking about Internet voting, but I don't think the technology is quite there yet. Then today in Edson the returning officer who attended and made some comments said that there is mail voting in some First Nation areas. Would that be of

assistance to you in Calling Lake, or is it pretty easy to get to the polls on election day there?

**Mr. Cardinal:** We usually have a ballot box right in the community.

**The Chair:** So it's not a problem.

**Mr. Cardinal:** It's no problem. We do have roads going in and out three ways towards Al-Pac and Athabasca and towards Wabasca, and it's all paved.

**The Chair:** Super. All right. Thank you.  
Any other questions?

**Mr. McLeod:** Just one. The line that you drew there: you're saying that that is the county boundary line?

**Mr. Gottfried:** Yes. That's pretty close. In the MD of Opportunity probably 30 kilometres south of Calling Lake is where our line stops and the county of Athabasca begins.

**Mr. McLeod:** Okay. Good. We try to follow natural boundaries. What would be the south one, then, the natural boundary there?

**Mr. Gottfried:** The south one would be the county of Athabasca.

**Mr. McLeod:** No. The line that you drew: is that a roadway, or is it just the county line?

**Mr. Gottfried:** It's just the county line I was going by.

**Mr. McLeod:** How about the one that runs north-south?

**Mr. Gottfried:** The one that runs north-south: it's not perfect, but it's pretty close to our boundary, too. Our boundary kind of just picks up Calling Lake and then goes back up north.

**Mr. Cardinal:** We would assume to follow the Athabasca River on the east side there.

**Mr. Gottfried:** There the Lesser Slave Lake boundary is mostly MD of Opportunity, north of Slave Lake. You know, I could almost see that half of that is MD of Opportunity.

**Mr. McLeod:** I just wondered. You said Athabasca River, so there's a good natural boundary. On this side is one; on this side is the other.

**Mr. Cardinal:** You could even bring the line in and maybe take in Al-Pac, too.

**Mr. McLeod:** You're looking around as if somebody is going to beat you up or something.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thanks very much for coming. That's been super. Thanks for answering questions outside of what you came prepared to maybe thinking that you were going to be asked about.

**Mr. Gottfried:** All right. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now, there's one gentleman here who has been here all along and hasn't spoken, and I'm wondering if you'd like to come up. You must be here because you're interested in the topic.

**Unidentified Speaker:** I'm just an observer.

**The Chair:** Okay. Do you live in Lesser Slave Lake?

**Unidentified Speaker:** Yes, ma'am.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Well, then, thank you very much. That takes us through all our registered speakers. Please, go onto our website, [abebc.ca](http://abebc.ca), on May

31 or afterward, look at our draft recommendations, and give us some input on those if you don't think we have it spot on.

Thanks very much.

[The hearing adjourned at 3:29 p.m.]



