

10:20 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll declare the meeting officially open. I would like to welcome both Walter Paszkowski and Glen Clegg today. The purpose of this morning's meeting is to have an exchange of ideas. We'd like to know as a committee what your thoughts are on a redistribution in northwestern Alberta, specifically your own constituencies. If there are questions you have of us, we'll attempt to answer them.

Pat, are there any comments you want to make before we go into it?

MRS. BLACK: No. I'd just like to echo the welcome to the two members from northwestern Alberta.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.
I'll turn it over to you, gentlemen.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Back during the last group of hearings that were traveling throughout the province, the electoral officer challenged me when I made the statement that I felt that the northwestern region of Alberta should have six constituencies. He said: that's not possible; I challenge you to try and develop that type of a format. I guess that was a bit of a challenge, and together with that we sat down and structured what we felt would be a suitable arrangement that dealt with the trading areas, dealt with the municipal boundaries. It limited the splitting up of municipal boundaries, it certainly kept the trading areas totally consistent, and in light of the tremendous settled area it would also allow for better service to the constituents.

So that's the proposal we have before us here. It would allow for an additional constituency in the Peace River country. It addresses the trading areas very, very adequately in that they're consistent and they're concentrated. If you notice the split between the top, Wood Buffalo and Peace River, there is an area that has no population whatsoever, so that splits that area off. Coming down the Peace River – the Peace River is sort of the heart of that constituency – the trading areas come both north and south from what we have designed here. It would include areas such as ID 17 west. ID 17 west has its offices located in the Peace River town. At the present time ID 17 west is serviced by Smoky River, so you really have to go into another constituency to even deal with it.

As far as the Manning area coming to Peace River, that's their general trading area as well. The east-west split would be along the Mackenzie Highway, so there's adequate and easy entry from both sides. Grimshaw would still be included in Peace River because Grimshaw and Peace River sort of operate as a unit.

The Dunvegan constituency would expand somewhat to the east. It's a large area, and as you can see, it's a large area that is settled. It has a network of rivers with very few bridges, which makes it fairly difficult to service as well. As a matter of fact, I think there's only one bridge that adequately services the Dunvegan constituency. The roads primarily run east and west, and when you have a river running in the middle of it east and west as well, it becomes a situation where you have to drive, spend a lot of time on the road.

The Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Grande Prairie-Smoky constituencies we would leave very similar to the original drawings that the original group had drawn. Splitting the city down Richmond Avenue would be the thought there.

Wood Buffalo would basically go from the British Columbia border through to the Saskatchewan border. It would cover

everything north of township 97 to the Northwest Territories border, and it would include everything straight across. The trading areas are as similar as one can obtain. The road network is consistent. There's a small population but a very vast area to service.

So what we would have here are the Wood Buffalo, the Dunvegan, and the Lesser Slave areas that would be in excess of the plus/minus 25 percent. I think there was made in the legislation allocation for four constituencies at plus/minus 50 percent, and I think there's good reason to allow for that in light of the tremendous geographical area for these three constituencies.

The Grande Prairie trade areas of course would cover part of ID 16 and the west half of the county as they do now. The other, Grande Prairie-Smoky, is consistent with the trade area as it is now. So that would be no sharp new undertaking there at all. Lesser Slave Lake from the west end, at least some of it, would be untouched from what it is now. So there wouldn't be any major great upheaval here. The major changes would take place in the Peace River constituency. It would actually become much more consolidated by taking in MD 130 as well as going up to township 97.

The nice part of this, from my perspective at least – and Glen no doubt will have some comments – is that it realistically traces the travel routes of the Peace River country. It consolidates, and the trade areas are very, very consolidated. There's really nothing here that has people going backward against the flow. So in that sense I think we've achieved what we set out to achieve. We follow municipal boundaries almost exclusively. There are very, very few split municipalities, at least as far as those that aren't split today. Like, if the county was split today, it would just continue to be split along the same border, and then everyone seems to be used to it and seems to be happy with that. The city of Grande Prairie is probably the major problem area in that it's not large enough to form an urban constituency, so it has to be split. The split right down Richmond Avenue would be a very logical split. It's the major business street in Grande Prairie.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.
Glen?

MR. CLEGG: Thanks, Bob. I thought we were meeting in general terms here today. Walter explained it very well. I have absolutely no quarrel with these boundaries. However, has the committee looked in Alberta in general? You know, this works very well, and as you can see by the map it becomes three ridings in northern Alberta that have a differential of up to 50 percent. Now, what's the feeling of the committee? Have they literally picked out the areas of the province that would fall into this category?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, we haven't. At the present time we're going through *Hansard* documents on both the former all-party committee work, of which the four members of the committee were a part – and that's a tremendous advantage – and also the commission hearings so that we can see what briefs were presented and what arguments were made by people. We know that the courts have already upheld our legislation allowing us to create up to four constituencies that are up to 50 percent away from the mean population figure, but where those constituencies should be located in the province we don't know. We were obviously looking at a riding like Chinook because of the number of municipalities and the vast areas, all of which are settled. Lesser Slave Lake is pointed to often, but we haven't picked the ridings, if you like. So this brief is helpful in that you're coming in with your recommendations, although I note that you're suggesting that there be three in the northwest part of the province.

10:30

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes. If we do it any other way, we run into problems of splitting off trading areas, splitting off municipalities, splitting off school boards. This one probably addresses those particular issues in as practical a way, I think, as can be achieved really, and it does it very, very adequately. There'd be very, very few split boards, split municipalities.

MR. CLEGG: When I first talked to the commission that came around, it was my suggestion that Dunvegan take in Grimshaw and take in the total of the MD of Peace. At that time, Peace River could afford to lose population. However, with the one riding right across the north, then it can't afford to lose population to Dunvegan. So, you know, if you look at this one across, then you have to go with the map as drawn here. That's where the problem is. If you do away with that one, of course, then the boundaries here can be changed, but unfortunately, when you change one, it has a bearing on the others. So if it's possible for us to get that – when I say “us,” in the north, and I say “the north,” northwest basically, but certainly this would be the north and northeast of the province, too, so it's not just specifically northwest.

MRS. BLACK: Can I just ask a question?

Glen, what is this? Is this the river going up here?

MR. CLEGG: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: Which river? I can't see it on the map.

MR. CLEGG: Smoky.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The Smoky, and it joins the Peace. Part of it is the Peace, and part is the Smoky.

MRS. BLACK: And this one down here is also the Smoky then? So it comes up . . .

MR. CLEGG: The Smoky is here, and the Peace comes in here.

MRS. BLACK: But this is the Smoky down here, right?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes.

MR. CLEGG: Yeah, that is the Smoky.

MRS. BLACK: Then it comes over. So that would be a natural boundary there.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The Smoky comes to here, and this is the Peace. That's the Peace.

MRS. BLACK: That's the Peace, and this is the Smoky down here. It comes down like this?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: No. It comes across here, and this is the eastern part of the county. That's the way it's split now.

MRS. BLACK: And this is . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's the Wapiti River. That, of course, is a problem. We only have one bridge across the Wapiti and we only have two bridges across the Smoky, which creates the situation where in the first year I drove 100,000 kilometres trying to service

a constituency. Just as an example, I went to the Harmon Valley fair last week. It's the same distance going to Harmon Valley, there and back, as it is driving to Edmonton for me.

MRS. BLACK: What is the distance?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Three hundred miles.

MRS. BLACK: Three hundred miles. That's quite a distance.

Mr. Chairman, might we take a couple of minutes' break so we can go over to the big maps?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think we should, and I also think we should take a break until our other colleague, Mike, gets here. So we'll do that.

[The committee adjourned from 10:33 a.m. to 11:25 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. We'll reconvene and with that welcome our colleague Pearl. We're pleased that you could come in to share ideas with us on the Lesser Slave Lake constituency in particular. We're also pleased to welcome Karen Hudson, your research assistant, who I know has been assisting you on this task. We try to keep the process fairly informal. We'd like to hear your thoughts and views first. There may be questions that our colleagues Pat or Mike or myself have for you, and we'll have a general discussion.

First, any comments that either of you would like to make? Pat.

MRS. BLACK: I just welcome you to another round of electoral boundaries.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mike.

MR. CARDINAL: No, I don't have any at this time. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.

Pearl, over to you.

MS CALAHASEN: Thanks, Bob. I'd like to say thanks, first of all, for allowing me to come and speak to you. I think this is maybe my second time around. [interjection] Is it the third? Oh, gosh, I've even lost track now. This is the third time that I've attended various committee meetings and commission meetings, and it's really nice to know that at least we can come and give our perspective in terms of our constituencies.

I first of all would like to start by very briefly stating that the Lesser Slave Lake constituency should stay as it is for a number of reasons. I think you've just received one of the reasons that I would like to talk about, and that's the number of people that we have there. I think you've just seen the federal census data. Presently we are one of the constituencies which are maybe, I would say, at the 25 to 50 percent variance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could I stop you for just a second?

MS CALAHASEN: Sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do we know, Bob or Mike, whether or not the figure is accurate? In other words, we've discovered that a number of natives have not been counted for census purposes.

MS CALAHASEN: I don't even know if mine have been counted, so we don't.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've been doing some work on that. We'll check that as we're proceeding.

MS CALAHASEN: Okay. You can check those numbers as we go.

MR. PRITCHARD: Yeah. We'll have to, because there were some unenumerated.

MS CALAHASEN: Basically, it's still within that perspective.

I think the Lesser Slave Lake constituency is politically stable as it is presently. There's a natural three-way power relationship that ensures effective representation for all constituents. By natural I mean that municipal and federal boundaries complement the provincial constituency boundaries, as do the hospital and school districts. If you have a map available, you'd probably be able to see it in a much better form than when I'm talking about it.

In addition, the cultural links and geography tie Lesser Slave Lake families and communities together. There seems to be that number one priority which is the family and the cultural ties and I think what we call the geographical lines that go with the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. To change the boundaries I think would only lessen the effective representation for all of the people in the constituency as it is.

Secondly, the current boundaries were acceptable in principle actually to your committee when you established criteria for constituencies which could be exceptions to the 25 percent population base rule. As such, there is no imperative to change the boundaries, in my view. There may be attractive alternatives to current boundaries; however, these would only serve limited interests in the short term at the long-term expense of the people through disruption and diminished representation. I feel very strongly that the status quo boundaries are the best of the many alternatives that may be considered. I am also confident, given the numerous presentations made to the Electoral Boundaries Commission and the previous Electoral Boundaries Committee, that my position enjoys the support of most of the people of Lesser Slave Lake.

Those are basically the two main reasons, as well as the fact that it is one of the constituencies which is within a 25 to 50 percent variance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS CALAHASEN: I think most importantly, Bob, is the fact that the way the constituency is set presently is that we've got Slave Lake, we've got High Prairie, and then we've got Wabasca-Desmarais. The population evens out in all three. The way it is presently, there is no one community that has the upper hand over the other, and that I think is crucial for representation of all people, because you cannot forget one over the other. I think that's crucial when we look at the representation, whichever MLA may be there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.

First of all, I might ask Karen: is there anything in the presentation you'd like to supplement?

MS HUDSON: No, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right.

Mike, Pat, questions or comments?

MRS. BLACK: I guess from the report it looks like you're about 38 percent off the mean.

MS CALAHASEN: From this one it looks like 38.69. I can't remember exactly what it was from the last census, the '86 census. Do you recall, Karen? I can't remember what it was. I think it was 34 point some percent.

MS HUDSON: Twenty-five point three six.

MS CALAHASEN: Twenty-five point three six presently or the proposed?

MS HUDSON: Based on the '86 census.

MS CALAHASEN: Okay. So it's 25 point some percent.

MS HUDSON: Page 22.

MS CALAHASEN: I thought it was always 34; I don't know. Presently I'm also one of the exceptions. [interjection] Lesser Slave Lake; that's Athabasca.

MS HUDSON: Oh. Sorry, Pearl.

MS CALAHASEN: I always thought it was 34 percent.

MRS. BLACK: I don't know whether these are accurate. It shows 38.69 percent variance.

MS CALAHASEN: Yeah, and I'm not sure if they've got – are you talking about this latest one?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MS CALAHASEN: Okay. I'm not sure if they've got all of the bands and Indian reserves census too.

MR. CARDINAL: Possibly not.

MS CALAHASEN: So that's one of the problems. I'm not exactly sure.

MRS. BLACK: Could that be the case, Mr. Chairman, of other areas as well?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, yes. Actually, Mike has been leading some work for the committee on that. For instance, in this particular constituency we're not sure about Sucker Creek. If Sucker Creek is not included in the count – that's over 1,500, which substantially affects the statistics.

MS CALAHASEN: Yeah, and that's 1,500 maybe of the band members, but we don't know how many are actually living within the Sucker Creek reserve.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We know that, and we're working on that.

MRS. BLACK: Would we get that verification from the federal body, or how would we get that verification?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we're now looking to see how primarily the federal government and to a lesser degree the province provide assistance where assistance is made available on a per capita basis,

but that's as much information as they'd share at this time. We thought the census figures were fairly accurate, but when we began to examine them more carefully – and you may recall that this is one of the reasons that we recommended several years ago that we go to census rather than an enumerated list. We thought the census figure would be more accurate, but we're finding large blocks that were not counted for census purposes. The bands prefer to use band lists, and some of those residents are not living on the reserve; they've living in urban areas or elsewhere in the province. So we're still trying to verify those numbers, because we want to ensure that the final count does not miss – we don't want to miss 1,500 people for instance.

MRS. BLACK: When you take that on the variance of 30,000, 1,500 makes a big difference.

MS CALAHASEN: It makes quite a lot of difference. It might go back to the . . .

MR. CARDINAL: The figures provided by Municipal Affairs, of course, are no doubt the closest the province can get without doing a detailed count, but I assume that the bands would have agreed with the numbers provided to the province because it would mean some of the per capita transfers from the province to the Indian reserves as far as program dollars in certain areas. So I suspect that it would be reasonably close. At least it's an agreed number at this time. It may be a bit different, but it's a number it seems that's agreed on between the province and the bands because of that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other questions? Yes, go ahead.

MRS. BLACK: Can we move to the maps and have a look?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly. Let's go over.

[Following a review of the map, the chairman thanked Ms Calahasen and Ms Hudson for meeting with the committee]

[At 12:30 p.m. Mrs. Black moved that the meeting adjourn]