

3:04 p.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll let the meeting begin. Welcome to you, Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A number of MLAs have joined us for the various meetings we're having. I'm pleased that we've had representation from both government and opposition members in this process to date. There have been a couple of briefs submitted in written form, and therefore we read them into the record so we know what their thoughts are.

We certainly welcome your input specifically on Olds-Didsbury and the area. I would ask that you proceed with your remarks, and then we'll go into a general question-and-answer session. Hopefully we'll all be wiser when the process is completed.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start out by thanking you for the opportunity to be before you, because as you know, this has been very controversial, and certainly Olds-Didsbury has been impacted very significantly by the last suggested boundary change.

I'll start out by being very honest. I don't have anything new or unique or startling to add to the process. Given the reaction we had in our area – I'd remind you that we had 26 or 28 presentations the evening of the Olds hearing. The hearing went well overtime. When I reflect back on the hearing in Red Deer, 88 percent of those representations were from people in Rocky Mountain House who also objected to the changes, and primarily they were changes in our constituency. So I'd be remiss if I didn't at least avail myself of this opportunity to just reinforce some of the issues that were made and follow up with some of the suggestions I see as perhaps contributing to an eventual answer to the boundary allocation for Olds-Didsbury.

One of the issues that I would like to dwell on for a little bit is the community of interest issue. As you know, the boundaries, as they exist currently, follow very natural commercial and geographic lines and represent a realistic community of interest. We have in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury five towns, one village, one community, four counties, and one improvement district that I represent. Most of these communities share a common water line. Many share a common fire and ambulance service, co-ordinated hospital services, school boards. There are many, many areas of mutual interest.

We are traditionally an agriculture-based riding. However, we also have one of the largest oil and gas industries in our riding. We have people that raise ostrich for a living. We have the second largest fox ranch in Canada in our riding. We have the third largest guiding and outfitting business in Alberta, and we have one of the largest lumber mills in Alberta in our riding. So we are very diversified in nature.

I'd like to point out that all of these people who work in the energy industry and the sawmills and on the farms and so on all shop and play and volunteer their free time to activities within the towns that I've outlined. Therefore, this point I'd like to make about this community of interest that I referred to is not only tangible, but it's vital. It's vital to the survival of these communities. Most towns, as you know, are struggling very hard for survival. It is not an easy thing to cope with this exodus to other areas, such as the cities and so on, and right now our rural communities are dependent to an

extremely large degree on this community of interest, the vitality that that creates.

I think now more than ever these communities must pull together and not only try to satisfy the needs of those living in the immediate area of the towns and villages but also in the surrounding areas. The last proposal did absolutely nothing to enhance that. As I recall, we were going to move significantly down into the Calgary area and pick up a very significant portion of Calgary, and that would be disastrous, partly because the interests of the two communities are so different. This isn't one person against another; it is simply a matter of adequate and meaningful representation.

I'd like to just make a couple of suggestions. One of the things that has always created a bit of a problem has been our eastern boundary, which doesn't quite coincide with the county line. This has made a kind of spillover into another constituency, namely Three Hills, for our school district and others. I would strongly recommend that our eastern boundary expand to encompass the county lines. Now, when you look at Three Hills' boundaries coming in at just under 11 percent of the allowable variance, this would allow us to expand into that without infringing on that portion of representation that they've got as it exists.

I'd also recommend that we expand our southern boundary as far as practical but to exclude Airdrie, Cochrane, and Calgary. There's a lot of rural territory south of us that could quite adequately be drawn into that mutual community of interest area that I'm talking about and could be represented quite handily. I'd point out that the Banff-Cochrane constituency, with 11 percent over the mean average, certainly could afford to give up that portion without infringing. I'd also like to point out that currently the Olds-Didsbury boundary, with the new statistics given to us in the 1991 census, puts us within an 18 percent variance, well within the 25 percent allowed. So we could be left alone quite handily and not be significantly challenged.

The two recommendations that I mentioned I think would help to foster and promote the community of interest. I would just leave you with this one thought: please, if we can't help that revitalization that is so necessary to our small towns, then I sincerely hope that we don't do anything to further hinder it. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Roy.
Any questions? Pat?

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Roy, for your presentation and comments. You mentioned extending the southern boundary down but not to include Cochrane or Airdrie . . .

MR. BRASSARD: Or Calgary.

MRS. BLACK: Or Calgary. But not as far as Cochrane or Airdrie.

MR. BRASSARD: I think we could expand it significantly. If it was really a numbers game and we had to pick up area and population, then I think we could expand into that without distorting, as I say, this community of interest.

MRS. BLACK: You already don't follow the county line.

MR. BRASSARD: No, they don't follow the county line to the south. The only meaningful change that would bring us in line with the county is to the east. Right now we extend past Highway 2 about two miles on average. I think we could move that to five or six miles. It wouldn't impact significantly on Three Hills, but to those

people within that area, it would mean they would have a common representation.

MRS. BLACK: Is there a county office?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: Where is that?

MR. BRASSARD: It's in my constituency, in Didsbury.

MRS. BLACK: So you would, say, move over to the county line . . .

MR. BRASSARD: . . . to the east. I think we can draw that boundary. We already extend past the county line to the south, so if we went a bit farther in that area, that wouldn't affect us at all. As I say, we interact quite a bit with Rocky View at present.

MRS. BLACK: Do you have any feel for how many people live between your present boundary and the county line?

MR. BRASSARD: Not very many. I would think 200 or 300 probably, maybe 300 to 400. It wouldn't be a significant amount on the eastern boundary change. Depending on where you drew the line south, I think we could pick up another 2,000 people without a great deal of difficulty.

MRS. BLACK: What about the western boundary? You mentioned the Banff-Cochrane area.

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MR. BRASSARD: I don't have any trouble with leaving the western boundary as it is, but if we wanted to kind of square that off . . .

MRS. BLACK: It looks like it goes over to . . .

MR. BRASSARD: It goes right to the foothills.

MRS. BLACK: . . . the end of ID 8.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, it goes right through ID 8 at the top, but I also share ID 8 with Banff-Cochrane. We could lower that boundary line without having any significant impact. That area is very sparsely populated, and it's primarily distance that is significant. I just point out that whoever represents the Olds-Didsbury riding would have a much easier time serving that area than the individual from Banff-Cochrane, because the bulk of Banff-Cochrane's population, as you can see, is between Cochrane, Canmore, in that direction.

I note that Banff-Cochrane is already something like 11 or 12 percent over the mean average now, so it might facilitate easier representation in that area if you did lower that boundary a bit, right straight across.

MRS. BLACK: Well, I was wondering if you were recommending going as far south as Cochrane.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I don't have access to the current statistics other than the totals, and I don't have a map in front of me that would tell me what the population level is, but I can honestly say that it is not heavily populated. Certainly ID 8 is not a heavily populated improvement district in that part of the foothills.

As you know, we touch on the municipal district of Bighorn, and I'm not just sure where those boundaries would be most appropriately drawn. I'm just saying in that Cochrane is in excess of

the mean average and in that we are lower than the mean average, it would seem practical to lower that boundary to the south. I'll leave that to your discretion. You have better access to the numbers involved, but I would think we would pick up 3,000 or 4,000 people by doing so.

MRS. BLACK: May I have one more question, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

MRS. BLACK: The move to the east to the county line: you said 200 to 300 in there.

MR. BRASSARD: I would think so. It's not a big amount. It really would be more to facilitate those people than anything. Right now it is an awkward position they find themselves in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Because their children come into school in Olds and Didsbury?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, and the residents all deal with the towns of Olds and Didsbury.

MRS. BLACK: And the county office?

MR. BRASSARD: And the county office, of course. So it would be practical to keep it under one as much as possible.

In an ideal world if we could duplicate the county lines and the electoral boundaries in some way, it would be great, but I know that can't happen. Wherever it can happen, I think it should be done for that community of interest aspect that I pointed out and talked about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Mike.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah; I just have a couple of questions. I notice that the population statistics from 1986 census data for Olds-Didsbury were 21,405, and the latest draft provided for the 1991 federal census data shows that the population is now 25,059.

MR. BRASSARD: That's right.

MR. CARDINAL: It has grown close to 4,000 people. Is that a trend that could continue in that area? What has caused the flow?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, there have been a number of significant changes. We've had an oil and gas plant in the Caroline area that has impacted on the Sundre area quite significantly. It's an \$825 million plant, as you know, that has gone in. We also have started up Sunpine Forest Products. It took over an existing Revelstoke mill. The mill originally handled about 37 workers, and now that population is up to 400. What do we figure? An average of three per family? I would expect that the sawmill itself has contributed somewhere around 1,200 to 1,500 people directly to the Sundre area. As I said, many of the people working at the Caroline gas plant also live in the Sundre area.

MR. CARDINAL: The population trends are stable now and will no doubt continue to be?

MR. BRASSARD: I think it would be safe to say that they're stable. I'm not certain that we will be able to continue to put up \$825 million gas plants to enhance further growth. I rather think it will remain constant, and if anything, we will be trying to stop the erosion of these smaller communities.

MR. CARDINAL: You indicated in your presentation during the commission's hearings that there was a strong presentation from the Olds-Didsbury constituency to retain the riding as it is or at least very close to what it is now. We all know that it already falls within the 25 percent allowable variance. Of course, it's hard for you to answer this, I suppose: what would make a commission move the population to 26,000 and put 8 percent variance when strong presentations were made by the public to retain the area outline, which was safely within the legislation? Less than 8 percent variance is what's recommended; in fact, 7.92 percent variance is what they're recommending. What caused the commission to go to this extreme, as a member originally involved in the development of the legislation that would have allowed ridings to be safely adjusted with minor adjustments in cases? The commission went out and heard about the same thing from the public and yet came up with something that's completely out of whack.

MR. BRASSARD: I don't know where the commission came from in their original proposal. I do think it was a result of some kind of domino effect where we were trying to achieve a perfect world in a given area, and of course that then impacted on all the subsequent ridings. I think we were caught up in that.

I can tell you quite emphatically, though, that just about every town, every county had representation made at the hearings saying that we oppose this, that it is not in the best interest of the area. I also know that when the commission came back with their second report, albeit it was as fragmented or even more so than the first, they had seen the wisdom to change it. I don't know where they arrived at the original one.

MR. CARDINAL: Roy, would you think that people in Olds-Didsbury, for example, would support changes if they were more gradual and happened over, say, three different periods of adjustment rather than one drastic adjustment within a short period of time? Could people live with a long-range plan of adjusting constituencies in the province to suit the needs of Albertans rather than having closer to 25 percent now and then jumping all of a sudden to minus 7.92 percent all at one time, which is not necessary by the legislation?

MR. BRASSARD: I think everybody is going to resist change just for change's sake. I don't think anybody realistically wants change. As I said, there are too many issues confronting the rural areas to just be caught up in something that is just changing, as I say, without a realistic rationale behind it. However, where change is seen to benefit the area and also achieve a given end, such as a minor adjustment to conform to a county line to pick up areas that are remote enough and are having difficulty being served under existing policies, I think that's valid.

To be very honest, to answer you directly, I don't think that was taken into consideration. In fact, at the hearing I attended, we got into quite a debate about that whole attempt to achieve a perfect world within a given set of circumstances. It's impossible. There are far too many varieties of situations out there across this province. Some of them are territorial because of our mountains, rivers, and so on and so forth. Others are just, as I said, basically good, commonsense, economical, social, realistic lines to follow. I don't think those were adhered to at all, but rather the attempt was to come to some absolute in terms of a mean average, and it just didn't work. So people would resent that change because it was seen to be change with no significant benefit. If there are reasonable, rational attempts to adjust boundaries . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Long term?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, long term or short term I think people can understand a good, sound reason for change if it's presented, but I don't think there's been one presented. We're well within the average, the variance that is allowed. We're within that variance if we do nothing, so I could sit here before you and say, "Please, don't do anything to my constituency." Looking at it realistically, I do think that in the process we have some chances, as I say, to conform to the county line, to pick up some areas, and I'd be happy to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.
Anything else?

MR. CARDINAL: No, that's good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think that any points I had have been covered by either Pat or Mike in their questions to you, and you really touched on a key point at the end, Roy, when you mentioned the domino effect. If you're looking at your riding as it exists today, you fit within the mean, but you know that any changes that are made in other ridings will have an impact on their neighbouring constituencies and that just continues to have that ripple effect right across the province.

MR. BRASSARD: This whole process is about representation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right. And fairness.

MR. BRASSARD: And fairness. If we keep those principles in front of us, I'm sure that we could sit down and draw up a realistic boundary line. I'm not saying that your job is easy. I don't mean that, but I think we can be fair to everybody in all this.

Thank you again. I appreciate it very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 3:26 p.m.]

