



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Brooks

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Brooks

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Colette Smithers, Alberta NDP Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat Constituency Association
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12:53 p.m.

Friday, July 21, 2017

[Justice Bielby in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks very much for coming out to this hearing of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. We're all here and ready to go, so we're going to get started a few minutes early just to make sure we aren't pressed at the end. Hopefully, we won't be pressed at the end.

Let me start by introducing the commission. I'm Justice Myra Bielby of the Alberta Court of Appeal. I'm resident in Edmonton. To my left is Laurie Livingstone of Calgary, and 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 form the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

We were appointed last October pursuant to the provisions of this piece of legislation that was passed by the Legislature in 1990 called the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, but there's been some version of this process in place since the province was created in 1905. The reason for the legislation is to set up a mechanism to review the sizes of our provincial electoral constituencies to make sure that they are still adequate to allow effective representation by our MLAs on a go-forward basis. This is particularly important in Alberta because over the last eight years, since the last commission sat in 2010 – not us, different people – Alberta has experienced a growth rate of over 14 per cent. More than 600,000 people have moved into the province net of anyone who might have moved out. That gives us the highest growth rate in Canada. The next highest is Vancouver at 6.9 per cent, so Alberta has grown more than twice as fast as Vancouver. If you think of those pictures on the news of what Vancouver looks like, well, we've got twice that in terms of people entering the province.

But all those 600,000-plus people did not move equally into each of our 87 provincial constituencies, and each of those constituencies is shown on these two maps at the front here. Rather, they tended to move into Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Fort McMurray, and Grande Prairie. So while eight years ago all of the constituencies were relatively close in terms of population size, all hovering around the 40,000-person number, right now, if we were to have an election today, a vote cast in Jasper would have three and a half times the effect of a vote cast in Calgary-South East because Calgary-South East has grown so very quickly. Jasper has grown very little over the last eight years, so things have gotten quite out of whack. That's made our job more interesting than it might have otherwise been because we get to deal with the biggest change historically that Alberta has experienced and probably, percentage-wise, the biggest change in Canada at this current time.

Our task led us to have a round of public hearings in January and February of this year. I'd like to thank many of you who were here then, are here again today. Thanks for your continued interest in the commission. After those hearings we sat down, of course, and considered the 749 written submissions we also received in the first round and prepared recommendations for each of the 87 constituencies. We filed this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on May 24 of this year, and it contains each of our 87 recommendations. Now, we don't recommend change in every constituency, but we do speak about every constituency and say what our recommendation is.

Then under the legislation we're to have a second round of public hearings and invite written submissions a second time, and that's what we're doing right now. We have at this moment over 640 written submissions that we've received in the second round. This is speaking specifically to our proposals. We've held hearings this week in Grande Prairie, Vermilion, Edmonton, Calgary, and here,

and on Monday we're going to Red Deer. We are using the information we get through this process to prepare a final set of recommendations, which we're to file with the Legislature by October 23 of this year. Then it will be up to the Legislature to enact legislation setting the provincial electoral boundaries for the next go-around, the next election. We're expecting that they'll accept our recommendations at least in part. They have always accepted them before, so that's our thought in our mind, that that'll happen again.

This legislation plus some case law from the Supreme Court of Canada and the Alberta Court of Appeal interpreting it have given us a set of rules as to how to approach our task. That's the Alberta Court of Appeal long before I was a member of it. Those rules state that the first step is to figure out what the average population in Alberta is. What we've done is look at the population of the province as set out in the federal census of 2016. Those figures became available to us online February 8, 2017. That figure, 4,062,609, we just divided by 87, and that yields 46,697 people. That's not relevant because if we aimed to put 46,697 people in every constituency, none of our recommendations would result in that. Rather, that's the baseline, the first step that we take in our process. For example, the next step we take is that we go to each individual constituency and compare its population to the average. At the moment the population of Strathmore-Brooks is 52,474 people based on the same census, so the population here is 7 per cent higher than the provincial average.

The next step for us in this process is then to look at the other criteria set out in the act to help us decide whether the Strathmore-Brooks constituency area – the shape of it, the boundaries – should change to raise or lower that population closer to the provincial average or leave it alone or do something else.

1:00

The criteria that we have applied are set out in the legislation in relation to all constituencies. The first one is common community of interest. We're trying to avoid cutting up common communities of interest if we can possibly do so. That doesn't mean just towns and villages and cities although our report does not cut up towns, villages, and cities except for Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat, which have their own special situation. We've been able to achieve that. It also means that if you've got a group of people with the same culture, with the same ethnicity, with the same way they earn their living, with the same production in the province, we should try to keep them together if possible. All of us belong to many communities of interest. They're not all geographical. It just depends on where you live, what you belong to, what you believe in, but our aim here is to not cut up geographical communities of interest. That doesn't mean, though, that we have to have only one community of interest in every constituency. That wouldn't be possible. You can have more than one, but we're going to try to avoid cutting up one or more if we can.

The next consideration is to not cross neighbourhood boundaries in Calgary and Edmonton. That's perhaps less immediately of interest to you, but just so you know: what we do in one place affects what we do everywhere. In those two cities in particular there's a huge number of neighbourhoods. In Edmonton they each have community leagues, and they function and do sports and Cubs and Brownies and whatever, skating, hockey all together in this community. The act says to try to avoid cutting up communities if we possibly can.

Then in regard to other areas we're to try to avoid crossing municipal boundaries. As I said just a moment ago, we haven't cut up any town or city or village except for the cities which are too large to

have one constituency, have a much greater population than 46,697, but don't have enough to form two constituencies. There are different models of how that can be done, and we'll talk about that, I'm sure, through the afternoon. One of the models is the Medicine Hat model. You might be familiar with that. It's sometimes called the doughnut model. In Lethbridge, too. It's where you've got the city constituency in the middle, and then there's the leftover part of the city, the balance of the city, joined with the neighbouring country area to form a blended constituency. Another approach to doing that, though, is the approach currently in place in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, where they have two blended constituencies. Part of each of those cities is in two constituencies, and the surrounding rural area makes up the balance of the constituency.

Other than that, we haven't crossed the boundaries of Edmonton or Calgary. The first time we went out and spoke to people, unanimously people said: please don't do that. The mayors of each city wrote to us and said: please don't do that; whatever else you do, don't make a constituency where the MLA has to represent part of Calgary and part of an area outside of Calgary. Our recommendations honour that request.

We've tried to use natural boundaries, where they're available, to suggest the boundaries of constituencies. This means major roadways like highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary, rivers where they're available. Where you see a constituency with a really squiggly boundary, that invariably means that we've used a river to be the boundary. The idea, I think, behind the legislation was that people should be able to identify where their constituency is, and if you can use natural markers, that makes it easier for them to remember where it might be.

Another consideration we've taken into account is projected growth. The legislation doesn't talk specifically about projected growth, but it says that we can take into account other factors which we feel are relevant to the issue of effective representation by MLAs. This isn't statistical growth information. We didn't receive from any submitter hard, detailed evidence of a breakdown, for example, of where in Calgary growth is anticipated. Perhaps ironically, today in the *Calgary Herald* there was a map, but nobody sent that to us. Nobody worked it out in advance.

What we did, just to exemplify how this works in Calgary, is we left the core communities, which are fully built out, so any new residents in there will have to be on account of infill housing or building high-rises or whatever. We've assumed that their growth rate will be lower than the provincial average. In the outside areas of Calgary, in suburbia, where houses are being built even as we speak, we're assuming that there's still going to be population added in those areas over the next eight years, till the next time boundaries are reviewed, and that the growth rate in those areas is likely to be slightly higher than the provincial average. We've made constituencies in the centre of the city with the population being slightly higher than the provincial average in the expectation that their population growth rate will be slower, so they'll be right at the provincial average next time. Same with the outside: we've left them below, so as they continue to grow, they'll be closer to the provincial average the next time the boundary commission sits.

Another consideration is communication. We try to establish constituencies where communication between parties, between the MLA and constituents, between constituents and one another – we consider the ease of communication. Do you have to drive outside of part of the constituency and back in because there's no direct road connection, for example? Are people able to gather together pretty easily to talk about issues, or is that more of a challenge? Those are the sorts of things that we've taken into account in designing constituencies.

Mr. Clerk, is there any way we can lose the music?

Mr. Roth: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks.

Right now the final aspect of our constituency design is public input, and we're seeking that from you. We've received terrific public input to this point this week and not just generally on whether our philosophy of design is a good one but specifically in regard to individual boundaries. Like, people have been good enough to go around the individual boundaries of our maps and identify places where they made no sense, where, you know, we left little orphan bits of communities in a second riding. Our map-making facility the first time around wasn't fine enough to be able to pick up on those things, but people definitely picked up on them and said, "Gee, why are you leaving those three blocks out of Lethbridge and putting them in somewhere else?" or what have you. That's not true; I'm just using that as an example. We got great feedback in Calgary yesterday, where people said, you know: good idea except you cut two neighbourhoods in half; why don't you join one of them in your northern constituency and the other one in the southern constituency? Those sorts of inputs have been really helpful, so we've been particularly grateful for those.

Our task now, as I said at the beginning, is to prepare a final report that has to be tabled with the Legislature by October 23, actually, of this year, in which we finalize our 87 recommendations. Then it's up to the Legislature to enact new legislation to revise the constituency boundaries in time for the next provincial election. It seems like we're doing this awfully early – I thought it was early myself – but apparently the returning officers need at least a year to get ready for an election, so the mechanism in the act was designed to set this process in motion kind of mid-term in a government's life.

Before I call the first registered speaker, I want to mention that *Hansard* is here, and it's taking down everything that we say, so when you come up to the mike and make a comment, know that it's being recorded. There's an audio recording that's placed on our website every day of the hearings held that day, and it's there indefinitely. A written transcript is produced, and within 48 hours, probably, it'll be up on the website. At abebc.ca you can listen to and read transcripts of all of the hearings we've held to date. I've been gratified but perhaps slightly surprised by how many people have actually tuned in, that I've talked to, and have listened to at least part of a hearing. Just so you know, that's going to happen.

Our first registered speaker is Bev Muendel-Atherstone, and I invite her to come forward.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Good morning.

The Chair: Morning.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: It's my real pleasure to be here today. I'm Bev Muendel-Atherstone. Should I just start?

The Chair: Yes. Please do.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Thank you so much to the boundary commission for all the work that you have done on the provincial riding divisions in Alberta, and thank you for allowing me and others in the communities to come and speak.

I will be presenting an alternative to eliminating the Little Bow riding, where my husband and I have lived, in the county of Lethbridge, for the past 24 years. We have been residents of Alberta for 39 years, having worked here, raised our children, and seen them through their education and university here in Alberta.

1:10

I have a few suggestions on how to reconfigure the six ridings in the south from the existing seven ridings, keeping the Little Bow riding with a changed name and area and eliminating the Cardston-Taber-Warner riding. I will be tabling a map at the end of my presentation for you as well as my presentation if you wish.

The Chair: If you have the map, it would be great if you could give it to me now so that I can follow along as you make your presentation.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: I have three maps that you can perhaps share.

The Chair: We'll share. Thanks very much.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Okay. Thank you.

I'll start off with the names that we're going to use that I've come up with here. Instead of Little Bow, I believe you have Taber – sorry. I've forgotten what you have for Little Bow.

The Chair: Well, much of Little Bow would be part of our Taber-Vulcan constituency, but not all of it.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Taber-Vulcan. Yes. That's right.

We would see this as High River-Vulcan. The suggested Taber-Vulcan riding is problematic as it's so large, with residents from as far afield as Vulcan and Medicine Hat, that it does not seem to reflect people's best interests. Creating a rural riding with a minus 11 per cent deviation, when rural ridings grow at a slower rate, seems less than optimum for this riding, but moving High River to Little Bow, or Taber-Vulcan, or, as I'm saying, High River-Vulcan, would create a population of 46,446, or plus 8 per cent. This would include all of the county of Lethbridge in one riding, and it would follow the three county boundaries – Lethbridge, Vulcan, and Foothills – which is one of your criteria, to follow these natural lines. It would also include the arterial highway of highway 23. This would be preferable to dividing counties and having more than one MLA represent a county.

Instead of eliminating Little Bow, I would recommend we eliminate Cardston-Taber-Warner by creating a Brooks-Taber riding. This riding would have most of the Strathmore-Brooks become this riding. With a population of 50,056 it would be plus 7 per cent. Along with the High River-Vulcan, Livingstone-Macleod, and Brooks-Taber ridings, all would follow the major highways radiating from Calgary. We would see more north-south ridings rather than sort of the patchwork quilt that you have in your map. These would be more north-south, which follows our geographical features of our mountains, follows our major highways, and also follows our county lines.

To the west would be the Livingstone-Macleod riding, with a population of 45,609. That would be at minus 5 per cent. That would unite the First Nations in southwest Alberta. Now, in the commission you've done a terrific job accepting the voice of indigenous Albertans as part of an important consideration in your deliberations. Alberta's First Nations have faced inequality in a number of areas, especially in the political. In almost every riding in Alberta, with the exception of Lesser Slave Lake, indigenous voters were not a significant percentage of the voters.

In southwestern Alberta there is a chance to rectify this by including not just the Kainai but also the Piikani First Nations together in one provincial constituency. In the interim report these two First Nations are separated into two constituencies, whereby First Nations voting power and voice may be diminished. Instead, it could be enhanced by moving the border for Livingstone-

Macleod south to encompass the Kainai First Nation. This will help facilitate and enhance the engagement of First Nation in the political process. Also, inclusion of the Kainai First Nation would be consistent with the commission's goal of amalgamating First Nations and Métis communities.

To do this, we would move Waterton into this riding, sharing a common culture with other mountain park communities – again, that north-south geographical dividing line – aligning it while raising its population closer to the provincial average. This follows the northern Cardston county and Warner county boundaries. This would allow one MLA to represent one county instead of having that split.

To the north and east would be the Drumheller-Strathmore riding, with a population of 53,099 and a quotient of plus 14 per cent. Now, the high variance in this riding is accounted for as the population is expected to stagnate or decline in the future – and you mentioned you're looking at the future in your presentations – making it comparable to what the commission has constructed for their seat in the area. The three special areas are kept together, as you have desired.

One more thing to mention, and that is because I'm very concerned about Little Bow. The northern part of Little Bow in the past – and I don't see Little Bow previously on here. On the northern border of Little Bow Siksika Nation was at the upper northern edge, but Gleichen, which is the town and part of the nation, was across the street and in a separate constituency. I see that you people, the commission, have come up with putting them together, which is laudable. We would also like to see these together.

Okay. In regard to Medicine Hat one urban Medicine Hat riding is preferable to splitting Medicine Hat and its environs between two ridings and diluting the urban representation and voices. This would make one MLA for urban Medicine Hat rather than two, trying to balance representation of Medicine Hat and the counties. Cities need to be recognized for the central role they play in people's lives and in service delivery, going along with your point of people doing similar jobs needing to be together and not crossing over municipal lines.

The last point is that Cypress-Medicine Hat re-creates the previous riding with one blended rural seat surrounding Medicine Hat, the doughnut you were referring to. That would include most of Warner county, with a population of 48,481, at plus 4 per cent. This reorganization would allow for better representation of its constituents with one urban riding and one blended constituency taking in all of its environs and incorporating them with the rest of Cypress county.

Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to me today and for allowing me to present.

The Chair: All right. I'll kick off the questions by noting that the population in Medicine Hat is well above 46,697. It's not open to the commission to leave it together, as you propose, in one constituency. I don't have the population right at my fingertips, but, one, it would be more than 25 per cent larger than the provincial average figure. That's the maximum we can go to. We can't go that high without having good reason and telling you what those reasons are, but even if we have a good reason, we can't go above that, so Medicine Hat has to be split some way. Just so you know. Just as a bit of background for why we did what we did.

That said, I'm going to turn to Mr. McLeod to see if he has any questions or comments.

Mr. McLeod: No thanks. Not at this time.

The Chair: Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: Thank you for the work you've put into this and the time to come here today. I'm wondering. I'm interested in the southeast corner. You included Cypress and Warner. You're including also Forty Mile – is that correct? – in the counties. There are three counties in that corner, are there not?

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Yes. My map is so tiny, I can't see.

Mrs. Day: Okay. That's good. I just wanted to clarify that.

When you said Medicine Hat proper, did you mean that you took in the rest of the Medicine Hat population and put it in with that corner of your revision?

1:20

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Medicine Hat proper would just be the city.

Mrs. Day: Up to 46,000? And then . . .

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Then Cypress-Medicine Hat the rest.

Mrs. Day: Okay. The sliver of the rest of Medicine Hat you meant to put in with the rest. Now, would that reflect this plus 4 per cent, or would that put that over now, further than that?

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: I'm sorry; I don't have those figures with me right now.

Mrs. Day: Okay.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: I've got them. I'll try to find them while I ask Ms Livingstone if she has any comments.

Ms Livingstone: I just had one quick question. First of all, thank you very much. This is a tremendous amount of work you've done. I was just wondering which population figures you used for your calculations.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Sorry. I have my booklet over here.

Ms Livingstone: Is it municipal data, or is it federal?

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: No, it's municipal.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. It's Municipal Affairs' 2016 population list.

The Chair: And that's the potential . . .

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: It's Municipal Affairs' 2016 population list.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Just so you're aware, because we need one data set for the whole province, we are using the federal census. Sometimes those are close. Sometimes they're a little bit different.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Oh. Right.

Ms Livingstone: To the extent in our final report that you see something different than what you've proposed, it may be because the population figures we're using don't allow this exact design, but this certainly gives us a different template to try as we do our work, so I appreciate that.

Thank you.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

Ms Munn: With respect to Medicine Hat, given that the whole city can't comprise a constituency and it has to be split, do you favour one urban and one blended, or would you prefer two blended so that the city is divided equally into its surrounding rural areas?

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Well, I think the commission suggested two blended, two suburbs, right? This suggestion is to . . .

The Chair: No. One totally Medicine Hat and one blended.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Oh. Sorry. Okay. Then that is similar.

Ms Munn: Right. Okay.

The Chair: All right. Thanks very much. I won't stop to try to find those population figures right now, but thank you very much for your presentation.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Dr. Muendel-Atherstone: Do you want a copy of my presentation?

The Chair: Please. Yes. If you could maybe give it to Mr. McLeod, who has volunteered to be our registrar, kind of. He didn't volunteer, but I volunteered him. He'll make sure that that's an exhibit to your presentation.

The next presenter is Maria Fitzpatrick.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Good afternoon, Madam Chair and fellow commissioners. I'm Maria Fitzpatrick, and I am the MLA representing Lethbridge-East. However, I will talk about Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West. My presentation will be short because I certainly agree with the recommendations that you have provided for Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West.

I'll begin by commending the commission on the work they have done with a fairly daunting task. It appears from my review of the full report that you have used population equality as the primary goal of this work. I believe that in both Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West this presents an excellent delineation within the current boundaries. There is a reasonably clear division between Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West that respects the natural division created by the city's many neighbourhoods and major traffic routes. With populations of 46,204 and 46,525 respectively, these numbers are virtually at the provincial average for constituencies and allow for the expected growth of the city.

The constituency of Lethbridge-East includes some 19 schools; the Chinook regional hospital; 10 long-term care facilities; numerous seniors' housing facilities; Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre; 26 churches; a multitude of city parks, including Henderson Lake; the Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden; two major golf courses and the exhibition grounds; Lethbridge College; a number of ethnic facilities; and two fire halls. Lethbridge-West is almost a mirror of this with the exception of no regional hospital.

I've asked many of my constituents, since I knew this was going to happen, about how they felt about the electoral boundaries and the commission's review. They are adamant that there be no changes to the boundaries of my riding or Lethbridge-West. From my perspective, I would not recommend any changes to the boundaries of either constituency at this time.

I also looked at the immediately surrounding constituencies of Little Bow and Cardston-Taber-Warner. I see that there are a number of changes which, in fact, do not affect the constituencies of Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West. I see the logic of the recommended changes to the other constituencies so that the constituencies are better represented. As they have no impact on Lethbridge-East or Lethbridge-West, I will not provide further comment except one little thing, and that is that, on a personal level, I would like to see that Piikani is included with Kainai-Cardston. I'd like to add that I am supportive of the efforts to ensure that the indigenous communities are amalgamated as communities of common interest for the purpose of representation, increasing political influence for our indigenous people in Alberta.

That is my presentation. Thank you very much for allowing me to do this for you.

The Chair: Thank you.

So am I to interpret your last comment as that you support our proposal for the Cardston-Kainai constituency?

Ms Fitzpatrick: I do.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just going back to the last presentation, my population for Medicine Hat is 63,260 people, based on the 2016 census, so it's right in the middle. It's one and a half constituencies.

I'm going to turn to Ms Livingstone and ask if she has any questions.

Ms Livingstone: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Munn.

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

The Chair: Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Day.

Mrs. Day: Thank you for being the easiest constituencies to figure out in all of Alberta. It was, like, check mark, done that one.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Well, the line is almost right in the middle. Thank you.

The Chair: It did work out that way. Thank you for your kind words. It's always nice to hear things like that. Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

The Chair: Our next registered presenter is Colette Smithers.

If everyone could start off by giving us the constituency in which they live.

Ms Smithers: Madam Justice, members of the commission, good afternoon. My name is Colette Smithers, and I am representing the Alberta NDP Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat constituency association.

Firstly, I would like to thank the commission for its work as I don't think any boundary commission has ever completely satisfied everyone, and it's a job which can certainly draw out the passion of constituents. Speaking on behalf of the constituency association, we provide our submission to the commission respecting the principle of voter parity and fair representation.

With respect to Medicine Hat may I bring to the attention of the commission page 57 of the interim report, the paragraph that starts to speak about Medicine Hat? The paragraph says:

It is recommended that the "toe" found in the southeast corner of Medicine Hat (north of the Trans-Canada Highway) be removed from the electoral division of Medicine Hat and be added to the electoral division of Taber-Vulcan.

That particular toe is currently in the Cypress-Medicine Hat riding.

The Chair: It's already there.

Ms Smithers: Yes. The discussion, as we understand it, in the boundary commission is to opt that toe, which is option A in your report, into the riding of Medicine Hat.

The Chair: To take it from what's now Cypress-Medicine Hat and put it in Medicine Hat.

Ms Smithers: Move it into Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Smithers: We believe that the recommended boundary change to the Medicine Hat riding as proposed in that option A is appropriate. By including the communities within what the interim report describes as the toe, Medicine Hat remains an entirely urban riding and sits right at the provincial average population.

1:30

While the historical component might not be one of those principles you look at, it's incredibly important for those of us who call Medicine Hat home. Since 1905 Medicine Hat has been its own riding, with the brief exception of the short-lived Medicine Hat-Redcliff riding in the '70s, but that is an exception in name only as the only thing that separates the two ridings is a road.

Medicine Hat is unique in many ways as a municipality. Its city-owned gas utility is the oldest continuously operated driller in the province, and the city still maintains direct ownership of its utilities, one of the few on the continent who does. This requires exemptions under provincial legislation.

Having an MLA dedicated to the Medicine Hat constituency is invaluable and absolutely necessary to deal with this specific issue along with other issues that derive from a city which is unique in many ways: possessing its own municipal wind farm located within city boundaries; issuing energy efficiency rebates through its own version of a carbon tax; as well, concerns which affect a city of 63,000 citizens hundreds of kilometres removed from a similar-sized municipality. It can't be stressed enough that while Medicine Hat is in a fairly remote corner of the province, it is, in fact, a city with all the specific issues that come with an urban municipality. These stand in stark contrast to those found in a rural area.

With respect to Brooks-Cypress, by far the biggest thing which comes to mind regarding this proposed boundary is what is being said in the current Cypress-Medicine Hat constituency regarding the connection between these communities. In reference to the federal electoral boundaries commission of 2014, keeping these two communities together at least appeared to be something that many constituents wanted, citing the historical as well as current connections between the communities as the reason. However, despite submissions and input from the constituency and elected representatives that argued for keeping the constituency intact based on a strong community of interest in terms of economic, cultural, social, education, and health linkages, the commission, in fact, did separate the communities of Cypress and Brooks prior to the 2014 election.

Notwithstanding the connections between Cypress and Brooks, we, the Cypress-Medicine Hat constituency association, recognize that there are legitimate concerns with the commission's proposed Brooks-Cypress and Taber-Vulcan boundaries, one of which is splitting a rural municipality like Cypress county. To that end, our constituency association would encourage the commission to give consideration to the map presented by the first presenter, Bev Muendel-Atherstone.

Our constituency supports the proposed Cypress-Medicine Hat redrawn boundary, which includes the county of Warner, as it maintains the integrity of the county of Forty Mile and Cypress county while also reflecting a balance in the population goal of each new riding. This proposed boundary takes into account the agricultural and socioeconomic dynamic of Cypress county, the county of Forty Mile, and Warner county through the grouping of industries connected to irrigation and ranching. This boundary also closely matches that of the federal riding of Medicine Hat-Cardston-Warner. In addition to maintaining the integrity of the rural municipalities, the proposal also encompasses the boundaries of several irrigation districts and school boards.

We believe this proposed reorganization of southeast Alberta connects communities across social, economic, cultural, education, and health linkages while also respecting the principle of voter parity, fair representation on which the commission is established.

Thank you so much for your time today.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to take this opportunity to ask you about one of our questions upon which we have invited special public input. That is in regard to our option 2, or option B, for dealing with Medicine Hat and Taber-Vulcan, and that is to make two blended constituencies. Now, I know you're saying that you like the totally urban model, but many people favour making two blended constituencies, each containing part of Medicine Hat and then spreading out in a wedge shape. The immediate advantage is that you don't get a constituency geographically as large as Taber-Vulcan. Each of the two constituencies would be roughly half that size geographically. It also, on my rough look at the map, gives you your second wish because it would put Taber-Warner back into the constituency where you want it to be, with Brooks. What's your view on that proposal?

Ms Smithers: Our preference, Madam Justice, is not option B. We believe that because of the unique personality of Medicine Hat, if you will, that I talked about in my submission, based on those criteria, we feel the benefit is to retain Medicine Hat as an urban riding.

The Chair: Even though this other proposal would deal with your wish regarding Taber-Warner? It is a balancing act, for sure.

Ms Smithers: It is.

The Chair: All right. I'm going to ask Ms Livingstone if she has any questions.

Ms Livingstone: I have just one. Just on the off chance that the numbers don't work for the proposal that was made by the first presenter, if we had to shrink that Cypress-Medicine Hat riding down a little bit, if the population went too high, where is the best place, do you think, to do that? Would it be to the north side, the west side? Do you have any suggestions for what would be least disruptive, I guess, if we had to pull a boundary in somewhere?

Ms Smithers: I would hesitate to answer that question. Our submission was put together by committee, and there are certainly

people who could speak to that better than I can. I would suggest that the parties in Cypress county and Newell, Forty Mile, Warner, and even in the Brooks area would be better able to speak to how to reduce or where to make those changes.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.

Ms Munn?

Ms Munn: I have no questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: Yes. In our proposal – in our proposal – that we have put together for Brooks-Cypress, we did hear that Brooks has a very good working relationship with Medicine Hat. Would you agree with that?

Ms Smithers: Absolutely, sir. The connections between Brooks and Medicine Hat: there are college campuses, work relationships. There are citizens of Medicine Hat who commute back and forth to Brooks for work. We are certainly not denying the connections between Brooks and Medicine Hat.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. I'll sit that over there for a second. But then when I look at the Taber-Vulcan one that we've also produced, we have attempted in that one also to capture the majority in the southeast corner of those counties in there. Was that not part of this presentation, to capture those counties also in the southeast corner there, which would be Forty Mile, Cardston, and – what is it? – Warner?

Ms Smithers: One of the biggest concerns with the adjustment that the commission has suggested for the Cypress-Medicine Hat constituency is splitting Cypress county. Our urging is to keep that community together.

Mr. McLeod: Understanding that, but, again, it's like we had to explain yesterday. In the city of Calgary, for example, if you take something from someone, you either have to put something back or find it from somewhere else because it's almost like this domino effect. Where you start playing with things, certain things have to happen. Sometimes it doesn't work. Let's put it that way.

My last question. You saw on our slide presentation growth projections. Let's just take the southeast corner. Let's take Medicine Hat and the southeast corner up to Brooks right here. What do you see as the growth potential within this area as a whole?

Ms Smithers: Speaking of Medicine Hat, sir, our constituency, when putting our submission together, did attempt to find growth projections. Unfortunately, we couldn't find that information. With respect to Cypress-Medicine Hat and that growth forgive me; I am not an expert on that particular question. I would have to defer to one of our association members to speak to that. I'm certainly happy to gather more information on that if you wish, sir.

1:40

Mr. McLeod: No. That's fine. Just if you had something off the top of your mind. For example, when we see Airdrie, we see the 1,000 houses going in west of Airdrie. You can actually see that one. You're going, "Okay; two people for each house: that's a lot of people going in there," for example. I just wondered if there were projected housing projects that you know about. That's all. I see a lot of shaking heads out there, so I'm taking it that pretty much the status quo is what you're telling us.

Ms Smithers: Yes, sir.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate your time.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks.
Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: Thank you for your presentation. I, too, did some exploring on the Medicine Hat situation and wanted to ask you while you're here about having two blended constituencies with rural ridings around them rather than one urban and one part. If you take the whole of Cypress county, the whole of Forty Mile and Taber counties and the city of Medicine Hat, it's around 100,000. If you divide that by two, it's 50,000. I mean, I don't know where the dividing line would be, north and south, et cetera, but when you just do the simple math on that, it seems to me that it could work with two blended ridings. It would make the rural riding, that riding in the far southeast corner, less massive if we shared out, I guess you'd call it, the city of Medicine Hat within your region. I'm not sure we could do that without separating Cypress county because you're kind of doughnuttled by that county, so I think you couldn't necessarily keep Cypress county as a whole. It was just a thought that I was exploring, but I don't know if there's an appetite for that, and that's why we're asking for feedback.

Ms Smithers: Well, I think, solely speaking to the population question, to the numbers question, that option B, the two blended constituencies, certainly is favourable, but when you look at the other considerations like those we alluded to – economic, cultural, social, et cetera – it makes more sense to us, certainly because of the uniqueness of Medicine Hat as an urban municipality, to keep it intact.

Mrs. Day: Okay. So from your perspective, you'd rather have one whole urban riding and blend it with the rest.

Ms Smithers: Yes.

Mrs. Day: Okay. Thank you for your input.

The Chair: All right. Thanks so much for coming and making a presentation to us.

Ms Smithers: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Michael Ell is our next registered presenter.

Mr. Ell: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, Chairman, members of the board. My name is Michael Ell. I'm the mayor of the town of Strathmore, which is in the Strathmore-Brooks riding. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. As mayor of the town of Strathmore I asked our MLA, Derek Fildebrandt, to present his suggested outline for the electoral boundaries. This electoral boundary, as I said, is currently called Strathmore-Brooks. He made his presentation to Strathmore town council, and in the presentation that he made to us he also included the adjacent boundaries with his recommendations. After his presentation to Strathmore town council they approved my attendance here today to speak in support of his boundary proposal, which includes the town of Strathmore. Let me say that we have not confirmed his statistics for population in the new boundaries.

We have two concerns regarding the new Drumheller-Strathmore riding: first, the immense size of the riding; second, the population. Drumheller-Strathmore as proposed is a large, sprawling area. An MLA for this riding will have a mammoth task to carry out their responsibilities to meet with citizens and municipally elected

officials, in part because of the travel requirements. An MLA must be available to the citizens of a riding to address their concerns and to resolve their issues. Time spent on travelling is nonproductive. Because of the time committed to travel, Strathmore's citizens will be underserved in a new, proposed Drumheller-Strathmore riding.

The town of Strathmore council believes a riding with a population of 16 per cent more than the average in the province negatively affects our ability to meet with our MLA. The citizens of Strathmore deserve fair and equal representation in our provincial Legislature. An MLA representing a substantially larger population, 16 per cent more, seriously reduces their voice in our Legislature.

It is stated that the new riding will not see growth as other ridings will. I'm not convinced this is fact. I will agree that part of Drumheller-Strathmore riding may have below average growth. However, I believe Strathmore and its surrounding area will see more than average growth in the next few years. Strathmore and the surrounding area is recognized as a growth node. The Calgary Regional Partnership has information in regard to this. I say again: Strathmore will be underrepresented and negatively impacted.

Citizens and municipally elected officials need to be able to speak with their MLA to discuss concerns and to ask for representation in the provincial Legislature. Because of the geographic size and the larger population as proposed in the Drumheller-Strathmore riding, Strathmore citizens will have less opportunity to meet with their MLA.

One other item I will bring forward is the benefit of a good working relationship with neighboring communities. As an example, Wheatland county, Golden Hills school division, and the town of Strathmore are partnering in a kindergarten to grade 9 school with an attached recreation facility, a unique partnership. When communities have close working relationships, we achieve more. Wheatland county has expressed a desire to be represented by one MLA in the provincial Legislature. I understand why it's a benefit to the citizens and the elected representatives of Wheatland county to have one MLA representing them, and I support Wheatland county's desire to be represented by one MLA.

I'm asking for you to give favourable consideration to the recommended boundaries as submitted by MLA Fildebrandt for the Strathmore-Brooks riding. Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. McLeod, any questions?

Mr. McLeod: We've asked this question across the province, and I'll continue to ask this question. Do you think it's an advantage or a disadvantage – I know you may not want, Your Worship, to speak on behalf of Wheatland county – having two voices in the Legislature or one?

Mr. Ell: I cannot speak on behalf of Wheatland county. I just know that they have indicated that they have had a desire. They are, I understand, sending a letter. I will let Wheatland county speak for themselves.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. How far is it from Strathmore to Drumheller?

Mr. Ell: It's about an hour's drive if I remember right.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. And then Drumheller to Hanna?

Mr. Ell: Drumheller to Hanna is likely another hour.

Mr. McLeod: All right. No, I'm – go ahead. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Day.

Mrs. Day: There are questions, but I guess we'll wait to see Mr. Fildebrandt's mapping. There are questions in my mind, but I thank you for your time and for voicing your opinion on this.

The Chair: Ms Livingstone.

Ms Livingstone: No questions for me. Thank you.

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

The Chair: Thank you so much for coming. You're the warm-up act for Mr. Fildebrandt, but we're not going right to him. We're going to the next registered speaker, Kris Samraj.

Mr. Samraj: Hi there. My name is Kris Samraj. I'm a librarian with the Medicine Hat public library, and I live in Medicine Hat. I'm here to give specific input that was asked on the question of whether to have two blended ridings in Medicine Hat and Taber-Vulcan or a largely rural one and an urban one.

1:50

I read your report. It was very interesting. It helped me really understand some of the things that you look at when you're making these decisions. I understand that voter parity is the main factor in drawing these boundaries but that it is not the only factor. Part of effective representation has to do with equitable work. Now, a lot of the people that have come up here before have talked about the culture of the constituency itself. I'm going to take a slightly different tack and look at the work of the MLAs as they serve these ridings here.

In your report in a number of places you talk about the different expectations for work for a rural and an urban MLA. Part of the reason for that is that you're trying to compare the workload for each of these. Travel time is definitely a challenge for rural MLAs, but in the report you've cited some other comments from urban MLAs about the different complicated work that they might have as well. I mean, it's kind of complicated because you're comparing apples to oranges in some way there. However, in this case you don't have to have that dilemma of trying to make sure that the rural MLA in Taber-Vulcan as opposed to the urban MLA in Medicine Hat have an equitable workload. If you went to the blended ridings, they would be two very similar ridings both in geographic size and in demographics. I think that should be an important point there. In this case, also, if you go to two blended ridings, it doesn't affect any other ridings, so it should be a fairly easy change to make from your initial proposal.

The second point I have is the question: how big is too big geographically for ridings? We all understand that people are leaving rural areas to go to urban centres and the challenges that has for the rest of Alberta in trying to draw these boundaries. On page 18 the report concedes that at some point a riding can be too large to manage. I have a question for you. How do you know at what point a riding is too large to manage?

The Chair: Well, maybe I'm burdened, but I'm a judge in Nunavut as well as in Alberta, and it's one riding. It's as large as China. That has maybe given me a distorted view of what travel time problems are. In the past ridings were kept smaller because people had to travel by horse to get around the constituency. We've, fortunately, been able to abandon that concern as ability to travel has gotten better. Looking at things like roadways and telephones and cellphones and other means of communication also impacts what impossibly large is.

I think the Court of Appeal said in '91 that the only reason to move away from voter parity was to avoid a riding that was

"impossibly large" or which cut up communities of interest. I think "impossibly large" isn't just geographic in nature, but it also considers these communication aspects. That's one of the factors we take into play. Looking at our recommended ridings, we'll see that Peace River is probably three, four times as large as our proposed Drumheller-Strathmore. I think it's one and a half times the size of the Netherlands. You know, we think that an MLA can effectively represent Peace River. The MLA who's sitting there now says, yes, she believes she can effectively represent her riding and talked about some of the strategies she uses.

You know, the size of Drumheller-Strathmore as we propose is virtually identical to the size of Drumheller-Stettler in terms of square miles. That's just my eyeball comparison. I haven't the skill to actually compare the size. You can't just say that because you're the biggest constituency in that area of the province, you're too big. There has to be more than that.

Mr. Samraj: I understand. I mean, it's a judgment call in that sense. I'm talking about Taber-Vulcan here.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. Okay. Well, the same with Taber-Vulcan.

Mr. Samraj: Right. It's a similar question.

I guess, when you visited Medicine Hat on January 26, you heard from a number of former MLAs and one sitting MLA. I think there were four former MLAs, and Drew Barnes was there as well. All of them spoke about the challenges of serving the current Cypress-Medicine Hat because of the size it was, and they all asked for the status quo. One of the main reasons that they gave for that is that the riding was already very difficult to serve. I think the words of the people who have actually served those ridings should carry considerable weight here. I mean, what the commission has done here – and I understand the reasons for doing that – is create an even larger riding in Taber-Vulcan than the current Cypress-Medicine Hat one. In this case, again, two blended ridings would mitigate some of these concerns. I mean, it's not a perfect solution, but at least it would speak to the valid concerns that the people who have actually represented these ridings have expressed.

Now, some of the strategies for managing the travel time in travelling these large ridings were brought up in the report. One of them was hiring a driver so you could work while you travel. The other one was talking about using the Internet or different new technologies to communicate with people throughout the riding. I have lived across Canada. I've lived in Victoria and Vancouver and Inuvik and Halifax and Edmonton and Lacombe. The roads in southeast Alberta are some of the worst roads, I mean, not the quality of the roads, just the weather on the roads. It has to do with the drastic temperature change. You know, we get freeze and melt. For large parts of the year travelling is dangerous here in southeast Alberta. So I think that if you're talking about MLAs working even if they're driven, it's not an ideal work environment. I drive a Smart car. If this meeting was held in January, I would have a very difficult time attending this thing. I think that's one part of it.

The other part of it is that through my work with the public library I work with other rural libraries in some of the small towns in southeast Alberta, and Internet access is not guaranteed in a lot of places. I mean, if you talk about some of these technologies as a way of communicating with your constituents, I'm not sure that we've gotten to that place where that's a good way to communicate with them.

I understand there are some difficult decisions to be made here. The other point I want to make is that there was an article in the *Medicine Hat News* that came out two weeks ago, and most local leaders, from the mayors to councillors, almost unanimously had

serious concerns about the proposed geographically large rural and single urban riding there. Now, I don't agree with everything that they do, but it does give me pause when there are such united concerns to this particular proposal.

I think the two blended ones, while not perfect, meet those concerns. It is a compromise between what you initially proposed and some of the concerns that we have here in southeast Alberta.

The Chair: Thanks.

Ms Livingstone, any questions or comments?

Ms Livingstone: I guess I'm just a little bit confused by some of the stuff you've said. You say that you favour two blended ridings, but then you said that we didn't listen to the MLAs who said that they didn't favour two blended ridings.

Mr. Samraj: I'm sorry. No. The concerns have to do with just the large geographic size. Maybe I misspoke.

Ms Livingstone: Because the option is that you've got an urban riding and a blended riding . . .

Mr. Samraj: Right.

Ms Livingstone: . . . or you've got two blended ridings. The consequence is that if you do an urban riding and a blended riding, the blended riding gets larger.

Mr. Samraj: I guess you're right. I mean, I guess what I'm trying to do is create equitable work for the MLAs of this region here. That's my overarching concern here.

Ms Livingstone: So what you're proposing is what the MLAs said that they did not favour in the first round of public hearings.

Mr. Samraj: Well, the MLAs favour keeping the status quo there, which I don't think is realistic given some of the changes that you outlined earlier there.

Ms Livingstone: I just wanted to be clear if you were saying that you were wanting us to follow what the MLAs said in the first round or you were wanting us to do two blended ridings, because those were not the same thing.

Mr. Samraj: Right. Yeah.

Ms Livingstone: You favour two blended ridings.

Mr. Samraj: Yes, I do.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Mrs. Munn?

Ms Munn: I have no questions. Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for your presentation and for coming here in your Smart car and delivering us a smart presentation. Anyway, I just had to say that.

I just really wanted to hear from you if the possibility was there – I'll back up for a second. I do understand what you are saying about the MLAs, that they were speaking about that difficulty of

serving such a large rural community. Three of the past ones, or whatever it was, spoke, and I do recall. I understand what you were saying earlier. But if you were to divide the city of Medicine Hat and make two blended, sharing out their population with the large rural ridings around them, which direction would you go, make an east-west or north-south?

Mr. Samraj: I don't have strong opinions either way . . .

Mrs. Day: Either way.

Mr. Samraj: . . . on how you would divide that, whether it's Medicine Hat east and west or Medicine Hat north and south.

Mrs. Day: I just was curious if there was a definite divide in the river or if there was something that stood out for you.

2:00

Mr. Samraj: Yeah. I mean, the river is a natural boundary for the city of Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Day: Okay.

Mr. Samraj: I have one more question. Your report states that the commission tried to minimize the number of blended ridings in Alberta. I was curious as to the reasons why.

The Chair: In the first round of public hearings everyone who contacted us in regard to the issue said unanimously: don't create blended ridings because it burdens the MLA by having to represent two dramatically different sets of interests, and the city set of interests are in competition with the out-of-city interests. Now, when we were here in January, Mr. Barnes said that that's not such a problem – I'm just recalling anecdotally – because the people who live in Medicine Hat city have great ties with the surrounding area. Perhaps they lived there prior to their retirement or whatever, and the views and values and culture of both areas are the same, notwithstanding that some people actually live in the city and some people don't. I think it's this view of not wanting to split the attention of the MLA between what are considered to be two such different communities of interest.

That said, we also say in the report that suburban blended ridings aren't such a concern because many people who live in Chestermere, for example, work in Calgary or who live in Sherwood Park work in Edmonton. Just because they're outside the city boundaries, it doesn't mean they have different views, values, and ideas. Where you have the blended riding, I think, is also a thing.

Mr. Samraj: Right. Yeah. I guess I would say to that: with so many people moving from the country to the city, you're going to have a lot of people in cities that understand rural concerns very well already. I mean, that should minimize some of that urban-rural divide that we talk about here.

Ms Munn: Another big concern with a blended riding is that if in the urban population – say that we took Medicine Hat, for example, and divided it in half and had 32,000 people in urban Medicine Hat, and then we topped that up with the rural surrounding. Let's say that's another 15,000, and then you have 47,000 people, right on the provincial average. How are those 15,000 rural voters represented in comparison to the 32,000 in the urban constituency?

Mr. Samraj: Absolutely.

Ms Munn: There is a big problem with effective representation for rural residents in a blended riding where the urban population is double that rural population.

Mr. Samraj: I understand that. I mean, look, rural voters are going to have a tough time in this regardless of which way you go. Because of the way that people are moving, they're going to be, you know, outvoted either in the Legislature or at the riding level. Then, at least, you have to think about which way is more preferable. I think with blended ridings you ensure more equitable work for the MLAs, which is very important, and I think it also helps people in those ridings look at their riding and say: "Yes, I'm here, but look at this huge riding I'm in. What do we have in common with each other?" I think it helps facilitate that communication between those two groups as well.

Ms Munn: Okay.

Mrs. Day: If I may, Chair. Thank you. We heard very strongly from the major cities of Edmonton and Calgary, and I will clarify: do not make us any blended ridings. Those larger metropolitan cities were very clear, and the people in them and the people around them are very clear. In the small cities in the rural areas of Alberta there was not so much, in my recollection, of that strict adherence to our boundaries. I think it's different in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and even Red Deer, perhaps. Red Deer worked out perfectly, just like Lethbridge did. I just wanted to say that.

I also heard, as very eloquently spoken, from a Sherwood Park MLA, who does represent part of the urban part of Sherwood Park and a rural area around it, that she felt she could bridge that gap very well. There was an interconnectivity that she found in doing both, and there was a better understanding of her position from being in parliament and knowing both sides of the lifestyle in that region. It can be done, has been done, is being done.

Mr. Samraj: Absolutely. I agree. I mean, I don't want to speak for how Calgarians or Edmontonians feel about blended ridings. The question was asked for specific input on the two blended ridings, Taber-Vulcan and Medicine Hat. I think my comments, you know, have to do with just my experience here in this riding.

The Chair: I wanted to conclude by thanking you very much for addressing your comments to one of our six specific questions on which we invited public input. This option wasn't so clear to us until we actually sat down with our cartographers after our last set of public hearings and we saw what the options were in Medicine Hat. Because this two blended ridings option hadn't been raised in our first public hearings in the area and when we were in Medicine Hat, we wanted to put it out there as an option. I'm delighted that somebody's answered that question for us, and perhaps we'll receive other specific answers and other specific views on that. Thank you for taking the time to respond to our request.

Mr. Samraj: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. Our next registered speaker, Barry McFarland.

Mr. McFarland: Good afternoon. Thanks for the opportunity to maybe not make a formal presentation as much as tell you a life experience, pass on a few stories, and ask a few questions. Please don't take anything personally.

I represented Little Bow for 20 years, 1992 to 2012, and I've gone through three of these iterations of electoral boundary reviews.

Every time I do, I have to remember that in the 20 years of experience I don't once recall one person ever coming to the office, writing a letter, or phoning to say that they had a concern with voter equality. Not once. In fact, I found that the larger the centre of population in any of the towns or villages, the greater the demand and the smaller the centre was, the small village and hamlets, the better their understanding and the greater their appreciation for the job you're trying to do for them. I always tried to remember that because in our case the riding changed from 1992 to 2012, when I quit. The geographic area almost grew by three times.

Today I'll have to tell you that I am not really enamoured with all the work that you've had to do to push a balloon to have the other side of the balloon pop out so that you can have a 3 per cent variance in the end result. When I look at the map back there, the existing boundary variance and the new one is a mere 3 per cent. And if I read your interim report correctly, it seemed that I was reading that you were quite happy with a variance of 16 per cent. I may have misread that, but I looked at Little Bow and I thought: "Hmm. Seems to me we're quite within it." And what about the 25 per cent? What about the 25 per cent variance?

Now, I made a submission in 2010. I brought copies, and I'm happy to leave them with you because what I had to say then probably applies to today.

I remember going to grade 6 classes in social studies. They studied municipal governments, and I refused to talk about party politics. I just wanted to explain to them what it was like to be an MLA, and of course the little boys wanted to know what kind of truck you drive. I explained to them that our riding was so many miles long, in our case about 200 kilometres, 120 miles, and it was about 150 wide. I'd say: "In an average year I'll drive between 80,000 and 100,000 kilometres. Now, I want you to do a little math here, kids. We're doing the speed limit at 100 kilometres an hour. How many hours is that?" Johnny would stick up his hand and he'd say: "Eight hundred." I'd say: "That's right. Eight hundred hours of driving. When you're bigger like your mom and dad and, hopefully, you have a job and you're working eight hours a day, how many work days is that? Do the math." One of them would say: "A hundred days." And I'd say: "That's right. I drive 100 days a year." One hundred days a year.

2:10

I have a rough count here. Over 50 elected towns, villages, counties, MDs, irrigation districts, regional school districts – and that didn't take into account a period of time when we had elected hospital boards – all wanted to meet with you. And guess what? You had to be in Edmonton some of the time for spring and fall session.

I remember sharing room space with some of the city MLAs, and it was interesting, the comments that they would have: "Oh, you've got 50? Well, we've got one city council. We've got a separate school board and a public school board. Oh, Barry, I understand you've also got the largest number of independent school districts in all of Alberta in Little Bow." They don't have school boards, but they sure want to see you. I remember one of the other comments that stuck with me forever was when a city MLA was a little bit upset with a constituent. He said: you know, most of my constituents can tell me who their school trustee is, who the mayor is, and who their alderman is, but they don't even know the name of our constituency, and they don't even know who the MLA is.

I don't know that I'm providing any real solutions here, but I'm really disappointed to see that you've taken or proposed to take over 6,000 people from the very north end of the county of Vulcan. It's a funny line. The township road 200 means nothing to most people, but it would take a village and a hamlet and the Siksika Nation of

over 6,000 and move them up into Strathmore-Brooks or whatever you want to call it today or tomorrow. At the same time, the county of Lethbridge, the mainstay of a lot of different activities, including a world-class research station, you're proposing to move into Cardston-Kainai. The effect of that is that you've taken over 13,000 people in the county of Lethbridge, split the county of Lethbridge, left part of it in Taber-Vulcan, and moved it down into Cardston-Kainai. Now, as I looked at some old returns or statistics from elections past, Blood reserve has, I believe, around 12,000 people.

The last election voter turnout was something like 6 per cent. Six per cent. In our riding I was always rather proud of the fact that we never fell below 54 per cent of the actual voter turnout. We had people who had to commute 60 miles round trip for advanced polls. We had in 20 years – I think this is a sad reflection on society in general although I was personally proud of having one of the highest voter turnouts, not to mention the majority of votes that happened to be for me. But at the same time, 5.4 out of every 10 voters chose to vote on average, and we were one of the highest. It doesn't speak well.

I guess the story that I want to leave with you is that when you extend Taber-Vulcan and want to run it to the southeast corner of Alberta down into Onefour country, and you want to come back across the bottom of the province against the U.S. border, and you propose to split the county of Warner, you propose to split the county of Lethbridge, you propose to split the county of Vulcan, and, incidentally, I believe in what's going to be called Chestermere-Airdrie you drop across a section of the Bow River into the northwest corner of the MD of Foothills. There's not even a bridge across the river . . .

The Chair: Just to interrupt, you must have been listening to our hearing yesterday.

Mr. McFarland: No.

The Chair: That was a proposal, but that's not our recommendation.

Mr. McFarland: Okay.

The Chair: Our recommendation was to keep Chestermere intact and to make Airdrie-Cochrane, but we heard, certainly, from the mayor of Airdrie yesterday about other options.

Mr. McFarland: Okay.

The Chair: But I'd simply invite you to conclude your remarks so we can get to questions.

Mr. McFarland: Sure. I can quit right there, if you like, because maybe I can answer the questions with the rest of my remarks. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. All right.
Ms Livingstone.

Ms Livingstone: I don't have any questions.

The Chair: Ms Munn.

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

The Chair: Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Day.

Mrs. Day: I'm certainly thankful that you came and shared your perspective, and I thank you for the years of service and driving time. Yeah. I just appreciate you coming today and sharing with us. You don't have a suggested alternate map or consideration?

Mr. McFarland: My alternate map: rather than all this work to change a mere 3 per cent, I think you need to really look at maintaining Cardston-Taber-Warner in some close iteration. I don't want to make anyone else mad here. I don't think I would be particularly fond of living here in Brooks and being jammed in with Drumheller-Strathmore. I think that's an issue you have to deal with. I think you've already addressed the Medicine Hat-Cypress county area, which I think you're aware probably has issues of its own.

Here are the copies, if you wouldn't mind, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thanks, if you don't mind.

Just while you're doing that, I will just try, for members of the audience, to say that we note that Little Bow is 19 per cent below the provincial average; Cardston-Taber-Warner, 11 per cent; Livingstone-Macleod, 12 per cent; Cypress-Medicine Hat, 16 per cent; Medicine Hat, 9 per cent; Drumheller, very close to the maximum, 23 per cent below. This wasn't our driving consideration although obviously certain people think it was. Rather, the Supreme Court of Canada has told us in starting our analysis that we have to look at what it would take to achieve voter parity and then decide whether that's a journey worth taking based on our application of the other criteria.

Unfortunately, the growth rate in this corner of the province hasn't matched the average growth rate in the province. We have taken this opportunity to draft a proposal that we hope will allow these new constituencies to exist for a long period of time and so that there won't be further consolidation next time this is done in eight years. Not by us; we won't be here in eight years, but whoever does it next. If the future growth rate in this area continues at the same rate as in the past, Drumheller-Strathmore, at 16 per cent above provincial average, will be right at provincial average eight years from now. We had a great example of that in Calgary-Hawkwood yesterday. They were 16 per cent above eight years ago, and they're at 2 per cent above right now.

You know, if Calgary just stopped growing, there wouldn't be a problem, but it does continue to attract people, and here we are. This approach is the approach outlined by the Supreme Court of Canada, and that's basically the underpinning for our thoughts in the interim report.

I'm going to call on Don Gibb, and after Mr. Gibb's presentation we'll take a five-minute break.

Mr. Gibb: First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity of making a presentation before the commission today. I was here I think about seven years ago and made a presentation at the last one, so I certainly appreciate this opportunity. My name is Don Gibb. I'm the mayor of the village of Rosemary, a very, very small municipality in the Strathmore-Brooks riding.

I'd like to sort of take a step back from what has been said so far. Rural Alberta and urban Alberta are completely different and should not be treated the same in terms of electoral population; at least I don't feel they should.

2:20

The urban centres have an abundance of human resources while rural Alberta contains almost all of the natural resources. You would be hard pressed to find any cattle, grain, oil, gas, coal, forestry, you name it in one of the urban centres, yet they're in great abundance in rural Alberta. The urban population continues to grow

rather significantly, and the rural population is decreasing, which means under the current process that the urban centres have an ever-increasing say about what happens in rural Alberta.

Reducing the number of electoral districts in rural Alberta and increasing the number of urban ridings is very much like pulling a rope around a pulley. If I pull it down one metre, it doesn't just affect this end; it also affects the other end. The other end goes up a metre, so the disparity is not one metre; rather, it is two metres, and the same thing is going to happen with the electoral ridings. When you reduce the number of electoral ridings in rural Alberta by three and increase the urban by three, the end result is not a difference of three. It is a difference of six. And that has a huge, huge bearing upon what happens in rural Alberta.

There are no better stewards of Alberta land than the landowners themselves. I personally believe that it is important for rural Alberta to maintain the say that it now has and not erode it further. I believe that it is much more difficult for an MLA to be responsible for people who are spread over a huge rural area with scattered centres of population than an urban centre where the population is very dense. Most MLAs of an urban riding can probably walk across their entire riding in about the same length of time that it takes a rural MLA to ride or drive across his. Because of the voting power of city residents governments readily hand out billions of dollars of public money to urban transportation while the importance of transportation routes in rural Alberta are minimized despite the fact that those very routes are the ones that carry the natural resources to market so urban residents can have jobs.

The less representation rural Alberta has, the easier it will be to ignore them. I would plead with you to retain the electoral boundaries and numbers as they currently are. If that is not to happen – and probably it won't – then I'd like to make a second plea.

To me, it makes no sense to break counties and municipal districts into parts contained in two or more electoral districts. The argument is that there will be twice the representation if two MLAs are responsible for the entire region. My contention is that all that will really happen is that small portions that are contained in different electoral regions will simply be ignored, and that I believe is what will happen with the county of Newell. When the southern tiny section of the county of Newell is shoved into another electoral district, it will simply be ignored because of the very, very small population. It is difficult enough to calendar meetings with one MLA, let alone two. In no way am I criticizing our MLAs. That is just the way it is when dealing with two very busy people. This complicates the affairs not only in the municipal district but also in the Grasslands regional district as well as the Eastern irrigation district. It fractures both of those as well. It is difficult enough to engage in dialogue with one MLA, let alone two.

My concern is not whether there is a Brooks-Strathmore riding or a Brooks-Cypress riding. My concern is that the entirety of the municipal district remains intact. Although I agree that a great deal of thought has gone into these proposed changes, they certainly seem to lack common sense in many ways. Looking at populations is important to a certain extent but should not take preference over the commonality of the regions of people.

Again, I would plead with you to retain the boundaries of the county of Newell as well as other municipal districts within the same electoral district. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Gibb.

Ms Livingstone, any questions?

Ms Livingstone: No.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

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

The Chair: Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: No. Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll now take five minutes.

[The hearing adjourned from 2:26 p.m. to 2:36 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, if we could get started again, that would be great. We're going to get going again.

Mr. Fildebrandt was next, but he's kindly allowed us to stand him down. We're getting a colour photocopy of his proposed map made in the hotel next door. I was hopeful we could have that, and that might make his presentation better for us to follow along. A picture is worth a thousand words, that sort of thing. So he's agreed to wait until we see if we can get that.

Meanwhile we'll call on Mr. Drew Barnes.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Well, good afternoon. I, too, would like to thank you all for your hard work.

I'm here with two overriding ideas in two areas I think I can help with. First of all, I absolutely agree with Commissioner Day's dissenting report that three seats should not be taken out of rural Alberta. Secondly, at our last meeting in January in Medicine Hat we clearly talked about the way that Cypress-Medicine Hat is now and the fact that it should be left as is with maybe a couple of small modifications we could talk about. Those are the two areas where I want to head.

Currently I am the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I do live in Medicine Hat. I guess to me what's kind of interesting is I think I live in that toe part of Cypress-Medicine Hat that's going to be moved into the Medicine Hat constituency. I never heard Ross Glen described as that before, but what the heck.

I want to talk about what I'm hearing from Medicine Hatters and Cypress-Medicine Hatters first. We have a big day tomorrow. It's two parties talking about getting together. But almost as often – almost as often – in Medicine Hat, which is four or five times a day, Medicine Hatters stop me and say how disappointed they are with this proposal, with the fact that Medicine Hat is only going to have one constituency with its name on it. Of course, now we're Cypress-Medicine Hat and Medicine Hat compared to the proposal of Medicine Hat, Taber-Vulcan, and Brooks-Cypress. It's a frustration, you know, being a leader in the province, being a similar size in the past to places like Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Airdrie, Sherwood Park, Fort McMurray, which all will still have two.

It was interesting to me – and I believe you've heard from all six of the municipal councils that I represent: the city of Medicine Hat, the town of Redcliff, Foremost, Bow Island, Forty Mile county, and Cypress county – their opposition to the changes. They preferred to leave it the way it was, to leave it the way Cypress-Medicine Hat was.

To me it's sort of interesting how long it took this to develop. When your report came out on May 25, there was a headline in our daily newspaper. I can't remember it exactly. It was the morning before the report came out, and it said something like: Medicine Hatters could be happy with the report because we're going to get three MLAs.

Well, when I first started to talk to people about this and they realized that actually we were going to be in bigger constituencies with only one Medicine Hat name of the 87 seats in the Legislature, the dissatisfaction really spread. I think that whatever the misunderstanding was around the way that came up, that was important.

I disagree with the earlier presentation from the NDP Cypress-Medicine Hat and Medicine Hat caucus that people want one Medicine Hat constituency of 63,000. Their first choice is to leave it the way it is. Their second choice is a blended constituency, splitting the city almost in half, and I have some ideas on that if you care to talk about that.

The Chair: You could have Medicine Hat on both parts that way.

Mr. Barnes: All right. Sounds good.

Anyway, back to Mrs. Day's dissenting opinion. Thank you for that. I a hundred per cent agree. Rural Alberta is where the primary industries are. Rural Alberta is our values and our base. As a few Cypress-Medicine Hatters have said to me in the last month or two: the way the province of Alberta is designed is that we don't have a check and a balance; we have one Legislature. Now, I feel the need to say: thank God that we don't have a Senate; we only have the Legislature. Therefore, it's important that the minority, in this case rural Alberta, have some extra say, some extra protection.

I'm going to bet that you know lots more about it than me, but the two court decisions that I'm aware that, yes, agree that all constituencies with the same number of people in them is a starting point, but I understand that Charlottetown versus Prince Edward Island and the 1991 Justice McLachlin Saskatchewan reference case clearly talked about the fact that constituencies don't have to have exactly the same number of people and that there are other important elements. As previous speakers talked about, they were very excellent in explaining how the size, the time loss, the different needs, the different numbers of school boards and municipalities that you have to represent are very onerous tasks for MLAs. For those reasons I would hope that the entire committee would pay a lot of close attention to Mrs. Day's dissenting report.

I want to talk, then, a little bit about, again, what some others are saying. Brooks-Cypress: I think I can help with a little bit of clearing up because I, too, was at that January meeting. One of the previous speakers mentioned how the federal constituency just took Brooks away from our federal constituency and added parts closer to the south of Lethbridge instead. At the time a lot of people that spoke to the federal committee were concerned, feeling that Brooks was a bit closer, Brooks was a bit similar, and, yeah, obviously, we were happy to work with people south of Lethbridge, but we felt that the history and the Brooks connection was a bit better. Well, the result was that that committee seemed to have a total deaf ear and didn't change it. That's why I believe that when you people were in Medicine Hat, the four or five people that did answer, you know, "What are we more like? Who would you rather be with?" – I recall your questions were: if we had to make Cypress-Medicine Hat bigger, should we add Taber, should we add Hanna, or should we add Brooks? I think that's why a lot of them suggested Brooks – okay? – because of a hangover from what had just gone on with the federal. I hope you recall that my answer was: no, leave Cypress-Medicine Hat exactly the way it was because we're close to the average with 42,000 or 43,000 people now.

I appreciate Mr. McLeod and others that have asked questions about growth and where the continuing growth is. Personally, I don't feel it's your committee's business to try to get this right for eight years from now and worry about urban growing more than rural. I think it's important to get it right for now. But if we're going

to talk about that, Medicine Hat up until three to four years was growing like crazy. We went from 45,000 to 60,000 people very, very quickly. Unfortunately, for us now we're only growing at about 1,500 people a year. But we have Desert Blume, which is part of Cypress county just to the south of Medicine Hat, which in the last seven or eight years has gone from no one to 2,500 or 3,000 people. Dunmore, again in Cypress county, which is on the east side of Medicine Hat and will be part of the new Taber-Vulcan constituency if you go ahead with your plans, has been growing like crazy as well, okay? So we have some opportunities for growth in our area.

2:45

But if we feel the need to make Cypress-Medicine Hat a little bigger – and I remember Ms Livingstone asking about maybe moving that line in Medicine Hat. I appreciate that this may change things to the north of me. I'd hoped you'd hear from those people. But I was wondering why you didn't consider just adding Oyen to Cypress-Medicine Hat. If you look at highway 9 and where the rivers are, that may be a natural to make Cypress-Medicine Hat slightly bigger. Anyway, I suggest that.

There are some other things that I feel the need to say. One of them is that two or three people have pointed out to me their opposition to this, and they're saying: how hilarious that Brooks-Cypress doesn't even include the Cypress Hills. The Cypress Hills are in the southern part of Cypress county. Of course, I believe you have a letter from the Cypress county reeve and councillors, that are absolutely opposed to Cypress county being split.

You know, there's a belief in Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat. We're very, very independent. We're very, very proud Albertans. We're very, very proud Canadians. We like to call ourselves the forgotten corner, and we carry that with pride. I made a note here that we're one of only two regions in the whole province that isn't covered by government-funded air ambulance. We raise our own money annually to the tune of \$700,000 or \$800,000 for an air ambulance service called HALO. People have said to me that this boundary review is similar to that. This feels like us being more of the forgotten corner.

I will also say that, again, I've talked to some of the councillors in the six municipalities that I represent, and they're not expecting a lot of changes, but they're hoping for them.

Again, in closing, I would ask you to consider not taking the three rural seats out of Alberta in general because of the fact that we don't have other checks and balances to protect minorities throughout Alberta. Secondly, I'm going to ask you to leave Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat exactly the way they are because of the size. I mentioned it in January in Medicine Hat. I believe I'm the MLA the second furthest away from Edmonton. The constituency is about 200 kilometres by 200 kilometres, with six municipalities and six or eight small communities that are just part of Cypress county or Forty Mile county. Of course, I need to represent them and hear from them, what their needs and their ideas are as well.

Unless you have any questions, I would ask you to please consider those two things.

The Chair: Thanks. I understand what you're saying and will definitely consider that. But I do have some follow-up questions in relation to other things you've raised. First of all, do you have any idea of what the population of Oyen might be?

Mr. Barnes: I believe there are some councillors here that would know. My guess is 1,200.

The Chair: Okay. Now, if we found that we had to go to your option 2, Medicine Hat-Taber and Medicine Hat-Vulcan, say, do

you have any suggestions for where the dividing line should be within the city of Medicine Hat?

Mr. Barnes: I do. A lot of people at your meeting in Medicine Hat suggested that the river was a natural. Of course, the north side of Medicine Hat – I'm sorry; I wish I knew better. I believe it's about 25,000 people, so that would leave about 40,000 on the south side of the river. We also cannot forget about Redcliff. Redcliff is six or seven miles kind of northwest of Medicine Hat. To me, you know, like, one of the quick thoughts is that if you decided to go with a fully blended, put the north side of Medicine Hat, north of the river, with Redcliff and Forty Mile county and then all of Cypress county with the south side of Medicine Hat. Then I'm going to bet you that that's an area that'll get you very, very close to two constituencies with 49,000 people. I'm sorry. I haven't checked the numbers.

The Chair: We can work that out just conceptually. All right. Thanks.

Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: No questions from me.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

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

The Chair: Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: I understand where you're coming from, but does that not then divide Cypress county up also? It looks like it probably would divide that up at least once, maybe twice.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. I don't believe that Redcliff – yeah. Redcliff to Forty Mile county: they don't touch, for sure, so there would have to be some corridor or something.

Mr. McLeod: Yeah. But Cypress goes basically almost all the way around Medicine Hat, doesn't it?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, it does, and Redcliff as well. But, again, working with the current things, maybe there's a way to put Cypress all with one side of the city. Somebody would have to look at the numbers.

The Chair: How many people live in Cypress? I bet you know that one.

Mr. Barnes: I think it's 8,000 or 9,000.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: Thank you for your presentation. I was going to ask the same question: where would you suggest that it divide? Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Great. Thank you, all.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

All right. Do we have those photocopies? Okay. It's on its way, apparently, from next door.

We'll move on to the next registered speaker, Molly Douglass.

Ms Douglass: Hi, everybody. I've been sitting here so long that I sort of forgot why I was here, and I heard my name. I'm not dissing you. Thank you for being here. My name is Molly Douglass. I'm reeve of the county of Newell. That is in the current Strathmore-Brooks riding. Going forward, we would be in the Brooks-Cypress riding for the most part, with a little piece of us pulled out south to Taber-Vulcan, which is why I am here today.

The county of Newell council would like to first acknowledge the challenges of your task as members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. We thank you and also appreciate that you have come today to our friendly and diverse city of Brooks in our Newell region to listen and learn. On behalf of our 10-member council and their communities I present with one purpose in mind, and that is to keep our county's boundaries intact, whether it be in Strathmore-Brooks or Brooks-Cypress. It is to be noted that we understand our present MLA's position, which also supports our desire to remain intact.

I will speak first to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, the guiding legislation, which four times mentions relevant considerations for determining the area to be included in and for fixing the boundaries of proposed electoral divisions. Section 14 lists the eight items that shall be considered. I will touch on those that specifically speak to keeping our county in one electoral division.

The first is effective representation, (a), which, of course, must be balanced with the population of a constituency. To have a group of our county residents removed south across a natural boundary, the Bow River, in order to better balance population does not translate to effective representation for those residents. The population numbers should not be the critical fact in overriding this effective representation consideration, which is lost in becoming a small, outside part of a large new electoral division.

Common community interests and community organizations, (c), another relevant consideration, are a key part of our Newell region's achievements. Our eight county hamlets with their outlying rural areas; our mini munis of Bassano, Duchess, and Rosemary; our large urban, Brooks; and our Eastern irrigation district endeavour to work as a region however we can, recognizing as a guiding focus that all taxpayers deserve the provision of efficient and effective services.

Regional partnerships have assisted us to implement infrastructure systems such as the Newell Regional Services Corporation, which is a supplier of potable water to all residents within our Newell community. Having the availability of potable water at my home out in Red Deer River ranch country that is treated in the city of Brooks 75 kilometres away speaks to the success of our largest regional initiative. Understanding that collaboration and co-operation are of much benefit and that all of our residents are in this together, regardless of where they live, has become an accepted way of thinking within our Newell boundaries.

2:55

Because small municipalities struggle to survive, our approach has been to provide staff wherever helpful as well as to financially support all of our municipalities within. Over the last nine years just over \$14 million has been given to our municipalities and hamlets for regional enhancement. This doesn't include fire, recreation, economic development, waste management, libraries, or other joint services.

When the village of Tilley chose to dissolve in 2013, the process was positive, fair, and speedy, unlike many dissolutions that are a struggle. Just last month the town of Bassano asked for our assistance to provide them with an administrator. In order to help out our neighbour, one of our county staff was quickly put in place with the support of her colleagues. These are only a few examples of work carried out with community in mind.

Our desire to be part of only one electoral division remains stronger than ever due to our regional accomplishments and our regional identity. Backing our request to keep us whole is also the relevant consideration of existing municipal boundaries wherever

possible. We say that it is possible in this case and really is important to us.

Common sense supports the “desirability of understandable and clear boundaries,” which is item (h). What is even more important is engaging citizens in the democratic process. This becomes difficult with anything that complicates the system. It is incumbent upon all of us connected to government in any way to work to make things clearer for our ratepayers. When your neighbour across the road in a rural municipality goes to a different location than you do to vote for a different MLA, “clear” and “understandable” do not come to mind. Where this can be fixed, it needs to be.

Indeed, as a commission you have written on page 27, paragraph 4 of your report that your authority to create “electoral divisions with populations of up to 25% above or below the provincial average . . . can be used only where . . . factors in s. 14 of the Act and other relevant factors support over-representation.” What we are requesting makes little difference in the variance or numbers in Brooks-Cypress or in Taber-Vulcan. Indeed, the geographic size of the proposed Taber-Vulcan – fewer constituents might be quite appropriate.

On page 61, paragraph 3 of the interim report you reference keeping “Flagstaff County intact as it is doing significant work related to inter-municipal partnerships and is considered a template for regionalization.” This clear acknowledgement of recent regional initiatives in one location can certainly be considered in another, our county of Newell, where it has been occurring for many years and recognized by present and past provincial governments.

That’s basically my presentation, but I was interested in listening to Madam Justice Bielby’s comments at the start of today where she spoke of aiming not to cut up communities of interest, not to cut up any villages and towns and sort of felt – I heard pride in her saying that, but I think that the rural municipalities are just sometimes not looked upon as as strong or as important, as a community, as a village or town. We’re just bigger, and we do have identities, and we are proud of those.

I believe people should be able to identify their constituencies. We’ve been east. We were part of the Bow Valley constituency, the county of Newell, prior to 1996, and after that we went west to Strathmore-Brooks. So we’ve been east, and we’ve been west. We don’t much mind where we are, but we really want to be intact as a county and as a community.

Thank you.

The Chair: Following up on that, because we’d like to keep you intact, too – we just didn’t know – am I correct in understanding that the bit of the county of Newell that you say is in Taber-Vulcan is right about there?

Ms Douglass: No.

Mr. McLeod: It’s straight south.

Ms Douglass: It’s the southwest . . .

The Chair: Oh. It’s the other corner. Okay. Would you do me a favour and come up? This is what we were doing all day yesterday in Calgary. Could you mark on the Taber-Vulcan map exactly where the boundary of the piece of the county of Newell that you . . .

Ms Douglass: Want back?

The Chair: That you want back. Yes. Exactly.

Mr. McLeod: If I may, the river is the Bow River, correct?

Ms Douglass: Yeah, the Bow River. It’s Bow City, Rainier, Scandia, Rolling Hills. It’s the county line, right here.

Mr. McLeod: It’s the county line.

The Chair: Does the Bow River work?

Ms Douglass: The Bow River works.

Mr. McLeod: The Bow River works. Okay.

The Chair: So this part here is the part that you want back into Brooks-Cypress?

Ms Douglass: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Douglass: It’s just the county of Newell.

The Chair: You bet. Can you guess – and I’m sure it would just have to be a guess – how many people reside in that area right now?

Ms Douglass: We did, yes. We’ve had a couple of different numbers. We’re going to settle on about maybe 1,400, which seemed high to us. The biggest community is Rolling Hills, with 200 people in it, so I’m not sure.

The Chair: Okay. All right. Thank you.

Ms Livingstone, any questions?

Ms Livingstone: No, just a curiosity. Did the county of Newell make a submission in the first round of hearings?

Ms Douglass: No, because we didn’t know that we were going to be separated into two, so we just thought life was grand.

The Chair: You were a risk taker.

Ms Douglass: You know what? No.

Ms Livingstone: I was just curious. The reason Flagstaff is mentioned is because a lot of people from Flagstaff came to tell us about their regional partnerships, so we were aware of what was happening in that region and were able to take it into account.

Ms Douglass: We just assumed, Laurie, that we were so famous that you all knew about our accomplishments, so, no, we did not submit.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. I just wanted to make sure because I didn’t remember a submission from Newell county, but I appreciate that you’ve come to give us your input this time. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Munn.

Ms Munn: I don’t have any comment.

The Chair: Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you. You answered my question in regard to the county and, I’m sure, Mrs. Day’s also on how the county went. I’m fine. Yes.

Ms Douglass: You can get it fixed, right?

Mrs. Day: Therein lies some of the struggle with working with our mapping, having the provincial map of the ridings and then, you

know, trying to have an overlay. Can you imagine? Well, you can see this one.

Ms Douglass: I can.

Mrs. Day: Having an overlay with where the county lines were would have been really helpful. We're, you know, working on that.

I wanted to go back to your comments about rural municipalities. Perhaps I'm putting on a bit of my past county councillor hat, but rural municipalities being considered as a community aren't as equal to a neighbourhood in a city riding. Because we've had to learn to work regionally, like you've mentioned, that really knits that together even further, I think, in perspective. You're describing something that rings true to me. I just wanted to thank you for that and if you have anything else to add to that description of either a municipality but also a neighbourhood of influence.

Ms Douglass: Yeah. Absolutely. I think, though, that we need to start thinking a little bit beyond all of our boundaries, whether we're rural or urban. I mean, we have the city of Brooks within us that is sort of a rural, for sure. I've been around for 13 years with municipal government. In the past there's been way too much headbanging and ego butting probably more than anything, and people haven't learned to get along. Urban and rural have to learn to get along. That creates neighbourhoods and communities, and that's what I believe we've done in the county of Newell.

Mrs. Day: Yes. Right.

Ms Douglass: I'm very proud of it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Douglass: You're welcome. If I can help you fix up anything else, just let us know.

The Chair: We love little jigs and jogs because, you know, they're a little easier to address than some of the larger issues.

All right. We have now Mr. Fildebrandt's materials, and I invite him to come forward.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you very much. I'm Derek Fildebrandt. I'm the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks. I want to welcome you here and thank you very much for all the work you're doing. It's been said before that this is a thankless task no matter what. You'll be very lucky if you get 51 per cent of the people being happy with what you're doing. I understand that if you push one side in, something else falls out the other, so I understand how difficult your task is, but I want to work with you as much as possible.

3:05

The comments of Mr. McFarland, the former MLA for Little Bow, really struck a chord with me. I thought I did a lot of driving. I do relatively little compared to him. I did work out the math, and I do the equivalent of 62.5 workdays a year of just constituency travel. It's quite a bit. We can make phone calls. I utilize technology, I'm guessing, a fair bit more than Mr. McFarland did. I'm serving at a different time and different generation. But even with the significant use of technology that my office, my organization makes, it is still woefully inadequate. One of your presenters came here in a Smart car. I came here in a truck with jerry cans of gasoline and blankets because of the distances that I travel.

As proposed by the commission, I know you're trying to – I do agree with the comments of Mr. Barnes about rural Alberta losing

constituencies. I understand the need to balance population. He also referenced a Supreme Court case, yet you need to balance population also with effective representation. Those are often competing interests, and finding the balance is difficult. I appreciate how difficult it is for you to try and redraw this area with southeast, east-central Alberta losing a constituency and trying to get this right. My proposal to you, as you'll see, is trying to work with what you have done but trying, I think, to make it a bit more efficient, to actually better balance the populations than is being proposed, and trying to keep our municipal boundaries intact, as Reeve Douglass and others have talked about.

One thing I will note, though, is that as constituencies become increasingly large, safety for travel will be an issue. I won't get into it. There was an incident a year ago. The more travel MLAs do by the road, particularly in regions where roads become absolutely treacherous during the winter, safety will be an issue. But safety is not the biggest issue or consideration with my submission to you here. It is trying to better balance population and regional representation.

Right now there is quite a variation in our region, with Drumheller-Strathmore being 16 per cent overpopulated to Taber-Vulcan, being 11 per cent underpopulated. I'll begin with a critique of some of what you've done. Again, I'm trying to work with what you've done but trying to tweak it as much as possible here by going through the critique and then my proposed solutions. At 16 per cent overpopulation that's 7,500 people more than the average.

Now, traditionally I think the way things have worked is that geographically large constituencies are also not supposed to be large populated constituencies, that it would be one or the other. You know, you would have geographically smaller sized urban constituencies that are growing, obviously Calgary-South East being a growth region, but if you have an already large geographic area, that would also not be overpopulated at the same time. That is an extraordinarily rare, if ever done, thing when we're redistributing constituencies, and it's very much a point I want to emphasize.

With 7,500 extra people here, this is a town the size of Coaldale, Banff, Innisfail, Drayton Valley, or Drumheller added to a constituency. Strathmore-Brooks I've always considered a traditionally large constituency. I now consider it a very small constituency compared to what's proposed for Drumheller-Strathmore. I want to just really drive home that it is highly unusual historically and consistently with what's done in Alberta and in other jurisdictions, federal and provincial, to have constituencies that are large both geographically and by population.

Now, I know, Madam Chair, that you talked about the Peace River constituency, that it is larger, but it is also hugely underpopulated. When we have constituencies that are – that is also a special constituency if I'm not mistaken.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's not?

The Chair: It's 15 per cent below, so it would in fact have more people than Drumheller-Strathmore.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Fifteen per cent below?

The Chair: Fifteen per cent below is what our proposed would be, yeah.

Mr. Fildebrandt: But Drumheller-Strathmore would actually be 16 per cent over.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. Yes. Right now, before we do any changes, Peace River is 23 per cent below, and Drumheller-Stettler is 21 per cent below.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Compared to Drumheller-Stettler, yeah. I'm talking about what's being proposed, though. Peace River is absolutely a huge constituency, as the northern ones are expected to be. There are other very large ones there, too, but they're all underpopulated. They're not overpopulated. The two very large ones that are being proposed here, Drumheller-Strathmore and Drayton Valley-Rocky Mountain House, are both – Drayton Valley-Rocky Mountain House is 17 per cent over. Drumheller-Strathmore is 16 per cent over. I just want to really emphasize how extraordinary that is, against precedent, to have very large constituencies geographically and by population.

I'll move on from there. I want to echo what Mayor Ell of Strathmore said. Strathmore is a growth node within the Calgary Regional Partnership. It is growing at a very healthy pace, and I'm not entirely convinced that our population relative to the rest of the province's will decline by as much as is being estimated. As Mr. Barnes of Cypress-Medicine Hat said, redistribution should be primarily targeted, I think, to today, not eight years from now. We don't know what these constituencies are going to look like. We don't know how the economy will change, et cetera.

Now, Strathmore is culturally a mix of a small prairie town but also a large commuter population that works in the greater Calgary region. Drumheller is a badlands community, and it's largely independent of any other major metropolitan influence, and of course Hanna, Acadia, the special areas, and other rural communities are completely independent of any metropolitan areas.

The proposed Drumheller-Strathmore constituency would have 38 municipalities in it: six towns, 14 villages, 10 unincorporated communities, five counties and special areas, and one First Nation. This would make approximately 97 elected officials that the MLA would have to deal with. There are 87 members of the Legislature, so effectively if I want to have a municipal meeting, I should convene it in the Legislature and add a few seats to it when we get together. County lines are not kept intact. Northern Vulcan county is severed from the historic Little Bow constituency, which you're proposing be Taber-Vulcan, alienating those people from the MLA that represents the vast majority of that county. Stettler county is also divided from the rest of Stettler county and the town of Stettler, which is the obvious centre of activity, economics, and politics in the area.

Siksika Nation I'm a bit more neutral on. Siksika Nation could naturally be a part of either constituencies of the current Strathmore-Brooks or the current Little Bow or the proposed constituencies that you would make out of it. It has no natural boundaries since it straddles both sides of the Bow River, and culturally I think it has quite a bit in common with both Vulcan county and Wheatland county.

I would note that one of your earlier presenters said that the town of Gleichen is a part of Siksika Nation. That's factually incorrect on two levels. Gleichen is an unincorporated community and is a part of the county of Wheatland. It is very clearly part of Wheatland. It is not a part of Siksika Nation although, obviously, there's a great deal of trade and commerce that take place between the two.

Ms Livingstone: Yeah. I understood that comment to be culturally. I know that Siksika's offices are in Gleichen, so I understood that to be not municipal districts as opposed to closely associated.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Gleichen is a part of Wheatland county. Really, we should be trying to keep our municipalities intact as much as we

practically can, and separating an unincorporated community from its county, I think, would be quite damaging to it if that were to happen.

My opinion on Siksika Nation is that it could belong with either constituency appropriately. It's at home naturally with one or the other, but my proposal would be that Siksika Nation go with which constituency requires more population. As proposed, Taber-Vulcan requires significantly more population at 11 per cent under than Drumheller-Strathmore does at 16 per cent over. So my proposal to you would be, because I know that other changes could be made, whichever constituency is underpopulated relative to the other is where Siksika Nation should probably be.

Brooks-Cypress: my main critique there is that Newell county is arbitrarily divided, not on natural borders, not on political lines. There's no reason, I think, for it, and it's a relatively small population that's being taken away.

The Chair: I think we've got that one.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. I think Reeve Douglass's comments are quite to the point. I don't think I need to emphasize that much more, just that I really want to make sure that the county of Newell is intact, that all of our counties are intact.

3:15

Brooks could naturally be joined to Strathmore or Cypress county. As you said, we can go east; we can go west. It's not as unnatural a constituency, I think, as Drumheller-Strathmore is. My critiques on the Brooks-Cypress side are not as emphatic as on the Drumheller-Strathmore side.

My proposals. You might find it easier to follow along looking at the map that has been provided. That might be easier to follow along than the large amount of text I've included. You'll have to forgive my artistic abilities. The line has been drawn freehand. It's not exact, but I think you can very clearly get the point of what I'm trying to achieve there.

In general, my proposal would equalize populations of the proposed large southeastern Alberta constituencies. Currently the variance is plus 16 in Drumheller-Strathmore to negative 11 in Taber-Vulcan. Where possible I want to restore municipal boundaries and as much as is possible ensure that the communities have common interests.

The foundation of this, unsurprisingly coming from me representing Strathmore-Brooks, is to maintain Strathmore-Brooks, but the foundation for that is not just that I like my constituency; it is that Strathmore-Brooks is the only large rural southern constituency that is actually the correct population, largely due to significant population growth in Strathmore and western Wheatland county. That provides a foundation to build out from. I don't see there being a particularly good reason to break up a constituency that is already the correct population. Actually, it's over population, but over time maybe we'll be right around where we should be.

Strathmore-Brooks is a natural constituency. Both Strathmore and Brooks are of nearly equal size, although Strathmore will probably overtake Brooks in population at some point in the next few years. Wheatland and Newell counties, with their inlaid smaller communities, are of nearly equal size. This creates, I think, a healthy duality for the constituency, that no one side dominates another unreasonably, that both are treated equally and receive equal amounts of time, at least from myself. Both ends of the constituency are connected by a major and obvious trade corridor, the Trans-Canada highway. You couldn't get a large rural constituency that is better connected as a trade corridor and common community. Both the northern and southern boundaries of

the constituency have a natural barrier, the Bow River and the Red Deer River. Very importantly, this constituency is entirely intact. We are two counties with their inlaid communities put together that make the correct population without any need whatsoever for any divisions. They're completely watertight, as I put it.

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt to disclose why we put Brooks with Cypress, and we say this in our report. Concerns were expressed by people other than yourself that Brooks and Strathmore are not a natural mix. They're too different in nature to be adequately served by one MLA, notwithstanding your saying that you can do it. The view was that Brooks was more agricultural in orientation and a better mix with Cypress as a result of that. What's your comment on that?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I would say that even if that was true on the Brooks side, it would certainly not be true on the Strathmore side, connecting Strathmore to Oyen and Hanna, as far north as Stettler county and as far south as Vulcan county. So even if it was correct on the Brooks side, I think it would be quite incorrect on the Strathmore side.

Now, as I stated the last time I appeared before you, Brooks is more independent of any major metropolitan centre than Strathmore, Strathmore being part traditional prairie town, as Brooks almost entirely is, and Strathmore being part commuter town. Some of it, at least, is culturally within the orbit of the greater Calgary region or partnership. So I think Brooks could go either way. It could go to Cypress, or it could go to Strathmore. Either are natural fits, I think. I would say that at the very least they're not awkward or unnatural. Strathmore to Drumheller is not a radically unreasonable thing, but the further you get out – now, just as an experiment, if you look at the map, the far western tip of proposed Drumheller-Strathmore is closest on an east-west axis to British Columbia. The other end of it is Saskatchewan. So on an east-west basis proposed Drumheller-Strathmore stretches across more than half the province and is overpopulated. It goes from the town of Stettler in the north well into Vulcan county in the south.

I think, as I've said, the Brooks-Cypress constituency you've proposed is not entirely unreasonable, but I think the Drumheller-Strathmore one, I'll say, doesn't meet the mark. Feel free to interrupt me if you have issues as we're going. Strathmore-Brooks has strong population growth, particularly in the Strathmore area, so if Strathmore-Brooks is maintained, I expect that it will not at any time go below the average population of the province. If it does, it would be by a hair, but I don't believe that it will.

This proposal allows us to restore quite a few municipal boundaries. It restores Newell county intact. For Taber-Vulcan it would give back Siksika Nation and northern Vulcan county, which would far more than compensate Taber-Vulcan for the lost population without materially increasing the size of that constituency, which is also an extraordinarily large constituency. You would be trading geographic sizes that are roughly the same but giving Taber-Vulcan considerably more population into it than we're taking out by restoring Newell county to it. I'm trying to take a rather regional approach to this, understanding the domino effect of these changes. That would be for Strathmore-Brooks.

Concerning our neighbours, I would recommend taking, for lack of a better term, the rump of what you're proposing for Drumheller-Strathmore minus the – actually, I should add that it's not in my written submission. But I would return the remainder of Stettler county to the rest of Stettler county and the town of Stettler. So in Stettler-Wainwright I would try to keep that Stettler county intact, I think, as much as possible. I would recommend taking, for lack of a better term, the rump of Drumheller-Strathmore minus that

section of Stettler county and connecting it to at least a portion of the Cypress portion that you're proposing that Brooks be connected to. I believe that is a more natural constituency. The eastern parts of it, special areas and Acadia, have quite common shared interests with Cypress county and are within the eastern Alberta trade corridor.

It's a more congruently shaped constituency. If you could bring up the map for Drumheller-Strathmore here, I think we'll all agree that it's a mushroom. It's a bit of an odd-shaped constituency. I think we'll admit that most of them we try to make – I think the perfect constituencies are a quarter section. They're a perfect square, and we build out from there. Obviously, it doesn't work that way. But that is a particularly oddly shaped constituency. It's not particularly congruent. I think that if you can envision it, just take a slice out of the northwestern edge there where Stettler county is and take out everything south of Drumheller there in Wheatland county and Siksika and Vulcan and connect it down – you'll see on the map I proposed to you here – it's a more congruent constituency. It's a more wholesome shape.

Its population would be 10 per cent over the provincial average so still considerably higher than the provincial average although – again, this is not in the written submission – you may want to not move everything from that chunk of Cypress that you're proposing to move to Brooks. Some of the more Medicine Hat dependent areas, south of Medicine Hat, you may want to move that into Taber-Vulcan as well for population reasons. That's a possibility that I'd submit to you. But most of that Cypress area could be connected very reasonably with the Drumheller and the special areas.

This would not materially increase the size. Drumheller-Strathmore would not be materially different in size than Drumheller-Cypress. They would be roughly similar, but the populations would go from plus 16 with Drumheller-Strathmore and negative 11 in Taber-Vulcan and plus 2 in Brooks-Cypress to between plus 2 and plus 7 in Strathmore-Brooks, plus 10 in Drumheller-Strathmore, and I think minus 2 in Taber-Vulcan. This would better help to balance the populations. I know that's a major objective of this panel. I know that it would help to better balance your populations.

3:25

So on the Taber-Vulcan side, I think you can see, obviously, what I'm proposing to do here. My proposal would take it from negative 11 to negative 2, much closer to where you want to be, and it would not significantly increase the size of the constituency on a geographic basis as well. As I said, what I would be proposing to give back to Strathmore-Brooks with that part of Newell county would be more than made up for in population from Siksika Nation and northern Vulcan county, which I think the people of Vulcan – I'm not sure if there are any representatives of Vulcan here, but I know Mr. Schneider, the MLA for Little Bow, will speak to this. Keeping Vulcan county together is as important to me as keeping Newell county together. We could try to keep these counties together.

The Chair: If I can ask a question related. You've heard, I think, earlier the suggestion that we could make two blended constituencies out of our proposed Taber-Vulcan and Medicine Hat. If we were inclined to go that route at the end of the day, instead of having Taber-Vulcan there, you would have – I mean, I'm not sure what the actual name would be, but let's say Medicine Hat-Vulcan, which would be the top part, and Medicine Hat-Taber, the bottom part. How would that impact your suggestion? I mean, it would change things considerably.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. If that was the case, you might want to reconsider changes around Stettler county. I think it would be good to give Stettler county back in its entirety. Again, I'd like to see Cypress county kept together, but if you're intent on dividing it, I think the river outside of the municipal boundaries of Medicine Hat would be the best way to go. My proposal doesn't take into account the contingency of two blended Medicine Hat constituencies. Now, I can't speak for Hatters, but that's not an entirely unreasonable proposal, but it's not my place to say.

I think that if you're going to go that route of having a blended constituency, the entire thing is surrounded by Cypress, so Cypress would probably still be divided, then, in that case. You'd have two Medicine Hats and two Cypresses. You could still do that. My proposal doesn't take that into account, but I'm certainly happy to work with that idea. I think it's not an unreasonable idea.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. McLeod: Just so I'm . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm just about finished. Do you want me to just finish this first, or do you want to continue on this exact point?

Mr. McLeod: Go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. For Taber-Vulcan restoring Vulcan county, as I said, and for population reasons returning Siksika to its – Siksika Nation has traditionally been with Little Bow. Little Bow is, I think, one of the, let's say, granddaddies of Taber-Vulcan. I would recommend it for population reasons. Again, it could culturally fit with the Mossleigh-Arrowwood region in Vulcan county, but it could also equally fit with the Gleichen-Cluny region in Wheatland county. If you're trying to encircle it, as I see you are – and I understand the reasons for that – you're cutting up counties, so I would say that we have to kind of pick one side or another. Either Wheatland has got to be cut up, which obviously I would oppose, or Vulcan county has to be cut up, which I would oppose. I would say that we're probably not going to be able to practically encircle it, so I think that picking one side or another and not diving those counties – for population reasons, if you were taking my proposal as a whole, the Siksika Nation would be on the other side.

The only other thing I would say is that in the event that you do stay with Drumheller-Strathmore as a constituency, I would point out that they are the major population centres, but they are geographically a very small southwestern corner of it, and people in far-flung areas might not identify with the name of that constituency. Again, it's not in my written submission, but I'd submit that if you're going to go with a Drumheller-Strathmore riding, which, again, I'm not proposing you do, but if you do, a more appropriate name for it would be Drumheller-Strathmore-Badlands, which I just think is a cool name for a riding.

That's my formal submission.

The Chair: How about Drumheller-Badlands or Strathmore-Badlands or just Badlands?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I think Badlands is a pretty bad name. Actually, I like it, but I'm not sure how everybody would get it. I think including Badlands in the name, whichever way – Badlands on its own is not an unreasonable name. It's all within the badlands region, however generous we are with the term "badlands." Even though the population is overwhelmingly concentrated between Drumheller and Strathmore, so much geographically would be there that I would want them to at least be able to identify themselves

with the name of it. Special Areas is a bit of mouthful, so I think Badlands would be a good name.

Ms Livingstone: Not nearly as cool.

Mr. Fildebrandt: And not nearly as cool.

The Chair: All right. Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Yeah. Just two comments and one question. Well, no, one comment and two questions. Cypress county is being divided up again by your proposal; it's basically being divided in half again. I understand we're trying to maintain it, and we didn't quite successfully do that either, but it's one of the themes that I've heard today so far about the counties being kept together. So I'm listening to that, and then you're moving on to the northern boundary of Drumheller-Strathmore, as we call it. On your map it doesn't outline, and maybe I missed it in reading through this, but what would be the northern boundary if we just took what you're seeing there going north? What's the line? Where's the line, please?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. Sorry. Two issues, and I'll address them both if that's okay. I appreciate that we should really try not to divide county lines as much as possible. I appreciate that sometimes – Rocky View county has to be because it's so populated and has so many communities around it. Cypress county: if we could keep it together, I think we should. For my proposal I've just tried to work with where you guys have divided it although I would still try to avoid that as much as possible. Although I would say that it's, again, not in the written submission, you may wish to exclude Medicine Hat portions of that Cypress area, and you could move that into Taber-Vulcan, again for population reasons.

The Chair: If I can summarize . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

The Chair: You say that you want to put the rest of Stettler county back into Battle River-Wainwright or what we're calling Stettler-Wainwright.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

The Chair: So would that restore the northern boundary of what is currently Drumheller-Stettler?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes. The map is actually cut off, but I would propose that the northern boundary of either Drumheller-Strathmore or Drumheller-Cypress, whatever direction you go, take what you're proposing here minus the county of Stettler, that Stettler county be restored to its integrity because it's like we go right up almost to the edge of the town of Stettler. I'm sure Rick Strankman is going to speak to this, but that's a region that really kind of acts together and should be kept together. I really don't want to see them divided, but otherwise I propose that the northern boundary of whatever the constituency is, Drumheller-Strathmore or Drumheller-Cypress, be what you've proposed minus the county line of Stettler.

But just on the Cypress side . . .

Mr. McLeod: Which is roughly the Battle River.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Roughly, yeah.

Mr. McLeod: Up there.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. Your line right there, that you've drawn, minus the county of Stettler portion that you've included.

Mr. McLeod: The county of Stettler portion actually goes north of Stettler quite a way.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes.

Mr. McLeod: Paintearth and Provost and special areas are to the east.

Mr. Fildebrandt: All that would be included in whatever the Drumheller constituency is.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. I understand.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The whole northern area I would recommend to keep as you've said, minus the county of Stettler. That's my only proposal, because you've divided the county of Stettler. I'm talking about restoring it to its integrity.

Mr. McLeod: Yeah. Again, when we change something in one area, the sheer numbers will have a ripple effect on then what is currently Stettler-Wainwright. If you take the population of Stettler and all the area around the Stettler group out of there, where are we going to start bringing stuff in to keep the balance so we're not minus 25 or 20 or whatever? We can't do that. That's the other issue.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. That depends how far you want to go down with Cypress. If you took the Cypress portion that you're proposing to put with Brooks right now for that constituency, keeping Stettler would take you 10 per cent over population according to my numbers. I'm sure we'll probably have a little bit of variance.

Laurie is going to ask the question: where did I get my numbers from? But that's a question I ask all the time. Where did I get my numbers from? We used Google population. It integrates Google Maps with drawing on the maps, and also we used some municipal data. So I'm sure there'll be slight variations in there somewhere.

But, yes, it depends on which area you want to be more militant in cutting or not, in the south or in the north, about where that population would come from. But, broadly, the main suggestion is to restore Strathmore-Brooks, taking the rump of the Drumheller-Stettler riding and attaching it a little further south into that Suffield/northern Cypress area because that is all a single-trade, common-trade corridor, and they have a lot in common culturally.

3:35

The Chair: Anything else?

Mr. McLeod: No, no.

The Chair: Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: I thought it looked a bit more like a dinosaur, personally.

The Chair: That's what we were secretly going for.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It would be appropriate for the badlands. It includes part of Dinosaur park, so it's appropriate.

Mrs. Day: Yeah; there you go.

You touched on it just a minute ago, but just to go back to why the northern part of Cypress county would better fit with the Drumheller area and have more effective representation for those

people as opposed to having Strathmore with them, if the numbers could work – I don't know if they could work.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. I'm just talking about commonality. I think there are going to be problems regardless. I think that no matter what happens – I appreciate that if I was on the commission, I'm sure I would not be able to satisfy folks as well. There are always going to be trade-offs. But I think that in terms of areas that have a lot in common, as I said, Brooks could go either way. Brooks could go to Cypress very reasonably, but Brooks could also go to Strathmore very reasonably.

The problem is that Strathmore connected to Saskatchewan is not reasonable. You're taking a community within the Calgary Regional Partnership and connecting it to Saskatchewan and overpopulating that constituency to boot. I think that's the greater problem. Brooks-Cypress is not a problem; Drumheller-Strathmore is. I think the way to fix that is to take the existing constituency, the only one in the south that has kept its population sufficient to be maintained as a constituency and that has no divisions in municipal boundaries whatsoever, and use that as a bedrock to build out from there. In a balance of interests I think that's the best.

The Chair: Anything else?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Also, I would just add that it is of little political consequence. I don't want to get into it too much, but if we just look at the representatives of the entire region and what parties are represented, it is of zero political difference. We're not talking about combining ridings of different parties. I know that's not the issue of the commission here, but I would say . . .

The Chair: It's not something that we've considered at all.

Mr. Fildebrandt: No.

Ms Munn: I would like to follow up on that point. You've made a very good case for why your suggestion makes for very good, effective representation, and you've made a good case for why this suggestion is better than the interim proposal. One of the questions I have for you is: there are six MLAs, and all of them are your colleagues, so to what extent have you consulted with them? If there was agreement amongst the six affected by this configuration, then that would make an even stronger case for why this provides better representation for the people who live in southeastern Alberta.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you. I don't want to be too presumptuous of the positions of my colleagues, but I have extensively consulted with each of them on this. They'll all make their own presentations. It probably won't surprise you to know that most MLAs would like to maintain their constituencies more or less as they are, but I think you will find general agreement among – you know, Strathmore-Brooks borders Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Chestermere-Rocky View, Little Bow, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and Drumheller-Strathmore. We generally don't like that we're losing an MLA to another region to begin with, but if it's taken as a given that we are and that significant changes are going to be made, I think you will find agreement for the broad direction of what I'm proposing from my neighbouring MLAs. I don't want to speak too much for them here, but I will assure you that I've spoken to them and consulted with them in considerable detail. As much as possible we're trying to restore municipal boundaries here. Yeah, I'm just trying not to be too presumptuous. I can tell you that I've consulted extensively, and I've had no – some are in explicit agreement with me, and some at least do not object.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Livingstone.

Ms Livingstone: I just had one question, which is sort of a technical one. In terms of the piece of Cypress county that you're proposing would join with the Drumheller-Strathmore constituency, just looking at my map, is highway 884 the only point that crosses the Red Deer River, or are there other ways across that boundary of the river there?

Mr. Fildebrandt: My gut would generally say that as much as possible we should try not to cross – the river is a good natural boundary. I would add more orally to my written submission, that population pending, depending on if you do restore Stettler county or not, if you need the population, then you can go south of it, but if you don't need it, then I would recommend trying to keep the river as the natural boundary. I don't spend as much time in the Hat as Mr. Barnes, so I'm not sure where the corridor would be. As much as possible, though, it's generally good to not have to . . .

Ms Munn: I think we're talking about two different rivers here.

Ms Livingstone: It's the Red Deer River.

Ms Munn: Right. We're talking about the Red Deer River, and your proposal is bringing Drumheller-Cypress all the way down to Medicine Hat.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

Ms Munn: The Red Deer River is just above the old highway 884, so the question is: can you get across that river? We're not talking about the Bow down in Medicine Hat.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Normally when I'm crossing the Red Deer River, I take the highway that goes up through Duchess, straight up through Hanna. That's normally where I go. I normally don't cross the Red Deer River further east than that, so I can't say, but I know that when Mr. Strankman is up here, he'll be able to answer that question more adequately.

Mr. Barnes: There's a bridge on 41.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Yeah. Drew is right behind me.

Mr. Barnes: There is a bridge on highway 41. It's no problem at all.

Ms Munn: On 41. Oh, I see. Way over on the east side.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Yeah. I just remember someone telling us in the first round – and at this point I can't remember which area it was at – that there wasn't a way across the river, so it wasn't natural for us to attach Drumheller and Cypress. If that's not a problem, that makes that easier to consider, so thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming and providing your map, which has been very helpful.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: All right. Vic Budz.

Good afternoon.

Mr. Budz: Well, thank you to the commission for the difficult work that you're tasked with doing, and I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak.

My name is Vic Budz, and I'm the first and probably only educator that you're going to hear from today. I'm the board chair of Grasslands public schools. Our offices are here in Brooks, and our boundaries are actually coterminous with the county of Newell, so you can probably guess why I initially came here. It's with respect to keeping the county together rather than splitting it, and of course that makes sense in terms of considering municipal boundaries, considering the use of natural boundaries, setting constituency boundaries, and also in terms of common communities of interest. In rural areas, just as in cities, there are areas that you would consider to be a community, and the county of Newell and the Grasslands school division are such. We take pride in being part of the entire school division and, at the same time, part of the entire county.

You've heard quite a bit today about trying, as much as possible, to keep municipalities intact, and that's useful from a couple of points of view. First of all, it's much easier for county councillors to do their work effectively if they're dealing with one MLA rather than two or three. Well, the same thing is true for school divisions. In our case, since our boundaries are the same, it's a non-issue, but I'm sure that in other parts of the province it is, and I'm not sure if the commission has taken into consideration the boundaries of school divisions as well. As a school trustee – and I've been an educator for many years, and I've got a long history in the Strathmore-Brooks area. I began teaching in what was the county of Wheatland back in the early '70s, so I've lived . . .

3:45

Ms Livingstone: Sorry, Mr. Budz. I'm just going to interrupt you briefly.

Can I ask the MLAs at the back of the room to take your conversation outside? Thanks.

Mr. Budz: I've got a long history in the current Strathmore-Brooks constituency, having lived in the west part of the constituency at one point and for many years now in the Brooks area.

I've watched the sense of community develop within the school division after amalgamations in the mid-90s. Prior to that, when I first came to Brooks, I came to work for the Brooks school district, which was situated entirely in Brooks. Then we had the county of Newell education system all around us. To me, that never did make sense. The two school divisions didn't communicate all that much, other than a tuition agreement to provide some high school services in Brooks for some of the county students. That changed considerably after amalgamation. We became much more of a regional community, and that's become an important aspect.

It's been quite easy over the years, as a school division, to have one MLA to communicate with. As a school trustee I attend Alberta School Board Association meetings monthly in the south region, where there are 10 or 11 school boards that are part of the regional, and periodically hear comments of frustration where a school board is working with two and, I think, in one or two cases, three different MLAs because of the way the constituency boundaries run through their school division. As I say, as important as it is for municipal districts to remain intact through this process as much as possible, I would suggest that the same is true for school divisions, and hopefully, as you do your final deliberations, you give that some consideration as well.

As a school division, in terms of whether we're part of Cypress or Strathmore, that is not a big issue for us. There are some aspects of what we do educationally where we have a closer working

relationship with the Strathmore region. There are other aspects where we're more closely affiliated with the Cypress-Medicine Hat region, so that part is immaterial to us. The key issue, as I came here, was to explain how important it is to maintain the county of Newell as it is. At the same time, that maintains our school division as it is.

As frustrating as it would be for a school trustee to deal with several MLAs, I'm sure the same is true for MLAs. I think an MLA would prefer to deal with two school divisions rather than three. If the part of the county of Newell that's taken out with the current map – how much attention would one expect an MLA from an already large constituency to give to a very small number of people in our school division? Two schools, K to 9, a total of 200 students: I think we'd be hard-pressed to get much attention from the MLA of that constituency.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask my colleagues whether any of them have any questions or comments. Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: Nothing from me. Thanks.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

Ms Munn: I don't have any comments.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: I think you anticipated my question about the double MLAs. Thanks, anyway. Thank you very much.

Mr. Budz: All right.

The Chair: Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: It's good. Thank you so much.

The Chair: I have a good feeling about the possibility that your request might be granted.

All right. Sorry. I have missed Mr. Strankman, and I would ask him to come forward. Is he here?

Mr. Strankman: Thank you and good afternoon, Madam Justice Bielby. I appreciate the opportunity to present. I am and have been for two election cycles the representative of what's now known as Drumheller-Stettler. I appreciate your positions in making changes. I do also understand that for every action there's a reaction, so I am somewhat remiss to offer great changes because I know that for every consequence there's an unintended consequence, too.

I'm looking forward to your questions as we go. My submission is very brief. In speaking to the clerk, I understand that my electronic submission of this submission did not make it to your records, so I'm going to be submitting my note-stricken copy to you for your perusal as we go forward. I'll get with it and read it. It's relatively brief. I'm looking forward from that to your questions as a lifetime resident of what is now known as the special areas and the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler.

The current constituency of Drumheller-Stettler includes a vast, diverse area that is sparsely populated while making a substantial contribution to agriculture and energy markets. As outlined in the mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission considerations, effective representation is at the top of the list, as it should be. The vast distances between population centres in east-central Alberta create challenges that affect the ability of a representative personally to attend events, meetings, and other functions. These

challenges are amplified in the winter months, which at times can be prohibitive. I've added: if not even dangerous because of winter conditions. We've heard presentations from others in that regard.

There's a lot of ground that's been covered by the presentations ahead of me, so I guess my short presentation will be, hopefully, effective.

The proposed Drumheller-Strathmore riding would see an increase in the number of counties, MDs, towns, villages, school boards, high schools, and elementary schools that the MLA must either represent, work with, and attend community events at, including rodeos, anniversary events, et cetera. It would also mean an increased frequency of involvement with energy-based businesses either in regard to their proposed expansions or their community support activities.

Exacerbating the issue of the number of boards and councils are the vast distances required to travel to and from the locations in question. The proposed Drumheller-Strathmore riding is now larger than its predecessor, which already creates challenges to providing effective representation. With a population of 36,810 and no town larger than 8,200, notwithstanding the invention of the internal combustion engine, this is simply too large an area for one person to effectively cover physically. My addition there: the word "physically."

Modern communication tools can ameliorate these issues to some degree. However, people have an innate preference to see other people in person. Electronic solutions are no substitute. Witness your commission's own option to have both pre- and postreport public meetings. There are deep psychological reasons for in-person meetings.

The current population of the Drumheller-Stettler riding is 36,800. I'll repeat the 2016 census. Though under the provincial average, this is still within the prescribed differential of plus or minus 25 per cent, at 21 per cent. When taking into consideration the parameters set out in section 15(2), that would allow our riding to be under the average population by more than 25 per cent. The current riding of Drumheller-Stettler now meets four of the five parameters.

3:55

The commission's mandated consideration of sparsity of population must reasonably be applied to the current riding of Drumheller-Stettler, and there have to be clear and stated reasons for changing the riding boundaries. Significant change to our riding carried out to solve an issue elsewhere in the province, an issue which by any measure doesn't exist in Edmonton, at 5 per cent over the provincial average, is not something the commission should be considering without exhausting other options first. The proposed changes to the Drumheller-Stettler riding will negatively affect the stability of the riding and most certainly will not achieve the ultimate goal, as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that guarantees effective representation.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter and your commitment to the democratic process in this province of Alberta. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thanks. I'll start off the questioning by asking you what comment you have to make, if any, on Mr. Fildebrandt's proposal, that instead of combining Drumheller with Strathmore, as we propose, it be combined with the part of Brooks-Cypress that excludes Brooks.

Mr. Strankman: As you may have noticed, I was chomping at the bit in the back there to answer Ms Livingstone's questions. Yes, the overlay of many jurisdictions, whether they be Alberta Health

Services and business patterns, would possibly preclude the possibility of the Cypress addition. The community of Oyen, for example: in a business trade pattern and through AHS their services go to Medicine Hat. Hanna and other jurisdictions along what I call the highway 12 line, where I live, in the extreme northeast part of the constituency tend to go to Red Deer. The AHS, Alberta Health Services, jurisdiction goes to Red Deer.

The Chair: Sorry. I'm not quite following you. Do you accept that you could effectively represent your constituents this way, or would you prefer to have Brooks with you?

Mr. Strankman: In my humble opinion, it would be better received. It still may not meet your simple numbers criteria, but it would possibly overlay the trade patterns and the health care systems that are in place. The one negative to that, though, is that in there we have the municipal district of Acadia, which is the town of Acadia Valley and goes to the river, but we also would be cutting into the jurisdiction of the special areas. You know, to previous conversation regarding the following of municipal boundaries, it could create negativity to . . .

The Chair: What would it cut?

Mr. Strankman: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm getting that backwards. You're talking about inclusion rather than taking it out.

The Chair: Yeah. I'm talking about excluding . . .

Mr. Strankman: I apologize. I retract.

The Chair: Okay. We're just talking about Drumheller as it currently is . . .

Mr. Strankman: Drumheller-Stettler.

The Chair: . . . not including Stettler, going down and picking up Cypress. That's part of our proposed Brooks-Cypress, essentially combining our proposed Brooks-Cypress with our proposed Drumheller-Strathmore but moving both Brooks and Strathmore out of it. Does that cross any municipal lines?

Mr. Strankman: I think that's a workable process. I don't know about the southern boundaries, but if you don't include the town of Stettler and the county of Stettler as a whole municipal jurisdiction – and this is just an opinion – I don't think you'd be able to achieve the population that you're desiring.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt thinks we'd only be 10 per cent over. We'll have to look at that, for sure.

Mr. Strankman: That's your prerogative.

The Chair: Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: You actually just stole my question I was going to ask. Mr. Fildebrandt had suggested that a little bit more of Stettler county could go north in his proposal. Yeah. I was wondering: from your perspective, knowing the area well, what that would do to the population.

Mr. Strankman: Well, I would prefer in that case to stay with municipal boundaries. Yesterday I was at the opening of the Stettler county shop, and the coffee shop conversation talked about where the new boundary would be. Well, the shop is south of the town of Stettler, but their county office is in the town, so one of the guys was teasing and said: well, maybe we could get the shop in town to

apply for a grant, and we could use the shop to apply through the mailing address of Big Valley. Then they could effectively, in teasing, double-dip for things because of the situation of dividing up.

Ms Livingstone: So it's a genius solution. I'm just kidding.

Mr. Strankman: I am hesitant to get – because I know the seriousness of *Hansard*.

Ms Livingstone: Just my one other question. This is the one that you were at the back wanting to help with, in terms of crossing the Red Deer River if you're headed south into Cypress county. I believe Mr. Barnes answered it. There's a crossing with highway 41. Are there any other crossings?

Mr. Strankman: In fact, Ms Livingstone, AHS services uses what's called – I can't think of it directly – a landing. The ambulances come to highway 41 at the river crossing, and they meet the ambulances from the northern jurisdiction there. I mean, it's an all-weather road. It's known as the Buffalo Trail. You know, you mentioned 884; that's the highway I came down here on today.

Ms Livingstone: Okay.

Mr. Strankman: You know, it's not every, like, city block across there, but there is access. Mr. Fildebrandt and I jokingly talk about the transition fees that go interjurisdictionally between MLAs, that he doesn't keep up his end of the bargain when he travels into my constituency.

Ms Livingstone: Very good. That's all the questions I had for you.

The Chair: All right. Ms Munn?

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

The Chair: Mr. McLeod?

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

Mr. Strankman: Well, if I could, sir, you talked about the idea of having different MLAs or two MLAs representing a constituency. And that is, you know, an issue for it. Like, that's why I would prefer that a single MLA, for example in Stettler county, because of the interjurisdictional – at the northern boundary right now of Stettler county where it meets Battle River-Wainwright on highways 56 and 53, there is a horrible jurisdictional problem between EMS and the police service. So if there's an accident in that area, I'm inundated with concerns from people. Because people are at an accident, they phone out on a cellphone, and the cellphone can go to any jurisdiction, but when the people call for 911 service, which is a dire instance, then there's a jurisdictional problem to know where the service should come from and who the regulatory body is to get the service from.

Mr. McLeod: I understand what you're saying, sir. The reason I asked that question is that we've had mixed answers all over the province, but I'm always of the opinion, being the mayor of a small village, that I'm going to reach out and touch as many people as I can to get my answer. And if I don't get the answer I like, then I go a little step higher, which is called the minister, and then I work backwards.

Mr. Strankman: I hear it. It's called the food chain. Yeah.

Mr. McLeod: Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you.

Mrs. Day: Just a couple of questions. I just want to clarify. One of your comments was that you're sitting at minus 21 per cent and that our legislation allows us to go to minus 25 and that you felt that Drumheller-Stettler, your constituency, is content being that considering how large and sparsely it is populated. Did I hear you say that correctly?

Mr. Strankman: Yes. I felt that part of a special circumstance constituency could go to a minus 25 population. As a lifetime resident of the area and always a person that envisions a cup being half full rather than being half empty, the preconception that all these rural areas are going to be in an inward-bound mode, populationwise, I have been strictly, intrinsically – in fact, just last week I had a personal conversation with the agriculture minister about developing irrigation projects in our area, which would stabilize, long term, the populations in our area.

As a lifetime resident, third generation, my son, I would like to believe, is going to be living in that area, raising his family as well. Yes, I understand those are the realities, but to preconceive that is somewhat beyond, I think, the mandate of what we're trying to achieve here today. The economic environment of this province now: I would like to see up-to-date numbers because I don't think that the spectacular growth that some of these communities have seen in the past is happening. I've lived within six miles of a social experiment known as Saskatchewan my whole life. I was just in Kindersley the other day, and you just about need sunglasses to keep the blinding chrome reflections off your eyes. The growth that's going on in that province is stellar. Policy makes a difference.

4:05

Mrs. Day: My second question was: what did you think of Mr. Fildebrandt's suggestion of the name, if it stayed with Strathmore, or should I say Badlands-Strathmore, rather than using the name of Drumheller?

Mr. Strankman: I think Badlands has an interesting connotation, but I think there is the possibility of negativity to it, so I would reserve my opinion in that regard. Maybe I'm old and staid in my ways. I don't know. But like in my opening statement here, I do proudly describe my – or the constituency, not my, but the constituency, the people that I represent as a vast, diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. We have plain flatland, and we also have the marvellous striations of the Drumheller valley and those badlands that you're describing.

Mrs. Day: So it's not all just badlands in your area? That's describing a portion of the geographical area of that.

Mr. Strankman: We have a marvellous constituency, and I'm proud to be there.

Mrs. Day: Great. Thank you so much for coming today.

The Chair: Thanks so much for your helpful comments.

Mr. McLeod: Can we have that, please?

Mr. Strankman: I was going to leave that with the clerk.

The Chair: Oh. Well, Mr. McLeod is being our clerk. He's the exhibit manager.

Mr. McLeod: I've been designated for some reason. Somebody has designated me, so I better do my job.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Our next registered presenter is Ben Elfring.

Mr. Elfring: Good afternoon, Chair, commission members. My name is Ben Elfring. I'm a councillor from the MD of Taber. It seems like everybody is trying to split us apart, but we have two divisions in our municipality, Little Bow and Taber-Warner. We have three major concerns about this new proposed Taber-Vulcan district. It's the size of the district, the distance between the boundaries, and the number of communities, school divisions, irrigation districts within our boundaries. Irrigation districts: we'll have five. School divisions: probably about three or four. Those are our concerns. That's basically all we have to say. We have no remedy.

The Chair: But what about this remedy, which is one of the questions in our report – and I'd love to hear your views because you'd be directly affected by this – to reconfigure the whole thing as two blended constituencies? So Taber would run from Medicine Hat to Taber in a kind of pie-shaped, wedge shape and include roughly half of the population of Medicine Hat and the rest of the Taber-Vulcan constituency. It would be roughly half the size of this proposal, I'm guessing, with maybe half the number of communities to service.

Mr. Elfring: We would be opposed to that, to a blended.

The Chair: Tell me why, please.

Mr. Elfring: Pardon me?

The Chair: Why would that be?

Mr. Elfring: I don't think that as a population between the MD of Taber and the town of Taber, which would be roughly about 16,000 people, we would get fair representation. We are closer to Lethbridge, and we do more commerce with Lethbridge than we do with Medicine Hat. Medicine Hat is about an hour away whereas Lethbridge is half an hour away. Like I said, we are closer to Lethbridge. We have nothing in common with Medicine Hat.

The Chair: So if you got to pick – it's a devil's choice because you don't like either choice – would you think this works better or the blended?

Mr. Elfring: This would work better, if we had to be split. I mean, we're already split. We don't know what it's like to have one MLA.

The Chair: All right. Mr. McLeod, any questions?

Mr. McLeod: No. Thank you for that response.

The Chair: Mrs. Day? Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: No. You actually anticipated my questions and answered them. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Munn?

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

Mr. Elfring: Sorry for being so long-winded.

The Chair: No. This is one of our six special questions, so you almost deserve a prize for answering that.

All right. Our last registered speaker here this afternoon is David Schneider, MLA for Little Bow. Great. Thanks.

I've just been told there was one late arrival, so there will be a speaker after Mr. Schneider.

Mr. Schneider: See, the problem with being last or second last is that it's already all been said. But that's fine. I appreciate being here.

Ms Livingstone: It's okay to be brief.

Mr. Schneider: Oh, yeah, yeah.

I did prepare a few notes. I'll just read them. I'll just give them to the collector of goods after I'm done. First of all, I believe the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission somewhat lets down rural Alberta by focusing too heavily on equalizing population. Somewhere in all the documents that I have been reading recently, I read that the Supreme Court said that effective representation matters more than making every riding close to absolute parity. Now, I couldn't agree more with that. Geography, community, history, community interests, minority representation, and ethnic, religious, and cultural groups are equally important in decisions on electoral boundaries. The report shows that rural Alberta has been overlooked somewhat and is grouped together in what I would probably call piecemeal ways that do not reflect our communities. It's clear that common community interests, geographical features, and trading areas should always be represented in this commission's final report.

I do want to steal a few words from the AAMD and C, that stated that the Alberta Legislative Assembly is a place where representatives from all over Alberta meet to effectively represent Albertans of every stripe, every walk of life. "Representation is achieved by balancing population and demographics, community interest and characteristics, existing municipal and natural boundaries." That's one I'll talk about more. One more thought from the AAMD and C is that "over reliance on absolute voter parity may not achieve the desired outcome and may inhibit the ability of Albertans to be effectively represented."

Let's have a look at this new riding. Considering the things that I've just stated, I'd like to make a few points with regard to the commission's alignment. As Little Bow sits right now, she envelops the entire border of Vulcan county, the entire border of Lethbridge county, and the northern portion of the MD of Taber, which we just heard about. Now, the MD of Taber is naturally divided by the Oldman River, which the Little Bow boundary follows. Now, the commission's changes to this portion, just this portion, of the new riding see the north end of Vulcan county severed south of Siksika and township road 200. Somebody brought that up. Barry McFarland, I believe, talked about township road 200 not meaning anything to anybody. I honestly don't know what it means either. But if we follow that road east and then join up with the Bow River again and move south for just a short distance to a place called Bow City, which could just about fit inside this room – it's a strange name.

Unidentified Speaker: Hey, hey, hey.

Mr. Schneider: I knew I'd get somebody.

Then cross the Bow River, with Bow City to the east, and sever Newell county and follow highway 539 east to range road 133, then south on that range road to the Bow River east of Hays. Of course, this discussion only covers about a third or a little better of the proposed riding, yet we've already severed two municipalities. The fact is that the new riding of Taber-Vulcan contains seven counties

and MDs but severs five of them. Keeping municipalities intact has to be at least a consideration when we're discussing boundaries.

When we talk about effective representation, driving from the northwest corner of this new riding to the southeast corner will take upwards of four hours. From Wild Horse, in the far southeast corner, to Herronton, in the far northwest corner, is well over 300 kilometres. Now, I can drive to Edmonton from my home southwest of Vulcan in four hours to represent all the people in the riding.

4:15

I now represent three school boards, but the new boundary will see that I represent four. I represent nine high schools at the moment. The new riding will see me trying to represent 18 high schools.

The sheer size of this proposed new riding doesn't give the people that live within her equal or fair representation by one MLA, let alone access to their MLA. The Supreme Court again accepted that constituents look to their MLA for a couple of things: one, to take care of their needs as they sit in the Legislative Assembly and, the other, to promote their interests in the legislative process and to deal with bureaucracy. Now, that takes time, and it takes resources. The size of this new riding is double. We are now five times the size of Prince Edward Island, half the size of Nova Scotia, the same size as Great Slave Lake, 27,000 square kilometres.

You know, each municipality or community has its own special traditions that it celebrates. They also traditionally have events that they invite their MLA to attend, be it a parade or reading week or a grand opening or graduations, centennials, historical societies, chambers of commerce, rodeos, seniors' homes, emergency services locations, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. People want to be around their MLA. They want to see him. In the case of the newly formed Taber-Vulcan riding, making it to every event the MLA is invited to would be just about an impossibility. Does that indicate equitability to rural Albertans? That's a question I have. I already have two offices in Little Bow. If the size of the riding doubles, I may need another one so that constituents can be fairly represented without driving for two hours.

I'm sorry, folks, but, in my opinion, this is what happens when voter parity is the most important criterion in drawing lines. Municipal boundaries in this case, I believe, weren't respected as well as they should have been. Natural boundaries weren't considered, it appears, in a lot of the margins represented here. The sheer size of the new riding is difficult to comprehend, certainly, for the MLA and the constituents as well. But the municipalities within this new riding that I've spoken with – maybe they have made a submission; I don't think there's anybody here that'll make one now – don't believe that it makes any sense either with regard to their trading area, their geographical features, and community similarities and interests from one end to the other.

I've drawn a different boundary there, that I handed out, and I respectfully submit that. I also submit one for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Mr. Hunter isn't able to come today, so he and I had kind of collaborated on what I've presented there. I hope that the commission would consider them, of course. The boundary and others that may be represented here today lean toward not taking three ridings out of rural Alberta. I don't pretend to have enough sway here to stop that. Once again, voter parity: it seems that it was the largest criterion.

I should say that the borders that I've drawn represent about a minus 17 per cent population. It may be a little higher. Mr. McFarland talked about 6,000 residents at Siksika. I was using the number 14, but it may turn into a minus 14 or 15 per cent population from the Alberta average, well within the legislation, of course. But

it respects municipal boundaries, natural boundaries a little more fairly.

Some consideration to using the same legislation in the cities and increasing variances there would likely give better effective representation to all ridings.

The map clearly doesn't include Cypress county and the county of Forty Mile, which are now part of whatever Drew calls himself. I believe he's got Forty Mile in there as well. Those municipal boundaries are important. We heard that from the last gentleman, certainly a few before that. I know that can't be the number one reason for a boundary either.

Those are my thoughts.

The Chair: All right. Thanks very much for coming. I'm going to ask you about option 2 for Medicine Hat because that would touch on this directly. If we were not persuaded to go with your thoughtful option, just covering off all alternatives because you're here and you're going to be directly affected by this, do you believe you could effectively represent your constituents if we created a riding from the northwest portion of the current Taber-Vulcan but which included about half the population in Medicine Hat city?

Mr. Schneider: You know, if you're talking about blended ridings, as much as Lethbridge doesn't want anything to do with another riding, that makes way more sense for the people within my riding. A lot of the trade – a lot of trade – is done in there, a lot of movement. Feedlot Alley sits within most of Little Bow, what is Little Bow right now. So when we talk about losing Picture Butte and Nobleford and Coalhurst and Coaldale, which are natural trading areas for Feedlot Alley, I would have to suggest that Medicine Hat would probably not be something that would run in conjunction with what's going on in the rest of the riding.

The Chair: As the last speaker so succinctly put it . . .

Mr. Schneider: Second-last.

The Chair: . . . this Taber-Vulcan choice is better than a blended riding, no matter how – whatever problems there are with this, you'd still think this was better than a blended riding with Medicine Hat.

Mr. Schneider: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: I just have one point, just a point of clarification. You'd mentioned earlier in your presentation about the lines of Vulcan county being violated. Am I correct, though, that the only place where that was done was to put the Siksika Nation in one riding together, or was there another place?

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. Vulcan county's borders follow the Bow River on the north end.

Ms Livingstone: Right. So the only place that we didn't keep Vulcan county together was to put Siksika Nation together. Are you opposed to that?

Mr. Schneider: No, no. I have no problem with Siksika. I have it now, and there's no issue.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Yeah. I was just a bit confused because you said . . .

Mr. Schneider: It just seems like we've severed Vulcan county, right? We've taken the top off Vulcan county in this new riding. It's gone. Vulcan county goes north to the Bow River. You're talking about range road 200, I think.

Ms Livingstone: Well, that's what I'm trying to clarify. My understanding is that the only alteration was that we put the Siksika community back together instead of having it divided.

Mr. Schneider: Well, to the – yes. Okay. Yes.

Ms Livingstone: You're not opposed to that?

Mr. Schneider: I'm not opposed to that.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. So it's okay that we didn't follow Vulcan county to the river for the purpose of putting Siksika together, because that's obviously a single community of interest.

Mr. Schneider: Yes.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that because you used it as an example, and it sounded to me like it was a mistake. So I wanted to clarify if you thought that Siksika should be separated.

Mr. Schneider: No. I don't think so.

Ms Livingstone: Okay. Good. Thanks.

The Chair: Ms Munn?

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

The Chair: Mr. McLeod?

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

The Chair: Mrs. Day?

Mrs. Day: No. Thank you so much for your thoughtful presentation and sharing the sheer numbers. Square kilometres isn't something we get to pull up, so that was a really interesting number. Yeah. Thank you for coming today.

The Chair: Thank you for bringing an alternative map. I think we all agree that the people who bring maps to illustrate their suggestions are particularly helpful.

Mr. Schneider: I'll give you my . . .

The Chair: Presentation. Thanks.

While you're doing that, I'll call up the very last speaker, Ross Owen.

Mr. Owen: Hi. Good afternoon, and welcome to one of Alberta's 13 irrigation districts. This presentation is from and on behalf of the Eastern irrigation district. I am the board chairman. My name is Ross Owen. Incidentally, I'm new to the position, so there's not too much polish to this. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the proposed constituency boundaries.

The EID has an elected board of directors, and we are governed by the Irrigation Districts Act. Our boundaries are virtually the same as the county of Newell's. Our southern and northern boundaries are the Bow River and the Red Deer to the north. Our district currently lies fully within the Strathmore-Brooks constituency. We believe that being fully within one constituency has contributed to effective representation, has minimized

confusion and expense, and has benefited the residents and the province by respecting physical, municipal, and other formal and informal boundaries and traffic patterns.

4:25

We acknowledge that the constituency must be larger than the district. However, we propose that the constituency boundaries be revised to support effective representation, minimize confusion and expense, and respect physical, municipal, and district southern boundaries. To basically speak to the same thing that Molly spoke to, we have irrigation reservoirs. Our major irrigation reservoirs are in the proposed – if you go to the proposed ones to the south, besides taking a few of the smaller towns, it would take our irrigation districts out of the boundary, which would lead us to be dealing with a couple of different MLAs, again, for the purpose of that.

That is about all I really have.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

I'll turn to my colleagues and see if they have any questions. Mr. McLeod?

Mr. McLeod: Again I've got to ask the question: is it easier to deal with one MLA or two MLAs, speaking on your behalf as an irrigation district?

Mr. Owen: With the complications, most folks don't really understand irrigation districts much. I think that one is quite a bit better. It's complicated enough trying to explain to somebody, to a layman. I think it would be much easier dealing with one would be my opinion.

Mr. McLeod: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Munn?

Ms Munn: Essentially, it's your position that the county of Newell has to be reunited in one constituency.

Mr. Owen: Yeah. We have ongoing drainage projects with the county. We're like this, eh? So it just seems . . .

Ms Munn: More efficient, more effective.

Mr. Owen: Yeah.

Ms Munn: Understood.

The Chair: Mrs. Day? Ms Livingstone?

Ms Livingstone: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks. And thanks for being so succinct.

Mr. Owen: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Well, thank you, everyone who's attended this afternoon. Some of you have sat through the entire experience. Thanks very much for your interest. It's been terrific to have so much support, particularly on this second round of electoral boundaries hearings. We've had a great turnout everywhere. On to Red Deer on Monday, and then we'll start our deliberations leading to the final report.

Thanks again.

[The hearing adjourned at 4:27 p.m.]

