

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings St. Paul

1:06 p.m.

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: Could I have your attention, please. I'd ask everybody to be seated. We would like to start this afternoon's hearing.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I want to thank you for coming out in this not so nice weather to our hearings in St. Paul. My name is Edward Wachowich, and I'm the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I am also the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta. I have a feeling that my other job will be much easier than this one, but I hope not.

Let me introduce you to the other members of the commission. On my far left is Robert Grbavac of Raymond, Alberta. On my immediate right is Joseph Lehane of Innisfail, Alberta. On my far right is John McCarthy of Calgary, Alberta. On my immediate left is Wally Worth of Edmonton. The five people you see before you make up the commission, and I want to say that we are very happy to be here to receive your comments and consider your thinking with respect to our duties.

The commission is holding public hearings here in St. Paul to receive and to consider your arguments and points of view with respect to the areas, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions in Alberta. We must do this according to a particular set of rules, which I will review in a moment.

I want to assure you that every member of the commission has reviewed the law and the literature which has been recently written concerning electoral boundaries in Alberta. So I want to tell you that our minds are open inasmuch as we have not reached any conclusions, but I need to remind you also that our minds are not empty. We have given this matter a lot of thought. We have reviewed the law. We have reviewed the work of previous commissions and committees who have studied boundaries in Alberta, and we have reviewed what the courts have said about electoral boundaries in this province and in Canada.

I would put before you for your consideration the following summary of the law of Alberta with respect to electoral boundaries. One, our function is to review the existing electoral boundaries and to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly about the area, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions in Alberta.

Two, we have very limited time to accomplish this task. We must submit a report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly setting out our recommendations with respect to area, boundaries, and names of any proposed electoral divisions with our reasons by the 31st of January 1996. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly shall make the report public and publish the commission's proposals in the *Alberta Gazette* as soon as possible.

Three, the commission is required to hold two sets of public hearings. This is the first set. These hearings are being held before we make any report or proposals to the Speaker. The second set of hearings will be held in 1996, probably in March, after our report to the Speaker has been made public. We are required to hold public hearings to enable representations to be made to us by any person or organization in Alberta about the area, the boundaries, and the names of electoral divisions. We are also required to give

reasonable public notice of the times, places, and purposes of our public meetings, which we have done in this case.

After our report is published by the Speaker, we will undertake a second set of public hearings, as is required by the Act, and lay before the Speaker a final report by June 30, 1996. Again, the Speaker shall make this report public and publish it in the *Alberta Gazette*.

If more than one report is submitted from among the members of the commission, the report of the majority is the report of the commission. But if there is no majority, my report, or the report of the chair, is the report of the commission. The final report of the commission is then laid at the earliest opportunity before the Legislative Assembly, immediately if it is then sitting or within seven days after the beginning of the next sitting.

Then it is up to the Legislative Assembly by resolution to approve or approve with alterations the proposals of the commission and to introduce a Bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the resolution. This law would come into force when proclaimed before the holding of the next general election.

I want to speak to you about the redistribution rules. Population. Population means the most recent population set out in the most recent decennial census of the population of Alberta as provided by Statistics Canada. We are also required to add the population of Indian reserves that were not included in the census as provided by the federal department of Indian and northern affairs. But if the commission believes there is another provincewide census more recent than the decennial census compiled by Statistics Canada, which provides the population for proposed electoral divisions, then the commission may use this data.

Number of electoral divisions. The second rule is that the commission is required to divide Alberta into 83 proposed electoral divisions. The commission may take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate, but it must and shall take into consideration the following. Relevant considerations: one, the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; two, sparsity and density of population; three, common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements; four, whenever possible existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary; five, the existing municipal boundaries; six, the number of municipalities and other local authorities; seven, geographical features, including existing road systems; eight, the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

Population of electoral divisions. The population rule is that a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 percent above or below the average population for all 83 electoral divisions. There is an exception to the 25 percent rule. In the case of not more than four proposed electoral divisions the commission may have a population that is as much as 50 percent below the average population of the electoral divisions in Alberta if three of the following five criteria are met: one, the area exceeds 20,000 square kilometres, or the surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15,000 square kilometres; two, the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of any proposed electoral division by the most direct highway route is more than 150 kilometres; three, there is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 4,000 people; four, the area of the proposed electoral division contains an Indian reserve or a Métis settlement; five, the proposed electoral division has a portion

of its boundary coterminous with a boundary of the province of Alberta.

For our purposes the boundaries Act instructs us that the municipality of Crowsnest Pass is not a town.

This is a very general overview of the legislation, but we must now also turn to the guidance that has been provided by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Supreme Court of Alberta.

The Supreme Court of Canada and the Alberta Court of Appeal have agreed that the right to vote under the Charter includes, one, the right to vote; two, the right to have the political strength or value or force of the vote an elector casts not unduly diluted; three, the right to effective representation; four, the right to have the parity of the votes of others diluted, but not unduly, in order to gain effective representation or as a matter of practical necessity. The rulings of the Supreme Courts as well as the electoral boundaries Act must guide our decisions and ultimately the proposals that we make to the Legislature.

I want to speak to you about the focus. The commission in its public advertising has clearly stated that it is considering after preliminary deliberations, one, merging a number of rural electoral divisions into contiguous or neighbouring divisions; two, adding a number of urban electoral divisions to Edmonton and Calgary; three, any other revisions necessary to achieve one and two.

We have set forth our focus after preliminary deliberations. We have not reached any final conclusions. The commission wishes to hear the views of all Albertans with respect to this focus. Please let me assure you that our preliminary deliberations are preliminary and that no final conclusion has been drawn. The commission will not move to the consideration of proposals without the benefit of input from individuals and organizations in Alberta. Indeed, this is the purpose of the public hearings.

1:16

I also want to say that without public input the work of the commission will be seriously impaired. We want to hear the arguments and the reasoning of all organizations and individuals in Alberta with respect to the area, the boundaries, and the names of all electoral divisions.

I would like to now call upon the first representative that we have scheduled for our St. Paul hearings, and that is Ovide Langevin from the town of Lac La Biche. Mr. Langevin, you're the mayor of the town?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: I'm the mayor.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation before the Electoral Boundaries Commission. As you may be aware, the town of Lac La Biche sought boundary changes in connection with the 1993 provincial elections. Now that we have been invited to make a presentation, we're very, very pleased to do so.

With reference to the matter at hand, the position of the town of Lac La Biche is that we are still opposed to the existing electoral boundaries. We believe that historically and economically our community is tied with communities to the west and south of Lac La Biche. These boundaries, which we feel are in the best interests, are indicated on map 1. It is our first position to have the electoral boundaries revert to much as they were in 1989.

Over the past year we have seen the administration staff of the Northern Lights school division relocate to Bonnyville. This was followed shortly by most of the employees of improvement district No. 18 being moved to Bonnyville after annexation to the municipal

district of Bonnyville. Further, the local hospital board was decommissioned, and senior staff were located to Smoky Lake. All of these moves have been made to other ridings. Having these essential offices located in other jurisdictions makes our situation quite confusing. These shifts have caused us to ponder whether the future of our community remains predominantly to the west, as it has been for many years. The relocation of administration headquarters for education, health, and rural municipal government over the past year caused rapid changes in the direction that business is now conducted. These boundaries have been blurred because of expanding trade patterns and changes to provincial funding policies.

On an economic basis the present boundaries have separated the town of Lac La Biche from all but a token influence in the Al-Pac project. Most of the natural resources come from north of Lac La Biche and are carried across an electoral boundary to the Al-Pac project. We could compare this to having a riding boundary between the city of Fort McMurray and its tar sands development. We have also been hearing from many of the citizens that they want less government. We support this idea, but we oppose any reduction in our ability to have proper representation. We must continue to have access to our elected representatives on all matters that affect our community. A case in point is the Al-Pac pulp mill project. The town of Lac La Biche is the largest community in the vicinity of this billion dollar development, yet it, too, is located in another riding. Our riding boundaries must be changed in order to gain a fair and equitable representation.

There are certain to be even more changes taking place as other economic and political pressures are exerted upon us. It is perhaps then in the best interests of our community to expand our concerns to a larger regional perspective. We must also be prepared to accept alternatives to time-honoured views and adapt to take our place in a larger setting. With this in mind, we propose revised electoral boundaries for consideration as set out in map 2. Unfortunately, the town lacks the resources to determine if the population content in this area will meet all the requirements for adequate representation at the provincial level. We trust the maps will be received with the good faith under which they are sent.

Recognizing the difficulties of the task you are undertaking, we wish you good fortune. Nevertheless, during this round of electoral boundary reviews we fervently hope that the Electoral Boundaries Commission, when making any changes, will spare no effort to ensure that our citizens will be given fair and equal representation.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: If you'll just wait, there may be some questions.

MR. McCARTHY: In your submission you refer to map 2, and I understand when you indicate you don't have the exact population figures. Do you have an approximate figure that you would be aware of?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: No, I don't.

MR. McCARTHY: You indicated that you support the proposition of less government. The other question I have is: am I to take from that that that applies to the number of MLAs or not?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: There has been some talk that maybe the areas should be expanded a bit to include more population; thus I believe there would be less MLAs.

MR. WORTH: Mr. Langevin, I wonder if you would help me get oriented with respect to map 2 in your proposal.

MR. O. LANGEVIN: Okay.

MR. WORTH: Am I correct in interpreting that on the west you're proposing the inclusion of county 12?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: Athabasca?

MR. WORTH: Yes.

MR. O. LANGEVIN: Yes.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Then on the east it includes a chunk of MD 87?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: That's right. It goes right to the border.

MR. WORTH: How many hospital or health unit districts would this embrace? Would it embrace something beyond the Lakeland?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: There's Athabasca, Boyle, and Lac La Biche, I believe.

MR. WORTH: So part of that would be in the Aspen health district?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: I believe so, yes.

MR. WORTH: Then one other question: what school divisions or school districts are involved here other than Northern Lights?

MR. O. LANGEVIN: I'm not sure; I'm sorry.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert? Joe?

I want to tell you this, Mr. Langevin. We can get for you the information that you don't have. We have the facilities to acquire that information quite quickly. If you want to phone the electoral boundaries office after we're here and tell them that you would like to get this information, they can give you the populations that are shown in your two maps.

MR. O. LANGEVIN: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have to know them because if the population is only 15,000 in one of them . . .

MR. O. LANGEVIN: The reason that I didn't give you any numbers: the population has been looked into, but I'm not exactly sure of the numbers, and I would rather be sure of the numbers before I give them to you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. Well, I want to thank you for coming.

MR. O. LANGEVIN: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Hansa Thaleshvar. Not here?

Then we have Denis Ducharme. Will Denis Ducharme come forward please. Do you represent any organization, Mr. Ducharme, or are you just representing yourself?

1:26

MR. DUCHARME: I'm here as a citizen and also as a member of the Bonnyville PC Association.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine.

MR. DUCHARME: Good afternoon, gentlemen. I would like to express my disappointment in the fact that the province of Alberta is again reviewing its electoral boundaries, its third review in five years. Alberta's electoral boundaries were redrawn just before the last election. Over 50 percent of the present MLAs were newly elected following the 1992 review. It is also my understanding that the boundaries will be redrawn again in the year 2001, six years from now. My questions. Why are we reviewing again? What is the problem with the present boundaries? This is the fourth political commission studying this so-called problem in six years. Four court decisions, including a 1994 Alberta Court of Appeal case have also studied the matter. Each one found that the current electoral boundary laws meet all legal and constitutional tests.

The population variances between urban and rural ridings in Alberta are well within acceptable limits. I'm told that the average variance is less than 15 percent, when the courts allow 25 percent variation from the provincial average. Voters in our larger urban ridings of Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer are almost perfectly represented. These ridings are only 11.6 percent above the average population. The rural riding of Bonnyville, according to the 1992 review, shows a population of 25,739, a negative 9.7 percent variation from the average but well within the legal requirements.

Distance and area are certainly a problem in the Bonnyville constituency. Increasing the size of the area would certainly be detrimental to the constituency. Compared to an urban MLA who may represent four communities in a small and compact constituency, the Bonnyville MLA has several communities to represent: the towns of Bonnyville, Grand Centre, Cold Lake, CFB Cold Lake, Medley, the village of Glendon, the hamlets of Therien, Fort Kent, Ardmore, and Cherry Grove, the Métis settlements of Elizabeth and Fishing Lake, the Indian reserves of Cold Lake First Nations and Long Lake Cree Nation, and numerous other smaller communities in the constituency. Surely you will agree that there are significant cultural and economic differences between all these communities. The MLA's workload and time management are demanding in the present format without extending the boundaries of the constituency in order to raise the population.

The distance factor from the Legislature in Edmonton is also a major concern. With no regular air service to Edmonton, our MLA spends many hours commuting to and from Edmonton, time that could be better spent addressing the concerns of his or her electorate.

With a provincial election possibly only 18 months away, this electoral boundary review certainly hampers the nomination process in all constituencies due to the fact that your final submission is due only by the end of June 1996. Also, a recommended change by your commission could create a domino effect throughout the province, a change that is neither needed nor wanted according to the results of the last three reviews.

Let's just get on with the business of government rather than wasting time, effort, and taxpayers' dollars on a review that is not urgently required at this time.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: John, do you have any questions? Do you want to answer his questions?

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah. Maybe just a comment further to your submissions, and that is that you, I think, correctly summarized the process that has occurred to this point in time. The last court decision on this was the Court of Appeal decision rendered on October 24, 1994, so just about a year ago. They looked at the matter, and I think Chief Judge Wachowich has indicated what the constitutional rights of Albertans are with respect to being able to vote. The problem and I think the reason why this commission was established is summarized in one of the paragraphs from the conclusion that the Court of Appeal wrote. I'll just read to you the conclusion that they came up with, and perhaps it'll explain to you why we're here:

In the result, we again have decided to withhold any Charter condemnation. We do, however, wish to say more precisely what we meant by "gradual and steady" change. We think that a new and proper review is essential before the constitutional mandate of the present government expires, and, we hope, before the next general election. We reject any suggestion that the present divisions may rest until after the 2001 census.

This is the only hearing that will occur before the 2001 census, so we're faced with the problem where the Court of Appeal has rejected any suggestion that the present divisions may rest. Hopefully that'll explain to you the dilemma we face.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe, do you have any questions? Wally? Robert?

I might add to this, Denis, that there was an article in the *Edmonton Journal* by the *Journal's* staff last Saturday. I don't like to quote the *Edmonton Journal* as any kind of an authority in respect to these proceedings, even though we have somebody from the *Journal* here today. I think they put it succinctly in a very nice way:

Last year, the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled the province's election boundaries were constitutional but unfair to urban voters. The judge recommended they be changed before the next election, saying "this cannot be permitted to continue if Alberta wishes to call itself a democracy."

The Legislature has listened to this admonishment, or whatever you want to call it, and has asked that another Electoral Boundaries Commission be organized, following the court's recommendation. I might say that we don't relish this job. It's not an easy job, but the politicians in the province have decided to listen to what the court has said, and they're acting according to the court's instructions. What you're complaining about – I want you to know that even though we just started our hearings yesterday, we've heard this complaint from a few other people already.

Thank you.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: We also have here today, I understand, Stan Harder from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul PC Constituency Association.

MR. HARDER: Gentlemen, first I'd like to apologize. I didn't realize how many commission members there were, so I only had three copies printed up.

THE CHAIRMAN: That will do. There are two of us who can't read.

MR. HARDER: Perhaps I could ask the gentlemen on both sides of you to share one copy, then we can get over that.

As a preamble to our submission, I would like to say that I would support Mr. Denis Ducharme's presentation. There's probably not much point in going over the same ground twice, so I'll leave that with you. I would say that if you have the time to review this brief, we put a lot of thought and effort into putting this together to reflect what we feel is the majority opinion of the constituency members.

The bottom line, essentially, is that we would like to see the boundaries remain the way they are to give us time to work with the boundaries as they were established in 1993.

THE CHAIRMAN: You're speaking for the Bonnyville . . .

MR. HARDER: No. Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. HARDER: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry; I was looking at the wrong sheet of paper.

Any questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Mr. Harder, I've got a question. In your brief you stated: let's not fix something that isn't broken. The first presenter suggested that in fact the situation was broken, and I'm just wondering how you would respond to that.

1:36

MR. HARDER: Well, I presume this is why you're here. This is a matter of opinion, I'm sure. Our opinion is that it is not broken, and the other gentleman is of course entitled to his opinion that it is.

THE CHAIRMAN: John? Not only can some of us not read; some are slow readers.

MR. HARDER: I would say that if you wish to review this at your leisure, we would be happy to respond to you in any way. If you have questions that you would like to direct to us later on, just get ahold of our constituency president, Linda Yurdiga, or our secretary, Paul Pelletier, and we'll be pleased to respond in writing to whatever questions or concerns you may have.

MR. McCARTHY: Just one question. Your Progressive Conservative Association: what was the process you went through within your association in order to come up with this particular position?

MR. HARDER: Well, we had a meeting of representative members of the board, and I believe there's some policy input from central in this.

MR. McCARTHY: Okay. And that included people from the town of Lac La Biche as well?

MR. HARDER: Yes, there were. The president of our association is from Lac La Biche.

MR. WORTH: Before you go, Mr. Harder, I'm intrigued by your suggestion in your first paragraph. You argue for stability and your argument is that with that stability you would be able to ensure intercommunity co-operation and co-ordination. Do you think that stability will bring about that kind of co-operation and continuity better than boundaries that were set up that would be, to use the chairman's quotation, boundaries that would provide for, if you like, a more equitable acknowledgment of the interests of the people that are in the area? We have heard that some of them don't feel that their interests and concerns are being met. So the argument against stability is: well, look, we need to try to accommodate these interests. Your argument, if I understand it, is: let's leave the people together and let them work it out. Is that right?

MR. HARDER: Essentially that's right. I understand the problem that you're up against. You know, you're trying to put all of these various arguments together and come up with something reasonable. This is our position: that stability will be better supported if we do nothing with this particular boundary until the next review. I understand there is some reference to the review being too far away and all of the legal reasons why this is being done. I understand all that, but this is our position.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, if there are no further questions, we want to thank you, Mr. Harder, for coming and talking to us.

MR. HARDER: I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: We also have today Mr. Léo Vasseur, the MLA for Bonnyville. We're honoured to have you, Mr. Vasseur. Most MLAs, for some reason, don't want to come and talk to us.

MR. VASSEUR: Thank you. Did you have the opportunity to get a copy of the submission that I brought forward? Unfortunately, I only brought one in for the panel, forgetting that there are five individuals on the panel. Did we have a chance to make copies? We've only got one.

THE CHAIRMAN: We don't have a photocopier. Maybe you could go through it with us.

MR. VASSEUR: Well, in that case I'll go through it in more detail.

The first portion of my presentation is more of an editorial one. It's strictly a suggestion that I'd like to give to the board on the name change. It's not a drastic name change; it's only to reflect more the area than the name now. The name is the Bonnyville constituency. My recommendation would be that it be called the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency strictly because the east end of the constituency has about 14,000 to 15,000 population, which represents slightly over 50 percent of the constituency. Strictly editorial and strictly a recommendation.

The balance of my presentation is in answer to the considerations that were listed in the pamphlet. The first one, being the effective representation question. I honestly believe that if we're going to be

democratic about electing people to the Legislature, we have to remember that one person, one vote is very important. I've listened to the last two submissions here this afternoon. I know that the job as MLA in rural Alberta is considerably different than an MLA's in an urban setting, but having said that, I honestly believe that the job as an MLA in rural Alberta, because of the distance and the sparsity in population, can include a lot more travel and considerably more time in the contacting of groups or towns or individuals or whatever you have. But the Legislative Assembly should then consider even additional personnel or resources to do that in lieu of gerrymandering with the issue of representation other than one person, one vote.

I personally understand that if the commission acts in a fair and equitable fashion, there would be a shifting of seats from rural Alberta to the urban settings, specifically the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. If we go strictly by number, looking at a median of about 30,000 or 30,700 per constituency, we know that there's a possibility of some additional five seats to the two cities, two possibly in Edmonton and two or three in Calgary. I personally don't have any arguments with this. This is somewhat different probably than what you're going to hear in rural Alberta, but I strongly believe in one person, one vote.

I also support the recommendations in the brochure that was sent out that we should probably try to establish some boundaries within existing boundaries that are in place now between counties or MDs or school boards or the new regional health boards. That may be difficult, because to be able to do that we're going to have to shift some of the existing boundaries. If we're prepared to do that, shifting boundaries between municipalities and counties or school boards or regional health boards, then the process may take much, much longer. So it's a suggestion that is probably workable, but we may not have the time to look at it in that fashion in this case.

I also support the suggestion that we look at geographical areas, the road system, et cetera, but also we must look seriously at economic regions. There have been some suggestions that to accommodate the additional population which we would require in the constituency of Bonnyville, we would have to add possibly the town of Elk Point to the constituency of Bonnyville. May I suggest that keeping close to the 30,000 median that we have, we can probably attain that population in the constituency of Bonnyville by looking at the boundaries that the constituency has or go strictly to a geographical boundary, let's say the North Saskatchewan River, and include that population that is not presently in the Bonnyville constituency. That would probably bring us very close to the 30,000 population without looking at the town of Elk Point, and it would take a sliver out of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency that is a long distance away from the centre of that particular constituency.

The Bonnyville constituency is not all that difficult to move around and add a couple of thousand people to it, being that we bound the province of Saskatchewan on the east and absolutely no population at all to the north, which is the air weapons range. So the only way we can add to this particular constituency is to the west or to the south.

I:46

I'd like to conclude by just repeating myself maybe but again emphasizing that we have to remember that one person, one vote is democratic. In the shifting of the boundaries, we also have to remember that the shift in Alberta for many years has been from rural to urban. Politically that's unfortunate for rural Alberta, but that has been the shift. The expectation over the next 10 years is

probably not different than that. So if we give everybody 30,000 to 31,000 people per riding, and if we want to stay within the 10 percent limit and give the consideration to rural Alberta of a couple of thousand people, I have no problem with that, but I certainly do have problems when ridings are in the neighbourhood of 16,000 to 20,000 people.

So having said that, I will leave those comments with the board. Hopefully we can come up with a fair and equitable formula, knowing that it would reduce the rural seats from the present number, I believe, of 43 down to 40, maybe the high 30s.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine.

Mr. Vasseur, I'd like to talk to you about the suggested name change. We've had people appearing before us stating that they don't like constituencies named after former politicians. They like them to be identifiable. The name of Bonnyville is very identifiable. You're suggesting Bonnyville-Cold Lake. We've also heard the objection that adding another name is making it too long for people who might have to answer the phone or whatever.

MR. VASSEUR: It was merely a suggestion because at least half or more than half of the population lives around the Cold Lake area.

THE CHAIRMAN: I appreciate that. We've also had another suggestion in respect to this area, and that is that it should be named Lakeland, which is the opposite of giving it a name identifying it with a community. So I just wanted to tell you the different views that we're getting. After telling you this, what is your reaction to naming the constituency Lakeland?

MR. VASSEUR: I would have no objections to that at all. It would represent the area quite well. It's also identified as Lakeland presently. A bigger area is known as Lakeland, but I would have no objections to that.

THE CHAIRMAN: John, do you have any questions?

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah. You indicated that there was an area to be added. I'm from Calgary, so you're going to have to bear with me here. You indicated an area south and east of Elk Point and north of the Saskatchewan River. Is that correct?

MR. VASSEUR: Well, it could probably easily follow one of the lines going straight south from the present constituency. I don't have a map in front of me, but there's probably a township line that we could follow straight down, the township line right here that would go right down to the North Saskatchewan River. Then that would include all the people there. It also would include the Frog Lake Indian reserve, which presently is in the St. Paul constituency. It's merely a suggestion.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. WORTH: Mr. Vasseur, you are, I think, arguing for greater relative parity in numbers between urban and rural constituencies. In support of the argument of providing for effective representation, you suggested that perhaps the MLAs in rural constituencies might be given added resources to enable them to provide effective

representation. Could you just elaborate a little bit on how you might see that working just to help me understand it?

MR. VASSEUR: Well, presently the rural MLAs are treated differently when it comes to traveling expenses and expenses in Edmonton, which is fair. My suggestion at this time would be that if you go to a large, sparsely populated area – there are some in northern Alberta; there are some in southern Alberta – you would in that constituency allow a certain amount of money for that MLA to hire the additional personnel that is required to do the necessary traveling and all the extra legwork that's necessary to provide those services. With an additional person or a half-person you'd probably need additional financial resources for the traveling that's involved in those larger constituencies. At the present time there is a traveling cost that is borne by the constituency, but all I'm saying is that that could be expanded, and then you would have a much fairer one person, one vote situation.

I fully agree that the time an MLA spends on the road representing a rural constituency is a lot more than one in an urban setting, and we deal with a lot more people, a lot more groups, a lot more municipal governments, school boards, on and on and on. Having said that, we have to believe in democracy, and representation by population should mean just that.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to talk about that because I'm unfamiliar with MLAs' offices. I would gather that in the city of Edmonton or Calgary the MLA has just one office in his constituency. You could take St. Paul constituency here today, and the MLA may have an office in St. Paul and he may have one in Lac La Biche and he may have one elsewhere. I don't know. He may want to run two or three offices in these larger constituencies. Does this happen? Are they given an extra allowance for running more offices, or is it just the extra mileage allowance?

MR. VASSEUR: No. At the present time the amount of money that is allowed to the constituency is on a per capita basis. It's so much per elector in the constituency. I honestly believe that should be changed. I'm sure that if you talked to the MLA for this region, he would probably tell you the same thing. I presently have an office in Bonnyville and I have one in Grand Centre to try to represent the constituency as best we can. Having said that, both those individuals are not full-time because the amount of money in the budget is not there. We're able to do a reasonable job in that particular riding in this fashion. I'm not saying that I need additional personnel, but I can see that some constituencies that have far greater distances to look after may very well have to have three and four different offices to service their people.

The other thing we must remember is that we deal with people in a much different fashion in rural Alberta than in the cities. Having talked to city MLAs, their offices become – and they only have to have one office – offices of advocacy, dealing with people that come in with problems with social services, WCB, that kind of stuff, a lot more so than a rural constituency, which gets involved with programs in the communities and the towns, not as much now as before because a lot of the funding programs have been eliminated. It's a different role and a much different role if you happen to be on the government side and end up being a minister. The role of the MLA before, who is here today, the MLA for Bonnyville, was much

different than my role. So having said that, it can be addressed, as far as I'm concerned, with additional resources and personnel.

1:56

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you telling us that the rural MLA's work is greater and more varied than an urban MLA's of Edmonton or Calgary?

MR. VASSEUR: It's different.

THE CHAIRMAN: I can see that it's different. You tell me a rural MLA might have to deal with different farm programs and various other things. I think it's safe to say his work is more varied, but is it more work than an urban MLA's?

MR. VASSEUR: In the traveling time, yes. That's where the biggest difference would be, I would imagine.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm trying to figure out the income that you get to run your office. You're running two offices and you could be running three, while an urban MLA only runs one. You say that it's a grant of so much per head. Is the grant of so much per head the same for a rural and an urban MLA, or is it different?

MR. VASSEUR: At the present time, yes, it is.

THE CHAIRMAN: The same?

MR. VASSEUR: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: I see. So what your suggestion, then, would be is that maybe the allowance for a rural MLA should be higher than an urban MLA.

MR. VASSEUR: Yes. You'd also have to take a look at the sparsity of the population and the distance between the communities. The Bonnyville constituency is by far much better than other ones as far as distance between towns and communities. I can get from one end of the constituency to the next in an hour and a half. You certainly can't do that in northern Alberta or in the extreme southwest part of the province.

THE CHAIRMAN: So, not that it's important, you're telling us you have one of the easier constituencies.

MR. VASSEUR: As far as the rural constituencies, yes. There are some constituencies that are considered rural that are not rural. I mean, if you take the city of Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie or Red Deer or Lethbridge – in the discussions that we've had for some reason they only put Edmonton and Calgary together as urban constituencies, and that's not the case.

MR. GRBAVAC: Mr. Vasseur, should the commission opt to implement your philosophy of one person, one vote, that could result in upwards of 10 or 15 percent of the landmass of the province coming under the jurisdiction, if you will, of one Member of the Legislative Assembly. I'm just curious whether or not you see that the responsibility of that member, any component of his or her responsibility, is to represent that land base. I appreciate that may sound a bit alien in terms of a democratic proposition, but do you see the impact then – the environmental impact, the impact on

geography, the impact on that particular region of the province – as a responsibility of the various ministries of government, or do you see that MLA as having a responsibility to represent that land base, if you will, with its myriad of complications and the resultant impacts of economic development and that sort of thing? I'm just curious about that component of the job with respect to an MLA who may have to represent 10 to 15 percent of the land base of the province.

MR. VASSEUR: In my opinion, the majority of the responsibility lies with the department responsible. Yes, the MLA would get involved in many of the issues, but the responsibility stays with environment or energy or agriculture or forestry, depending on what goes on in that area. You know, you may very well be sitting in the opposition representing a large area of which 99.9 percent of the activity would be the responsibility of the departments anyway.

MR. GRBAVAC: So you don't see, then, that particular concern being a justification for any additional resources in the constituency.

MR. VASSEUR: Well, there's no resource, yes, but not the gerrymandering of the representation by population.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, I think we have a slightly different interpretation of the term "gerrymandering."

MR. VASSEUR: Yes.

MR. GRBAVAC: You know, I think a deviance from a particular mean cannot necessarily be equated with gerrymandering, but that's a slightly different issue. I think you've answered my question.

MR. VASSEUR: I can use a different term if you want me to.

MR. GRBAVAC: No.

MR. WORTH: Mr. Vasseur, if I may just ask one other question, how have the recent consolidation of health districts into larger health regions and the consolidation of school divisions into larger educational units affected the work of MLAs? Has it lightened the load, increased the load, or has it had no impact whatsoever?

MR. VASSEUR: In my situation in the opposition it hasn't changed anything. I could expand on that, but I don't think it's necessary at this level.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many education boards, health boards, and whatnot do you have to deal with?

MR. VASSEUR: Our region is totally within the Lakeland health authority, the new regional 12. As far as the school boards are concerned, we're still dealing with only two school boards. That's what we had before. Northern Lights at the present time goes into the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. It hasn't increased the number of boards that we're dealing with, no.

THE CHAIRMAN: How many municipalities?

MR. VASSEUR: At the present time I believe there's one less than we had before because the area that was looked after by the ID, the improvement district, is now all part of the MD of Bonnyville.

THE CHAIRMAN: So from what I'm hearing from you, you've got one of the easier constituencies in Alberta to look after. Some people that come to us have four municipalities and a bunch of school districts.

MR. VASSEUR: Well, there are eight municipalities left within my constituency at the present time. The only one that's been reduced by the changes in the boundaries has been the ID. All of the IDs within the constituency have become part of the MD.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

MR. LEHANE: Mr. Vasseur, are you familiar with Madam Justice McLachlin's decision in the Carter case, which is a Supreme Court of Canada case?

MR. VASSEUR: No, I'm not.

MR. LEHANE: I ask you that question because she discusses the right to vote under the Charter, and of course it's the leading case by which we're bound in this country in terms of the right to vote under the Charter. To quote from that case, she says:

The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s. 3 of the Charter is not equality of voting power per se but the right to "effective representation". The right to vote therefore comprises many factors, of which equity is but one. The section does not guarantee equality of voting power.

Now, that's the Supreme Court of Canada's majority decision in the Carter case, which was a reference out of Saskatchewan. It's the leading case by which this commission is bound in terms of deciding what is the right to vote for Alberta in determining in our review of the electoral boundaries whether they are satisfactory at present or whether they need to be revised.

I find your submission somewhat at variance with that. I'd like you to expand a little bit in terms of telling us to what extent you see that there can be variations from the one person, one vote in terms of ensuring that rural constituents have the same effective representation as urban constituents.

MR. VASSEUR: Well, I know definitely that there has to be a variance allowed to some degree. Having said that, I don't believe that it should be any greater than 10 percent. Because of the distance, you know, you could give that 10 percent to the rural area from the median quite easily, and you may have to do that to follow some kind of economic region or boundaries, be it geographic boundaries or a road or whatever at the present time. Yes, there will be some variance. My opinion still stays the same, that we should try to stay as close as possible to the median that we have found from the last census.

The other thing is that when we talk effective representation, that's why I suggested – and it's strictly my personal opinion – that to try to provide that effective representation, we allocate additional personnel if required or resources to the MLAs that do represent an area that is sparsely populated to assist them in representing that effectively. Again, that is a personal opinion.

2:06

MR. LEHANE: So, as I understand you, then, you feel that a 10 percent variance is an acceptable variance but that anything over and above that is not acceptable.

MR. VASSEUR: Basically that's it, but we must remember that, you know, we put these boundaries into place, and they should last for 10, 12 years, from what I gather. That's usually how often we look at these boundaries. Having said that, there is a shift all the time into urban settings. So allowing for that, even if we put everything equal today, 10 years down the road you're going to have constituencies that are going to be considerably larger in the urban settings than what you set today. So you have to remember the history of the shifts also when you're making some new boundaries, I would suggest.

MR. LEHANE: Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to thank you, Mr. Vasseur, for coming here and having your frank discussion with us as to how you see your constituency and how we might try to solve the problems.

MR. VASSEUR: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: We've finished the speakers that have been listed, and I see a gentleman has put up his hand. We're going to call for people from the audience to come forward and to make presentations, even though they have not turned in their names. So if you wish to come up and say something, sir, you're quite welcome to take a chair there and try your best to teach this panel something.

MR. HOLTHER: Thank you. My name is Sid Holthe. I'm from Elk Point, and the reason I'm here is that the community of Elk Point has just been mentioned. Now, this is the first indication that I have ever heard that the constituency of Bonnyville was considering joining the Elk Point district. Frankly as an Elk Pointer – and this is only my opinion – I think that if the commission was indiscreet enough to link us to Bonnyville, you probably would create such turmoil that the situation in Quebec would look like a Sunday school picnic.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Don't run away. First of all, I want to get the spelling of your name for *Hansard*.

MR. HOLTHER: Yeah. First name, S-i-d, Holthe, H-o-l-t-h-e.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now we may have some questions.

MR. HOLTHER: Oh. Okay.

MR. McCARTHY: So the point that you're making is that Elk Point has more affinity with the town of St. Paul.

MR. HOLTHER: Oh, definitely. You see, traditionally the river always was a boundary. We have not had south communication to the same extent that we always had east and west. So our linkage really is with St. Paul. I think that we would have considerable difficulty adjusting to any other situation, and it certainly would not be of any benefit to us. I doubt if we would be of any benefit to Bonnyville, honestly, except numbers.

MR. McCARTHY: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the distance between Elk Point and Bonnyville about the same?

MR. HOLTHE: Pretty much the same, yes, but it's the traditional patterns that I am talking about. You know, in the way of education the county offices have been in St. Paul of course. People are accustomed to coming to the provincial offices in St. Paul as well.

MR. McCARTHY: Just to be fair, I think, to the previous speaker, I don't think from what I heard him say that he was suggesting that Elk Point be included with Bonnyville. An area to the east of Elk Point and north of the Saskatchewan River but not including Elk Point was my understanding of what he said.

MR. HOLTHE: Oh. So that you are not including the town of Elk Point.

MR. VASSEUR: Can I please comment?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Go ahead.

MR. VASSEUR: The gentleman is quite right in saying that the economic activity in Elk Point has been historically with the town of St. Paul, and the proximity of Elk Point to St. Paul is less than to Bonnyville. It's an economic region that Bonnyville has very little to do with, and my suggestion is that the town of Elk Point would stay with St. Paul. I concur in what the gentleman is saying: no question about it.

MR. HOLTHE: I think some of this certainly would apply to the region east. If you look at the east boundary, there is the settlement of Fishing Lake, for example, and I don't know where they want to go. They are in Bonnyville now. If they wish to stay in Bonnyville, that's where they should be. Here again they're kind of down at the eastern edge, and their education patterns, travel, have more to do with Heinsburg, for example. The hospital services have been primarily in Elk Point. What is going to happen in the future, of course, no one knows, because you know the health situation.

So when you look at that area east of Elk Point, to me it seems logical that the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency should in fact be going to the border; okay? But that's a matter for the people that are in that area to indicate by themselves. I'm not suggesting we should grab them, but I'm saying that if they wish to make any presentation to the commission at any time, it's something that should be considered. We also previously had an area south of the area which had joined the St. Paul constituency, and I think that now they have been excluded again. So there always are parameter problems that have to be dealt with, and I sympathize with you in that matter.

MR. McCARTHY: So if I could try and summarize here and question you on your comment. Looking at the area east of Elk Point but not including Elk Point and north of the Saskatchewan River, if that were to be added to the Bonnyville constituency, in your opinion we'd be into a Quebec-style situation.

MR. HOLTHE: I can only speak, you know, from my own point of view because this is not something we've had an opportunity to survey any opinion on. I think you would have a lot of unhappy

people if in fact the kind of linkage that they have enjoyed in the past were denied them and if they had to attempt to communicate effectively with Bonnyville. I think you'd have some unhappy people definitely.

MR. McCARTHY: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, any other questions? I'm glad you came forward, Mr. Holthe. You at least cleared up the fact that Mr. Vasseur doesn't want Elk Point and that Elk Point doesn't want Bonnyville.

MR. HOLTHE: I'll sleep better tonight. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Another gentleman has his hand up. We need your name for the *Hansard* report.

MR. GREEN: Yeah. I think I can remember it. I'm Peter Green, reeve of the county of Vermilion River. I'd like to say that we appreciate the status quo. Further to his question that we've been discussing just lately, we did have two MLAs representing our county two or three years ago. Now we have one, and we appreciate that. So I wouldn't like the idea of drawing a constituency along the North Saskatchewan River again, as far as our county is concerned. I don't know what your map shows, whether you can see the Tulliby Lake area of our county. It's in the northeast. They were represented by one MLA and the rest of the area by another, and we appreciate dealing with one MLA.

THE CHAIRMAN: Vermilion River is in what constituency now?

MR. GREEN: Vermilion, I would think.

THE CHAIRMAN: What you're telling us is that you want to stay in Vermilion.

2:16

MR. GREEN: That's right.

MR. GRBAVAC: I've got a question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Yesterday we had a representation to the effect that one municipal district had three Members of the Legislative Assembly responsible for their particular municipality, and they felt very strongly that they would like to have one MLA. Could you just expand on that a little bit? It seems to me that if you had three captive audiences, that would be a more effective voice in the Legislature than one. Why is it that one MLA is such a captive audience when two or three are not? Excuse me if this sounds a little facetious, but I would like you to expand on that a little bit. I'm not asking you to incriminate yourself.

MR. GREEN: No.

It has been beneficial to have two because they have two pools of money, and we've gained from that. On the other side of the coin, when we set our secondary highway priority list and those kinds of things, it's nice to talk to one person and have one person represent you.

MR. GRBAVAC: So basically it's easier.

MR. GREEN: Yeah. Well, at least the opportunity's there for effective representation this way, and I do personally feel we are getting it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, there are no more questions. Thanks, Mr. Green.

MR. GREEN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Langevin.

MR. P. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Your Honour and members of the commission. As the local MLA first of all I'd like to extend my appreciation to you for having chosen St. Paul as a location for the hearings to make it easier for people in northeastern Alberta. I see there are people from Bonnyville and Elk Point and Ashmont and Lac La Biche. So thanks for being here today.

I know that the setting of boundaries, if we look at the past, is not always an easy task. The last go-round was a real mess for a long time until they were set for the last election, and I don't envy your job to have to review this again and make some recommendations. Even today, if you look at the presentations, you've heard some conflicting points of view, so you will have to be the judge at the end, and it's not easy to decide.

I would like to give you my point of view as an MLA and as an MLA of a rural riding and a very large riding. As you review this process and as you hear all the submissions, I'd like to put some points again. A lot of people in the riding of Lac La Biche-St. Paul are looking for stability at this time. I don't think there is too much support for changing the boundaries. I'm sure that if we had an opinion poll, the majority would say that we would like to retain the status quo. People are just getting accustomed to the riding they belong in: where the MLA's offices are, how to deal with the MLA, and how to find their services. I think that's one thing that is by and large the opinion of the people.

The second thing is democracy, and I know the MLA for Lac La Biche has stressed very strongly that democracy, in his opinion, is one person, one vote. We hear that a lot in Alberta from urban people also. I've had discussions with people in cities that would like to see an equal number per riding. They think their voting power is diluted because they may have a riding that has 12 or 20 percent above the average and in rural Alberta it's less – Lac La Biche-St. Paul I think is 10.8 percent less – than the average. They see that as a mark against democracy, but I think democracy is much more than that. Democracy is government service and accessibility to government and accessibility to services and accessibility to the MLA. I maintain as an MLA that if I had a riding in a large urban setting with a large population of people who are basically of the same interest group – they live in the same close community, and in maybe five or 10 minutes you can drive across your riding – it's much easier to serve 40,000 or 50,000 in that location than it is to serve 25,000 or 30,000 in Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

In my riding I have over 40 different communities. There are five Indian reserves. There are two Métis settlements. I have three private schools. I have two Francophone schools. I have one AVC. And many of these things – there are only a few in Alberta. There are only four AVCs in Alberta. There are maybe about eight or nine Francophone schools, and I have two of them. I have four different

counties to deal with. The only one that's totally in my riding is the county of St. Paul, and I have a large part, about two-thirds, of the MD of Bonnyville. I have part of the county of Smoky Lake. I have part of the county of Two Hills. I have four different hospitals in different communities. I have 12 ag societies. I have six town and village councils. So if we look at the complexity of serving a rural riding like mine, I have to say that it's a lot more work than an urban riding, where they might have one town council for 15 or 16 MLAs or they might have one hospital in one riding and some ridings not even have one hospital.

You have to look at all of this, and there are many other things. There are these small special-interest groups or special groups like in the riding of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Very few other ridings would have small loggers that are operating as they did in the last 30 or 40 years. It's a big problem with companies like Al-Pac moving in and taking FMAs. The MLA has to look after their problems, trying to find logs. I still have about 30 to 40 traplines that are registered, and that's another interest group that has to be looked after. There's commercial fishing. There's a fish processing plant. There's heavy oil. I think there are only five ridings in Alberta that have heavy oil industry. I have it in my riding. So if you look at the complexity of that, it's an enormous job.

If we were going to go to one person, one vote, this riding might have to be about 50 percent bigger in territory than it is now. It's already close to 180 miles from one end to the other. It's hard to service. At the present time I have two constituency offices: one in St. Paul and a suboffice in Lac La Biche. If it were enlarged by quite a bit, I'd probably end up with three offices. When I first was elected, I also had an office in Elk Point, but because of fiscal restraint I had to close it. These people have to travel out of their community to access the service of government and the service of their MLA. The bigger you make the riding, the harder it is for people to access. I think it's important to keep that in mind and when we talk about democracy that we see all of these points. That's part of democracy. It's not just the day you vote and the number of voters at the polling station on that day. Government is much more than that if it's going to be responsible and effective and if it's going to be answerable to the people of this province.

The job of an MLA is a big commitment, and I'm not complaining, because when you get into office, you accept that as a task. But I wouldn't want it to be, in my case, a lot more, because I would have a hard time saying that I'm doing an effective job of representing all the people. It's a full-time job as it is. Certain people and political parties will always attack the number of MLAs and say that you shouldn't reduce the number of MLAs, and that seems to attract the attention of a lot of the constituents of Alberta because they think there is a savings by reducing the number of MLAs. We may reduce from 83 down to 60 or 70 or whatever it may be and in fact there may be an increased cost if we do that.

I maintain in my case that if you reduce the number of MLAs in Alberta and if you make the role of a constituency much larger, if you force MLAs to have more offices and more staff, the government will have to pick up a lot of these extra expenses because we cannot do it on the current budgets. If that happens, then what happens is you distance the MLA from contact with the population. They're out there in suboffices dealing with office staff who try to do their best and it could be effective, but in the eyes of the constituents they still want to deal with their MLA on many issues.

So if you reduced the wages of a few MLAs but increased staff and offices in the field, I don't think there would be a savings. All you will end up with probably is a lessened amount of personal contact and personal attention by the MLA to the local people.

That is my presentation.

2:26

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Langevin.

I'll see if there's anybody who wants to ask any questions.

MR. WORTH: I've been interested in what you've said about the number of authorities that you have to interact with, the number of different organizations and groups. We heard this yesterday from a number of other rural constituencies. Facetiously, it makes me wonder what all the other elected people are doing in rural Alberta: the councillors, the school trustees, the mayors. If the MLA has so much to do, is he covering up for these people because they're not doing their job? I'm being facetious. What I'm really trying to get at is: what's the relationship between a rural MLA and all of these other elected people in his constituency? Why is it that the rural MLA seems to feel that he has to deal with all of these agencies and units of government himself and not simply leave that job to the elected mayor or the councillors or to the school trustees?

MR. P. LANGEVIN: First of all I'd like to say that I think the local elected officials, our mayors and councillors and school trustees and board chairmen and whatever you have, are all doing an excellent job, but in their own dealings they look after the issues and the problems of their local municipality or local boards. When they have to deal with the province, if you take the counties and the MDs, if there's a program to upgrade secondary roads, which are coshared by the province and the local municipalities, what happens is they set up their priorities at home, then they meet with the MLA to gain some support and backing, and one day go back to the department of transport to get the funding to do these things. They often do that for funding for upgrading of infrastructures, for water and sewer, for infrastructure programs in communities.

Whatever problem a local government may see they have difficulties with in dealing with a government department – the minute they think they sense those difficulties or they want extra help in approaching that department, they will approach their MLA. They will ask for a meeting with him. They will go over the issue, and then they'll ask the MLA to accompany them to a meeting with the minister or the department. You have to do that with all councils or all invitations that come across your desk. This is what takes a lot of the time between the MLA and the municipalities. Or if a constituent in a town has a problem with his own town council and if he figures in his estimation that he's not treated fairly, he will go to the MLA and say, "What is the municipal Act, and what can I do with this?" So a constituent will come directly to the MLA to resolve a problem that he or she may have with a board or a school board or a town council or a county council. That often has happened also. Sometimes it's just the misunderstanding of a constituent who jumps the gun, but still they end up in our office, and they're asking us to intervene or to look into these problems.

MR. WORTH: So you're kind of a super-duper constituency ombudsman.

MR. P. LANGEVIN: Well, I don't know how you would classify it, but they do come to us with all kinds of problems that maybe could

be resolved at another level. In the estimation of the constituent it's a problem. He has to deal with it. He goes to the MLA for help.

MR. WORTH: This is a role, I assume, that has developed over years and years and years and now is embedded in the tradition, if you like, in the folklore, of the region.

MR. P. LANGEVIN: It's part of the tradition, yes.

MR. WORTH: I suppose it could be changed, but that would be to assign more responsibility to the local government people. That would take some doing; wouldn't it?

MR. P. LANGEVIN: Well, the last municipal Act did assign more responsibilities to local government, but it did not lessen the amount of people who came to my office. The public out there doesn't have the time or the knowledge or they haven't studied the Acts. They don't know exactly. The minute they have a problem, they say, well, that's control of their municipal affairs: "There's the MLA. That's where I go." How are we going to stop that? I don't know.

MR. WORTH: It sounds like your job is more difficult than ours.

MR. P. LANGEVIN: I don't know.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Mr. Langevin, I have had the opportunity to serve as a municipal councillor for the last 15 years or so. It seems quite apparent to me that the number of municipal governments in this province is on the decline. It may not be currently evident to people, you know, but I think that the future points to fewer and fewer municipal governments. I'm just wondering if you would concur with that. Certainly if there aren't going to be fewer governments, there will be greater collaboration and sharing of administrative services and that sort of thing. One of the mandates of this commission is to look towards the future and establish boundaries that will serve not only today's needs but the future's needs as well. I'm just curious to get your insight with respect to the level of municipal government you see existing in the future.

MR. P. LANGEVIN: I think that there will be a lesser number of municipal governments. I don't know to what extent. It's all on a voluntary basis right now. The Department of Municipal Affairs will facilitate the annexation or the joining of two municipal districts, but they're not forcing or asking anybody to do it. So I think that as they evaluate their finances and their efficiency, we're going to see more and more of them joining forces, either total annexation or maybe co-operation in administration of some kind, joint agreement and joint administration.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Langevin, I want to thank you for coming. I think you made a very good point with respect to telling us that effective representation is more than just equality of voting.

With respect to cutting MLAs and saving money, I should tell you that we met in Edmonton yesterday for our first day. It's not part of our mandate, but a lot of people wished to come to talk to us and said cut the number of MLAs by various figures and save the money. You're the first one who's pointed out to us that just cutting the

MLAs may not save the money, so I want to thank you for bringing up that point. Thanks for coming.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:39 p.m.]

Is there anybody else in the audience who would like to speak?

MR. TREFANENKO: Thank you, Chief Justice Wachowich and panel. I want to also thank you for coming to our town. I'm the mayor of St. Paul. I wasn't going to say anything today, but I thought I could shed some light on the current constituency. I'm what you would call a true northeastern person. I was born in Smoky Lake, raised north of Lac La Biche, married in Lac La Biche, had a business in Lac La Biche, and now I live in St. Paul. I've been here 21 years, but before the 21 years I had lived in other parts of Canada as well.

I just wanted to speak a little bit about the connection between Lac La Biche and St. Paul. Maybe you could look at me and think – and I'll put it up front – that I might be a bit biased because I lived in Lac La Biche and I've lived in St. Paul. There is quite a bit of connection between the two communities, and I feel strongly that they should stay together. So what I'm advocating is the status quo.

Lac La Biche and St. Paul have both been government centres, so there's been a lot of connection between the two communities. There have been many provincial government offices in Lac La Biche – and I'll just give a couple of examples, AVC and the parks and wildlife department – that provide services not only in Lac La Biche but in other parts of the region like St. Paul. In St. Paul there are also a lot of government departments like Canada Manpower, the RCMP, provincial departments like transportation, fish and wildlife, and others that not only provide service in this area but also in the Lac La Biche area.

The farming community of St. Paul and of course the farming community of Lac La Biche spend a lot of time in this area because this is where the big implement dealers are, the big car dealers, and so on. We must also remember that part of Lac La Biche in trading patterns goes towards Athabasca as well, but anything south of Lac La Biche comes to the St. Paul area.

2:36

I didn't want to speak too long, but I'd also say that I'd hate to see Elk Point and east of Elk Point go to another constituency, because there is a strong historical relationship between the Elk Point and St. Paul areas. They're in the same county, and the same educational and a lot of other services are provided to the Elk Point and east area from the St. Paul area.

That's all I really wanted to say. I know you hear a lot of conflicting items. I want to thank you for coming to St. Paul. I'm glad you came here; I hope you come back. We know you've got a tough job ahead. Good luck.

THE CHAIRMAN: I was going to ask you your name, but they gave it to me. It's John Trefanenko.

MR. TREFANENKO: Right. I met you, Judge Wachowich, a couple of days ago in Edmonton at a session.

THE CHAIRMAN: Has anybody got a question? Thank you for welcoming us.

Well, have we cleaned out the house yet? Would anybody else wish to speak to us? We've still got some time. If there's nobody else who wants to speak to us, I guess we will adjourn these proceedings. We're moving to Wainwright tonight to see what they've got to tell us. I want to thank you for coming.