

## Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings Wainwright

7:07 p.m.

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I want to welcome you to the public hearings of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I would like to make a few opening remarks.

My name is Edward Wachowich, and I am the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I am also the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta. I would like to say that so far I'm finding my other job a lot easier than this one.

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 Joe 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 Wainwright 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. 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 the 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. Our function is to review the existing electoral boundaries and to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly about the areas, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions in Alberta.

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 the areas, the boundaries, and the 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 thereafter.

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 areas, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions. We are 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.

Redistribution rules. 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.

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: 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 the 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.

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.

The commission in its public advertising has clearly stated that it is considering after its 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 Alberta with respect to this focus. Please let me assure you that our preliminary deliberations are preliminary and that no final conclusions have 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.

7:17

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 areas, the boundaries, and the names of all electoral divisions.

For the purposes of this public hearing I would like to first call upon Roger Buxton, president of the Chinook Progressive Conservative Association. Mr. Buxton.

MR. BUXTON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Members of the commission and ladies and gentlemen, my brief was circulated to the commission ahead of time, so I assume you've all had a chance to read it. I'm not just quite sure whether I should read it word for word or just cover some of the pertinent points in it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think you have time to read it, sir, and go through it.

MR. BUXTON: Okay. The residents of Chinook cannot help having a feeling of déjà vu. Since 1990 residents have witnessed two special select committees of the Legislature as well as a boundaries commission with two reports. We have made numerous presentations on why we can't afford to have a larger constituency. In fact, the concern of this large constituency was so great that Bob Bogle's committee had to come back to Hanna for a second hearing. The concerns of the people of Chinook constituency have not changed.

The job of our MLA has not gotten any easier. She puts a tremendous number of miles on her car every week, and she spends a tremendous amount of her valuable time just traveling. We do not have regular air service to make her travel more convenient. She is still expected to have the time for not only her constituents'

concerns, but she must also know everything that goes on in her cabinet portfolio, a cabinet job that I think is the most demanding portfolio in this government. Notwithstanding these problems, Chinook appreciates the fact that the Premier respects our member's ability so much that he has given her this important job. But how can we expect our rural MLAs to serve in cabinet posts if we run them down trying to serve too large a constituency? She represents 13 municipal bodies – towns and municipal areas and whatnot – parts of three regional health authorities, one school authority and parts of two others. City MLAs represent only part of one of each.

No one is ever happy about a meeting location when the president of the Chinook PC Association calls a meeting. We have dedicated board members from all over Chinook. It is always too far for someone to come to the meeting. Some need to travel two and a half to three hours when the meeting is in the far corner of the constituency and then return home in the wee hours of the morning. In the summertime the sun might even be coming up. Even if the meeting is in a central location, the distance is too great for many to take time from their busy schedules with family and work.

We realize that Chinook is 48.6 percent below the provincial average for population. We must point out, however, that Chinook is also the least densely populated and the largest constituency that has population in all parts. The residents of Chinook do not believe that there is ever a point when we can go strictly to a situation of representation by population. The primary resources that are so important to our province's wealth and our province's ability to sustain jobs and create wealth are primarily in the rural areas. If the rural areas did not have adequate representation, they would not have adequate political power, and this affects their ability to grow and develop. This will hinder the ability of the whole province to sustain growth. My understanding of how our economy works is that most city industries and jobs are there to either support directly or indirectly the primary resource industries in the country and to value add to the primary products. I don't think that our urban cousins can afford the consequences of a rep by pop situation or selection system.

Presently we are also finding that we have smaller and smaller populations of young people in Chinook because opportunities are not available to keep them in rural constituencies. This could eventually prove quite a problem for cities as well as rural communities as primary country development is stifled and cities become overcrowded in comparison to their resource base. Urban societies would then start to break down further as we have more unemployment, more problems with juveniles, and more crime like we have seen in more populated areas of this country and other countries.

Splitting up Chinook to attach parts to other more populated areas is also not an alternative that we would appreciate or accept gracefully. Chinook is presently drawn along special areas, county and municipal lines, where we have much in common. The special areas are by far the largest part of Chinook and especially need a common representative in the Legislature.

In closing, I would encourage your members to review the presentations made by the residents of Chinook at the Hanna select committee hearings in 1990. Please find enclosed the *Hansard* from the Hanna meetings in 1990. I had sent copies of those to all of your members. I'd be here all night if I tried to read them. This is a presentation by a lawyer in the Hanna area. That was quite a good presentation, I felt, by Eugene Kush from Hanna. You know, I made a presentation at that time, and I believe there were probably over 30

other presentations made to the Bob Bogle select committee at that time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your time and appreciation of the Chinook PC Association.

THE CHAIRMAN: We want you to stay there just in case there are some questions.

MR. BUXTON: Sure.

MR. McCARTHY: I don't know whether the other members of the committee got Mr. Kush's remarks. I didn't get them. I'd be anxious to read the remarks of a colourful and respected opinion leader in the area like him.

MR. BUXTON: They certainly are colourful. [interjection] I had attached them, yes.

MR. McCARTHY: I think it was the Hanna Chamber of Commerce that had some sort of a brochure where he's got an advertisement of his legal career starting from the beginning to about 20 years to the 40-year mark. It's quite an interesting kaleidoscope of pictures of himself that he's put in there as well.

MR. BUXTON: Well, he certainly promotes himself from time to time.

MR. GRBAVAC: I have one question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Mr. Buxton, is there any reconfiguration of Chinook that you would see as desirable vis-à-vis the status quo, given the argument you've made about it almost being virtually impossible to physically hold a meeting of your constituency association?

MR. BUXTON: It is fairly rectangular in size right now. I mean, we have the county of Paintearth, for which I see there's a representative here, as well as the MD of Acadia. Yeah, I think that's it along with the special areas that are in that. You can't very well increase the size of Chinook without making it difficult for our member to drive a lot more miles. As it is right now, I know I'm 300 kilometres from Edmonton, and she's farther. I'd say that she's another 50 or 60 kilometres from Edmonton. I'm probably close to the northern boundary of the constituency. Like I said, there's no air service, so for Chinook to be enlarged, it would just be that much more impossible for her.

MR. GRBAVAC: I'm not suggesting it should be enlarged. I'm just asking you if the status quo is what you would consider the best possible option.

MR. BUXTON: Yeah. I like the way it's set up now, and I think the member does too. In the previous boundaries setup we had part of Starland and a little piece out of Paintearth, and now we've got all of Paintearth in one group in there. I think Paintearth before was in three different constituencies, which made it really awkward for them. So now because of the configuration that we have, you know, you're dealing with less local governments.

THE CHAIRMAN: When you say that you live in the northern part of the constituency, where do you live?

MR. BUXTON: Consort. That's why I came here. A lot of other people would have to go Medicine Hat or Drumheller to make a presentation. I would urge you, too, the commission, during your second round to come to Hanna. I think you'll find we'll turn out a good group of people there to talk to you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Kush is a classmate of mine from university, and he's already imploring me to come to Hanna. I'm not sure I want to go see Mr. Kush.

7:27

MR. BUXTON: You don't find him entertaining?

THE CHAIRMAN: No. He and I are good friends though. I'm just being facetious.

MR. WORTH: Mr. Buxton, this is pursuing my colleague's question a little further. Many of your constituents have now had some experience in health region 5. My question is: do you find any affinity with the people in the Drumheller area if one were to think in terms of some expansion of the constituency along Highway 9 on the understanding that some other areas perhaps to the north might go north into another constituency?

MR. BUXTON: Well, the regional health authority you're talking about I don't believe is my regional health authority. I happen to be in the same one as we're sitting in. So I'm not sure what the people feel down there about region 5. Roger Lehr, what's the number of this one?

MR. LEHR: Seven.

MR. BUXTON: Seven. You know, we had part of Starland in our constituency before. Therefore, we had a split responsibility there between Butch Fischer and Shirley in the last redistribution. So again it becomes difficult for that county to make representation when they have two MLAs. If you add all of Starland, well, then you've got a problem with another constituency, I'm sure, somewhere else.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert, any more questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: No. I think my question has been answered.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe, any more questions?

MR. LEHANE: Yeah. Mr. Buxton, you've indicated that the MLA for Chinook travels a tremendous amount of miles. Do you have any particulars in terms of how many miles that might be that she would travel on constituency business?

MR. BUXTON: I was told I should get those numbers, and I didn't. I don't know if you've ever tried to contact the Minister of Health, but even I, the president of her constituency association, very seldom get to talk to her. So I haven't got the numbers right at hand, but I know she wears out a car every two years, you know, when it comes

down to it. She's having a difficult time getting back to the constituency every week right now with her cabinet portfolios. As you know, Health is a very, very busy portfolio for her, and I know she isn't getting back every weekend.

MR. LEHANE: It would be interesting to know in terms of miles and time how much time is expended in travel, because I would think it would be pretty significant.

MR. BUXTON: Well, you know, like I mentioned, she's got at least 350 kilometres just to get home, and if she's going to go any farther than that in the constituency, if she travels to Hanna from her home, I'd say she's probably got right around 90 kilometres one way. So for her to go home and come back on the weekend without going anywhere else, it's 700 kilometres, and for her to go to her constituency office in Hanna, she'd probably add close to 180, 200 kilometres more. You know, she made a pledge to start with to try and spend time at her constituency office each weekend, and it's just been impossible for her to do it. One individual mentioned to me that Lloyd McClellan is one of the loneliest men in the New Brigiden area, and I can believe it, unless he's traveling with her.

MR. LEHANE: I'm not familiar with exactly where the special areas are in the Chinook riding.

MR. BUXTON: The special areas run all the way from the Red Deer River up to north of Consort. I think it's township 37. Is that marked off in townships?

MR. LEHANE: Yes.

MR. BUXTON: Special area 4 is where I come from. It's probably the smallest of the areas. Special area 2 is the Hanna area. It runs from the south edge of Paintearth, which I believe is about 10 miles south of Coronation, and it wraps around the bottom end, even takes in part of the land south of the Red Deer River. It's on the north side of the MD of Cypress. The boundary on the west side would be just west of Hanna, between Hanna and Craigmyle, and the only area between that and the border – the Saskatchewan border I'm referring to now – is the MD of Acadia, which of course is still in Chinook. So she represents everything from the river up and over to, like I said, the edge of Starland.

MR. LEHANE: Where does she maintain her constituency office?

MR. BUXTON: In Hanna.

THE CHAIRMAN: And lives in New Brigiden.

MR. BUXTON: And lives in New Brigiden.

MR. GRBAVAC: Mr. Chairman, I've one more question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Mr. Buxton, I seem to sense a bit of a contradiction in your argument. On the one hand, you suggest that your representative is being taxed in terms of time and distance and travel and accessibility. I can appreciate that a component of that is the time commitment associated with being a minister. On the other

hand, you're suggesting that you wouldn't want to see your constituency reduced in area.

MR. BUXTON: Oh, I never said that. What I said was that I'd hate to see it increased in area.

MR. GRBAVAC: Part of your brief suggested that you didn't want to see Chinook affiliated with any more populated areas to the west.

MR. BUXTON: We wouldn't want to see it split, simply because of the fact that the special areas are such a large part of Chinook. It'd be very difficult to split Chinook and attach it to surrounding constituencies without splitting up the special areas as a representative area.

MR. GRBAVAC: So you see no solution, then, to the problem of accessibility and distance and travel.

MR. BUXTON: Well, I didn't notice that if you're making an argument for splitting it, but if you're making an argument for keeping the constituency as it is, I did notice that in the Chief Judge's opening remarks, we fit that criteria just about to a tee in that we don't have any large towns in Chinook and that we're way over 150 – is it miles or kilometres? – from the Leg. You know, we don't have any major airports in that area, so we can't see any point in making it any bigger.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, if there are no further questions, we want to thank you for coming and defending the constituency of Chinook. I want you to know I'm a taxpayer in that constituency.

MR. BUXTON: You're a taxpayer in Chinook?

THE CHAIRMAN: That's right. In Paintearth.

MR. BUXTON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next person that we'd like to call upon is Roland Larouche of the MD of Wainwright.

MR. LAROUCHE: Good evening, Chairman Wachowich, members of the electoral boundaries review commission. My name is Roland Larouche. I'm deputy reeve of the MD of Wainwright No. 61, and I'm here representing 3,919 rural citizens in our municipality.

Knowing the challenges faced by touring commissions, my first comment is to commend you for taking this arduous task upon yourself, hosting 17 public hearings in a period of 18 days during the blustery month of November. It's a task few would envy. However, having said that leads me to my second comment: why are we going through this process again? I am not alone in expressing my disappointment with the government's desire to further review this matter. Are the three commission reviews and two Alberta Court of Appeal rulings in the past six years not evidence enough that our provincial boundaries are just fine the way they are? I am simply astonished as to why we are again allocating so much time and resources to an issue that is not problematic.

Albertans are resilient and open-minded people, but the message that myself and my fellow councillors are hearing time and again is that our citizens are simply fed up with change. Examples: our seniors no longer are entitled to the benefits they once received; the

MD of Wainwright was forced this year to adopt a new property assessment policy, which had profound impact on our local ratepayers; we have had not one but three different Municipal Government Acts in the past two and a half years. The list could go on and on.

I acknowledge that Premier Klein was elected on a platform of creating a more accountable and efficient government. In pursuit of this, major structural and philosophical changes have been made, namely to our health care system and education system. Were these changes necessary? Perhaps yes. Were they successful? Only time will tell. In the meantime let us restore some level of normalcy to the institution of the province of Alberta.

7:37

I am not certain what prompted this review. However, one can speculate that the provincial government is again experiencing pressure to adopt the system of representation by population. From a rural perspective this system is not effective. The Wainwright constituency MLA, Butch Fischer, represents approximately 25,000 people in an area covering 12,000 square kilometres, an average of 2.08 constituents per square kilometre. Edmonton MLAs, on the other hand, with their 18 constituencies represent an average of 49.8 constituents per square kilometre. Simply stated, our MLA and other rural MLAs responsible for large areas must allocate more of their time seeking and exploring the views of those they are to represent. They are at a definite disadvantage relative to their urban counterparts in terms of having adequate time to represent their electorate.

Perhaps the most significant argument against representation by population lies with the number of municipalities rural MLAs must represent. Again illustrating our MLA, he is responsible to all municipalities within the geographic boundary of the county of Flagstaff as well as the municipal districts of Wainwright and Provost. In total, Mr. Fischer represents 21 incorporated rural and urban municipalities. To expand the population of his constituency would require increasing the number of municipalities he is charged with representing. With only so many hours in a day, Mr. Fischer cannot spend as much time communicating with rural municipal councils as he would like to. This deficiency would be further compounded if more municipalities were added to his constituency.

Rural Alberta already feels a profound sense of isolation and inadequacy with respect to effecting provincial government policy. This feeling would only be intensified by reducing the number of rural constituencies, thus watering down our voice in provincial politics. Therefore, my message to you on behalf of our municipal council and the citizens of the MD of Wainwright is: don't tamper with the provincial electoral boundaries. Our current system of provincial electoral boundaries isn't broken; therefore, don't fix it.

Thank you for your time.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** In respect to your question as to why we're doing this, I'm going to ask John McCarthy to give you an answer to that.

**MR. McCARTHY:** This question has been raised at some earlier hearings. As recently as this afternoon in St. Paul the exact same question was asked. I think you're quite right in indicating that we've had a court decision by the Alberta Court of Appeal that I think has resulted in this set of hearings being repeated. By way of background I'll just take a couple of minutes, if you don't mind, to

do the best I can to tell you why we're here, not that we really want to be here.

There was a Saskatchewan case in 1991 that went to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada considered this question of the disparity between the relative voting power of urban voters versus rural voters. Briefly, the Supreme Court of Canada said as follows:

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. Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation.

Deviations from absolute voter parity [however] may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation . . . Factors like geography, community history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic . . . Beyond this, dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced.

It goes on to say, in summary, that

effective representation and good government in this country compel that factors other than voter parity, such as geography and community interests, be taken into account when settling electoral boundaries. They indicated that there was a variation of about 25 percent, when those factors were taken into account, that would be acceptable.

Now, the problem we were faced with here in Alberta was that a redistribution occurred and it was challenged in front of the Alberta Court of Appeal. The Alberta Court of Appeal was aware of the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, these sort of setup guidelines given by the Supreme Court of Canada, and they considered the guidelines that the Supreme Court of Canada gave. They looked at what was done last time, and although they didn't overturn the election last time, they concluded – and I think the conclusion will speak for itself. It will explain why we're here. In the first paragraph of their conclusion the Alberta Court of Appeal said as follows:

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 time that the boundaries are going to be reviewed before the 2001 census, and the Court of Appeal has said that it rejects any suggestion that the present divisions may remain. So that's why we're here.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** Does anybody have any questions of Mr. Larouche? Robert.

**MR. GRBAVAC:** I don't think so, no.

**MR. WORTH:** I have a question that I would like you to react to. This afternoon in St. Paul we heard one of the MLAs tell us that he was not as concerned about one person, one vote as being something

that might impinge unduly upon MLAs from rural constituencies because he felt that it might be possible to change the financial allowance system for rural MLAs to enable them to hire additional office staff or other kinds of support personnel to assist with the various functions that an MLA has to perform. I wonder how you react to that kind of a solution to the problem you've been citing about an MLA having to deal with so many municipalities and so many other interest groups in a rural constituency.

MR. LAROUCHE: Mr. Worth, you cannot ever beat personal contact. If you're talking with your MLA, you can dialogue back and forth, but when you're talking with another person employed, you know, sometimes your message cannot get across.

MR. WORTH: So in other words, if you can't deal with the boss, you don't want to deal with anybody.

MR. LAROUCHE: Well, sometimes you have to deal with somebody else, but, I mean, it's always better to deal with the boss if you can.

MR. WORTH: I don't object to that. That's not unreasonable.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe, are there any questions you want to ask? John?

In response to the answer given by John as to why we're here, there was a short article in the *Edmonton Journal* last Saturday, and not that I like to quote the *Edmonton Journal* as an authority, because that's the last thing anyone should do, but they put it quite succinctly. They said:

Last year, the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled the province's election boundaries were constitutional . . .

In other words, they were okay is what they're saying.

. . . 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 government has reacted to that decision and has said: if the court has told us to redo it again, we're redoing it. I can appreciate your frustration because basically it's been redone and redone since 1991. We hope that we will get it right this time.

7:47

MR. WORTH: Can I ask another question?

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. WORTH: I'm piggybacking now on my colleague's question to an earlier speaker. Is there any kind of configuration of the Wainwright electoral division that would be tolerable assuming that there might have to be some increase in the population?

MR. LAROUCHE: Well, any time that you have to increase, you're going to be increasing the area that your MLA has to travel. I'll have to piggyback on Chinook's same answer. You know, we have the same problem in common with them: distance.

MR. WORTH: Well, let me come at the question another way. Is there any affinity between the people in special area 4 and Provost and Wainwright and Hardisty and so on?

MR. LAROUCHE: You mean, things in common?

MR. WORTH: Yeah.

MR. LAROUCHE: The Saskatchewan border. It's a long distance to Edmonton, in other words. Every time we travel to Edmonton – and I don't know if the rest of the province of Alberta realizes this, Mr. Worth; I don't mean to be smart – if we hit a bump on the road at Tofield or so – and it's very visible on the roads we go on – we've got everybody down this line complaining about it, but if you hit a bump on the border, there's only us complaining. You know, you don't have everybody else behind you to complain. I don't believe our government sees that when you're far away from Edmonton, you don't have that communication and all the people behind you to back you up on the same complaint.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think that's all the questions, Mr. Larouche. We want to thank you for coming and saying what you had to say.

MR. LAROUCHE: Thank you for hearing me.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next speaker scheduled is Bob Miller.

MR. MILLER: Chief Judge and members, on behalf of the board of governors of Lakeland College thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this commission. Lakeland College is a public postsecondary institution operating in northeastern Alberta. Our college is a multicampus interprovincial institution serving an approximate 50,000 square kilometre region with community learning centres located at Lloydminster, Vermilion, Fort Kent, Bonnyville, St. Paul, Cold Lake, Grand Centre, Vegreville, and Wainwright. The majority of Lakeland's programs are located within the electoral divisions of Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Bonnyville, Vermilion, Lloydminster, Vegreville, and Wainwright.

The three factors that most directly affect our operation and those of other public bodies are: the large number of distinct communities, including the many Metis settlements and Indian reserves and native communities within each electoral division; the geographic distance; and the sparsity of population throughout the region. Members of the Legislative Assembly have a significant challenge simply to remain in touch with their constituents.

It is the college's position that effective representation should be a key consideration when establishing electoral boundaries. This effective representation is linked to regional transportation, trading patterns, geographic area, and the accessibility of people in the region to their provincial politicians. In northeastern Alberta, because of the many distinct communities which each politician needs to serve, larger constituencies would make their accessibility to constituents even more difficult. As the commission considers merging rural ridings or adding urban ridings, one consideration is the allowable variance permitted within the constituency populations. In support of effective representation, Lakeland College supports a population variance of up to 25 percent for electoral divisions, especially for rural constituencies. In order to have effective representation in northeastern Alberta, we recommend that our region retain its current five electoral divisions with approximately the same boundaries.

Thank you for the opportunity to make Lakeland College's views known to the commission. It is our belief that accessible and

effective representation is very important to all parts of the province of Alberta, and I'm speaking on behalf of the board chair, Leonard Fundytus, and the college.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Miller, one of our functions is the renaming of constituencies. To the north of you, north of Vermilion – somehow I relate Lakeland College to Vermilion, which is probably wrong – you have the Bonnyville constituency, and the MLA from there said he would like to see the constituency named Bonnyville-Cold Lake because of the fact that Cold Lake makes up about 15,000 of the people in the constituency. We also received a suggestion from another person that they would like to see the constituency called Lakeland. I was just wondering, seeing that you're representing the board of governors of Lakeland College and Lakeland goes into various constituencies, whether you would object to that or support it or feel indifferent.

MR. MILLER: I'd probably support it. Lakeland is probably good for this whole northeastern part of the province.

THE CHAIRMAN: But that's to have just the one constituency named Lakeland?

MR. MILLER: Well, I wouldn't know. I'd better not give an opinion on that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, that's the question. I mean, if we recommended the change from Bonnyville-Cold Lake to Lakeland, I thought that the board of governors of Lakeland College might say, "We don't want that, because Lakeland represents a lot more than just that area."

MR. MILLER: Oh, a great deal more. It is far reaching in that entire area, but I couldn't say. I wouldn't want to recommend either way.

MR. LEHR: Judge, with regard to that, if I might be of some assistance, under the new redistribution of the federal ridings, with the riding of Beaver River, Vegreville will disappear, which is the riding we're in. Part of Vegreville goes into Beaver River, which is to be renamed Lakeland. That's the proposal, as you know, that hasn't passed the Senate as yet but in all likelihood will. So that would cause a great deal of confusion.

THE CHAIRMAN: That would add to the confusion.

Now, are there any other questions of Mr. Miller? John?

MR. McCARTHY: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe? Wally?

MR. GRBAVAC: I just have one comment. We've received numerous presentations to the effect that the number of Members of the Legislative Assembly ought to be reduced and reduced significantly, largely drawn on the premise that the fewer the MLAs, the smaller the size of government. I'm not necessarily conceding that that's a direct correlation, but I wonder how you would respond to that.

MR. MILLER: I don't really believe we should reduce the number of MLAs in our province. Most certainly, as far as I'm concerned,

our government is probably too big, but I don't think it is with regards to MLAs. We have a pretty hard time getting ahold of people we deal with now. We make appointment after appointment month in, month out to get in touch with Steve West and Butch and so on throughout our constituency. So I most certainly wouldn't want to see that reduced my own personal self.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. Well, Mr. Miller, I want to thank you for coming and making your representation. Basically I think what you're telling us today is that you support up to a 25 percent discrepancy and that this you consider is necessary for effective representation.

MR. MILLER: Most certainly. Thank you very much.

7:57

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The next presenter is Wayne Richardson.

MR. RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chief Judge, and good evening to the panel and ladies and gentlemen.

I'm making this presentation on behalf of the county of Paintearth. The council of the county of Paintearth No. 18 would like to present the following observations and comments.

The county of Paintearth is currently wholly within the Chinook constituency, the least populous of the special consideration electoral divisions. Prior to the last electoral boundary review Paintearth was split among three constituencies. Having experienced both situations, we feel very strongly that the principle of respecting existing municipal boundaries is a good one. The county's interests are better represented by one effective MLA of whose plurality Paintearth makes up 29 percent than by three to each of whom one-third of Paintearth represents 5 percent.

Paintearth is in some ways a transition county. Its population density is about four per square mile, which compares to seven to the west of us, six to the north, and about one per square mile to the south. The land quality and productivity generally declines from north to south, and with it, farm type changes from straight grain or mixed farming to predominantly ranching in the south. In spite of these differences there is a unity of view within the county on all of the important issues we have faced in the last few years. The forced merger of our school operations with those of the county of Stettler and Stettler town last year and a proposed annexation by the county of Flagstaff of our principal industrial tax source this year have served to strengthen our cohesiveness.

Chinook as a whole is relatively homogeneous in that it has farms and ranches scattered sparsely throughout the area, with many small towns and villages which depend mainly on agriculture and some oil industry. The population is evenly split between rural and urban. The region has similar geographic and climatic concerns, low erratic rainfall, and soils ranging from brown to dark brown with generally low productivity as compared to the areas to the north and west. There has been little opportunity for industry other than resource extraction, with its high capital and low labour requirements. These factors do not indicate any future increase in population but will probably lead to a further reduction of farms and viable towns.

Chinook is bounded on the north by the Battle River, on the south by the Red Deer River, the east by the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, and on the west by the western boundaries of Paintearth and special areas. The area enclosed is immense. Driving across the constituency, whether east to west or north to south, takes at least

two hours, and in fact if you want to drive it on the diagonal basis, you're looking at about a 170-mile distance. It requires a much greater expenditure of time and effort by an MLA to represent this riding and/or constituents receive less representation than in an urban riding. To expand this riding to the west, being the only reasonable alternative, would only exacerbate the problem while decreasing the riding's homogeneity. Paintearth does not consider this to be a viable option.

The other option you might consider would be to split the riding into two or three or four pieces and add them to the ridings to the west, south, or north. Any way in which you could do this would violate the commonality of interest, the existing municipal boundaries, and the geographical considerations you have been directed to consider. Paintearth also opposes this option very strongly.

A third option would be to split Chinook into two components, Paintearth and special areas, and leave them as separate ridings. Paintearth doesn't oppose this, but it probably is contrary to your mandate.

This leaves us with the status quo. As imperfect as it may be, Paintearth firmly believes that it remains the best option for itself, for Chinook, and for Alberta.

That concludes my presentation on behalf of the county. While I was writing this, though, it occurred to me that there might be one other factor that would be worth bringing to your attention. This did not have the benefit of being run before my council, so this is my personal opinion then. Please take it as such.

There is perhaps a fifth option, which is also outside your mandate but which might merit some discussion. Before discussing it, we first have to consider whether the problem we are addressing today has been defined correctly. The problem as currently defined, as I understood it when I was writing this, is that each of our MLAs does not represent the same number of people. Specifically, urban ridings are more densely populated than rural ones, leading to a larger number of rural ridings than the rural population warrants on a one person, one vote basis. We have been led to this position by our pursuit of effective representation. My appearance here today is based on fear of dilution of this principle in spite of its having been repeatedly reaffirmed by the courts.

The rapidity of the changes made by the province in the last two years has led to the perception all across the province that my, in quotation marks, municipality has borne an unfair share of the load. The greatest of these perceptual differences probably lies between urban and rural ridings. The perception of a problem may or may not agree with reality, but what reality is is that an incorrect perception can be as much of a problem as the reality that led to it. I suspect that this is the situation we are faced with today.

By and large, our MLAs have probably made fairly good decisions, but they are widely perceived as having been unfair, especially by me. We all have a tendency to judge without having walked a mile in the other person's shoes. What could we do about this? Obviously, the best solution would be for each of us to walk that mile, but equally obviously that is not a practical goal. We could, however, ask it of our MLAs, as our employees, as part of their job description.

Envision an Alberta with a fixed four-year term of office for MLAs, with a preset election date. Cast your ballot as you do now for the person whom you feel will best represent you or for the person representing the party you support. That person's job is to represent your interests in the best way possible, balancing them

against the interests of the rest of Alberta. On day 1 of year 2 that MLA moves from an urban to a rural riding or vice versa, said moves having been predetermined on day 1 of year 1 by a draw from a hat. The responsibilities remain exactly the same: to represent the interests of the new constituents while trusting that someone else is doing as effective a job for yours. On day 1 of year 4 you get to go home to your own riding.

Obviously, such a system would have a direct price tag attached which is greater than what we now pay for our legislators. However, there may be some indirect savings in the form of better legislation which would be better accepted by the people in the province and reduce conflict. The questions are: could such a system be made to work, and do the potential savings outweigh the cost?

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Richardson. If you'd just wait, there may be some questions.

John?

MR. McCARTHY: Not right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe? Wally?

MR. WORTH: Yes. Mr. Richardson, I was very interested in your comment in paragraph 3 in the submission on behalf of the county that the county was in some ways a transition county. You pointed out that it is not quite like the special areas but it's not quite like some of the surrounding municipalities and counties. It's for that reason that I wondered, perhaps, if you'd considered yet another option. You've given us four, and then you added a fifth just a minute ago. Because it is a transition county, had you given any consideration to recommending that it be included either with Lacombe-Stettler or with Wainwright?

8:07

MR. RICHARDSON: Certainly we had never considered it with Wainwright, no. Lacombe-Stettler: I guess we haven't thought of that. We are, as you perhaps may know, joined with the Stettler county and town for the school boundaries now. That was done against our wishes, but we did leave it up to the Minister of Education to make that decision. That has generated a certain amount of conflict.

Stettler is one of the natural trading zones for the western portion of our county. Perhaps 50 percent of the trade going out of the county would go through Stettler and on to Red Deer or south. It would stop in Stettler obviously. Probably 20, 25 percent might go south through Hanna, and the balance would go up through Camrose and along up to Edmonton.

Lacombe is quite different from us. To give you a few numbers, the average farm size in Paintearth is 1,450 acres; Stettler, around just under a thousand. Lacombe would be in the neighbourhood of 600. I guess we would feel that we were probably a very small tail on a very large dog if we were to be joined with those other two counties.

THE CHAIRMAN: How much of Paintearth was in Stettler last time?

MR. RICHARDSON: The border ran somewhere about seven or eight miles to the east of the town of Castor, but it wasn't a straight



north-south line, because some of the stuff to the south of Highway 12 I believe was in the southern constituency.

MR. WORTH: In addition to the school liaison now with Stettler, you also are in the same health region with them.

MR. RICHARDSON: Yes, correct.

MR. WORTH: I'll pass on that, but I'd like to come back to his option 5 in just a minute.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No. No question.

MR. WORTH: I'd just like to make an observation about your option 5, your innovative option 5. I haven't had time to really think about it, but I commend you for thinking of alternatives that might lead to more effective governance and more effective representation for all Albertans. I don't know whether this is a viable option or not, but I do want to commend you for your creativity and for thinking about it.

MR. RICHARDSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I guess that's all the questions, Mr. Richardson. Thank you for coming and making your views known.

MR. RICHARDSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Dale Blue.

MR. BLUE: Members of the commission, I appreciate your being here. I for a while was wondering why I was here, and Mr. McCarthy and Judge Wachowich have straightened that out for me. So I'll proceed.

I've got just a few notes here on considerations in establishing rural electoral boundaries. One of the things that we need to consider is representation by population. Representation by population is a sound democratic principle, but it does have limitations. One problem is that it doesn't address regional disparity. Regional differences exist not only in terms of population but in terms of production. Our area is one which is sparsely populated but quite productive in terms of agriculture and oil.

While a global view of the development of these resources can't be discounted, we also have to take into account our own regional views as to how we're going to deal with these. Nationally and provincially, strict representation by population is not the case. Federally, sparsity of population, distance, and traditional boundaries are taken into account in determining Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories constituencies, to name a few. Provincially, unique features of constituencies have also been recognized.

One of the things I haven't heard mentioned tonight is Alberta's demography. Alberta's population is growing older. All we have to do is look around the room here and we can quickly tell that. In 15 years the baby boomers – and I'm on the leading edge of that – will be near retirement age and will represent a significant percentage of the population. In rural Alberta seniors already represent a disproportionate amount of the population in many communities.

The special needs of seniors must be considered now and even more so in the future. One special need that seniors have is that of personal communication. Another is the inability of many to travel. Seniors should not be disadvantaged because they choose to live where they helped make Alberta what it is today.

One of the things I feel that we have in rural Alberta is a unique culture and some unique traditions. Rural Albertans live a lifestyle quite different from their urban counterparts. Independence is one feature, as is a higher degree, I feel, of personal freedom. Balanced against this is a sense of community. The rural lifestyle needs to be represented and reflected by its elected representatives. Part of what this is about is effective representation. You're going to hear this time and again, but I'll repeat it anyway. The two biggest factors affecting the rural MLA are distance and time. The electorate expects contact and often at a personal level. The MLA must be aware of the function of not just one or part of one but many town and village councils, municipalities and counties, health and school boards, and government departments at the local level. The MLA is also expected to be aware of the needs of individual constituents. It might be speculation on my part, but rural MLAs might have a higher volume of constituency business because rural people might see the MLA more clearly as a representative of the people and may ask for and expect more contact.

Again, it may only be a perception, but I feel one thing that's happening in government is the openness on the part of government to share decision-making with people affected, to do things like you're doing right now: consult. There's certainly a growing expectation on the part of people in general that information is shared, that consultation takes place, and that accountability exists. These expectations place more demands on elected representatives.

In summary, I want to say that historically constituencies in both Alberta and Canada have had disproportionate representation by population. Special needs have been and have to be considered. Sparsity of population and distance make equal quality of representation difficult. Separate formulas for rural and urban areas should be kept. Rural ridings might receive better representation by redistribution, an increase in numbers, whatever. A declining and aging rural population in Alberta seems to be a reality. This has to be carefully considered in the long term.

In conclusion, I want to say that rural areas have unique features and present problems in achieving effective representation. Personally, I don't expect any more representation than I already have, but I certainly don't want less.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Blue. Let's see if anybody has any questions here. Robert.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes, I've got more of an observation I'd like you to respond to. Numerous urban presentations to us have cited the advance of technology as a rationale for diminishing the variance in rural ridings. They're suggesting that video conferencing, cellular telephones, E-mail, personalized video conferencing over the Internet, various departments of government going on-line, being accessible through on-line communications via the Internet are all reasons why rural Alberta's claim to accessible representation has been somewhat diminished. I just want to hear your response to that and why you feel it's important that you meet with your MLA on a face-to-face basis as opposed to a conference call or a video conference arrangement.

8:17

MR. BLUE: The point's been raised already today that nothing can match personal contact. Personal contact is what's important. I consider myself reasonably computer literate and technologically literate. I would rather have personal contact than do that. I also think that in terms of some of the technology we see, it's trendy and it's neat, but it's also sometimes counterproductive in terms of an overload of possible information. You know, when you have personal contact, you get right down to the meat of the thing. I also mentioned the aging population. There's a certain resistance to change factor. If we're going to represent older people, we're going to have to represent them in more traditional ways. You know, that's certainly a valid point for those who want to do it.

I'm involved in other things. I've heard the response for E-mail, you know, computer technology. One thing is expense. Personally, I'm going to have to upgrade my telephone system. I'm going to have to get a modem for the computer, maybe invest a couple of thousand dollars in a computer in order to communicate in this way. But, you know, the bottom line is personal communication.

MR. GRBAVAC: Thank you.

MR. WORTH: Just an observation about your concern about seniors. You can appreciate that I welcome that concern. My understanding is that the demography of rural Alberta is changing with respect to the location of seniors, that more and more of them are to be found in the villages and towns and fewer of them on the farms. That being the case, since these towns and villages tend to be located on the main roads, does that in a sense sort of weaken your argument for concern about seniors and face-to-face relationships? Given the location of seniors, the face-to-face contact might be more readily obtainable now than it was two decades ago or even a decade ago.

MR. BLUE: Definitely, but there's still the distance factor. You know, it's not the same as having large seniors' complexes in a city versus small seniors' complexes in rural areas 15 or 20 miles apart.

MR. WORTH: Okay.

MR. LEHANE: I just want to follow up on Wally's remarks about seniors. I think that's a point that really hasn't been brought out as well before as it was by you tonight, Mr. Blue, and I want to thank you for bringing that to our attention. Certainly I don't have a question, but in terms of thinking about this and wrestling with the problems we have, I think that's a very important point in terms of seniors who would have more difficulty with larger distances and traveling and the personal communication, which is probably the traditional avenue of communication with their representative.

Thank you for those comments tonight.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

Well the only thing I can add is that any thoughts and suggestions that you have in respect to seniors – I'm close to being in the same position as Dr. Worth here beside me. I just want to thank you for coming in, making your views known.

MR. BLUE: Good. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The next presenter is Roger Lehr, the mayor of Wainwright.

MR. LEHR: Yes, sir. Thank you. Chief Judge and members of the commission, firstly, thanks very much for bringing your commission to Wainwright. We certainly appreciate you coming here and the fair representation. It's not what we had hoped, but we tend to find in these electoral boundaries things that the second round is when the numbers turn out, after they get some smell of what may be happening. I didn't prepare a lot of stuff. I did in 1990, and I might just touch on some of that, and it will be in answer to some of your questions if I may.

One of the questions asked I believe by Joe was the amount of time Minister McClellan spends in travel. I can tell you that Minister Butch in his working hours in the constituency spends in the neighbourhood of 65 percent of the time in his car, so it's fairly significant. To give you some idea, last Saturday evening he was here in this building at a fund-raiser for the community until about 9 o'clock and then was required to be in Daysland on Saturday evening. So those are the types of travel that they encounter.

With regards to Mr. Worth's suggestion – I would assume it was probably from Paul Langevin – about an executive assistant for the members in rural Alberta. It's one of things I suggested in my last brief, that because of the amount of time and the amount of travel and the sparsity and in fact because the seniors that are in rural Alberta consume, I would think, well over 50 percent of the time of an MLA in inquiries and answers and guidance, I think it's very positive that some funding allocation should be made to rural MLAs that they might have an executive assistant full-time in their rural offices. I know that we're always trying to cut expenses and that we talk about the E-mail and the type of communications stuff that's available. Keep in mind that these people are very fearful of that, in particular seniors. I'm quite intimidated by it myself. I've said that I'll probably be run over crossing the information highway before I ever get on it. There's nothing like the personal contact.

The positive side of some of the things is that we have had good representation in rural Alberta, and we certainly are not second-class citizens. We expect to be able to see our member of the Legislature as often as those people in the city. Keep in mind you can walk across a constituency in the cities and the travel time that's involved in rural Alberta.

One of the suggestions I made in my last presentation to the Electoral Boundaries Commission was that I'm not sure that Alberta is any longer governable by one government. Perhaps we should have one for the cities and one for rural Alberta. Please leave the taxation where it lies; the resource taxation belongs to rural Alberta. But it is a fact that the jobs are primarily in our cities, and they're there primarily supplying services and goods to rural Albertans and industry in rural Alberta. I tend to also – I know you get a lot of heat, or the government does. I question the wisdom sometimes, with respect, Judge, of our courts and some of these decisions in that I notice that those same people in our major cities in Alberta don't much like the way the federal government is represented by the populace in central Canada. On the other hand, when it comes to our own province, they seem to forget the grievance they have with that, having more power in those populated areas. So I think we have to be careful with that.

We cannot always come here to criticize, and I try not to do that if I can help it. I think there may be some alternatives available for the constituency of Wainwright, but it's going to cause some problems with regards to trying to stay within whole municipalities and not fracturing municipalities. The corner of Vegreville that comes down into Viking would lend itself quite well to Wainwright.

On the other hand, the corner down there of Forestburg doesn't really have much in common with the rest of the constituency, particularly up in this corner. They certainly do with Killam and down in there, but that's a part of Flagstaff. Viking of course is a part of the county of Beaver, so it would square the riding up somewhat if it was of any value to you. I caution you that it would be splitting municipalities.

8:27

Somebody asked about any relationship to special areas. Certainly a good part of our trading area goes into that Consort area, but again, it's another municipality, and it would be causing some problems within their thing.

The other thing I might suggest – and perhaps for your own credibility on this – is I've noticed Mr. Worth a couple of times suggesting the example of the RHAs. You might want to be a little careful with that. They're not very popular out here, the regional health authorities. We have a distinct feeling that they're not serving the purpose at all. I simply put that out to try and help you a little bit, if it is of any value.

Other than that, if you have any questions, I'll be pleased to try and answer them with my limited knowledge.

MR. WORTH: I got in hot water over this earlier today, so I'll try it again. One of the things that's been intriguing to me is that we have been receiving a number of submissions about how overgoverned we are in the province. When we come out to look at the rural areas, we hear from the MLAs and from constituency association presidents and others how hardworking the MLAs are because they have to interact with so many different units of local government. It raised with me a question about: what really ought rural residents to expect of their MLAs, given the fact that they have so many other elected officials that supposedly are looking after their school affairs, their municipal affairs, their health affairs? Here for some reason or other the MLA is also expected to look after all of this in some fashion. So I'm just wondering if the expectations that members of rural constituencies have for their MLAs are somewhat unrealistic, given the heavy loading of other officials that they have to look after their affairs. Do you want to take a run at that?

MR. LEHR: Sure. That's a good observation. I think we're probably on the same side of the table in that the reason that we run into so much intertwined work with our MLA is that when governments allocate funds, they don't give them of course unconditionally. You have to operate under the rules and regulations of the government pertaining to that particular grant, whether it be health or education or recreation or whatever. So then you have to deal with a huge bureaucracy to handle all those regulations.

I've been quite intrigued with Premier Klein's comments that the federal government, when they're no longer contributing as much money to the programs and the provinces, can no longer make the rules. I only hope that it comes home to rest in the Legislature in Alberta. I've told our members of the Legislature that it's like a card game, and if you don't ante up, you shouldn't be involved in making the rules. I think that the more of that funding that is left in the municipalities or handed down unconditionally to government locally, you won't need that heavy workload on your MLAs.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MR. McCARTHY: Roger, this may be the time for an interlude here. Mr. Buxton has included Mr. Kush's submission. You can comment on it; it might spur some other comment. You may have noticed me smiling. I wasn't smiling at anybody's comments. I was reading Mr. Kush's comments. I'll share them with you, and it might spur some comment later on. He indicates:

I have another radical proposal for you. We have a political convention that every person should have one vote, and that we are all equal to each other.

These are two nonsensical myths – no two persons are created equal because some are more equal than others.

The irresponsible have as much voting power as the responsible. Politicians trying to retain power listen to the number of votes and not to the logic of the question. That is why we are spending government money as if there is no tomorrow – and this is not good for Alberta.

Votes should be allotted to each person as follows:

- (a) One extra vote for those that are over 60 years of age;
- (b) One extra vote for each \$10,000.00 of income tax that he has paid;
- (c) One extra vote for each 5 persons for whom he has provided a job;
- (d) One extra vote for each 5 or more children being supported by him;
- (e) One extra vote for each 10 points that your I.Q. is above 120, and deduct one vote for each 10 points below 100;
- (f) One extra vote for every 20 years that you have not been in jail, and a deduction of one vote for every year that you were in jail;
- (g) One extra vote for not smoking either tobacco or grass;
- (h) One extra vote for being a male;
- (i) One extra vote for each trade qualification or degree that you have;
- (j) One extra vote for every \$10,000.00 donation to charity;
- (k) One extra vote for being a single parent with children under the age of 18 years;
- (l) One extra vote for being married and never having been divorced;
- (m) Such other additions or deductions as might encourage that voting is done by the moral majority;

And this is the one you people may find the most interesting.

- (n) Most important of all, 100 extra votes for having spent at least 10 years in this "god-forsaken area" of Alberta.

MR. LEHR: Oh, I certainly hope it was written in humour.

MR. WORTH: Well, I have one other kind of question that perhaps one of you might care to react to. It's simply this. Can a voter who lives in a constituency that's at plus 25 variance, which many of you said that you'd support, look forward to the same attention as a voter who lives in a constituency which is up to minus 50 percent lower than the average? In other words, you find a 75 percent difference in population. Do you really believe that they can get the same amount of personal attention?

MR. RICHARDSON: Well, if 65 percent of the minister's time is spent traveling, I guess that's, you know, the balance; isn't it?

MR. LEHR: I think that's the key. You have to balance it with the accessibility to your member of the Leg. or your Member of Parliament. Certainly if they're able to fly into Edmonton on a weekend from Ottawa or fly into Calgary on a weekend from Edmonton, they're a lot more accessible than, for instance, Shirley having to drive 300 kilometres to get out there, and you know the pressures you're under once you hit the constituency level. There's a host of invitations and requests for appearances.

I know that quite often the only time their spouses get to see them is if they choose to go with them, and that should not be a criterion on which we decide this. These people go into this job of their own free will; nobody forced them in. But from the other side, my ability as an individual in the constituency of Wainwright to access the time of my MLA, I think it's far more difficult than if they were housed in an office in a small block in the city of Edmonton. I think that's the weighing factor, and it's obviously in the criteria, so I think that's pretty important: how you weigh them equally. I don't cherish your job, gentlemen. You will not win – I'm assuring you of that – but I'm sure that you'll do a good job.

MR. McCARTHY: Roger, you've had some experience in the federal scene as well. How did the federal members, who have to service a much larger area in rural Alberta, face the challenge of personal contact?

MR. LEHR: One of them is that executive assistant that they have in their rural offices, in their home offices. You know, all of the staff of our rural MLAs, with the exception of a part-time person in their rural offices – that part-time person in the rural office is usually a female, who may or may not have any past experience in politics or any education in that area. Those of Members of Parliament are usually very bright individuals who serve as special assistants or executive assistants in their offices, and they can be of great value to someone going in and wanting some information, which takes up quite a lot of the MLAs' time, as I said, particularly with seniors who need a little help to get by, something on a grant, something explained, and these types of things. That could very well be handled by an EA. That's been my experience with the Members of Parliament, on the federal side.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

8:37

MR. GRBAVAC: Mr. Lehr, I'd like to ask you a hypothetical question and, by definition, probably a very unfair one. If reducing the rural constituencies in the province of Alberta by, say, two seats or three seats and giving those seats to a large urban centre, thereby diminishing the variance of electors per constituency, would drastically reduce the probability of a successful challenge to the courts, would you be willing to pay that price of not having us back here in a year or two years?

MR. LEHR: No. No, I wouldn't. I quite frankly have had it up to here with the courts and some of their decisions, with respect, Judge.

THE CHAIRMAN: I didn't make this decision.

MR. LEHR: I really think that it's come to the point in this country where at some point in time we're going to have to take on the Supreme Court for some of the ludicrous decisions they've handed down.

I could really feel for this decision. I'm not one of the people who feel we need less MLAs. I'm one of the people who feel that if it's that important that we close this gap of disparity in numbers, then perhaps it's time that we made some new constituencies in those heavily populated areas. This may not go well with our present-day government. They may not like that, but it's a fact of reality. I don't know of anywhere that you're going to go in rural Alberta where they're going to say: "Give us more area. We don't want to see our

MLA so often." The other side of the coin may be that you have to create more constituencies in those populated areas.

MR. McCARTHY: Our problem is that the legislation doesn't provide for that.

MR. LEHR: Where does their wisdom come from?

MR. GRBAVAC: From you, the elector.

MR. LEHR: It doesn't sound like it.

That's part of the problem I have, John. I know some of the conditions that you're working under, and as I said, it's a no-win situation. You can be lucky to get out of here with your ties at the end of the day, not at this particular meeting, but I mean when the thing's over. You will, without question, have better representation at your next round of meetings – I can assure you of that – once some recommendations come out.

MR. LEHANE: So, Roger, just to sort of summarize that point because it's a different perspective than we've heard from many other people who've talked to us – we've heard from many of them that there are way too many MLAs, and there should be some drastic reductions. As I understand you, you're saying that you feel a reduction of the rural MLAs is going to take away from the ability for them to effectively represent the rural population. Is that correct?

MR. LEHR: Without question.

MR. LEHANE: Therefore, another solution is that if the urban population centres that are growing and increasing in population feel that to be fairly and effectively represented they need more representatives, you would prefer to see it go that way.

MR. LEHR: Yes. And I would urge you, even though you're governed by legislation, to not fear that legislation. If you feel strongly that something outside the mandate you've been given needs to be brought forward to the government of the day, I encourage you to do that. You're knowledgeable people who will have listened to the populace, and I think that that would be well received.

MR. GRBAVAC: Something strikes me as odd. It seems to me that in the 1990s I can't think of a more crass waste of time than someone driving by vehicle from Coronation to Edmonton or from Hanna to Edmonton. Would it not make a whole lot more sense to provide more readily available air access to rural MLAs? I mean, in this day and age of fairly secure air travel, charter services, those kinds of things, why can't Shirley McClellan be only as far away from Hanna to Edmonton as a member in Calgary? I mean, I can't understand why that is not possible.

MR. LEHR: Well, that would be the sensible thing. I think that if you took a look at the actual cost of air travel balanced against the mileage for cars, it wouldn't be that significant, but it's a bone for the opposition parties and those who are not in favour of the government of the day, whomever they may be, to pick at continually rather than doing their job, as the opposition's supposed to do, which is to come forward with some constructive criticism and in fact some alternatives.

I agree with you. I think we should be flying them in and out when you're talking of that kind. I'm not talking about the person from Vegreville, but I'm talking about these outlying areas for sure. There are airstrips. We've spent an enormous amount of money on airstrips in rural Alberta that are very little used. For the difference in cost, it would make a lot of sense to me, along with an EA.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I don't know if there are any more questions, but I want to say, Roger, that you were wrong in your guess on Paul Langevin.

MR. LEHR: I'm quite often wrong.

THE CHAIRMAN: It wasn't he that wanted your constituency money; it was Léo Vasseur. I shouldn't say that he wanted more. He was suggesting this as a way of improving effective representation.

I want to also thank you for the warning: don't get married to the RHAs.

Thank you.

MR. LEHR: Okay. Thanks very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we've gone through the list of people that we have been given. When we've had these hearings, we've invited anybody in the audience who hasn't spoken who would like to speak or has any comments to make. We still have time, so is there anybody here in the category of what we call a walk-on that would like to say anything?

Well, I guess that's it. We want to thank you all for coming and for making your presentations. I think we will be back here in March, at which time, as the mayor says, things will be more interesting.

Thank you.

[The hearing adjourned at 8:44 p.m.]