



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings

Vermilion

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10:58 a.m.

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Vermilion

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Myron Hayduk, Mayor, Town of Vegreville
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Jessica Littlewood, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville
John Mather, President, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville PC Association
Omer Moghrabi, Mayor, Lac La Biche County
Ed Parke, Deputy Reeve, County of Vermilion River
Niel Parker
Lanie Parr, Vice-chair, Buffalo Trail Public Schools
Judy Plett
Ron Plett
Sonny Rajoo
Taneen Rudyk, Councillor, Town of Vegreville
Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster
Floyd Thompson, Chairman, Kikino Métis Settlement
Steve Upham, Reeve, County of St. Paul

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[Justice Bielby in the chair]

The Chair: Thank you. Hello, everyone. If you could take your seats, we'll get started. Good morning. Thanks very much for coming out to this hearing of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Your participation and feedback are an important part of the process of reviewing the boundaries of constituencies in Alberta, and I'm delighted that you've chosen to participate in our review.

I'll start off by introducing us, the commission. I'm the chair. My name is Myra Bielby. In my day job I'm a judge of the Court of Appeal of Alberta resident in Edmonton, but at the moment I'm also chairing the Electoral Boundaries Commission. To my left is Laurie Livingstone of Calgary; to her left, Jean Munn of Calgary; to my right, Bruce McLeod, mayor of Acme; and to his right, Gwen Day of Carstairs. Together we have been appointed as an Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Alberta to make recommendations to the Legislature about whether the boundaries and populations of Alberta's 87 electoral districts should remain the same or should change before the next election.

To that end, we've produced an interim report – you be Vanna – which we've filed with the Speaker of the Legislature on the 24th of May containing 87 recommendations for the boundaries, geographic area, and names of each of the 87 constituencies in Alberta. That was based on written submissions and public hearings that we held in January and February of this year. The idea is that we have these interim submissions, these specific interim proposals, and we're now going out to meet with people just like you to receive their feedback on the proposals and what we are recommending to the Legislature.

Now, we are governed in this task by something called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which is an act of the province of Alberta. This version was passed in 1990, but there have been similar pieces of legislation right back to the time Alberta was formed. This legislation requires that every eight to 10 years in Alberta an Electoral Boundaries Commission like us be formed to do this task and to make recommendations to the Legislature about legislation that they might choose to pass bringing up to date constituency size and shape in the province.

You can find a copy of our interim report on our website at www.abebc.ca. It contains our 87 recommendations and also a minority opinion, Mrs. Day's minority opinion, as to an alternate approach or alternate solution.

I thought we'd start today by going through the principles that are set out in this legislation that governs us, that are the laws that we have no choice about, and then talk a little bit about the things that we do have a discretion about. Basically, the law says that we start our task by looking at the population of Alberta and dividing it by 87. That produces an average constituency population size. That's relevant only because it's the first step in our approach to reviewing each constituency. It doesn't mean that any constituency has to be exactly at that number. In fact, while some are close, no constituency is exactly 46,697 currently or based on our recommendations. That is just a guideline that we keep in mind when we're then applying the other criteria set out in the legislation to base our recommendation on.

The reason that these recommendations are perhaps as dramatic as they are this time around is because there's been a huge population growth in Alberta over the last eight years. I was surprised myself at how many people had moved into the province net notwithstanding the downturn in oil and gas over the last eight years. Over 600,000 people moved into the province, mostly from eastern Canada but not exclusively. That gives us a population

growth rate of over 14 per cent. That's by far and away the largest in Canada. The next closest is the city of Vancouver at 6.9 per cent. So you can just see, looking at that, by how much Alberta has grown over the last eight to 10 years.

But all that growth didn't happen equally among each of the 87 constituencies. Even though eight years ago, the last time this was done, most constituencies were within 10 per cent of the average population size at that time, because most of the people moving into the province moved into Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray and not into other areas, that means that things have gotten out of whack. Most constituencies currently are not within 10 per cent of the provincial average, and you get some pretty dramatic changes. For example, if there was a provincial election held tomorrow, a vote from a resident of Jasper, Alberta, would have about 3 and a half times the effect of a vote cast in southeast Calgary because the population in southeast Calgary is so much larger than the provincial average, and the population in Jasper has not grown at all and is now so much below the provincial average.

Our task is to make recommendations to try to adjust this, to respect the constitutional principle that everybody's vote should be worth relatively the same, not exactly the same. The overall goal is to achieve effective representation of Albertans by their MLAs, but the first step in that is to see what would be required to make all of our votes have the same impact, and then we adjust that figure. This mathematical calculation: we divided 4,062,000 people by 87, and we got 46,697. That's our first step.

Our second step was then to look at the criteria that we've been given to apply. For each constituency, if we are making a recommendation to either expand its boundaries or contract its boundaries to bring its population closer to the provincial average, what we're to do is to try to keep common communities together. That's not just towns and villages. It's people who share interests because they work in the same industry: agriculture, forest, mining, service industries, whatever. It's people who have perhaps the same common ethnic heritage. It's aboriginal groups that traditionally have been grouped together for these purposes. Common community of interest can mean many things, and each one of us are members, no doubt, of a number of different common communities of interest. We're to try to avoid dividing those up if we can.

11:05

The next criteria is that in Edmonton and Calgary – this is specific in the act to Edmonton and Calgary. There are neighbourhoods cut out of the city. I'm from Edmonton. I'm familiar with the community league model we have there. We've got different communities. They have different community leagues. We're to try to avoid cutting up those neighbourhoods and those community leagues and community organizations, as they're called in Calgary. We're to try to respect them if we can. We haven't been able to do that in Calgary because Calgary has grown so fast. Many of their neighbourhoods are bigger by far than a single constituency. That's another goal that we're to try to follow.

We're to respect municipal boundaries. To the extent possible, we're not to cut up a city, town, or village. Now, sometimes we've had to divide a city between more than one constituency. For example, we're recommending Edmonton have 20 constituencies in the future and Calgary have 26 constituencies, but perhaps a more controversial or a different idea is: what happens with cities that are too big for one constituency but not big enough for two? We spent yesterday in Grande Prairie talking to Grande Prairie residents about that situation, which is exactly what they're facing. They've got 65,000 people in their community. It cannot legally be kept as

one constituency, so last time it was broken into two. How do we deal with that? Do we make one complete city constituency; one blended that's part city, part noncity; or two city and rural blended constituencies? There are a number of options in that circumstance.

Our next criteria is to follow natural boundaries where possible. Where a river or a major highway has been used as a boundary of a constituency in the past, we should try to continue to use that as a boundary if possible because people understand that as an aid to understanding exactly what area their constituency covers. Where we've been able to, we've used roadways and rivers.

Another relevant consideration that we've taken into account is growth rates, and that is: how much is a given area likely to grow in the future? Is that growth rate likely to exceed the average growth rate in the province, be more than 14 per cent? Or is it likely to be less than 14 per cent? Where we have been given additional information about projected growth rates in areas, we use that, but where we don't have it, we've just looked at the past as a guide to the future. We have taken into consideration the likelihood of future growth rates in given areas as relevant to what should happen to those constituencies.

Also, another criteria is ease of communication within the constituency and between the constituency and the Legislature in Alberta. It's another criteria that we've applied in making our recommendations regarding constituencies.

The final component of our consultation and consideration is the public input, and in January and February we held 14 hearings across the province. We had one in Lac La Biche and another in Wainwright, the closest ones to you. We're having it here this time because we're trying to move to different towns and cities that we didn't do the last time. Last time we had 749 written submissions that we received as well. I don't have the exact number of written submissions this time, but as of last Friday it was about 500 written submissions that we've received to this point. We are holding hearings in Grande Prairie, three half-days in Edmonton, three half-days in Calgary, Brooks, Red Deer, and of course here in the second round of public hearings. Our goal here is to consult with you on our specific recommendations in our interim report.

The point of this is that we will then prepare a final report. We have to file that with the Speaker of the Legislature by the 23rd of October this year. It will talk about our interim recommendations, make any suggestions for revision or change of those interim recommendations, and then it will be up to the Legislature to decide whether to enact legislation implementing these recommendations changing the boundaries for the next provincial election and probably for the provincial election after that. Remember that this process happens every eight to 10 years, so that will likely be for the next two provincial elections.

Thanks very much for coming here today to take part in this process, which is a fundamental part of democracy. We've been gratified, I must say, by the support and interest we've had this second time around in our hearings. Registration here in Vermilion has been full, which is terrific, so I'm pleased that so many of you have been willing to come and speak. The process we're following is that every one of you who'd registered online to speak has signed up with our clerk when you entered the room. I'm going to call people in order of them having signed up, and then when we're through the list of registered speakers, if we still have time, we'll invite anybody else who'd like to speak to come forward. Everybody is held, please, to a five-minute introductory time limit, and then the commission might have some questions for you. Sometimes it just breaks into a conversation about different ideas and different suggestions.

With that in mind, I'm going to invite our first registered speaker to come forward and take a place at the microphone. That would be Myron Hayduk.

Oh, yes. I've just been reminded that everybody should be aware that we have a *Hansard* reporter here. Everything that's being said is being taken down by him. A transcript will be prepared. It will appear on our website, abebc.ca, within the next couple of days. Also, an audio record is being made, so everything that is said here today will be available for people who aren't here to listen to at their choice.

Mr. Hayduk.

Mr. Hayduk: Thank you.

The Chair: If you could start by saying the constituency you live in at the moment, that would help us.

Mr. Hayduk: Okay. It's the Elk Island, Vegreville constituency.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hayduk: I always like being first.

Basically, communities are formed on common interests, historical content, trading patterns. Changes in these boundaries are going to greatly affect, I'm going to say, our representation and also our partners. One is going to be the water commission. Now we are going to be the only one, if the boundaries change, to be within that commission, so it's going to have two representations, if you want to call it, from the MLAs, which we don't think is that great. Education is the same thing. We're going to be split there. Human services. Policing.

Basically, we're kind of a hub, I'd say, in our area there, and we're losing a good portion of the people who frequently visit Vegreville from the north. When you look at the size of these boundaries, especially from east to west, our MLAs are also going to have a little bit of a tough time, I'm going to say, meeting all the requirements. Maybe we're a little bit spoiled now from the representation that we get.

Also, the difference between Lloydminster and Vegreville. There's not a lot of – I shouldn't say that. There is a lot of common stuff, but we don't have a lot of oil production in our area versus, you know, Lloydminster. I think that just because of the requirements of the regions the MLAs might have a little bit of – how can you say it? – conflict within themselves trying to represent that whole area. Yeah, I think that a lot of these are going to be similar things with the other constituencies. It's just that when you get used to dealing with a certain area and certain other communities, I think it's going to be difficult between – well, take Vegreville and Lloydminster, which is quite a vast distance. How many common issues do we have?

11:15

I'm saying that we're speaking in favour of leaving the boundaries, actually, the way they are. I know just what you said, you know, with the natural boundaries, the North Saskatchewan River to the north. Also, when you spoke about the different community leagues in the cities, in the urban areas, this is kind of what it also is like in the rural areas. We try to form, if you want to call it, you know, advisory groups and partnerships in what affects our area. Right now I'm thinking that with the boundaries that we have, we have good representation, and we have a lot of common interests.

Like I said, that's about all it is for now.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any questions, Mrs. Day? Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: Oh, yes. You made a comment. You said about your MLA or MLAs in the future – we're not sure yet – meeting all the requirements. Can you describe to me what that means to you?

Mr. Hayduk: What that means to me? Okay. You look at the distance between, well, we'll say Elk Island and Lloydminster. That's quite a vast area. Just time factors in travel time. They seem to be quite vast in the rural areas, like, as far as square miles, if you want to call it, or kilometres, you know. Yeah. Just right now, like I said, maybe we're spoiled with the amount of representation that we do get and the visitations that we get about our concerns.

Mr. McLeod: I understand where you're coming from.

Mr. Hayduk: Yeah.

Mr. McLeod: Just one other question. You said something about conflict between the MLAs.

Mr. Hayduk: Not between the MLAs. Sorry. It's between themselves. You have one area – okay? – within the constituency that we'll say is more on the oil productions or that, and then the other one that's on agricultural. There might be a conflict in trying to appease both instead of just in a community league in a city, that they have a common interest. Therefore, being that vast, there are definitely going to be different interests.

The Chair: If I can ask you, then, currently Vegreville is in the same constituency as Fort Saskatchewan, which is focused on oil and gas refining, so right at the moment your MLA in your constituency has more than one economic group. You've got a big agriculture component in the east part of the constituency and big oil refining in the west, and your MLA is managing to handle that, I take it.

Mr. Hayduk: Yes. But, you see, the majority of, if you want to call it, the area is agricultural. Also, I want to say that we have good representation as far as the agricultural goes from our MLA, but also we feel that rural Alberta is going to be losing some representation. More of it's going to be going to the larger urban areas. I think that the smaller person is going to get left behind, if you want to call it. But you've got to consider where the majority of the raw products, if you want to call it, come from, and I guess who is feeding this country.

The Chair: Thank you.
Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: Nothing for me.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

Ms Munn: I have no questions.

The Chair: Thanks very, very much, Mr. Hayduk, for coming and making your submissions.

Mr. Hayduk: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. The next person is Niel Parker. If you could start out, Mr. Parker, by saying the constituency you reside in.

Mr. Parker: All right. I'm Niel Parker. I'm from Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I actually live in Camrose, so the eastern part of our riding right now. I'd first like to start by thanking the commission for the work you've done and for taking the time to talk to Albertans and

taking our feedback. Generally, I have to agree with the executive summary and the direction of your interim report. I should also say that I'm a constituency assistant for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, so I'm here on behalf of Bruce Hinkley, MLA.

Our main issue, as I'm sure you've seen in the written submissions – we've heard a lot about this in our riding – is that the four Cree nations of Maskwacis desire to be in one area. Currently they're split into two. Two nations are split away from us, and two nations are in our boundary, but they all interact in Maskwacis. Maskwacis is the hub for those communities, so we strongly support your move to include them together. The one community that seems to be left out is Ma-Me-O Beach, which also desires to be in the same riding as these other communities. Our suggestion is that we extend the boundary further to the west to include them and sort of make us a little bit wider along the highway 13 corridor.

I think that's pretty much it. I guess I could sort of speak anecdotally about the kinds of interactions we have. The current boundaries create a lot of confusion, where we have constituents from Wetaskiwin or from Maskwacis who aren't in our riding but come to us for services through the MLA office. The current boundaries just do not reflect the day-to-day realities of that community or their economic or social interactions.

Thank you very much for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Sure. Well, I'll just tell you our thinking about this and why we didn't include the Pigeon Lake components of Maskwacis, which are, I think, Buck Lake as well as Ma-Me-O Beach. Two reasons. Right now under our proposal the population of Wetaskiwin-Camrose is above the provincial average. If we went as far west as to pick up those two constituencies, you'd gain a substantial increase in population because you're not just picking up the people who live on the reserves but all the people in between.

Right now there's a part of the current Devon-Parkland constituency called Drayton Valley-Devon, which is part of the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. It's the only noncontiguous constituency in Alberta. It's the only separate little island floating around out there. We have heard from the Chief Electoral Officer that it's very hard to administer elections fairly for that group of people, that despite best intentions resources are stretched at election time, and they're concerned that they haven't been able to do the proper polling and the proper representation of the people in a noncontiguous constituency and asked us to end that practice. We make that recommendation, suggesting that the indigenous folk who live in those two areas in Drayton Valley-Devon can nonetheless access perhaps their own associations or even directly the MLA in Wetaskiwin-Camrose familiar with dealing with indigenous matters and say: look, we're not your constituents, but in our hearts we are part of Maskwacis, and we have the same concerns. Then that MLA could take that representation to the Legislature in confidence. That was our thinking on that.

We also tried to avoid crossing highway 2 because traditionally that's the biggest roadway barrier in the province. We couldn't avoid it down in Airdrie because Airdrie itself straddles highway 2, but north of Airdrie we haven't cut across the highway.

That was our thinking. Any response to that?

Mr. Parker: Sure. I think that is a common practice that we basically do when people come to the office, especially if they've come from any distance. We just serve them regardless of whether we are their MLA or not. I mean, we do communicate with other offices and let them know.

One potential solution that we would propose is that we could lose an area to the north to reduce our population. You're correct

that that highway 2 barrier is significant, but we could kind of become wider and flatter, and that would reduce our population. It also maybe makes sense that Rolly View and, I think, Kavanagh have a bit more in common with Leduc county than they do with our county. The other added benefit would be that it would give us more of Wetaskiwin county. I know that Wetaskiwin county deals with, I think, four MLAs right now, and that can be a lot of people to interact with when you're the county government.

11:25

The Chair: I'll have to tell you that the constituency that has caused me the greatest personal concern here is Leduc-Beaumont. Sometimes the last one you reach in mapping isn't as beautiful as the 86 you've reached before, but we have a very high population in that constituency for a high-growth area. Ideally we would have liked to avoid that, but it didn't seem that there was an easy solution because all of the constituencies surrounding it were above average in size and we didn't want to cross highway 2 if we could avoid it. We've heard invariably people saying that they didn't want to be a blended constituency with Edmonton, so we haven't done that. We don't have much choice. We're boxed in in Leduc-Beaumont, and to add population from Wetaskiwin-Camrose would just exacerbate that problem. Have you any thoughts on that?

Mr. Parker: I think the alternative is also all right with us. I think we would be a bit above average if we just added rather than subtracting, but we are sort of along the really high-growth corridor, so I don't know if that can be avoided. That might just be a problem for future commissions to deal with, Alberta's exceedingly high growth.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McLeod, any questions? Mrs. Day? Ms Livingstone? Ms Munn?

Thanks very much for coming. We appreciate it.

Mr. Parker: Thank you very much.

The Chair: All right. Our next registered speaker is Lanie Parr. Again, Ms Parr, if you could start by saying the constituency you reside in.

Ms Parr: Sure. I'm from Vermilion-Lloydminster. Good morning. My name is Lanie Parr, and I'm vice-chair of the board of trustees for Buffalo Trail public schools. I'll be reading a letter from our board chair written on behalf of our board, followed by my own comments.

On behalf of the board of trustees of Buffalo Trail public schools, I am writing to provide a response to the Interim Report of the 2016/2017 Electoral Boundaries Commission. While we can appreciate the necessity to review the electoral boundaries to address issues, we are very concerned that the report recommendations have given little consideration to the voice of rural Albertans in our Province. In particular, we disagree with the recommendation to add three ridings in the Edmonton and Calgary areas, through further diluting the voice to rural residents in Alberta.

The belief that providing representation by population alone is inherently flawed. As Alberta's population grows and shifts to more urban centers, the impacts on rural Alberta are becoming more profound. As a founding member of the Rural Caucus of Alberta School Boards, we are seeing increasing pressures on many rural communities brought about by a system that is built upon population density. We believe very strongly that all Albertans need to be treated equitably. This equity cannot be achieved through a representation by population model. Recognition needs to be given to the fact that geographical

realities need to be given due consideration in establishing electoral boundaries. A decision to further reduce the voice of rural Albertans through the loss of rural representation at the provincial level will only serve to increase the divide that exists between rural and urban communities.

We urge the Electoral Boundaries Commission to introduce a geographical limit to the size of electoral boundaries in Alberta. Rural MLA's are often asked to represent a multitude of different communities spread over vast geographical areas encompassing thousands of square kilometers. Urban MLA's may have a larger number of constituents, they are often within a single community and spread over a few city blocks. It is not difficult to see how geography impedes the ability of a rural MLA to be present and accessible to many of the communities in their constituency. A decision to further increase an already inequitable representation model will only serve to further marginalize rural Albertans. We feel very strongly that the message to rural Albertans is one that carries a very negative impression about the importance of these parts of our province to the future of our great province.

We would like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to provide input, and sincerely hope that you will give a strong consideration to the needs of rural Alberta in the final outcome.

Sincerely,

Darcy Eddleston

Further to this letter, my concerns are regarding the fact that for the area that I live in and represent, which is ward 24, fourth electoral subdivision for Buffalo Trail public schools, representing the areas of Dewberry, Clandonald, and Marwayne, this literally divides my communities in half. It'll cause some challenges as well because currently those areas are all represented by Dr. Richard Starke. However, if these changes proceed, Dr. Starke will represent half of my ward while an MLA representing areas from Tulliby Lake all the way to Fort Saskatchewan will represent the other half of my ward. The people from my area that I represent work, do business, attend schools, and play sports within the current area. Therefore, I don't understand why the lines are not drawn following the county of Vermilion River boundary to the north.

I'm surprised and disappointed that this does not seem to be in line with the Electoral Boundaries Commission's website, where it says, "The Commission must take the following factors into consideration in making its recommendations to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta," one of the considerations being areas of "common community interests and community organizations" as well as "existing municipal boundaries," which in this case I consider the county of Vermilion River boundaries to be.

Thank you.

The Chair: Sorry. I didn't catch where – you say that half of your community will be represented by Dr. Starke and the other half from what constituency?

Ms Parr: Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul in the new boundaries.

The Chair: Just two factual points, if you'd like. We have no authority to make a recommendation that constituencies have a maximum geographic area or a minimum geographic area. We don't have the ability to change what's in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The Legislature alone can do that. We're left with the task that they've given us.

Many people, for example, have suggested: "Well, why don't you make three new constituencies like they did the last time? The impact in rural areas won't be so much." Well, that's not for us. The Legislature had already decided not to do that when they appointed us, just so that you know that that is beyond our jurisdiction.

In regard to respecting common community boundaries and respecting municipal boundaries, that's a goal, but we can't always

achieve that goal. Some counties are so large in the province that the other criteria of common community interests and maximum allowable deviation from population average sizes and so forth compel us to divide up counties, and unfortunately that seems to be worse, I must say, the further north you go in the province because the counties become larger in size, just like the constituencies become larger in size as the population becomes more sparse. So it's not that we didn't try to achieve that result, but we couldn't do it.

But that said, we're all ears, and we're particularly interested if you have a suggestion to make about the boundaries that we do recommend for your constituency, as to how we could make adjustments to what is recommended here on the screen. If you think that a relatively small adjustment could be made that would avoid, for example, cutting up the county of Vermilion into four rather than maybe three parts, we'd be very interested in that.

Ms Parr: The letter from our board is the overall way it's done, but for me personally and for my area, keeping the northern county boundaries following how the county goes would be the best because right now a line goes just about right through my communities. The northern half will be represented in that new area, and I think that it just makes for some challenges having it like that whereas if it followed the county boundary as it does currently, it would keep all of my communities together.

The Chair: Okay. So looking at the map, because I'm not as familiar, obviously, with your communities as you are, looking at the northern boundary of the proposed Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, how would it have to change to achieve your goal?

Ms Parr: It's hard to tell on that map there. I've got this in front of me. Currently it goes up north of Tulliby Lake, north of the 640. The new line is township road 532. If it continues to follow the northern boundary, so north of Tulliby Lake, which is the county boundary, and follow along above 640 – I'm not sure what that road is – and follow what's already there to the north, that's kind of the economic area, too. Right now, the economic trading area is the area that currently exists. Switching that to a northern area, it just seems like it goes out of the area that the community uses. So I think just following, continuing, with the north boundary as it exists would be ideal.

11:35

The Chair: Would that mean that your northern boundary would go right up to touch the southern boundary of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, as it does at the moment, under your proposal or suggestion?

Ms Parr: Yeah. That's what I would suggest, just keeping it as it is. Sorry; I don't have a map that shows how far north it goes.

The Chair: Now, just so that you know the consequences of that, because I'm going to ask you whether that bothers you or concerns you, if we did that, the proposed population of Vermilion-Lloydminster would increase above the provincial average. Right now under our proposal you're almost at the provincial average. You're just 4 per cent above, comparing to the current situation, where you're 17 per cent below, but if we added that other part in the north and took it away from Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul – do you know the population size, how many people live in that area? I mean, we can find that out, but I'm just asking you. How would that change the population between the two proposed constituencies, Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul and Vermilion-Lloydminster?

Ms Parr: I'm not sure. I don't have those numbers in front of me. Yeah. It would be a very small number in that area.

The Chair: I must say that we received a very helpful letter from Dr. Starke – I did, anyway, last week – in which he goes through this part of the province. I'll go through that with the cartographers back at Elections Alberta and see how that actually pans out, but it's helpful to know whether that would be a big change or a small change, because I look at this and see that Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul is 10 per cent over, too. So I'm sure they'd be happy to lose a little bit of population perhaps as well.

All right. Ms Munn, any questions?

Ms Munn: I don't have any questions. No.

The Chair: Questions?

Mr. McLeod: No thanks.

The Chair: All right. Thanks so much.

Ms Parr: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. This would take us up to Jessica Littlewood. Again, if you could start by telling us the constituency in which you reside.

Mrs. Littlewood: Happy to do so. Good morning. Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is the constituency that I live in. Okay. Is somebody going to start me off with a timer? All right.

Good morning, members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Thank you so much for having hearings out in rural Alberta. Those perspectives are what I hope to bring to you today. The changes that are proposed for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to be, most substantively, what it would become, Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul and Vermilion-Lloydminster, are troubling because of what I have heard and what I have experienced. It would take the constituency – obviously, from the map you can see that it would stretch it quite east, west, in effect doubling the travel time for any constituents travelling this particular constituency. It is for that reason that we do have a satellite office that is staffed in Vegreville, so that we are not unnecessarily putting seniors in danger, putting them out on the highway for longer than really is acceptable. That's why I am concerned about these rural constituencies being grown.

Also, I spoke to the mayor of St. Paul and the reeve of the county of St. Paul, and they share concerns that they're being divided away from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Whitefish (Goodfish) First Nation, Kehewin Cree nation, Frog Lake First Nation, and Fishing Lake Métis settlements. I don't believe that it achieves the commission's goal of having boundaries that would give common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements, especially moving forward with the new provincial direction of intermunicipal collaboration framework agreements, which is of course a new direction for many rural, urban, and indigenous partners.

Also, to that point, the current boundaries of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville are a fair reflection of families, business dealings, municipal entities, school authorities of this east-central region. That's been reinforced – I've been CCed on submissions from the county of Lamont, the town of Bruderheim, and the city of Fort Saskatchewan in your second round here.

What it does is that it would cut out Vegreville, which is a hub of Ukrainian culture in this area, and it would also be cutting out the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village into this southern constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Also, right now Vegreville is going through a current proposal from the federal government that would remove the immigration, refugee, and citizenship case processing centre and its 236 jobs out

of the town. So not mentioning Vegreville and why you are moving it between constituencies, unfortunately, adds insult to injury, given the current situation that we are experiencing there, and only further plays into a narrative that government bureaucracies don't understand or care about rural Alberta.

Highway 16 east does create a natural travel and trading pattern in that area. Highways 15 and 16 form a natural link between the communities of Bruderheim, Lamont, Chipman, Hilliard, Mundare, and Vegreville. Of course, many families that I meet in Fort Saskatchewan also come from these communities as they're only one or two generations from the farm.

What I do appreciate about the current situation and your proposal is that you have a suburban, ruralish, what is commonly referred to as – some people know this word – a rural municipality. When you are experiencing some real cultural rural-urban divides and when you have a constituency's MLA that is representing many different perspectives like that, it can help to grow empathy and understanding as opposed to creating adversarial relationships and alienation. I can't overemphasize the fact that Fort Saskatchewan continues to grow; it's almost doubled in the last 12 years, and we continue to grow the Industrial Heartland there.

In my last five seconds, in your recommendations you were talking about Internet access, and unfortunately not every Albertan has Internet access. So when you are talking about how you ensure that people in rural Alberta are served and your recommendations lay out that you don't even think that each person could have – could have – Internet access for another eight to 10 years, that is quite troubling when we are, in essence, trying to figure out what is fair and proper representation for every Albertan that we have in this province.

I also cannot overstate the impact of having a constituent, someone like a corrections officer that comes to my office with PTSD and wants to be able to look me in the eye and understand that I will advocate on their behalf, and an e-mail and a phone call do not replace that.

I thank you for your time. I hope that you take these things into consideration.

The Chair: Forgive me for this question, but are you the MLA, Mrs. Littlewood?

Mrs. Littlewood: Yes.

The Chair: In Fort-Saskatchewan-Vegreville at the moment is there high-speed access available for everyone?

Mrs. Littlewood: No.

The Chair: What parts of your constituency do not have high-speed access availability?

Mrs. Littlewood: Parts of the north of the constituency, in Lamont, and in some parts around the south into Beaver county.

The Chair: Okay. I'm happy that you came right after Ms Parr because I'd like to run her suggestion or request by you, which is totally aside from your other suggestions. I accept that your hope would be that we don't change the size of the constituency you serve. Setting that aside for the moment, she suggests that the northern border of Vermilion-Lloydminster cut off the proposed very eastern end of the new constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, taking Vermilion-Lloydminster right up to Bonnyville-Cold Lake as it currently is. What's your view on that idea?

11:45

Mrs. Littlewood: I would say that the communities of Two Hills definitely have more in common with Vegreville, being that I often

have constituents that come from that area and that county that presume that I'm their representative and who come down and sometimes get health care, and they do business down in Vegreville as the centre. Does that answer your question?

The Chair: Uh-huh. We love it when there are MLAs here because we've got lots of questions to ask.

All right. Questions?

Mrs. Day: Well, I'm curious if there's a way that you see numberwise – I'm not sure what would work – to come further, moving this boundary so that Vegreville is now united with the village and with your riding. It's quite a substantial move, considering Fort Saskatchewan's population growth. Do you have any suggestions for where you think your eastern boundary and their western boundary would be?

Mrs. Littlewood: If it were, like, a Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville-Two Hills constituency to pull in some of that, I think it would still be a little under 10 per cent over the variance. Currently, without Two Hills, it would be at a 1 per cent variance. But, I mean, I wouldn't presume to speak for the communities that are in that east side of this proposed Vermilion-Lloydminster just because I don't have relationships with them.

Mrs. Day: I was just looking if you had some solutions or suggestions for your riding boundary.

The Chair: Just to give that some context, we don't look at each constituency alone, sadly, and to an extent Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is impacted by the small growth rate of the constituencies that surround you to the east. Right now Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Vermilion-Lloydminster, and Battle River-Wainwright are all almost right at the maximum legal limit of 20 per cent below, and eight years from now, if nothing is done, they'll be well below the maximum legal limit.

One of the results of our recommendations would be to move them closer to the point where they don't need to be reviewed eight to 10 years from now, so that if growth rates continue, they'll still be close to the provincial average eight to 10 years from now. Keeping that in mind, if we were to recommend that Vegreville and Fort Saskatchewan remain in the same constituency, do you have any suggestions for what we might do with the 17 per cent above-average population or 22 per cent above-average population in Lac La Biche and Vermilion-Lloydminster? How do we move those boundaries to solve the problem?

Mrs. Littlewood: Yeah. I mean, I well understand that everything is going to have a knock-on effect across the province. As I see it right now, I think you have approximately 6,000 people that are in the town of St. Paul – I think it might be just under, 5,800 – and Vegreville is 5,706, so Vegreville makes sense to be in this catchment area. St. Paul and that part of the county just do not. They're connected economically and socially and culturally to that northern constituency above the river.

The Chair: But that's very close to the maximum limit of 22 per cent below, and even with our proposal – I mean, we're just having a conversation here – we're still leaving it at 23 per cent below in Lac La Biche and the area where St. Paul used to be. You know, we have to do something with St. Paul. I mean, it's not your problem to solve, but just to describe what our problem is, that's one of our challenges.

All right. Anything else you'd like to say?

Mrs. Littlewood: No. That's everything.

The Chair: Great. Thank you so much for coming.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you so much.

The Chair: St. Paul is about 8,000 people: is that what you said?

Mrs. Littlewood: Six thousand.

The Chair: All right. Our next registered speakers are Ron and Judy Plett.

Mrs. Plett: Good morning. I'm Judy Plett. My husband, Ron. We're from Vermilion-Lloydminster. We'd like to thank you for this opportunity to be here. This is a joint submission. At this point I'll hand it over to Ron.

Mr. Plett: Thank you, Judy. Thank you for the opportunity to be back here. Thank you very much for the opportunity we had to speak with you in Wainwright and now again today. I only gave you one copy of it, but in the second paragraph I wanted to address each of you as commission members, to thank you for being willing to do a tough task, because the ultimate deliverable – by the nature of the subject you will have great difficulty satisfying all of us as Albertans, but thank you for trying.

We read your interim report, your interpretations, your opinions, and various judicial decisions on various matters. We found some recommendations of yours very disappointing. On the other hand, there was also some encouraging content. Thank you for that.

One thing we found confusing was the subject of equality, and it's already come up. I appreciated, on one hand, how you tried to have more unity amongst us as Albertans. You use the words, "We are [after all] interdependent." Yet we keep on emphasizing: oh, we don't want to cut up that special interest, or we don't want to cut up another special interest. So I found that confusing, that you said, on one hand, that all Albertans are interdependent, yet on page 30 your report recommends minimizing blending of urban and non-urban ridings. I know you've mostly heard and probably will hear more that, yeah, we need to keep the urban and rural separate. I'm not in your shoes. I'm not quite sure, but I think that subject merits additional consideration, maybe beyond the time that you folks have.

On a different subject, when we as taxpayers, who expect frugality from our MLAs, then see in your report a comment that, after all, MLAs can hire drivers, I find that to be frustrating and, frankly, somewhat patronizing.

Changing subjects, on the complimentary side we respect you for including, on page 67, the minority position report by Gwen Day. Her suggestions are very insightful. Page 70, Ric McIver's comments on urban versus non-urban: he speaks from experience, yet very sadly it appears that you've chosen to ignore his wisdom.

11:55

Flipping to page 2, our recommendations, we spoke to a number of various people in gathering feedback for the recommendations we're submitting to you, and that included people throughout our ridings as well as from other regions of Alberta, including First Nations, in our case Onion Lake, or on the Alberta side it's called Makao. We just refer to it as Onion Lake. So we spoke to a variety of people.

Two specific recommendations we have. Please change the proposed northeast boundary of Vermilion-Lloydminster so that it matches our northeast boundary of the county of Vermilion River. I gave you three maps suggesting what the shift could be, and I think you've already heard from others that that shift would, relatively

speaking, have a very nominal impact population count wise. Later on I'll ask you if you have any questions about the suggested change, but it's outlined in that map that you have.

The reasons for this recommendation are that the communities in the northeast share a strong common community interest with the Vermilion-Lloydminster region, a common economic trading area. Our communities and school divisions are common – you heard that already from Lanie Parr – our municipal infrastructure, both for the county and the towns within the county who share that infrastructure. Clubs: you heard of sports. In our case we said: maybe clubs such as 4-H. Also, the Macao Indian reserve, or what we call Onion Lake reserve: they have many corporations that have major economic ventures and developments and employment in the Lloydminster region. So we'd ask that for those considerations you would draw the line as we have suggested on the map.

Our second suggestion is to move Gwen Day's report from minority to majority. Implement it. The correct response to growth in urban populations should have been increased variances in the city and not an increase in the number of ridings in the two major cities. We think that would best effectively represent Albertans as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here. Any questions?

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mrs. Day.

Mrs. Day: Thank you for your kind words.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

All right. Thank you very much. Thanks for the map. I'm going to ask the clerk to mark that and provide it to *Hansard* so they've got it and so that we have it and know that it's from you as part of your submission.

Okay. Our next registered presenter is Jeremy Johnston.

Mr. Johnston: Hi. I'm from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. My name is Jeremy Johnston, and I'm here to present today on behalf of the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville NDP Constituency Association. I'd first just like to take the opportunity to thank the members of the commission for your hard work. I know it can't be an easy job here, but I think you've done some good work so far. I'd like to just thank you for giving us a chance to present to you and for listening to our remarks on the proposed boundary changes.

In particular, today I'm going to be talking about the proposed Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul constituency. What we understand is that the commission has intended to meet certain criteria when you're drawing up these proposed boundaries such as common community interests and the interests of indigenous and Métis communities and fair representation. Those are just a few of the factors, I understand, in the process.

What confuses us is that it doesn't seem like these factors were actually taken into consideration when you drew up the boundary for Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, and I would just like to give a bit of an explanation as to why we came up with that conclusion. When we read the report initially about Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, we noticed that there wasn't really a clear explanation as to why the boundaries had to be drawn up the way they were. The report seemed as if the creation of the constituency was based more on just population numbers as opposed to the common interests of the community. A point I would like to say is that the town of St. Paul doesn't have much in common with the city of Fort Saskatchewan in terms of being community hubs and the town of Vegreville has quite a bit in common with the town of Mundare, but we're putting Fort Saskatchewan and St. Paul together and not putting Vegreville and Mundare in the same constituency. That, you know, just gave

the impression that this was more about, “How are we going to fit these new populations together? Where are we going to draw the line?” as opposed to what actually makes sense for the region.

Vegreville has a lot of strong ties with the communities north of highway 16; you know, the village of Andrew, Mundare, Bruderheim, Lamont, Lamont county, all those, and all those communities and villages and hamlets. They all go to Vegreville and Fort Saskatchewan, too, for different events or whatnot, but you don’t really see or meet anybody from St. Paul in that area. Again, it just goes back to the point that there isn’t a lot of commonality between the communities that are being proposed for this new constituency.

We also had concerns about the population and the projected growth in the constituency. Fort Saskatchewan, for example, is going to make up about half of the new proposed constituency at 49.9 per cent, with a population of 25,553 people. Back in 2011 the population of Fort Saskatchewan was about 18,500. Last year Fort Saskatchewan saw a growth of 3.9 per cent, which is well above the provincial average, which was 1.4 per cent, so this is like a high-growth area. I think it’s in the top 10 of the fastest growing communities in Alberta. There’s a lot of activity happening up in the Industrial Heartland, so this is going to bring more people, more jobs to the area. It’s only going to grow. St. Paul itself, looking at historical census data, has shown that it also is a growing community. It’s not losing much in population. So if you put this constituency at 10 per cent above the population, it’s only going to be higher in eight years. It’s not going to go down.

Another important issue that we noticed was that Vegreville isn’t even talked about in the report, which doesn’t really seem fair to the town of Vegreville. Again, it just goes back to the impression that this was a decision based on where to fit population as opposed to common interests.

Another concern we had was the town of St. Paul not being connected with the Saddle Lake reserve, as those two communities are also very well linked in population. We feel that if any new boundaries are going to be drawn up, Vegreville must be included with the communities north of highway 16 and St. Paul must be included in with Saddle Lake. That’s what makes sense to us.

Another area that we were confused about was that what was said in the report was a little bit different than what was on the map. The report says:

Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul would capture the area east of the eastern border of the electoral division of Sherwood Park, including the entirety of the area around the town of Tofield (currently split between two electoral divisions). It would follow the path of the Yellowhead Trail, a major highway, between Sherwood Park and the border. The southwest boundary would be extended further southwest into the Battle River-Wainwright constituency. It would gain New Sarepta (from Leduc-Beaumont), a community with similar interests to others within the electoral division, found along Highway 21 south, all as shown on Map 61.

The problem is that New Sarepta is not on map 61. It just seems like a bit of an oversight, but that gives us the impression that this particular part of the report may have been a little rushed, and that, to us, was a little concerning.

12:05

The Chair: I will interrupt to say that, yes, that omission has been pointed out to us by two other people who’ve written in. So, yes, you’re right. There is a disconnect between the verbal description of the constituency and the maps, but the report does say that in the case of that situation, the maps govern, and that is what you should address. Certainly, we’ll deal with that in the final report, but the maps are the official legal boundary once the legislation is

introduced. Our verbal description was simply trying to assist the reader to understand what we were talking about without having them flip back and forth between the two.

Mr. Johnston: Then the report does go on to mention that there were little concerns about travel time from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills area. What these changes do is basically take a problem from one area and put it onto another. The travel time between Lac La Biche and St. Paul is a little over an hour, like, an hour and 15 minutes, I think. The travel time between Fort Saskatchewan and St. Paul is over an hour and a half, and it could be upwards to two hours, depending on the route you need to take. So it would be an extensively larger amount of travel time for the representative. That doesn’t seem that it would be very fair to the constituents if their representative is basically ghosting in and ghosting out, you know: I’m here for five minutes, but I can’t actually represent you because I have to be there in an hour and a half. That was a concern we had.

Those are basically our concerns. Our recommendation is to not really change Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville so drastically. Echoing the concerns of the folks speaking about Vermilion-Lloydminster, I think that if you kept the east-west boundary where it was, by Lavoy, and then let the other constituency go north, that would be more fair. Vegreville should stay in the constituency, and perhaps, you know, St. Paul could go north into the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area. Those suggestions, I think, would be much fairer for representation. That’s basically my report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks. Just an editorial point. It’s not fair representation we’re to achieve. It’s effective representation that is our goal.

Could you repeat for me where you would put St. Paul and Saddle Lake? If we were to follow your suggestion, where do you see those two going? This is a trick question because I’ll have a follow-up for you.

Mr. Johnston: For me, it would be up into that northern constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The Chair: All right. Well, Bonnyville-Cold Lake under our proposal is already 7 per cent over the provincial average. If we added another 8,000 from St. Paul – and I don’t know the population of Saddle Lake, but I know it’s significant. I was a trial judge for 19 years, and we serviced St. Paul. It’s the third-busiest courthouse in the province, so I know Saddle Lake has a huge population. Saddle Lake is already in Bonnyville-Cold Lake. So if we added 8,000 to Bonnyville-Cold Lake . . .

Unidentified Speaker: Six thousand.

The Chair: Sorry; 6,000. That’s 15 per cent over. We’d be at 22 per cent over. We’d have to leave Bonnyville-Cold Lake at 22 per cent, very close to the legal maximum. Any comment on that?

Mr. Johnston: Yeah. I suppose there would be more redrawing of the boundaries up in the north area that you would have to take a look at to accommodate that, but in terms of commonality and common interests it makes more sense for St. Paul to be with its regional partners than it does for St. Paul to be connected to Fort Saskatchewan.

The Chair: Just editorially, part of this is driven by our problem in Fort McMurray. If you’ve read the whole report – you may not have – we don’t have good figures for Fort McMurray-Conklin because

the fire up there happened two weeks after the federal census. So under our proposal, which is very much a draft proposal for discussion about that, we've left what we now call Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche at 23 per cent below provincial average because we're expecting a return of people into that community as their homes are rebuilt and as the community recovers over the next two or three years. If we hadn't done that, we would have had to bring the Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche constituency probably down almost to Fort Saskatchewan to take in that extra population. So lots will be affected, depending on what we do with the Fort McMurray corner of the province.

We're facing legal limits here. I mean, we have some discretion to make recommendations based on different communities of interest, but we can't go over the 25 per cent. Also, in rapid-growth areas you don't want to because they're right away going to be over the legal limit, and we want something that will last at least for the next 10 years. This is an interesting area of the province.

Any questions?

Mr. McLeod: No. Thanks.

The Chair: Questions? Okay. Go ahead.

Ms Livingstone: I just wanted to follow up on the last suggestions, the things we were talking about there on the maps. If we were to try and move St. Paul back into what's called the Bonnyville-Cold Lake riding on the new map, as was discussed, we would need to make some adjustments probably on the northern side. I'm wondering if you're able to help me as I'm looking at the map to figure out which communities might be appropriate to go further north into that Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche riding that's proposed. I'm looking up in that northern area. I'm seeing McRae, Sugden, and Goodridge. To the extent you have knowledge of that area, would those communities be appropriate to go out of the Bonnyville-Cold Lake riding and up into the Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche riding?

Mr. Johnston: I'm not too familiar with that area, so I apologize. I probably shouldn't speak to that because that's just not something I've looked at.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Yeah, I just thought I'd ask just in case.

The same thing with the Whitefish Lake First Nation: do you have any knowledge of that First Nation and whether that would be more appropriate in the Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche riding or the Bonnyville-Cold Lake riding?

Mr. Johnston: I wouldn't have knowledge of that either. Sorry.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Thanks.

Ms Munn: I just wanted to clarify. Was it your suggestion that the Saddle Lake area stay with St. Paul? So it's not a solution to put Saddle Lake somewhere else? Okay.

The Chair: Anything else?

Ms Munn: No, I don't have anything.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks very much.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We'll take one more speaker, and then we'll have a five-minute break. John Mather.

Mr. Mather: Good morning. I'm representing Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Basically, I'm going to repeat quite a bit of what you've already heard. Thank you for allowing me to address the commission today.

I'm the president of the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville PC Association, and our organization isn't pleased with the new proposed constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul. In your legal requirement, section 14(a), "the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," given the shape of this riding it's very difficult to ensure that this would happen.

If you look at the map, one can automatically see that the riding doesn't work too well. It's notched to go up to include St. Paul, which, along with Fort Saskatchewan, make up the two main population centres. Fort Saskatchewan would have to be considered the only urban area in the constituency. As such, it has much different wants and needs than, say, Dewberry, Derwent, or Mymam. I expect, although I'm sure your numbers may show differently, that the balance of power in the proposed constituency would be around the Fort Saskatchewan area, with St. Paul being the second most influential area. I would expect that the future MLA would come from one of these two centres just based on the fact that MLAs sell memberships to become the MLA and the representative of their party, and obviously those are where the numbers are. The result would be a neglecting of the smaller centres scattered throughout the riding to the Saskatchewan border.

In this area of the province historic trade patterns, according to the chamber of commerce in the Fort, tend to be north-south. Families partaking in recreational activities for their children tend to gravitate north and south. School boards tend to move along this direction. Kids in Warwick are bused to school in Vegreville, which would be outside the riding. Dewberry residents are more prone to shop in Lloydminster rather than Fort Saskatchewan or St. Paul. Political discussion occurs in arenas, coffee shops, churches, and community halls, where the people congregate. What purpose does it serve to have a constituency based on an east-west direction when the social and commercial orientation and thus the discussion of provincial affairs and concerns works on a north-south orientation?

12:15

Under section 14(e) you talked about taking into consideration "existing municipal boundaries," and then this will move out of our constituency. But the residents of east St. Albert really don't have much in common with Redwater or Smoky Lake, but they do with the rest of St. Albert. How does splitting the St. Albert riding in two actually help those voters?

Looking at the map of the proposed changes, it would make much more sense to put Redwater and Gibbons in with Fort Saskatchewan. I realize that you use the river as a boundary, but people already cross the river to come to work in Fort Saskatchewan. The Industrial Heartland covers both sides of the river. People from Gibbons and from Redwater play recreational sports, hockey in Fort Saskatchewan. They shop in the Fort. It's a major destination for them.

Many in our association feel that this is already a done deal and my appearance here today is pretty much a waste of time. Why, they ask, is the constituency so large when it's obvious that it could allow for voter-MLA disconnect? Many wonder who was consulted to make this proposed constituency the shape it is. It's felt that, along with the north-south orientation, an argument could be made for including the growing Fort Saskatchewan community in a new constituency, which may include part of northeast Edmonton.

The Chair: And do you support that idea?

Mr. Mather: I can see that that will happen in the future. Whether it happens right now – again, you’re very numbers oriented, so you’re the map drawers, more so than I am.

Our constituency association would respectfully ask that the commission relook at the map with an eye towards a north-south orientation, still based on the population, which would more closely represent the way people live their everyday lives in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Just a couple of factual observations to perhaps answer some of the questions you have of us, and then I’ll ask others on the panel if they have any questions for you. We could not leave St. Albert in one constituency. It has more than 60,000 people. It would be above 25 per cent above the provincial average. In fact, it’s now split between St. Albert and Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

We received in the first go-round – and we based these recommendations largely on the comments we received in the first go-round – that people were very unhappy with the Spruce Grove-St. Albert blended constituency. They said that they were two completely different communities. One was francophone based; the other consisted of people working in suburban Edmonton. We had enough people. Spruce Grove has been growing hugely. It could essentially form its own constituency.

We took those suggestions and made the submission to add St. Albert to Redwater to try to keep the Franco-Canadian communities in that area of the province together. We couldn’t keep Morinville in there because Morinville is huge and growing very quickly as well, and there were simply too many people there. Again, we’d be over 25 per cent over. That’s why we’ve got St. Albert-Redwater. It’ll be interesting to hear what comments we have from people in St. Albert later today when we go to Edmonton. Maybe there won’t be any. Maybe there will be people there.

In regard to your suggestion that we have a blended constituency with Edmonton, again, in the first go-round, in all of our written submissions and personal appearances, no one suggested that we have a blended constituency in either Edmonton or Calgary. Both the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary wrote and asked that that not occur.

Totally aside from that, if we did consider doing that, I don’t think we could do it in northeast Edmonton. That’s a high-growth area in Edmonton similar to, in fact, high growth in Fort Saskatchewan, maybe even more rapid growth than up there. The big military base is up there, and there would simply be too many people there to blend Fort Saskatchewan in with that.

Again, we’ve got some statutory limits on the work that we can do here.

Mr. Mather: How do you count your military base when we know that that’s a transient population?

The Chair: If they’re transient, if they’re part of the shadow population, they’re not counted. But if they list that as their residence where they pay taxes, et cetera – many of those people are permanently posted to that base, or, you know, they’re residents there for the time being. That’s also true up in Fort McMurray. The people that are just there on two weeks in, two weeks out: they don’t get counted. Similarly, the military at Cold Lake don’t get counted unless it’s their permanent address, but if it is, then they’re counted there.

With that little bit of background, I’ll ask my fellow commissioners whether there are any questions.

Mrs. Day: I do have one question. Thank you for your presentation today. I did some exploring on my own, working with county blocks, like, as if they were neighbourhoods around the provincial

map, and I had explored Fort Saskatchewan, with 25,000, plus Morinville, with about 10,000, and sent some population into Sturgeon county to the north. Is that more aligned with the north-south idea that you’re presenting?

Mr. Mather: I would think yes. Again, I would look more at the Redwater-Gibbons area coming towards Fort Saskatchewan. With that little section of St. Albert I would wonder why you wouldn’t have included Morinville, Legal. Now, you mention the French-Anglo area. Well, obviously, Morinville and Legal are both French-Anglo oriented, so they would gravitate towards St. Albert as well. And it’s a commercial, recreational activity hub for them.

Mrs. Day: Okay. Well, thank you for your presentation.

The Chair: Questions? Comments?

Thanks very much.

Mr. Mather: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We’ll take a five-minute break. Thanks, everyone.

[The hearing adjourned from 12:22 p.m. to 12:31 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. If I could invite you to sit down once again, ladies and gentlemen, we’ll get going. Our first presenter is Dr. Starke.

Dr. Starke: Well, good afternoon, commissioners. My name is Dr. Richard Starke. I’m honoured to be the MLA for the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency for the past five years, but I note with some interest that it’s actually my second time I’ve presented to an electoral boundaries commission. I presented in 1992. My recommendations were largely ignored, so I hope I’m a little more successful this time around.

I want to thank you for being part of what is an extremely daunting task. If you want to use an analogy, I think you have been tasked with the job of juggling eight different factors and keeping all the balls in the air. That’s extremely difficult, and I acknowledge that, but I will tell you that from my observation and from the observation of many in my area, they’ve said that seven balls have fallen to the floor and one has been kept sacrosanct, and that is the so-called voter parity ball. Voter parity does not equal effective representation. The rural MLAs in the preliminary and the first round told you this, and you’re going to hear it all over again. Being a rural MLA has its own set of challenges.

In my view, the interim report shows an overemphasis on numerical equivalence, on voter parity. Because of this a number of distortions have been introduced, and you’ve heard some of those this morning. You will probably continue to hear those.

The other thing that concerns me is that one of the – the act is quite clear that the commission shall consider eight specific factors and that it may consider additional factors. One of the factors that the commission has decided it will consider is projected population growth or lack thereof. I would say that I think this is an error. Basically you have to be drawing these boundaries for what we have here and now and not for what might happen eight to 10 to 15 years down the road.

Finally, I will say that rural MLAs and urban MLAs have a very, very different set of representation challenges and that those need to be taken into account. That is why you have the plus or minus 25 per cent variance you can work with.

Specifically I want to talk about Vermilion-Lloydminster. We recognized that this constituency was very likely to expand. The

only given we knew was that it was not going to expand to the east. Beyond that, though, we really didn't know. I understand some . . .

The Chair: That would have solved a great deal of problems if we could have taken in Saskatchewan.

Dr. Starke: I would have liked that, rather.

Expanding to the east to include the remaining portions of Minburn county and Beaver county has some logic to me. I just want to say from the outset actually that using county boundaries I think is something that the commission should really take a much stronger look at. County boundaries don't change. Everybody in rural Alberta understands county boundaries. They know what county they live in. If you simply describe a constituency, for example, saying, "all of those lands included within the counties of Vermilion River, Minburn, and Beaver county," everybody would know exactly where they live and where they're in. As it is, the current boundaries are confusing and cause significant fragmentation.

I want to talk specifically about the northern boundary. Ms Parr raised this as well as Mr. Plett. The northern boundary that currently is proposed to cut off the communities of Clandonald, Dewberry, Tullibee Lake, and the Onion Lake First Nation: this is a major problem. Follow the county boundary as it currently exists. We're not talking about a huge number of people. I'm going to guesstimate somewhere between 500 and 1,000. Onion Lake First Nation, like the city of Lloydminster, is bisected by the Alberta-Saskatchewan border and because of that has dealings with both the governments in Regina and Edmonton. Because of that Onion Lake works very closely with the city of Lloydminster, but to have the Onion Lake First Nation in the proposed constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul makes no sense whatsoever. The same can be said for the communities of Dewberry, Tullibee Lake, Clandonald, and Lea Park.

Another area that I question is the exclusion of the town of Tofield in division 2 of Beaver county from the remainder. Now, in the report it says that they're trying to keep Beaver county whole, yet Tofield, which is a fairly significant community, is excluded from that exercise. To me, if you're going to include Beaver county, include all of it or none of it. In this case the decision is to include most of it, and I would include the town of Tofield.

Finally, I'm just going to state that leaving Vegreville out of the name is, quite frankly, a slight to the people of Vegreville. I would recommend that the constituency, if it is to stay similar to what you've recommended, be named Vegreville-Vermilion-Lloydminster. There are lots of constituencies that we have currently that have three communities in the name, and it doesn't cause a problem in the Legislature, I can assure you. I think that that provides more clarity and more descriptiveness to the name of the constituency, not less.

I thank you for taking my submission.

The Chair: First of all, I wanted to thank you for your comprehensive letter written that I received last week. We'll of course pay careful attention to it but particularly to your specific comments on the boundaries as you went around your constituency. That was the sort of thing that we were really hoping to receive in relation to all constituencies because we didn't have as much information in regard to specific mapping on a kilometre-by-kilometre basis as, obviously, the people who reside in different areas do. So thanks a lot for doing that.

We'll certainly take into consideration the other comments. I mean, we've heard it from others, not just you, about the

northeastern corner of our proposed constituency and what could happen there.

I'll ask my fellow commissioners whether they have any questions.

Mr. McLeod: Yes. I've got one. We've heard it before in the first round, and we've just recently heard it again in Grande Prairie. You talk about the rural and the urban and their differences. I live in a rural area. I know the difference, but how is the representation different in the rural than for an urban MLA? Can you give me a little bit more perspective on that? I mean, besides the area, okay?

Dr. Starke: Yeah. That's a really fundamental question. I'm glad you ask it. An urban MLA works with one city council, and they might work with one or two councillors from that city council. I work with one city, two towns, six villages, three counties, five school boards, and 13 ag societies. Each has a board. Each expects me to show up at their meetings and at their events, and if I don't show up at the Ranfurly fair, for example – now, some might say: well, that's not a big deal. I can tell you that your presence is appreciated; your absence is noted and remembered.

You know, in terms of being a rural MLA, effective representation doesn't just mean them being able to come to you, which in the urban setting is really pretty easy. It also means you being able to be at their events. I'm on the go from sunrise to well after sunset on Canada Day, and, as it turns out, in my constituency those communities are good enough to spread those celebrations over three days. But Remembrance Day is an example where the MLA is expected to come to the various Remembrance Day observances. They all occur at the same time on the same day, and I have to go around in a rotation. I have over six legions in my constituency as it is currently constituted. So those are the kinds of considerations.

12:40

If you'll forgive me for being so bold, the recommendations in the interim report as to how rural MLAs could become more effective are woefully inadequate. Rural constituents expect to see the whites of the eyes of their MLAs, not an assistant. They expect to have that in-person contact, not via Skype or via some other means. The additional office idea: I have two constituency offices as it is. I would be very happy to add a third constituency office if that was necessary, but what that simply means is that I need to maintain office hours in three separate locations where constituents expect to be able to meet with their MLA. An urban MLA doesn't have that.

I'll throw one other thing out. We've just finished what we call graduation season. In May and June I attend 13 graduation and convocation ceremonies throughout the constituency. Once again, if you're not at someone's graduation, the parents, and in fact the graduate, recognize and notice that. I talk to some of my urban colleagues and ask them, you know, "How's grad season going?" They look at me dumbfounded, saying: "Oh, what do you mean, grad season?" I say: "Well, how many high school graduations will you be attending?" And they tell me: "None. I don't have a high school in my constituency." That's an example of the kinds of things that are different. It goes beyond just distances. It just goes well beyond the size of the constituency. It's the fact that there is an expectation from each of these communities that you have a connection with them. Having too many communities or having a large number of communities to represent, if you lose that connection, people feel like they're not being represented.

That's the overarching task of the commission: effective representation. That does not equate to voter parity. Effective

representation is a two-way street between the people, the voters, and their elected representative. That means that they have to be able to see us and we have to be able to see them. In rural Alberta that is a completely different dynamic than it is in the cities of our province.

Mr. McLeod: I have one follow-up question, if you don't mind.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Day: I have one also.

Mr. McLeod: Us rural folks, we get on this. I have a follow-up question. Earlier in the presentations today there were comments about a water commission. There were comments about other things where one MLA is good. To me as the mayor of the village of Acme, if I had two voices talking on behalf of my water commission, for example, I think that's a good thing. What's your opinion on that?

Dr. Starke: I guess, in my own opinion, I have the experience of being in a situation where I have, for example, the county of Vermilion River. I'm the sole MLA for the county of Vermilion River. The county of Minburn is split currently between myself and Mrs. Littlewood in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and Beaver is split four different ways. Now, especially with the increasing expectancy for municipalities to enter into intermunicipal co-operation agreements – and the new MGA expects counties to do that. I note in the report on page 61 that you've elected to keep the county of Flagstaff as one contiguous community because of intermunicipal co-operative agreements. I can tell you – you would know this, and certainly Commissioner Day would know this – that these are becoming so commonplace all across our province. They are happening virtually everywhere, not just in Flagstaff county. Because of that, in my view, the better situation is to have one MLA to deal with, not a multiplicity of MLAs, you know, because sometimes – and this may come as a shock – MLAs don't agree on things, and they don't necessarily always co-operate in terms of their representation and advocacy on behalf of their community.

From my standpoint if, for example, Beaver county comes to me with a concern, you know, I feel like it's my responsibility solely if I'm the only MLA. If there are three other MLAs representing that constituency and their representation is not heard, I can say: well, I talked to them, but those other three guys obviously didn't. If I'm the only one, the buck stops at my desk. In my opinion it is better to have that representation all in the hands of one MLA.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you.

Mrs. Day: A couple of things. Thank you for articulating the role of the MLA so well for rural ridings.

When I think about regional co-operation, which you just mentioned, I'm well experienced with that at the Mountain View county, that I represented, the years of work that go into that to break down some barriers that perhaps were in the past, let's say, and make those regional agreements. Then taking that idea plus the county by county, looking at putting ridings together based on county boundaries, are those regional agreements pretty much town and county related, or do they span between two counties, say? Are they generally within that model? I'm just trying to picture it a bit. In my situation it was all within the county, between the county and the towns, et cetera.

Dr. Starke: That's the predominant model right now, co-operative agreements between individual municipalities within a county and

the surrounding county or rural municipality. Now, will there be bridging agreements going forward between two neighbouring counties or municipalities? Yes. Those will happen, but for the most part – you know, for example, in Beaver county there's already significant co-operation on emergency services, on waste management, on a number of other issues that are common issues for the people of the county. They've chosen – and it makes sense – to regionalize those services for the people of the county and deliver them in that way.

Mrs. Day: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Questions or comments?

Ms Livingstone: I guess I have one question. You know, we've heard today: follow the county lines; don't break up the counties. We've heard: keep First Nations together; don't break them up. Those aren't always – I can't do both. Do you have any suggestions for how we prioritize that? I'll give you an example here. As we've been talking about the riding immediately to the north, if I put the MD of Bonnyville and the county of St. Paul together, I'm 12 per cent over the average for a riding, so it's within the range of acceptable, but I cut two First Nations in half. If I keep the First Nations intact but keep the counties intact, I'm at 34 per cent over, and that riding is not possible in legislation. I hear what everybody is saying, but there are always conflicting priorities. Do you have any suggestions or advice on how those things should be prioritized? That's the constant problem in our work, that we can't do all of those things at once.

Dr. Starke: Agreed, and I understand that completely. I mean, I will say that I think that the commission would do well to make greater use of the leeway that you're provided under the legislation, the plus or minus 25 per cent, and that you will in fact get less push-back from people if you have a greater variance as opposed to a lesser one. It concerns me, for example, that in the interim report the commission has evaluated its success solely on the number of constituencies that are within the plus or minus 5 or plus or minus 10 per cent variance and compares it to the recommendations of the last commission. I think that, unfortunately, is a very narrow scope and a narrow focus.

You know, the recommendations I've made, for example, to the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, the boundary changes that I recommended in my written report, actually make that more than plus 4 per cent, as it is currently. Right now the constituency is plus 4 per cent. If the changes that I'm recommending or suggesting are made, it will be that this constituency will be at a greater variance, but it will make sense. It doesn't make sense to sever Tofield and division 2 of Beaver county and put it in Stettler-Wainwright. It doesn't make sense to sever that from the rest of Beaver county.

The same is true for that little sliver of Lamont county that exists below highway 16. You know, highway 16: granted, it's a very recognizable boundary, but there's a sliver of Lamont county that goes below highway 16, and it makes absolutely no sense to put that sliver of Lamont county into the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency. It should stay with the remainder of Lamont county, which is in Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul or Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, whatever the decision you make is.

You know, people like to have boundaries that make sense, and I think that the numbers game or the numbers – I know that that's an important consideration. I'm not trying to minimize it, but there's a variance that has been placed in front and has been upheld by the Supreme Court for a reason. That reason is because strict numerical equivalents do not allow for effective representation.

I just urge the committee – and with regards to your specific question I think that the committee would do well to consult directly with the leaders of the various First Nations involved and ask them directly, “We want to keep you whole,” as was the case with Maskwacis, and I agree that Maskwacis should be kept together.

Certainly, from my knowledge of dealing with the folks at Onion Lake, Onion Lake deals extensively with Lloydminster because we have the same problem. We’ve sometimes been called the illegitimate child of two distant parents living in Regina and Edmonton. That’s a problem, has historically been a problem for Lloydminster, and it’s historically been a problem for Onion Lake as well. So at least when we’re working on these co-operative interprovincial agreements, it makes sense for Onion Lake to be with the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, as it does for the other communities north of township road 532 that are currently severed from their traditional trading areas in Vermilion, Lloydminster, and Kitscoty.

12:50

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Just one follow-up on that. I would say that probably, easily a third to maybe a half of the submissions that we’ve had come in in round 2 have been opposed to rural ridings being at a positive variance at all. What I’m hearing you say is the opposite: if it keeps communities together, make a rural constituency plus 25 if you need to. Am I correct in understanding . . .

Dr. Starke: Yeah. You’re right. You know, I think where you’re getting that – and I will say that just a couple of constituencies that I think right now are totally unworkable based on their sheer size are Drumheller-Strathmore, Drayton Valley-Rocky Mountain House. These are huge constituencies, and they also have a lot of communities in them. It’s one thing to be geographically large, but it’s another thing to be geographically large and have a lot of communities in them. Stettler-Wainwright is another good example of that. You know, to have those constituencies not only be geographically massive but be significantly over the numerical mean, the 46,000 magic number, to me, like I say, is problematic.

I realize that the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, as rural constituencies go, is actually one of the more manageable in size as it’s currently constituted. Now, it would become increasingly challenging to be enlarged as the commission has recommended. But, you know, in talking to the various leaders of the communities, I think it’s workable. I think it’s manageable. As far as the community of, specifically, Vegreville, I mean, I’m certainly very familiar with the concerns and the challenges that Vegreville is facing, especially with regard to the case processing centre.

I understand the concerns that the mayor said earlier, but I think one of the jobs of an MLA is to represent those diverse and sometimes divergent interests, whether they be agriculture, oil and gas, manufacturing, you know, increased processing. That’s our job. We’ve got to do that, and we’ve got to do it in a way where there is effective representation.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Just to sort of close the loop on that, in terms of the immediate area that you serve, you’re fine with that area being physically larger to get communities of interest together and to keep other ridings physically smaller.

Dr. Starke: Well, I mean, as it happens, like, if I were to borrow, if you use that term – if Vermilion-Lloydminster were to annex that northern area around Dewberry and Tullibee Lake, it’s a relatively small change, but I’m plus four and they’re plus 10, right? As the chief commissioner said, they can perhaps, you know, stand to lose a few people. The same holds true for Stettler-Wainwright, which I

believe is also plus eight or plus 10. I’m plus four. If Tofield were to be moved into the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, that would, I think, help Stettler-Wainwright, and, yes, it would make Vermilion-Lloydminster larger. But, again, these boundaries have to be drawn with a certain sense of logic and a certain sense of continuity, and if that means the numbers – obviously, they have to be within plus or minus 25 per cent; I get that – vary a little bit more from the 46,000 number, I’m okay with that.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Yeah. I just wanted to get your sense of this immediate area, what your feeling was representing it.

Dr. Starke: You bet.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Just an editorial correction here. The Supreme Court of Canada didn’t endorse the 25 per cent over or under in its Saskatchewan reference case in 1991. It says that the test is effective representation, but the starting place is voter parity – it has prime importance – and then you move away from that when you apply these other considerations. What the Court of Appeal said in 1994, long before I was a member of the Court of Appeal, is that you cannot go over voter parity without giving reasons, and you have to have good reasons for doing that.

You have, if I may say, given us a good example of the kind of reasons that can support going over or under voter parity by talking about specific communities that you don’t want to divide up, specific communities that have always traditionally been together.

But we can’t. We’re not allowed. The law does not permit us to shoot right up to 24 per cent above or below the provincial average just because it would create a conclusion that we’d like to see overall for the province. There have to be specific reasons on a constituency-by-constituency basis. Of course, the whole jigsaw puzzle with 87 pieces still has to make Alberta at the end of the day.

Thank you for the specificity of your comments in relation to your riding.

Dr. Starke: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other comments and questions?

Okay. Thanks so much.

All right. Our next to speak is Mr. Hanson.

Mr. Hanson: Good afternoon. I’m David Hanson, the MLA for the now defunct Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding. As stated in the interim report, the reason for consolidating electoral divisions is “population in those areas having grown at a rate below that of the province as a whole.” It does not say that population is on the decline, yet we are losing three rural constituencies in this province.

On page 8 of the report under section 14 it clearly states criteria that the commission shall take into consideration. Under section (a) it states: “the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.” But how do we define effective representation? Is it the equal power of a single vote, or is it accessibility for the citizen to their MLA or their office? It’s far easier for an Edmonton MLA to effectively represent a larger population even during session than for a rural or southern MLA. Is this fair to all Albertans?

We cannot continue to allow the erosion of the rural voice in the Legislature. Many areas of the province outside of the major urban centres are the major economic drivers of this province and always

have been. Whether it is oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, or tourism, rural Alberta is where it is at. Should we not have an equal say in the direction our province is headed?

According to the 2016 census western provinces, including Alberta, experienced the most significant growth, and a great portion of that was in the northeastern section of Alberta. In addition to that, our communities can see incredible growth due to shadow populations supporting our industries, and I know that you don't take that into consideration.

How do you as a commission feel you have achieved effective representation when most rural ridings have increased in size and population variance while Edmonton and Calgary have gained seats and have much lower population variances, averaging plus or minus 5 per cent and in many cases less. Many of these urban ridings are already at their maximum population with little room to increase. Unless you're going to build high-rises in North Glenora, which I don't think will happen, you're not going to increase that riding by 10 or 15 per cent over the next eight years. So why would we lock them in at only plus or minus 5 per cent, 3 per cent to 5 per cent?

In the current constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills we continue to see growth and have much potential for more, especially when the economy rebounds. The new Mennonite school in Two Hills, for example, is already over capacity, and it hasn't even opened yet. We have many First Nations communities, and they are considered to be the fastest growing demographic in Canada. We have those in rural Alberta, not in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton. Do they deserve less representation and access than urban Albertans?

Some people think that the power of a single vote is higher in a rural constituency because of the population variance, but consider this, based on the 2015 election voter turnout: Edmonton, 47 to 61 per cent average; Calgary, 40.9 to 61.3 average turnout; rural Alberta, 51 to 66.4, a full 5 per cent higher in rural on average. At these rates of voter turnout an urban vote has much more value, even more now with the reduced variance.

Subsections (e) and (f) on page 8 refer to respecting municipal boundaries and the number of municipalities and other local authorities. How is this reflected in what you did to the four northeastern Alberta constituencies? Carving out the town of St. Paul and part of the county from the rest of the county and two major trade partners, Saddle Lake and Whitefish Lake: how does that make sense? Are Albertans from Tullibee Lake or Lea Park really expected to drive 240 kilometres to access their MLA in Fort Saskatchewan while an Edmonton Albertan can cross their entire 25-block constituency on public transit in less than 15 minutes? Is it fair that Albertans who live in Athabasca may have to drive over 300 kilometres up highway 63, one of the most dangerous highways in the province, to access their MLA in Fort McMurray while an Albertan living in Calgary-Glenmore can walk or bike to their constituency office in under 20 minutes?

1:00

The requirement was only for a review of the existing boundaries and to fix any glaring issues, which I don't think there were. There was no need for the wholesale changes that we are seeing here. We need to consider much more than the population when we look at fair and equal representation. This offers anything but fair and equal representation to rural Alberta. I would ask that the commission reconsider changes made, especially to the four constituencies in northeastern Alberta, and recognize the importance of municipal boundaries and community relationships and that there is much more to effective representation than having equality of voting power.

I'll give you an example. On Canada Day many urban MLAs in Edmonton would have attended the 150 celebration down at the Legislature. They would have hopped on a transit bus or LRT so that they could avoid parking. They'd have been down there in about 10 minutes. My wife and I put on over 750 kilometres that day, and it was very exhausting. Most summer weekends we will average about 400 kilometres a weekend just running around to different community events, parades, and that sort of thing.

What I would propose, what I would like to see is that you'd just leave the thing alone. It wasn't broken, so don't fix it. But if you have to move some boundaries, I would consider the county of St. Paul, the county of Two Hills, the county of Smoky Lake, and the communities of Saddle Lake and Whitefish Lake to be considered as one. I believe the numbers would support that.

The Chair: Sorry. The counties of St. Paul, Two Hills, Smoky Lake. And the other communities?

Mr. Hanson: Saddle Lake First Nation and Whitefish Lake First Nation.

That being said, you know, I hate to lose Lac La Biche. It's one of my favourite places to go. The communities of Kikino and Buffalo Lake: wherever Lac La Biche county goes, those two communities should be following that. That is their major access, major trading partner, and they should be kept together.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Okay. Two points I'd like to make. First of all, the interim report recommends creating a new constituency in each of Edmonton and Calgary. It doesn't end three rural constituencies. It moves one from Strathmore to Airdrie, so it moves it from southeast Calgary to northwest Calgary. Just in case some of the people here might not have read the interim report in its fullness.

I didn't want to let you go without trying to see if you've got some suggestions for us for Fort McMurray-Conklin because you're right now a neighbouring constituency, and I don't know whether anybody will come from Fort McMurray to talk to us about our proposals for how to deal with the uncertainty of statistical information in that area. We've asked in the interim report for people knowledgeable about the area to tell us whether they think the Alberta Treasury Board's estimate of population is more or less correct at the moment or whether we should use some other estimate based on other factors. The Treasury Board at the moment estimates that there are about 17,000 people living in Fort McMurray-Conklin, that it lost 9,180 people because of the fire, and that they haven't returned yet. It bases that estimate solely on the fact that there are 2,000 houses that burned and they haven't yet been reconstructed. Although some construction is well away, they haven't been constructed yet.

In our report we express concern about that because we say that probably some of those people just moved into rental accommodation while their houses were being built. That would be what you would expect. This drop in population may be overstated, and we invite anybody knowledgeable to make suggestions. When the mayor of Fort McMurray corresponded with me, I wrote her and said: "Gee, what's your school enrolment population this year versus last? Talk about admissions to emergency at hospitals. Can you give us anything that we can use as a double check on this 9,180 population drop?" That, of course, impacts Lac La Biche directly. That's part of the reason that we went so far south in the reconstructed constituencies for Fort McMurray, because of this concern of population drop. What's your thought, if any, on the population in Fort McMurray-Conklin at the moment?

Mr. Hanson: Well, I can only speak from what I've heard. A lot of people, although their houses burned down, did move in with neighbours or friends, so they actually have returned to Fort McMurray. I don't know whether the entire 9,000 population is there. When we look at the city of Fort McMurray, it does qualify under the guidelines, I believe, as a special area. It doesn't have all of them?

Ms Livingstone: It does not meet the criteria. The city of Fort McMurray is too large, so it does not meet the criteria for a special area.

Mr. Hanson: So they split it? The north part qualifies, but the south part of the city doesn't?

Ms Livingstone: Neither side qualifies.

The Chair: You can't have a city or town larger than 8,000 people. It's about 65,000 people, so it's well over.

Mr. Hanson: It just doesn't do it.

My concern is the folks down in Athabasca, Boyle, and Lac La Biche. That's a long way to travel if their MLA is stationed up in Fort McMurray unless they have a shadow office, of course, in Lac La Biche in that case.

The Chair: Our alternate proposal or our other ideas for Fort McMurray: we make it smaller by cutting Fort McMurray east-west rather than north-south, so the boundary, the constituency there, would be more of a square rather than a long rectangle. It would go from Fort McMurray proper down to Lac La Biche, which is the highway on which the MLA would drive to get to the Legislature in any event. I mean, it may be not a complete answer, but we're trying here.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Really, there are only two ways, highways 881 and 63, coming out of Fort McMurray. They both go very, very close to Lac La Biche, so that is an asset there.

I'm more concerned about the people that have to travel, the seniors or even high school students or students that want to visit their MLA or have them come down to a graduation. That's a long way to go. As Dr. Starke mentioned, you know, we do attend a lot of graduations. I think I've got eight or nine this year and nine parades and quite a few more to go this summer yet. It's very busy. I think these are things that should be taken into consideration.

I don't think urban residents – normally their first call would be to their councillor or to the mayor's office in Edmonton or Calgary. Usually the issues that they deal with are not provincial issues whereas out in the rural areas our office quite often, if there's a – this year in particular. Last year most of my phone calls to the office were about health care and education, access to AISH. This year it's flooding. We've had a very wet spring. Farmers can't get into their fields. People's basements are flooding. In particular, the Vermilion River watershed is very, very flat all the way through. There was some work done back in the '70s, but in the last 25, 30 years a lot of that stuff has grown in. Now we get a wet event year, and we end up with a lot of people being flooded, farmland being flooded. They won't even be able to access this year after not being able to get a crop off last year.

The issues that we face out in rural ridings are very, very different. I think those things should be taken into consideration. Like I said, in some of the urban ridings there's no way they're going to see any – the housing market is saturated in those areas, if you take some of the older areas. Unless you're going to convince the people in North Glenora that you can build a high-rise on Stony

Plain Road there – I think there are some in that area, but there's a lot of pushback to that. They want to keep their old areas the way they are. Seeing those areas increase by 10 or 15 per cent over the next 10 years is very highly unlikely. I think a lot of those urban ridings could be nudged up toward the 10 or 15 per cent, and we could keep our three rural ridings intact at least for the next eight years.

The Chair: Questions?

Mrs. Day: I do have one, just a clarification. I do thank you for coming here and spending your time and sharing with us. The communities of interest are something that maps and data don't always give us, obviously, so we need people like you that will inform us of what the communities are.

In regard to that, you mentioned a county – I couldn't get it down fast enough – the counties of St. Paul, Two Hills, Saddle Lake, and the First Nations.

Mr. Hanson: That was the county of St. Paul, the county of Two Hills, the county of Smoky Lake ...

Mrs. Day: Smoky Lake. Thank you.

1:10

Mr. Hanson: ... and the two First Nations of Saddle Lake and Whitefish Lake. Most of the students at Whitefish Lake and Saddle Lake go either to St. Paul or Ashmont, which is part of the county of St. Paul. Having those broken away from the town of St. Paul and a portion of the county and pushing that all the way back to the Fort Saskatchewan riding just doesn't make any sense to me at all.

I do have a very large riding at the moment, but I can be in Lac La Biche in an hour and a half, down to Heinsburg in about an hour. With the new proposal of the three counties together, Smoky Lake is still within an hour of me. I would be losing the county of Lac La Biche, which is a very active community. We were up there quite often, so I will miss that, and I'm sure that they'll miss me because they've commented quite a bit about how much I do show up there.

I understand that there are some changes that have to be made, but I don't think that they have to be the wholesale changes that we're seeing here. I think there could be some tweaking, moving some boundaries, and recognizing the importance of keeping the counties working together and intact.

Mrs. Day: So balancing population maybe even higher or lower. To you, it's the community of interest as much as we can go with the numbers as opposed to strict adherence to the numbers. I've heard this from urban MLAs as well. Community of interest – I mean, if the number is higher in their riding – is more important to them: okay, so now I've got 60,000 people to deal with, but they're all cohesive, and it's a community that I'm familiar with, and they're familiar with each other and have connections going deep and wide. So, yeah, it's not just being heard in the rural areas but more so there, of course.

Mr. Hanson: I'd absolutely welcome an increase in population or even an increase in area as long as we can keep our communities together that work together. That makes the most sense for Albertans. Like I said, you know, putting Kikino and Buffalo Lake in with the city of St. Albert makes absolutely no sense at all. They do all of their business with Lac La Biche county and Athabasca, so in having them totally isolated, they'll never have any representation. I think this is what we're talking about, effective representation. So we really have to look at even the folks here in Tullibee Lake having a 240-kilometre drive to the centre of Fort

Saskatchewan when they used to go to Vermilion or Lloydminster. It's going to be very hard on people, and it would be very hard for them to get used to.

Mrs. Day: One more question, one more comment. I'm hearing, you know, your representation with parades, with grads, et cetera, and the load that rural MLAs carry in that regard. What if someone said to you, "Well, maybe you need to just manage the expectations of the people in your ridings"?

Mr. Hanson: Like Dr. Starke said, you know, they appreciate you showing up, and they really notice when you're not there. We do try to get out and don't use the word "burden." I don't consider it a burden. I consider it part of my job. I would just like to see a little bit more equality and that recognition for that work that we do in our rural ridings, because we do work hard, a lot of us, and it takes up a lot of our personal time in the summer, when other people are going on vacation. I tried to sneak in two days to go to the lake, and it was very, very difficult. It's very tough. In our communities summertime is where they do all of their fairs, all of their parades. May and June are very busy with graduations, so, yeah, there is no real time until you get into September. Unless they call an early session, you might get some time in September to sneak away because things have kind of settled down with people going back to school.

Thank you.

Mrs. Day: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Day just reminded me of another question, a factual one. I want to make sure I understand your proposal for your revised riding. Right now you're 22 per cent below the population. Like population or not, it can't go below 25 per cent. If we take out Lac La Biche, you'll be about 35 per cent below. I don't understand what you'd add to your current constituency to bring you up to the permitted level.

Mr. Hanson: Okay. Let's change that, then. We'll include the county of Lac La Biche and the county of Smoky Lake. I'd be happy to represent both of them if that brings the numbers up to where they have to be, and that will make the people in Lac La Biche very happy.

The Chair: That just brings you back to where you are right now, minus 22 per cent.

Mr. Hanson: No, because we only currently cover a very small portion of the county of Smoky Lake. We take in as far as Bellis on the west border of my constituency, and we leave out the town of Smoky Lake altogether.

Ms Livingstone: I just want one follow-up on that. In that proposal what do I do with the 36,870 people in the MD of Bonnyville, who are now stranded on the border and below the allowable population limit for a constituency?

Mr. Hanson: That's a very good question. It's not insurmountable, though. How far below the average would they be? Below the legal limit?

The Chair: Eleven per cent below.

Mr. Hanson: Eleven per cent. You know, that's workable. You're allowed 25.

The Chair: No, no, no. They're 11 per cent more than the legal limit.

Mr. Hanson: Oh, 11 per cent more currently?

The Chair: No. Under your proposal, the proposal you just made.

Ms Livingstone: Your proposal would also have the Fort McMurray-Conklin riding being well below the legal allowable limit.

Mr. Hanson: Call me greedy. No. What is the current Bonnyville-Cold Lake population before any changes?

Ms Livingstone: The riding or the MD? You were making a proposal based on county boundaries.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah.

Ms Livingstone: If I put together the counties that you had suggested, that leaves the MD of Bonnyville . . .

Mr. Hanson: And the city of Cold Lake.

Ms Livingstone: . . . stranded on the Saskatchewan border. It's either got to join – well, no. If you use the counties, it is completely stranded if we put all of Lac La Biche county in with Smoky Lake.

Mr. Hanson: But that's the way it currently is.

The Chair: No. It's got more to it than that.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. The current boundary is the county of Two Hills, the county of St. Paul, the county of Lac La Biche, and a portion of the county of Smoky Lake. We don't go into the county or the MD of Bonnyville. The MD of Bonnyville is combined with the city of Cold Lake. My question is: what are the current numbers in the current riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

The Chair: Minus 19.

Mr. Hanson: Minus 19.

The Chair: Your proposal would leave Fort McMurray-Conklin at minus 63 per cent, for the largest number ever. I mean, just to say, you know, that's a problem.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. I understand the problems, but we're also looking at addressing that possible 9,000 in population that's missing – right? – in Fort McMurray.

The Chair: That would bring it back to 40 per cent below. I mean, I'm not being contrary. It's just that we've lived with these numbers for a while now.

Ms Livingstone: The only other thing I wanted to note was that you'd suggested that the urban ridings in Calgary and Edmonton were well below the provincial averages. In total the city of Calgary's ridings have approximately a half riding more people than the ridings that are allocated to them, and rural Alberta has a half riding less of people than are allocated to them, so in fact Calgary is overpopulated as compared to anywhere else. I just wanted to correct that.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. I was looking at the new boundaries and the plus-minus variances in Calgary and Edmonton that are sitting at, you know, anywhere from plus three to plus five and a couple of them that are below. I think those numbers in an urban riding are

much more manageable, if they're at the plus 10 or 15 per cent, than in a rural riding. I'm not saying that I wouldn't accept that if that's what I had. If I have a riding that's at, you know, plus 10 or plus 15 per cent but maintains the continuity of the communities, I'd be happy with that.

Ms Livingstone: Yeah. I'm just saying that in Calgary, in total for all of those ridings, you may be seeing some low numbers, but in total for all of those ridings they are essentially plus 50 per cent.

The Chair: Each riding, the average Calgary riding, is 875 people above average. The average Edmonton riding – I am happy to say – is right at provincial parity, just because the numbers worked out that way. So it's not that Edmonton and Calgary are well below and that we can somehow add population to them even if we could cross boundaries or whatever. That we don't want to do. It's that what you'd have to do is – like, I can't imagine. We've already left the centre of Edmonton and Calgary at 5 to 10 per cent above the provincial average, anticipating slow future growth. As you say, they're going to have to build high-rises there to add density. But to take them up another 10 or 15 per cent: I can't think of a reason for that other than to preserve rural areas, and the legislation doesn't give that as a reason.

Mr. Hanson: That's a very good reason.

The Chair: As much as is the feeling in this room.

Mr. Hanson: Yes, and I understand that. But I do like to reiterate the point that it is far easier for an urban MLA to represent a higher population than it is for a rural one. To lose three more rural seats in Alberta at this point is difficult for me to accept.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Munn: It was a very wise jurist who once said that there are only three possible solutions to this historical problem in Alberta and in fact in Canada. One of those solutions is to blend rural populations with metro populations in Calgary and Edmonton. We have heard from both the rural and urban that that is not a good idea because the communities of interest are just too diverse.

1:20

The second option was that there should be more constituencies. If the rural constituencies are just too large and impossible to have effective representation, then maybe what you need is more rural constituencies, more MLAs, but we have heard almost unanimously that we don't need any more MLAs, and we don't need bigger government. So the only third logical possibility is that there are fewer nonurban constituencies.

We are, you know, bound by the legislation. We think these hearings are really, really important for figuring out which neighbourhoods or which counties should be together, but we can't solve the whole problem of geography for rural MLAs.

Mr. Hanson: I guess my question is: as it stands, in the way the province sits right now as of the 2015 election, how many constituencies were really at that maximum 25 per cent plus or minus? Did it require these wholesale changes of eliminating three rural ridings to correct the issues that we have?

Ms Livingstone: There was one Calgary riding that was more than 100 per cent over. It was 110 per cent over. That's the riding I live in.

Ms Munn: There was a problem. We're limited to 87 seats. Now, if the Legislature had said, like they did the last time, when they went from 83 to 87 so that the rural concern could be accommodated – that's what happened the last time. We can't do that. There may be solutions and recommendations to be made for the future, and we will be doing that as well. Some of the suggestions that we've heard today about how to tweak the constituencies and the changes that have been made so that it makes more sense in terms of communities of interest have been fantastic suggestions, especially with respect to Vermilion-Lloydminster and the Vermilion River county. Yeah; that can be done. But we're limited by the law with what we can do in rural Alberta.

Mr. Hanson: Well, the biggest issue that I have with the new boundary is cutting the town of St. Paul and a portion of the county away from the rest of the county.

Ms Munn: We've heard that loud and clear. Yeah.

Mr. Hanson: It just makes no sense. It's not going to be something that's really workable.

Ms Munn: Right. Earlier a question in that regard was on taking the northwest part of Bonnyville-Cold Lake and moving it up into Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. We had asked that question of the people from Fort Saskatchewan. They just didn't have enough information. That would leave ...

Mr. Hanson: You were talking about the Glendon area, up in there?

Ms Munn: Yes. Right.

Mr. Hanson: They're not really high populations. I don't think you're going to move a whole lot up there.

Ms Munn: Can we move 6,000 to get St. Paul back in? No?

Mr. Hanson: No. I don't think there are that many there.

Ms Munn: Okay.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. The air weapons range: it looks like a great big area, but there are absolutely no voters in there.

Ms Munn: McRae, Sugden, Goodridge, those areas?

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. You're looking at a couple of hundred people.

Ms Munn: Not enough population?

Mr. Hanson: No.

Ms Munn: Okay.

Mr. Hanson: Not to offset the population of St. Paul.

The Chair: Mr. McLeod has a question.

Mr. McLeod: It's not really a question. I just would like to thank you for your presentation, but I would also like to thank you for – you're one of the MLAs to step up and say: yeah; you can make my area bigger. A lot of them are saying: don't make it any bigger. I'd like to thank you for that.

Mr. Hanson: I really enjoy representing it. Like I say, the biggest problem I have is losing the entire constituency and cutting myself off from the people that I've represented for the last two years. I've

tried to do that as effectively as possible. You get to build relationships with those folks, and it's hard to just see them cut away.

The Chair: Although I do make the point that we're not abolishing part of Alberta. I mean, you know, you can still have a constituency if it works out that way in the future.

Mr. Hanson: Well, we will.

The Chair: Yeah. All right. Thank you so much.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: And thank you for fielding all of our additional questions.

All right. The next registrant is Steve Upham.

Mr. Upham: Well, good afternoon, everybody. I feel that my points are going to be somewhat moot because things have been so well covered, but I'll read through my presentation.

The Chair: If you could say where you live, sir, which constituency.

Mr. Upham: County of St. Paul. Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is my constituency. Yeah.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Upham: Okay. First and foremost, I want to thank the commission for hearing the county of St. Paul here today. The county strongly believes that the commission's work is vital to the democratic process, and we are pleased to provide our comments for your consideration. After reviewing the interim report, the county of St. Paul has deep and abiding concerns regarding the proposed changes to Alberta's electoral boundaries. Simply, the proposed dissection of the county into two separate electoral divisions, Bonnyville-Cold Lake and Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, will have substantial negative implications for the county residents. The intent of this response is to humbly request that the commission reconsider the proposed electoral boundaries submitted in its interim report and constitute a single electoral division that incorporates the entire county of St. Paul. The inclusion of the entire county in one division is necessary to ensure a fair and effective representation for county residents.

Section 14 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act is clear and concise regarding the mandate and the factors that the commission must follow in carrying out its tasks. By breaking down these factors individually, the county desires to demonstrate that the commission would be sharply deviating from its mandate should it proceed with the recommendations proffered in the interim report.

In the 1991 reference re provincial electoral boundaries, the Saskatchewan decision made by the Supreme Court, it was determined that the purpose of the right to vote guaranteed in section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is not to obtain pure equality of voting power but the right to effective representation. Regarding the requirement to achieve effective representation, the county feels that the commission has hewed too closely to the concept of absolute voter parity while overlooking other crucial factors such as geography, common community interests, existing municipal boundaries, the number of municipalities, and the desirability for clear and understandable boundaries.

Regarding sparsity and density of population the commission claims to have shortened travel distances from those experienced in the current Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, but the county strongly disagrees with this statement. Both of the proposed ridings of Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul and Bonnyville-Cold Lake will see increased travel times for the majority of residents and for MLAs seeking to engage their constituents.

Regarding common community interests the county is partner with several neighbouring municipalities, including the town of St. Paul, the town of Elk Point, the summer village of Horseshoe Bay in addition to other surrounding counties on 12 Alberta community partnership grants. This kind of success rate is unmatched during this period. The county and its partners have even received recognition in the form of a municipal excellence award for its regional occupational health and safety initiative project. This is noteworthy because the commission recommends in its interim report to keep Flagstaff county intact, an important goal given the significant work in which the counties engage relating to intermunicipal partnerships. The county strongly encourages the commission to treat the county of St. Paul with the same reverence as Flagstaff county and ensure that the county of St. Paul is consolidated within one electoral district.

The county also believes its current community interests sharply diverge from those of Fort Saskatchewan, a city and bedroom community of Edmonton experiencing significant growth. The county encourages the commission to place the county of St. Paul in a riding with municipalities that demonstrate a much stronger alignment of interests.

Regarding the number of municipalities the dissection of the county of St. Paul into two ridings will markedly diminish the county's voice by creating increased competition with other municipalities when seeking to access and engage MLAs. In the current Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding nine municipalities exist that require access to and representation from their MLA. In contrast, the proposed riding of Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul boasts 15 municipalities, and in the proposed riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake there are eight municipalities present in addition to several First Nations reserves and Métis settlements. This means that the county of St. Paul would now compete with more than three times as many municipalities and local authorities when endeavouring to engage their MLA.

1:30

Simply, the commission's proposed severing of the county of St. Paul exacerbates the county's challenges to have its unique perspective and concerns sufficiently heard. Regarding geographic features and the desirability for clear and understandable boundaries, the county's potential splitting into two ridings would bisect numerous highways and roadways, which then requires the county to advocate to two MLAs when providing input on road infrastructure projects.

Also, the county strongly believes that the proposed boundaries are unclear and illogical for residents. The proposed boundaries of township road 590 and range roads 90 and 110 are not clearly significant landmarks to county residents. Since 1913 county residents have been voting in ridings with St. Paul in the name. The shift to Bonnyville-Cold Lake will be very confusing. Residents understand where they pay their property taxes and where they receive services from, but they will not intuitively understand the arbitrary line that has been drawn in this current boundary proposal. The proposed boundaries are more confusing than understandable.

While the county can understand the commission's deviating on one or two of the factors laid out in section 14, the fact that the commission has deviated on nearly all the relevant factors makes it

impossible for the county to support the proposed boundaries in the interim report. In particular, the county feels that its dissection into two separate ridings is inconsistent with the intent of the act. If the commission fully considers the factors laid out in section 14 of the act, the county believes that a better alternative option is available to ensure that the county is confined within one riding. Simply, the current proposed boundaries will unnecessarily dilute the county's votes and diminish the representative capacity of the two MLAs for the proposed new ridings.

In conclusion, the county strongly believes that the commission needs to revisit the recommendations and place a stronger focus on the existing legislation and case law that have provided the foundation of Canadian representative democracy. The county encourages the commission to balance voter parity with other elements of effective representation such as geography, common community interests, municipal boundaries, and the desirability for clear and understandable boundaries, that effective representation for the county of St. Paul depends on.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Questions?

Ms Munn: I don't have any questions.

Ms Livingstone: My only question was: did you have any specific proposals for where lines should move, either from your presentation or based on what you've heard today?

Mr. Upham: Well, I think that for us, logically, the town of St. Paul and the portion around that is from the county of St. Paul need to be rejoined with the county of St. Paul, with the constituency. It's illogical to sever out just a chunk of the county, go eight miles north, five miles across, then go back down and sever out the town and the county. It's illogical for the unity and the continuity of the communities that the MLA has to serve. So that's the first issue.

I mean, how you adjust it: I can see some adjustment on the west side. How you do that: I'm not too sure of the numbers in the counties or the county of Smoky Lake, but adjusting that end at some point would be probably the preferred way. To the east, of course, we've got Vermilion River and their concern, you know. So I'll leave that with you.

I mean, there seems to be a desire to have Saddle Lake, Goodfish Lake, Frog Lake all continue to remain in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency. If that's the intent, then that's the only option you've got, but maybe there's discussion. There's maybe a better way of dealing with First Nations representation. Anyway, you still aren't guaranteed a First Nations MLA in the Legislature. I think that if they're going to be effectively represented, you have to design boundaries in some way that they will have an MLA representing First Nations communities in the Legislature. I see nothing in this documentation that does that.

The Chair: Just to pick up on that, I mean, that's not a specific requirement of the legislation.

Mr. Upham: Right.

The Chair: Rather, we're just to try to avoid dividing up reserves and Métis settlements and to keep indigenous groups together as any other community of interest. So we've attempted to do that. I mean, happily, in Lesser Slave Lake they've got a majority aboriginal population. You know, maybe that will produce an aboriginal, indigenous MLA. If it does, great; if it doesn't, so be it. That's that.

To be absolutely candid – okay? – just looking at this on my jigsaw puzzle analogy, we can't deal with the county of St. Paul and St. Paul alone. We have to consider Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, St. Albert-Redwater, and Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. We have to consider it all together.

You've, I think, put your finger on the problem. If we take St. Paul out of Fort-Saskatchewan-St. Paul and put it back in Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the only way that we can keep Bonnyville-Cold Lake within the legal limits, the 25 per cent, is to move Saddle Lake into Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul. I don't see and I'd love to be able to see how we can keep Saddle Lake and St. Paul together even though I know personally that they are to a degree the same community of, you know, trading, going to school, that sort of thing.

Do you have any comment on whether it would be better to have Saddle Lake as part of Fort-Saskatchewan-St. Paul and St. Paul part of Bonnyville-Cold Lake rather than what we've proposed?

Mr. Upham: Right. Well, I do see the value in keeping Saddle Lake and St. Paul together within the county of St. Paul because we are working on co-operation agreements, you know, continually with both of those communities. How you rationalize that population adjustment that you need to make – I realize that if you leave both of those communities in, we're going to be nudging the upper limit of where we need to be.

The Chair: Way over that.

Mr. Upham: Way over the upper limit. I realize that. So the 6,000 people that make up the community of Saddle Lake: if you're including them, how do you, you know, take that portion off the county of Smoky Lake and move them? Is there enough population there to move? I don't know.

But it always comes back to the same thing about: where is the effective representation taking place in independence of population numbers? You know, I come back to the argument – and I don't think anybody has adequately addressed it from the panel – about how you can walk to your constituency office in the city of Edmonton, and they've got a million people represented by one mayor. Nobody cares about the fact that they've got one mayor. Mymam has 150 people, and they've got one mayor. There's an imbalance there. I'm being devil's advocate, but, I mean, really there is an imbalance there. Nobody worries about that in Edmonton, so . . .

The Chair: The answer is that we can't do anything illegal.

Mr. Upham: I get that, but at the end of the day, at some point that document that you hold up has to be challenged or dealt with – right? – because it's providing a level of ability to not deal with the dysfunction. There's no other way to describe it, right? I mean, I think that's the challenge.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thanks. Thanks for allowing us to be so candid with you.

Mr. Upham: Hey, that's the way I roll. It's good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ed Parke is next.

Mr. Parke: Good afternoon. I'm currently from the Vermilion-Lloydminster riding. I'm here to make a presentation on behalf of the county of Vermilion River, and I'll have my own personal comments after.

The county of Vermilion River endeavours to submit our concerns as they relate to the proposed electoral boundaries. As such, we raise the following points. The county of Vermilion River takes the position that the use of population as the only criterion for the commission's proposition to add a new riding and not balancing it with other factors will render the rural voice ineffective. Both Calgary and Edmonton ridings were added solely based on population.

1:40

It is of the utmost importance that rural members of the Legislative Assembly represent the rural concerns. The addition of central urban areas to a rural constituency could have a negative impact on the region as rural issues may be negated. MLAs do not have sufficient time in their schedule to represent the diverse concerns between rural and urban capital regions. This is primarily because rural MLAs have a greater workload as it relates to the vast geographical area that they must travel as well as various municipalities within those areas to consider. When more municipalities are added to an MLA's workload, their ability to properly represent everyone's varying views is greatly diminished. It is imperative that we draw the line between rural and urban MLA responsibilities. Evidently, urban MLAs have far more time to focus on a particular concern from a single area within a municipality as opposed to a rural MLA, who has to consider various concerns from many municipalities all at the same time.

MLAs will not be able to do justice to exceptionally diverse constituencies made up of both rural and urban residents. By grouping these diverse areas of interest that are unmanageable, residents will become disenfranchised. Arguably, residents on the rural eastern border have different concerns than urban residents in and around Edmonton. By grouping central urban areas in long, narrow ridings with previously rural ridings, it will continue to create a migration of power to the centre. Doing this will not only divide but also eliminate natural trading areas and travel patterns. Furthermore, this will lead to stranded constituents too far away from their MLA and reduce the potential opportunities to meet with them.

Ultimately, city centres such as Edmonton and Calgary do not need any more MLAs to be effectively represented. Edmonton's municipal government currently has 20 MLAs to represent their views, whereas the county of Vermilion River's MLA is tasked with representing around 20 different municipalities.

Our recommendations therefore are to reduce the west end of our riding and include the entire county of Vermilion River in the area. Therefore, our constituency would no longer include the northwest but rather the northeast. The county is hopeful that our concerns and recommendations will be considered prior to the final approval of the constituency map. Ultimately, fair and effective representation cannot be based solely on population density.

That's from Reeve Daryl Watt and the county council. They're having council today. He couldn't come, so you get the deputy. I just concur.

Some of this is repetitive, but I hope it reinforces. I'm Ed Parke. I'm the deputy reeve of the county of Vermilion River. This proposed change in the border would divide my area of the county, my division. The county of Vermilion River has about 1.4 million acres of land, just over 8,000 people, 12,000-plus oil wells, and 5,280 some-odd kilometres of road. My division is divided by this new proposal, as others have pointed out, school boards, other municipalities, and even the First Nation. I will no longer be in this constituency should it go forward as it will, but the person that represents it will be representing an area from the Saskatchewan border to the edge of the capital region. Different concerns.

Richard mentioned about the uniqueness of Lloydminster. I think he was being a little bit humble. The city of Lloydminster has somewhat in excess of 20,000 people within the border of the city, that is under what is called the Lloydminster charter. Under the Lloydminster charter the city, a municipality, decides about education, health care, whether it's Alberta or Saskatchewan, so that MLA has many dealings with their city as well as the Saskatchewan MLA – basically, it's not an international boundary, but it's another boundary he has to deal with, and there are lots of complications and work that go with that – as well as all the other municipalities within the region. I believe that this makes them less effective not only in representing their area but also in their work in the Legislature. If there's legislation to be developed, the people would have more time to research and do that type of thing.

In conclusion, I just believe that if the restructuring of boundaries proceeds as suggested, there will be an acceleration of the political power to the centre, that has been going on for some time. Our hospital boards are no longer here with us. Our school boards do not have the ability they once had to raise money and deal now only with a fraction of the things they once did. Rural decisions with respect to health, with respect to education now are increasingly being made farther and farther away. I am afraid that the capacity for rural communities to have input into their governance has already been eroded, and this may well undermine it further.

Effective representation, as we've heard often today, does not mean strictly one person, one vote, one criterion. All need representation. We are one province. We all contribute. We need to protect people's rights. In the case of Vermilion-Lloydminster one MLA works with somewhere near 20 municipalities whereas in the case of Edmonton one municipality has 20-some MLAs.

In conclusion, again, I would like to recommend that my area, Tullibee Lake, where I live, and the northern borders of the county of Vermilion River be included in Vermilion-Lloydminster. I actually visited with some councillors from the county of Lamont, and there's a small portion of the county of Lamont in here, and they would prefer that that – I better not speak for them.

I guess that's my five minutes.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Questions? Comments?

Mrs. Day: I just wanted to make sure I was hearing you correctly about Tullibee Lake included in Vermilion. I think it's been stated in this room several times already. You're in agreement with the people that have presented before you, about the riding going further north along the Vermilion county boundary: is that what you're saying?

Mr. Parke: Yeah.

Mrs. Day: Okay. Just to be clear. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Mr. Parke: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Great. Our next speaker is Sonny Rajoo.

Mr. Rajoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to see you in rural Alberta. We thank you for this opportunity to allow us to articulate the concerns we have with regard to the proposed boundary changes. I have been in community journalism in rural Alberta for 30 years, having worked as a reporter, editor, and now the owner of a newspaper with my son, who is also a school trustee. I was pleased that the last time that I spoke on proposed boundary

changes, we were successful in maintaining the status quo. I compliment the previous speakers for the depth and diversity in which they've presented their views. Much of what they've said I concur with.

I tell my readers on a constant basis that the town of Vegreville and the communities surrounding it and the town of St. Paul are the left eye and right eye of my town of Two Hills. Linking us to Fort Saskatchewan, Madam Chair and members of the commission, is like an arranged marriage of a mail-order bride. It does not seem right. If my 12-year-old grandson asked me, "Grandpa, what's your concern about this whole deal?" I would say, "I will draw a cartoon of a see-saw where a skinny man like me is on the one side and a 300-pound man on the other." It just does not balance it.

I am pleased and proud that our rural MLAs here in this room have served us effectively and efficiently, with passion. One of the reasons I have a special place in my heart for our rural MLAs is because as a journalist I cover the very same events that they're expected to be at. You can have your Skype and your cellphones, you can have conference calls, but nothing replaces the warmth, love, and affection of personal contact. I know that Mr. Hanson in the last few days – I'm surprised he's still married because everywhere I go, he shows up.

1:50

One of the advantages of the rural MLA is that we have unique challenges. I am very fond of my farming community, and I suggest to you, Madam Chair and members of the commission, that we add to rural voices, not take away. There has to be a balance. Any MLA should be efficient and effective, like two wheels of a bicycle. That's why the American fathers, in proposing the American elections, have the electoral colleges and they have a senate with two from each state. I understand that you work within the framework of what you're provided with. I understand. I sympathize. As a matter of fact, whatever you earn as members of the commission, I'm sure that it's hardly enough.

The Chair: Nothing in my case.

Mr. Rajoo: Sorry?

The Chair: I'm a volunteer.

Mr. Rajoo: Oh. Nothing. I'll give you some spending money later.

The Chair: I'm good. Thanks.

Mr. Rajoo: But we have a unique position, Madam Chair and members of the commission. The Saddle Lake Cree Nation: as a journalist they've constantly asked me not to refer to them as Saddle Lake First Nation but Saddle Lake Cree Nation. The awareness of the indigenous challenges is greater now than ever before. The town and county of St. Paul, who are real brothers and sisters to my community: we have a large Mennonite population. Now, I know that you have a shadow population, and the tendency is to ignore them. I choose to state the opposite. These shadow populations are critical, whether they are at the lake near my home or the Mennonite population that spends a lot of time in Mexico during the winter months.

Again I state to you that while you work within the confines of what you have now, I'm kindly, with every degree of humility I can muster, asking you to leave the county of St. Paul, the town of St. Paul, Saddle Lake, and the existing communities within the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding. Simply basing on population figures may provide some degree of guidelines, but I do know as a municipal councillor for the past 10 years that we as councillors

have discretionary use in certain interpretations of the Municipal Government Act. I'm kindly asking you to use as much of your discretion as you can in accommodating the previous speakers, whose cherished ideals I value most profusely.

I'm now open to questions. Please forgive me for my accent. I've got a very international background.

The Chair: No. Very clear. Thank you.

Questions? Comments?

Mr. McLeod: None from me.

Ms Livingstone: No. I think I'm good.

The Chair: All right. Thanks so much.

Mr. Rajoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, welcome to Vermilion. We appreciate having you here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Greg Kurulok.

Mr. Kurulok: Good afternoon. My name is Greg Kurulok. I'm speaking mainly as an individual. My wife and I have owned a business in Vegreville for 40 years, I'm a retired educator, and I have served two terms on town council in Vegreville. Many of the things that I have here, of course, have already been mentioned, and I guess I just won't repeat them.

What I see happening here is that the issue of parity, which you have pointed out as being the major issue, is having a rather negative effect on the constituencies particularly here in northeast Alberta, where I'm familiar with. It could be a problem in other areas as well; I don't know. We are not taking into account the community interests and the community involvements that are there. I'm in the constituency right now of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I do appreciate that MLA Starke suggests that Vegreville should be included on the map one way or the other, and I'm thankful for that. But what we see in this issue of parity is that we are not taking into account the traditional sorts of things which have existed.

This part of Alberta is a north-south orientation, okay? Yes, highway 16 is a corridor, runs through the middle of the constituencies, but it tends to be a one-way flow. Everybody from the east goes to Edmonton. We don't see people from Edmonton going east in the same proportions. It is a corridor, but it tends to be a one-way sort of corridor.

The biggest issue here is the configuration. Now, I accept the fact that we need to have constituencies that are somewhat similar in numbers. We can't have a constituency with 24,000 people and one with 90,000 people. That doesn't work. We have to bring them closer together. But the way that we have seen here in northeast Alberta, it just seems to be like these constituencies have been thrown into a blender, and this is the way they came out. I have no problem with tweaking the constituencies, adding, you know, a township or adding a community or whatever. That makes sense. But to wholesale turn the complete orientation, particularly that Fort Saskatchewan will be St. Paul and Vermilion-Lloydminster will be completely opposite from their orientation, to me does not make sense. A number of people have pointed out the St. Paul-Saddle Lake issue; Mundare, Vegreville, Tofield, et cetera.

I have worked in elections where people come to the poll and say: what do you mean they've changed where I'm supposed to vote? Now, that may be their fault that they didn't pay attention – they should have known where they voted – but that is a very real sort of concern and issue.

By changing this orientation, we are taking rural ridings and increasing the amount of travel that these people are going to have to do. We're talking 250 kilometres from one end to the other. Now, if I were to make an analogy, if you were building a house 1,200 square feet, would you build it 10 feet wide and 120 feet long? You'd spend all your time walking back and forth, and by the time you got there, you'd forget why you went. Much more likely and a much easier way to work would be something 30 by 40 – okay? – in that you have a closer association of people who have similar customs, ethnic backgrounds, business.

I own a business, and I know where my business customers come from. In the Vegreville area it's north-south. We trade with Lamont, to some extent with Tofield, as far as even to Smoky Lake although that's across the river, certainly Andrew, Willingdon, Hairy Hill, Two Hills, Innisfree. That's our trade area. This proposal cuts that in half. Mundare, which is 12 miles away from Vegreville: most of those people work in Vegreville. You know, they're in town; they can easily see their MLA if they have to. Now the situation is that they would have to make a special trip 45 miles down the road to get to Fort Saskatchewan, okay? Those sorts of things don't make sense.

I think one of the things that we want to do is that we want to encourage voter engagement and participation in the process. I think that many of the people here are going to feel isolated, that they're left out, and that's not going to encourage, in my mind, an engagement in the process. You know, the Charter issues have been mentioned already. It doesn't guarantee equal vote; it guarantees that we can vote and that we have representation. Parity shouldn't detract from, you know, the primary goals of effective representation.

In rural areas, I mean, there are a number of suggestions other people have mentioned; you know, using technology. That works except that we have gaps in rural areas, and technology is only good as long as it works. If you've ever been in a store when the computers go down, you know the turmoil that there is there. In rural Alberta we tend to sit down across the table and talk to people. We don't text them, okay?

2:00

Suggesting additional offices: well, rural MLAs are already using extra offices. One of the difficulties in rural areas that I see is to be able to attract and retain qualified staff, okay? If you're only going to be employing these people for two days a week, that becomes an issue because your bills come in all year round. It's difficult for an MLA to keep a person there because as soon as a better job comes or a full-time job comes, they're gone. As a businessperson I realize that when it comes to staff, the most important thing is retention, and it's very inefficient if you have to constantly be retraining staff. They're not up to speed, and of course it costs money. Hiring drivers has already been mentioned. All of those things are certainly there.

Now, I have suggestions, of course, on what I think could happen – unfortunately, I don't have your access to all the statistical numbers – which, as we've seen, sometimes pop up ideas that sound good until you see the numbers, okay? The issues have been mentioned, of course, by a number of people. The errors in the description have already been mentioned.

One of the things that hasn't been mentioned, I mean, is the idea that rural Alberta is not going to grow. I'm sort of resentful of that assumption. In rural Alberta we've been working very hard to try to encourage rural growth. Here in northeast Alberta we have what's called Hub. It's an economic association which tries to encourage economic development in eastern Alberta. We're talking about the corridor that we're linking with the Americans, Ports-to-

Plains, all the way from the Gulf of Mexico up to Fort McMurray – okay? – to move some of that traffic from the overburdened highway 2 corridor to highway 36, where there are no overhead encumbrances for vehicle traffic, or to highway 41. We've been working for more than a decade to try and encourage economic development. If we get it going, the populations will grow here. We have the resources. We have the transportation links. All we need is the money and the investment and, I guess, the faith that it will go. So the assumption that it won't grow: I sort of question that, although it does seem that everybody wants to go live in the city.

The concerns over senior populations having to travel great distances have already been mentioned. As I say, I have some ideas regarding what we could do, but many of the things that I have to say here have already been mentioned.

I guess one of the final things is that, you know, the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituency as it stands right now is in fact well within the guidelines. In fact, we are over the number. Now, I realize that part of the issue is that the constituencies further to the east, north, and south are not.

The report also suggests, you know, that you don't fix a problem in one area by punishing another. Being in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I sort of feel that we are being punished because we're taking this constituency and we're chopping it all up to resolve all these other issues. I guess this goes back to the problem that we don't know what's happening in Fort McMurray-Conklin. If we did, then we would solve a lot of those issues, the Lac La Biche constituency and so on. All those problems could probably be resolved that way, and that is a problem.

I've been in elected office, so I know what it's like trying to serve diverse interests, and that's just working in a small town. "Why is their street plowed before ours?" and "How come they got a park and we didn't?" even though it's two blocks away. You know, in a constituency the more you extend the distance, the more those kinds of conflicts are going to be.

I know there's been a fair amount of emphasis mentioned on municipal borders. When municipal borders work, they work very well. I'm in the county of Minburn, where in fact the current division between Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and Vermilion-Lloydminster pretty much follows what I would say is almost a natural schism within the county.

I have lived in Vegreville for more than 40 years, and the east and the west have never gotten along. They haven't, okay? Being on town council, trying to work a reciprocal agreement with the county of Minburn has caused us issues: "You know, we can't do that for Vegreville because: what are we going to do for Mannville?" So nothing happens.

So municipal borders, yes, as in, in Vermilion River, suggesting to go up to the natural boundary: I have no problem. That probably works very well. But I know that in the county of Minburn that municipal association has not always worked that well. Maybe it goes back to 50 years ago, when they picked Vegreville for the county seat.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks very much, Mr. Kurulok.

I'm going to turn to the commissioners now to see if they have any questions or comments.

All right. Thank you so very much for coming today.

Mr. Kurulok: Not even my suggestions on how to correct it?

Mrs. Day: Oh. I thought you gave those.

The Chair: Oh. Sorry. I thought you wanted to move Vegreville back into Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul.

Mr. Kurulok: Yes. But what I'm saying is that the east-west divisions are there. Historically Tofield has been part of Vegreville since the 1980s, you know, for 30, 40 years, even though it is part of Beaver county, okay? Most of the county of Lamont is in the constituency.

The Chair: So to summarize for us, in addition to moving Vegreville back into Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, what other changes would you like to see?

Mr. Kurulok: Well, I wouldn't include St. Paul. I would go up to the North Saskatchewan River. That would include Andrew, Willingdon, Hairy Hill. I would include Two Hills – historically Two Hills has been part of Vegreville, even though Mr. Rajoo doesn't think it should be; historically it's been there, okay? – then even accept Innisfree because they trade normally, although Innisfree has never been part of the Vegreville constituency. So I would block it north-south, have it more of a square rather than this 250-kilometre corridor.

The Chair: Okay. The \$64,000 question: what do we do with St. Paul if we did that?

Mr. Kurulok: Well, okay. That's why I'm saying that the basic problem there is that Fort McMurray-Conklin issue. If in fact those people are there, you can move that Lac La Biche border farther north, so then your Bonnyville-Cold Lake riding would lose some of that population. Is that the understanding? I'm not sure because I don't have those numbers.

The Chair: No. It would go the other way. We'd have to move all of the other constituencies further south because right now we're giving them a 23 per cent variance negative. If it turns out that they only – sorry. That's in doing the second change. It wouldn't solve the problem in the way you suggest because even if there were up to another 8,000 people in Fort McMurray-Conklin, they were still well below the maximum variance at the time the fire occurred. So that constituency would have to grow south in any event. We wouldn't be able to add St. Paul to it to solve this problem.

Mr. Kurulok: Okay. The only other thing I see there is that St. Albert-Redwater riding, I think, in this proposal: was it 3 per cent or 4 per cent below? Moving some of that part of the county of Smoky Lake – again, I don't have the numbers, so I am just throwing ideas out to you. I don't know what those numbers are, but that constituency, I think, is a little bit light, and that might help to resolve some of those issues. Athabasca was mentioned. Is that with Fort McMurray-Conklin?

The Chair: St. Albert constituency is – oh, that's current; sorry – 2 per cent above; St. Albert-Redwater, 3 per cent below variance.

Mr. Kurulok: Yeah. There is some leeway there. If Athabasca is part of that, maybe that can be moved so that you have that – I don't envy you in your task.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks. We understand that you'd like a different solution. We get that loud and clear. Thank you.

Mr. Kurulok: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to now call on Glenn Andersen.

2:10

Mr. Andersen: Thank you, Madam Chair and board members. Mayor Glenn Andersen, town of St. Paul, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills constituency so far. I'll be very honest. When I first saw

the proposed document, I said, if you're familiar with that show *Survivor*: who put us on Exile Island? To be perfectly frank – I have nothing against MLA Jessica Littlewood – St. Paul people do not share common interests with Fort Saskatchewan. We do business with the county of St. Paul, Saddle Lake, Goodfish Lake, Elk Point. We have numerous agreements with the county and Elk Point, and you've heard those before from the reeve and the MLA. We do business in Bonnyville-Cold Lake. In the past St. Paul has been called Bonnyville-St. Paul, so the business is there.

If you look at the geographical map of St. Paul, in that northeast area it dead-ends at Cold Lake, Bonnyville, St. Paul. There's nothing to the north. There's very little to the west unless you drive two, three hours. If you go through St. Paul, that's two hours to get to Edmonton. We're pretty isolated in that area, so to put us with Fort Saskatchewan, with very little population going all the way to the border: I totally understand the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville saying that it doesn't make sense. The MLA Dr. Starke said: bring Vermilion up north. I totally agree because that's what it should be. Those people have common interests, and they relate to that. The population from past St. Paul for the proposed Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul riding, or constituency, would have nothing past St. Paul: very low population, a few little hamlets, which are better served by the people that they know and are served by right now.

For the town of St. Paul, like I said, we have numerous agreements with the county of St. Paul, the town of Elk Point, and we work with the MD of Bonnyville and the city of Cold Lake. We do relationships with them as well. The reserves are just like a second St. Paul. Saddle Lake Indian reserve and Goodfish Lake do a lot of business in St. Paul as well. They come from Kehewin as well and Frog Lake. So we're sort of an isolated area out there.

I know you're doing the numbers, and you're going to say: where does St. Paul fit? I've heard it all day. Quite frankly, we know and I think that you should accept – I read the report, that you're anticipating that the rural population will drop, so you're not scared to put the numbers up. Actually, you'd be stunned to know that the average age in Cold Lake is 32. The average age in St. Paul is 36. Actually, we have the biggest baby booms in our area in a long time, quite frankly, because people are getting educated, they're returning, and there's work out there. So to say that – I was kind of insulted, but that's your prerogative. That's the way the stats are showing you towards the cities.

Ms Livingstone: I'm just going to interrupt you for a minute. We didn't say that populations in rural areas are dropping. They are not growing at the same rates as other areas of the province.

Mr. Andersen: I was saying: anticipating a drop.

Ms Livingstone: The entire province is growing, but it's not growing at the same rate. We are anticipating that the entire province will continue to grow, but it will continue to grow unevenly.

Mr. Andersen: Okay. And that's fine.

What we're proposing is that you include St. Paul back where we belong and back where we do the bulk of our business. Common interests: you said that in the act sections 14(a) and 14(c) come into play, effective representation. Actually, our MLA, whoever it would be, if you did go and put St. Paul back in there, could cover the constituency in a couple of hours, two and a half, maybe, from Saddle Lake all the way to Cold Lake. I know you're going to say that they're plus 33 per cent – I think I heard her say that already – if you include Saddle Lake in there.

Another thing I want to throw out there is: is it okay to divide up counties but not Indian reserves in this? Is that what I'm hearing?

The Chair: Yeah. That's what the legislation instructs us to do.

Mr. Andersen: That's legislated in? Okay.

The Chair: That's legislated in.

Mr. Andersen: Okay. So that takes off another idea. There's a natural boundary on one of the reserves.

The Chair: I've got one for you. It just, you know, builds on what the last speaker said. Just looking at the map here, you have expressed the idea that others have expressed, that St. Paul and Saddle Lake should be treated as a common community of interest. If we find that the numbers in Fort McMurray-Conklin are better than what the Alberta Treasury Board estimated, could we add – I don't know how – St. Paul and Saddle Lake to the new Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche constituency? How would that work?

Mr. Andersen: If we could annex Lac La Biche, I have no problem.

The Chair: Yeah, that would – wait. They would be annexing you.

Mr. Andersen: No, no. It doesn't work that way. That would still be a large, large riding, a huge riding. From St. Paul to Fort McMurray-Conklin is a four-hour trip just from St. Paul. Right now you probably have two hours to Fort Saskatchewan. And then for the MLA, if you did stick with the proposed Fort Saskatchewan to the Saskatchewan border, that would be a huge drive for that one as well. I agree with MLA Littlewood on that. It's a huge encumbrance to go all the way there when you've got Vermilion right there already, who's handling it and has for many years worked that way.

Where to put us is very interesting. I'll digress from our issue, but I'm saying that I think Vegreville should be and has always done business with Fort Saskatchewan. I think Redwater, Smoky Lake do a lot of business there as well. The natural transportation corridors are there. That's just my opinion. I'm not here to push anything. But for St. Paul, like I said, whatever you do to make it, it's the county of St. Paul, Elk Point, Bonnyville, Cold Lake that make the most sense. We definitely are the dead end, all of those communities, and there's nothing past us to the east in Saskatchewan. You have to come back out, or you go all around us. Those communities are pretty much isolated on their own in northeastern Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll just ask for questions here. Ms Munn?

Ms Munn: I have no questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Any questions, Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: No. I'm good. Thanks a lot.

Mrs. Day: I just have a quick question. I did a quick calculation, and it was 12 per cent over with the Stats Canada numbers. The counties of Bonnyville, St. Paul, and Cold Lake: are we talking – I'm sorry; I don't have a map that shows me close enough, and I'm not familiar enough with your community. Is Saddle Lake reserve within one of those counties?

Mr. Andersen: Just on the edge of the county of St. Paul.

Mrs. Day: On the edge or within?

Mr. Andersen: No. On the west side of the county of St. Paul.

Mrs. Day: Okay.

Mr. Andersen: They share a border with the county of St. Paul.

Another one, that Mr. McLeod had alluded to: when you made the division of St. Paul, you divided a major highway going into St. Paul on the east end and on the west end. So you divided one section through St. Paul, and that would be one MLA doing that, and the other MLA would be doing the outskirts of St. Paul.

Also, when you did that division in the computer-generated one, I hope, you put my water treatment plant in another constituency from the town of St. Paul. So there's nothing taken into consideration for that as well. I'd love to work with two MLAs, but it doesn't work well when you're going for infrastructure like that. That does affect us in the future because we may be having a pumphouse on the North Saskatchewan River that could be in another constituency as well. So their importance for us along with the agreements that we have with other communities around us: very important when you're an urban municipality. Our water treatment plant is not in town. It is quite a ways out of town, and it will be in another constituency.

The Chair: Where is it?

Mr. Andersen: It is on the southeast of St. Paul, Lac Saint Cyr.

The Chair: So you're saying that instead of being in Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul, it's in Bonnyville-Cold Lake on our new proposal.

Mr. Andersen: That's correct. So then I'd be dealing with two MLAs, one for water treatment plant upgrades and one for the transmission line, which will divide through the constituency itself. By putting us in that Exile Island, you're making life more complicated, trust me.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Andersen: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Our last registered speaker is Omer Moghrabi.

Mr. Moghrabi: I have a couple of members with me. You can introduce yourself.

Mr. Thompson: My name is Floyd Thompson, chairman of Kikino.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Moghrabi: I also have . . .

Mr. Thompson: Horace Patenaude. He's the chairman of Buffalo Lake.

Mr. Moghrabi: I'm Omer Moghrabi, and the constituency is Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. We're last. We're either a breath of fresh air or a whiff of sour gas. We sent a letter to you, and I believe you have it. Do I need to read it?

2:20

The Chair: No.

Mr. Moghrabi: Well, I guess you didn't take the recommendation of taking five from Calgary and giving one to Edmonton. See, you would have avoided all this kind of stuff if you would have done that.

I actually don't want to repeat anything that everybody else said, how important the rural areas and representation are and how

difficult it is. One of our concerns is that two of the Métis colonies that have always been in our region – and we are their urban centre and even have the same phone numbers, same school board. I'll let them speak for themselves if you don't mind, and then I can pitch in.

Go ahead, Floyd.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you very much, Omer. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak. I'm happy to hear our communities named by several different speakers, but I truly believe that if we want to be represented here, we need to speak for ourselves, and that's what I'm prepared to do today. Again, as was mentioned, my name is Floyd Thompson. I'm the chairman of my community of Kikino. Our community's name, Kikino: it's a Cree word, and it means "our home." Our neighbour to the west of us: we're linked by a boundary. It's called the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement. We share a lot of the same interests and the same goals.

In reading the interim report, that was presented to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in May 2017, I was drawn to the reasons for the commission's six recommendations, especially number 3. Number 3, if I recall – okay? – is the obligation to "consider setting electoral division boundaries in such a manner as to keep common communities of interest together, where possible." It also applies to indigenous people's communities as it does to any other. This conclusion is augmented by the specific reference in section 14(c) of the act to Indian reserves and Métis settlements in the context of consideration of "common community interests and community organizations."

I believe that what I'll be speaking about will fit into at least three of the eight major themes in the public submissions: rural concerns; common interests; geographical features, including existing roads. What I have to say will focus on, basically, six key words in that recommendation: the word "obligation," the word "keep," the word "common," the word "communities," the word "interest," and the word "together."

We are not requesting. We are not proposing. We are appealing to your greatest sense of understanding and appreciation as to what we bring forth to you today, that our communities of Kikino and Buffalo Lake be inclusive with Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray as per the electoral boundaries as they stand today. The history and ties of our community to Lac La Biche go back long before Kikino was established, in 1938. Members that live in Kikino and Buffalo Lake today: these families lived in the Lac La Biche area when David Thompson arrived on the shores of Red Deers Lake, now Lac La Biche, in 1798. A large number of families in the Lac La Biche area also moved to the area of Lac La Biche following the Riel Rebellion of 1885, and now their descendants live in Kikino and Buffalo Lake. That is what we believe is called connected.

Our children attend the schools in Lac La Biche. We are part of the Northern Lights school division district, Kikino and also Boyle. We receive our health care services in Lac La Biche and Boyle. We do our grocery shopping in Lac La Biche and Boyle. We attend the local college in Lac La Biche. It is our major destination centre for major sporting events. A large number of families work and live in Fort McMurray, and when they retire, they move back home. We are proud to be part of a region that is commonly known in our area as the mini United Nations. We have French, English, Ukrainian, Italian, White Russian, First Nation, and Métis. We have a very good business relationship with the town and the county of Lac La Biche and Boyle. We share services. We assist one another when need be. That's not what we call connected; it's called intertwined.

Our communities of Kikino and Buffalo Lake have an obligation to do our best to ensure that the Electoral Boundaries Commission

is made totally aware of our common interests and why we need to remain together.

Just a little better than a year ago the unthinkable happened in the Fort McMurray area. We did our utmost to accommodate our friends and neighbours from Fort McMurray along with the town of Lac La Biche. We own Silver Birch resort in Kikino. We have 141 lessees, annual people who lease there. Ninety per cent are from Fort McMurray. That is what is called intertwined.

We have no common connections to St. Albert or Redwater. I'm sorry, but we don't. I don't believe I even know anyone personally from there in municipal government, and I've been in leadership in my community for 44 years. Maybe – no. I'll apologize. That is not quite true, that statement. We have a connection. It's called highway 28 and St. Albert Trail. I drive by Redwater and through St. Albert on my way to meetings in the west end of Edmonton. That's about my connection.

Thank you for listening. Hay-hay.

The Chair: Thanks so much for coming along. Can you give me a bit of an idea as to the population of Kikino?

Mr. Thompson: The population of our community is 975 according to the 2015 census. That was done by the Alberta population lab. Buffalo Lake is around about the same, so we're talking about 2,000 people.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Moghrabi: If I can also, the chief of Whitefish Lake First Nation No. 128 has given me permission to speak. He regrets that he is unable to be here. Basically, if they're not with St. Paul, they would like to be with the Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche constituency.

Ms Munn: Again, do you know the population numbers of Whitefish?

Mr. Moghrabi: It's around 1,300 or 1,500. Yeah.

Ms Munn: Okay.

Ms Livingstone: Sorry. If I can jump in. Is their first preference to be with St. Paul?

Mr. Moghrabi: Well, yeah, but if you look at the distances there, that's one of their natural areas, Ashmont, McCrae.

Furthermore, it's difficult for me to have my back turned when I've got Two Hills and St. Paul behind me here. Am I going to be okay?

An Hon. Member: Watch what you say, Omer.

Mr. Moghrabi: I know.

I have to admit that our MLA has represented us, the best MLA since we had Ron Tesolin, and that's a long time ago. The representation has been fine.

Ms Livingstone: If I can also ask: in terms of where you would suggest that the line go, would you suggest that we follow the boundaries of Buffalo Lake and Kikino, or should Long Lake be included or any of the other communities, or should we just go around the Buffalo Lake and Kikino area?

2:30

Mr. Thompson: If you're asking me, I would say that you could probably just go around the areas of Kikino and Buffalo Lake to be included.

Ms Livingstone: Okay.

Mr. Moghrabi: Yeah. Long Lake is right over by Boyle, so you could use highway 28. I can't speak on their behalf.

On something you did mention about only the number of seats and that you want less government, a recommendation I would have, and not from you guys, is that we have 344 municipalities, counties in this province. Maybe we need to reduce their numbers and put more into our constituencies and add them. Just a thought.

The Chair: An excellent idea.

Mr. Moghrabi: Yeah. You have two major cities that take over a million. What have we got, 4.2 million, 4.3 million? A lot of small cities. Just a thought. I don't know if I'll make it out of the building, but you know.

The Chair: Okay. Ms Munn, any questions?

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

The Chair: Anything else?

Ms Livingstone: No. I was just concerned about the request to draw the line.

The Chair: Sure. You bet.

All right. Anything else, Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: No. I'm good. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Maybe I'm sounding defensive here, but we're hearing a lot of ideas for the first time that sound like good ideas. Had we heard them earlier, we might have included them in our interim recommendations. So thank you very much for coming here today.

Mr. Moghrabi: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: We have just a few more minutes left. If there's anybody here who hasn't registered to speak and has not yet spoken and who would like to come up to the microphone, they could do so right now.

Mr. Andersen: I have spoken, but I just have one quick question.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Andersen: Maybe you guys can answer it; maybe you can't.

The Chair: Sure. If you could give your name again for *Hansard*.

Mr. Andersen: Okay. Glenn Andersen, mayor, town of St. Paul. On the map that I have – maybe you can answer this – it says: proposed provincial electoral division, June 2010. Now, was this map that I have proposed back in 2010? Is this the original one, and you're just proposing it today in 2017?

The Chair: No. That's the current. That's what the last two provincial elections have been run on, and we're proposing changes from that map to the maps that are in our interim report. So you've got the current map.

Mr. Andersen: This is the new map that I have that says: proposed 2010.

The Chair: Where did you get the map from?

Mr. Andersen: Well, from your website. I just printed this off your – I forgot to ask that question, so that's why I'm asking it now.

The Chair: I can't answer that. I cannot answer why our website would say that.

Mr. Andersen: Bottom left-hand corner.

The Chair: No. Hey, I'm believing you. We've got our current and proposed constituencies on the maps around the wall here.

Mr. Andersen: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McLeod: Glenn, that's probably just an edit. If you'll notice, some of the other maps have been adjusted. The date in the left-hand corner at the bottom on most of them has been adjusted. Some also haven't. It's just that you picked up on the one that hadn't. It's a clerical thing, okay?

Mr. Andersen: You're in politics, right?

Mr. McLeod: Absolutely, I'm in politics.

The Chair: What number of map is that?

Mrs. Day: Well, it says it right on our book, page 186.

The Chair: Okay. But the constituency number is . . .

Mrs. Day: Eighty-five.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks.

Okay. You've just given us another thing to proofread for when we do our final report. Just hang on for a sec.

Thank you. If you could give your name, ma'am, please, and the constituency in which you live.

Ms Rudyk: Sure. My name is Taneen Rudyk. I'm a councillor with the town of Vegreville, currently in the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituency, formerly known just as Vegreville. I think you've heard loud and clear the vibrancy that exists in this part of the world. This is an area of Alberta that has a lot of educated, engaged, and interested political animals. This is a room that is full of municipal leaders, both from municipal districts and counties as well as from small municipalities. I can verify just based on the breadth of suggestions that you've heard here today that your decisions may have been different had you spoken with this group of individuals from the beginning.

I understand that the commission is tasked with the job of boundaries, not with the actual application of politics and democracy. It's an imperfect system. But I will say as a municipal councillor that we have diverse needs that need to be met, and our best vehicle in rural Alberta is to be able to listen to our constituents and be able to advocate to our elected officials. In this instance our elected officials are MLAs, as they've aptly spoken. I think MLA Littlewood has been an excellent representative for us in Vegreville, and I accept Dr. Starke's accolades and wish to accept Vegreville into his own constituency because we are a very active hub in the region.

However, our concerns range over a wide area. When we talk about intermunicipal collaboration, this is a mandate that is coming forward from the Municipal Government Act. This is the largest piece of legislation and a huge piece of legislation. It is affecting most of the people here behind me. Those considerations were not looked at in the development of these boundaries. Most of our

regional collaborations, our agreements, for example, in Vegreville are north and south, not necessarily east and west.

In addition, some of the concerns that we have about policing agreements, for example: those are concerns that every municipal government has to engage in with the province, need to be addressed with our MLA. We need to have access. We need to see that our voice is heard. When we talk about a rural voice, a rural perspective, Vegreville has experienced a very direct hit, and I have to say that the exclusion of our name from the list is a little bit of an insult. I realize that you can't mention every community, but we have had insult, and this a little bit of salt in the wound. The removal of the case processing centre or the suggestion that it should be removed from Vegreville is concerning. The dilution of the rural voice and the perspective of those of us that choose to live outside of large centres is being constantly eroded and challenged, and I do appreciate the distinction that rural Albertans and rural Canadians are not decreasing in numbers, but we're not growing at the same rate. That doesn't mean that our existence doesn't add value in terms of a political perspective that needs to be heeded, needs to be listened to, and it needs to be considered in a different way, and boundaries don't necessarily capture that.

We were talking about the water commission, Mr. McLeod aptly identified that. Our water commission, that used to be called the Vegreville water commission, has now changed its name. If we are going to be accurately represented, our water comes from the North Saskatchewan River, and excluding Vegreville from our partners that we work with makes it very difficult for us to advocate and be able to be heard in a larger setting. The city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary: they have their growth management boards. They also have their large city councils. They already have the ear of the province. Those of us outside of large urban centres need to be heeded.

In addition, education. We have two different school boards that represent our community. Those are not taken into consideration with the new boundary we draw.

Another major expenditure for the province: almost 50 per cent of the budget is spent on Alberta Health. Alberta Health Services, as we are speaking right now, is talking about long-range planning. The long-range planning does not talk about simply corridors of care or hubs anymore. They talk about spoke and wheel. Lloydminster is an interesting example, again, where two provinces have to try to negotiate their health agreements, and those people are not being served well.

Additionally, living in rural Alberta means that your needs are not being met in the same way that they are in a city. So I would ask for some of those considerations when you're looking at other boundaries. For example, for each one of the ones that I've listed, none of those boundaries matches up with these electoral boundaries that are suggested for the new constituencies.

When I'm advocating for my citizens in Vegreville – and I'm not talking simply about those that have a residence and pay taxes in my community – I need to be able to access my MLA, and rural MLAs hold a place in rural Alberta or rural Canada in a way that doesn't have the same significance in an urban setting because we have not the same weight at a provincial level. We need to have access to our elected officials in a way that is different, and I would say that our perspective needs to be listened to. There are many of us that choose to not live in urban centres. We have lived there. We've gotten educated, and we've moved back to be able to make a difference in our community.

That would be my submission.

The Chair: Thank you.

Questions, Mrs. Day? Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: No, thanks.

The Chair: Ms Livingstone?

2:40

Ms Livingstone: No. Just one quick comment. For the benefit of everyone we held hearings all over the province in January and February, including in Wainwright and St. Paul. None of our hearing days were fully subscribed except for in Red Deer, and we really would have liked to have heard from people and heard what their interests were so that we could have taken them into account. You note that we did mention Flagstaff county because they took the time to come and talk to us and tell us about their partnerships and things they wanted to stay together. Just as sort of a general announcement it really is helpful if people make those submissions at first instance so that we can take them into account. The last time we were in this area, all we heard was that things don't go north-south; they go east-west. You know, we're left with the submissions that people bring to us, so take it back to all of your municipalities. When these things come around, take the first instance to come and share where your communities of interest match so that we can take that into consideration at the first instance.

Thanks.

Ms Munn: I do have a question. You were very diplomatic about Vegreville dancing with Fort Saskatchewan, and perhaps Vermilion wants to dance with Vegreville. Where does Vegreville want to be in terms of the way the new constituencies are looking?

Ms Rudyk: Well, I have to say that historically, if you look back over the years, Vegreville has had a place of significance in this region. Traditionally our trading partners are mostly north and south although highway 16 does bisect the current drawing. I'm sorry; I can't see that very clearly.

What I would recommend looking at – and you won't have that in front of you. If you take a look at Alberta government websites, if you're taking a look, for example, child development coalitions across the province have been mapped out. That takes human services maps, that takes the social services map, and that takes education boundaries as well as the health services delivery model. We've got in our area – for example, Yellowhead East Health Advisory Council is part of East Central Health. Add that to the Elk Island public school division, the Elk Island Catholic school division, the county of Minburn, and the surrounding areas. We've got all these different bodies that are dealing with the same people.

To be really fair, I don't know that I necessarily have a specific suggestion. I do prefer the current model, that we would stay with Fort Saskatchewan. I'd be very curious to hear a submission answering why Edmonton would have dissimilar interests, for example, from Sherwood Park. I find that a little bit arbitrary.

For ourselves the area where we would do most of our trading and where most people come to Vegreville would be more of a bull's eye. If you actually look at the Alberta Health Services model and their mapping of where our patients come to our hospital, for example, where they come to receive care, where people do their trading for business, and where they bring their children to be educated, it's a bull's eye. Again, I understand the bisection of using roads and natural divisions like rivers, for example, but it's very difficult to actually see that captured here. The communities that we trade with or come to us are sort of in a cyclical pattern around the community, which would encompass those. Traditionally, I guess, highway 36 has often been the eastern boundary – is that correct? – for our community and then going further towards the city of Edmonton, and I don't see our

interests with Fort Saskatchewan as being dissimilar although that was a new creation of the last time.

Actually, coincidentally, I did work for Elections Alberta for the last election, not my first time. Telling people that have traditionally voted, for example, at a community hall that is literally across highway 16 that for the first time in 40 years they need to drive 40 miles the opposite way is something that doesn't make sense to people. If you actually want to have an engaged populace – and that's what we're all looking for, a greater level of engagement, a feeling like our voices are being heard and that we can see ourselves in government – I would say and I concur, Ms Livingstone, that we do need to have our voices heard.

I can say, quite honestly, that our council was not aware of those original submissions. That's why we're here today. We will submit a written proposal as well as to where we would like to actually be included. I guess, really, at the end of the day, we would be happy to be

represented by either MLA Starke or MLA Littlewood as we currently have because our council is engaged. We can make sure that our voice is heard, but we want to be able to be included with our communities that we have similar interests with. Most of our communities are north and south as well as to the west, closer to Edmonton.

The Chair: Thank you. Thanks very much.

All right. Well, I'd like to thank everybody who's here, who stayed to the end. I hope that you found this morning interesting. I certainly have. We're very, very grateful for the good suggestions, all good suggestions, that we received and certainly will take a careful eye at all of them when we're deliberating on our final recommendations.

Thank you very much.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:45 p.m.]

