

9:12 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Bogle]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; we'll officially commence. Welcome to you, Don. With your permission we'll stay on the record.

MR. SPARROW: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The process we've been following, Don, is to listen to the presenter, and once you've gone through your presentation, then we'll go into a general question-and-answer session. Hopefully we'll have a better understanding of the part of the province that you have quite a bit of knowledge in, the Wetaskiwin-Leduc area. So it's over to you, sir.

MR. SPARROW: I guess the biggest concern that was shown – I know you've heard this at the hearings, and I know the commission heard it at the hearings loud and clear – was your 'rurban' aspect of adding a portion of Edmonton to the new, proposed Leduc.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, and maybe I could comment on that. We haven't taken a formal position on it yet, but I think that the consensus is that we not look at the so-called 'rurban' concept.

MR. SPARROW: Okay. That was the biggest complaint in Wetaskiwin and Leduc: the changes in Leduc, the new boundaries. Also they didn't follow county boundaries. You know, they drew the southern line of the new Leduc boundary four miles away from the county of Wetaskiwin's boundaries. In the natural flow there should be an opportunity, if they're going to create two, to create a Leduc riding with more of the county of Leduc and a Wetaskiwin riding with most of the county of Wetaskiwin. That would simplify communications between the communities and the boards and agencies, and it would be a lot more simplified than cutting across boundaries and having several counties to deal with and numerous school boards.

I know that Wetaskiwin-Leduc in its present state is high in population, but I can also state that it's working very well with its existing boundaries. In '86 when the boundaries were changed, I lost a bunch of the west country, which is Thorsby, Calmar, Devon, and 13 summer villages, to Drayton Valley. Communication efforts in that area were just tremendous compared to the existing Wetaskiwin-Leduc. So the smaller communities need a lot more attention, a lot more of an MLA's time, and the MLA has to be more available to them on a continuous basis. With the larger cities of Wetaskiwin and Leduc the professional staff they have on board keep up with what we're doing at the provincial level and are a lot easier to handle.

I'd be quite satisfied if you left Wetaskiwin-Leduc the way it is. It's worked well, but you have the population problems. If new boundaries are going to have to split it up, it would be from the natural trading patterns that take place out there. The workload would be better, and I think a person could serve his constituents better if you stuck to a riding within the county of Leduc and another riding within the county of Wetaskiwin. That was part of the proposal that was made, but they weren't following the normal boundaries. The only area that is in the riding that you could add to either Camrose or Edmonton would be the town of Beaumont. It's right on the border, it's very close to Edmonton, and the majority of people work in Edmonton. It is almost a total suburb of Edmonton. That's 5,000 people.

MR. CARDINAL: But Beaumont is in your riding.

MR. SPARROW: Beaumont is presently at the corner of my riding.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes; it's in your riding. Okay.

MR. SPARROW: Yes. Its natural trading patterns are directly to Edmonton. Its ambulance service is to the new hospital on the south side of Edmonton. They have a lot of connections with the city. It's sort of the anomaly in my constituency. The rest is very rural orientated.

The main problem was the big chunk of Edmonton and the 'rurban' portion that was being added to. There was just no commonality, and everyone in the constituency complained about it.

I guess that basically covers my overall comments. I took an opportunity to draw two maps over there, and the one you have, Bob, expands the boundaries into the county of Leduc versus the county of Wetaskiwin and tried to come up with an average number of voters.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Good.
Questions. Mike.

MR. CARDINAL: Could I get a copy of that, or is there only one?

MR. SPARROW: Those are two different maps.

MR. CARDINAL: Oh, two different. Okay.

MR. SPARROW: Yeah. There are two different options, and this one here shows more of the county. If you've noticed, I've drawn lines that show most of the county of Leduc on one and most of the county of Wetaskiwin on the second one which would be the normal trading patterns and communication. All the boards and agencies in those areas work together, and it would be a lot easier for them to communicate with an MLA if it was done that way versus putting it across the county boundaries.

MR. CARDINAL: Leduc now has 13,822, somewhere in there.

MR. SPARROW: Approximately, yes.

MR. CARDINAL: Beaumont has 4,952 by my figures, in the Municipal Affairs population list. Is it heavily populated within the county just immediately around Leduc and Beaumont? What would you estimate the population to be?

MR. SPARROW: There are not a lot of acreages, but there are quite a number of acreages just by Nisku, but nothing like you have in Sherwood Park or some of the other areas. There's a fairly good sized subdivision . . .

MR. CARDINAL: What would you estimate the population to be?

MR. SPARROW: For the acreage side?

MR. CARDINAL: East and west from Leduc, within your riding.

MR. SPARROW: On the old boundary?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, the existing boundary.

MR. SPARROW: About 2,000.

MR. CARDINAL: Two thousand, you'd say?

MR. SPARROW: Yes. The majority of my riding is between the city of Wetaskiwin, the city of Leduc, the town of Millet, and the town of Beaumont, and only about 10 percent of previous figures were rural acreage owners and farmers.

MR. CARDINAL: Part of your constituency takes in county 25 and also county 10. Could you see moving the line north closer to Leduc or closer to county 25?

MR. SPARROW: You could. The line at the bottom of the existing constituency is only two miles from the city of Wetaskiwin, and it's just on the outskirts of the four bands reserve there. A natural boundary south of Wetaskiwin is the boundary between the county and the four bands reserve. That would be a natural because there are a few farmers left out there, and they're part of Ponoka, and they've got nothing in common with Ponoka whatsoever. So if you're drawing a line south of Wetaskiwin, the natural place to draw it would be the county of Wetaskiwin line and the reserve line. If you wanted to go farther south, you would take two of the reserves in.

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MR. CARDINAL: I'm thinking of the other way, coming north of the line instead of going south.

MR. SPARROW: If you came north, you automatically pick up the city of Wetaskiwin. If you move it two miles north, you're right in the heart of the city of Wetaskiwin. The next logical place north of that would be the county of Leduc boundary.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MRS. BLACK: That's county 25, right?

MR. SPARROW: Yes.

MR. CARDINAL: So your riding would be solely within county 25.

MR. SPARROW: Yes.

MR. CARDINAL: Is it possible to move it east to follow the county line?

MR. SPARROW: It's possible. The majority of people on the west side of Highway 21 come to Leduc. It's their trading pattern. So it could move out towards Highway 21. When they get on the other side of Highway 21, they travel primarily to Camrose.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else, Mike?

MR. CARDINAL: No, that's it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Pat?

MRS. BLACK: Actually, Mike asked my questions.

MR. CARDINAL: Oh, just one more. What would the population be of the acreage residents on the north edge of your riding adjacent to Edmonton? It runs to the city boundaries.

MR. SPARROW: Yes. In the last annexation they pretty well took all of the acreage owners into the city.

MR. CARDINAL: How is it now? What would the population be?

MR. SPARROW: It's very sparse with acreage owners. There's not an abnormal number whatsoever. There's a big cluster of acreages down by Millet, more in the sand hills there by Millet, but that's in the county of Wetaskiwin, county 10.

MR. CARDINAL: And that's in your riding now?

MR. SPARROW: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: But are those folks on those acreages that were annexed into Edmonton happy with that scenario or would they prefer more the . . .

MR. SPARROW: At first they weren't, but they're slowly . . .

MRS. BLACK: Do their children go to school in Edmonton?

MR. SPARROW: Yes.

MRS. BLACK: They do. So there's a link there.

MR. SPARROW: Yes, and the city is gradually growing south and will consume and build right around them, so it's a natural that they stay in the city.

One of suggestions the commission had made was that Devon come back into Wetaskiwin-Leduc.

MRS. BLACK: Is it in Drayton now?

MR. SPARROW: It's in Drayton now. It's been a county unto itself, and it's the only town that's a county under the county status. So there's not a lot of connection between the town of Devon and the county of Leduc and/or the city of Leduc. It could be part and parcel of Stony Plain; it could be part of the south. There is an opportunity there because they are sort of self-sufficient unto themselves.

MRS. BLACK: What about Calmar?

MR. SPARROW: Calmar definitely should be, in my mind, tied with Leduc, wherever the city of Leduc goes. That's the natural trading pattern. It's 10 miles away. They bus kids back and forth.

MRS. BLACK: To Leduc.

MR. SPARROW: Yeah.

MRS. BLACK: Where do the kids from Devon go?

MR. SPARROW: Devon has their own high school. They've always had their own school system. The only connection Devon has with Leduc is maybe on the hospital board, with the hospital boundaries, but they have their own hospital.

MRS. BLACK: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anything else, Pat?

MRS. BLACK: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions I had have been covered by either Mike or Pat so far. We are obviously looking at the changes that have to be made and wherever possible going to a municipal

boundary. People know which county or MD they live in. They have no trouble with those lines. That's a factor.

So I guess if there's nothing else, thank you very much, Don.

MR. SPARROW: Okay. Thank you. I know you've got a challenging job ahead of you. Nobody envies you and wants to replace you. Do the best you can.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I hope we have some friends left in the Legislature when we're finished.

[The committee adjourned at 9:28 a.m.]

