

**Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings**  
**Slave Lake**

1:02 p.m.

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it looks like it's 1 o'clock, so I think we will start. I would like to welcome you all to the public hearings of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. 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 introduce you to the other members of the commission. On my far left is Robert Grbavac of Raymond. On my immediate right is Joe Lehane of Innisfail. On my far right is John McCarthy of Calgary, and 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're 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 Slave Lake 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 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 the 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 the electoral divisions. We are required to give reasonable public notice of the times and 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. 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.

In respect to 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.

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 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.

In respect to population, 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 general overview of the legislation, but we must 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 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 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.

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 the electoral divisions.

I would now like to start our hearing by calling upon Kay Long as the first presenter. You can go ahead.

MRS. LONG: Good afternoon, gentlemen. First of all, welcome to the great white north. We're glad to see people come up here even for something as ostentatious as this. First of all, I'm half of a team. The other half didn't get here yet. She's driving from High Prairie, and the roads aren't that great today.

I'd like to start out by just stating our position. We believe that the boundaries of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency should remain as they are. We also believe that it is in the best interest of the people who live in this constituency that the boundaries as created by the '91-92 Electoral Boundaries Commission remain unchanged.

This brief has been prepared by Carol Dillman, who is the constituency administrative assistant, and myself, Kay Long, who also works in the constituency office as a part-time volunteer. We would also like to let you know that we both have a longtime history of living and working in northern Alberta. Carol was born and raised in the Manning area and has worked as a social worker, addictions counselor, and community development consultant. Myself, I retired from the Alberta government service last January after 17 years of experience in the field of housing. Thirteen of those years were spent traveling throughout northern Alberta.

1:12

To prepare for this presentation we looked at the process and the results of the electoral boundaries review that was conducted in '91-92. At that time the Lesser Slave Lake constituency was like Alice in Wonderland. First, it grew very, very big, then it started shrinking and finally established boundaries that are just one notch away from unmanageable.

Your predecessors, the Electoral Boundaries Commission of '91-92, gave our MLA an enormous territory to service and a nearly

impossible assignment to represent a population of nearly 20,000 people scattered over 88,000 square kilometres, give or take a click or two. However, the lady of whom I speak has never learned the meaning of the phrase "I can't do it," and she has certainly proven that she can and will serve those who live in this constituency. That doesn't mean that the job has been easy or that there isn't a high price to pay in time, energy, and money. Pearl Calahasen makes herself available to those who live in her riding, from the area south of Highway 2 to the Northwest Territories border, and she does this by getting out there to the communities as often as time, funding, and weather conditions allow.

Since these parameters were established three years ago, our MLA has accepted the challenge and adapted to the workload. This constituency, with excellent leadership and representation, has proven that a cross-cultural population can become a working, homogeneous group. We are asking that you neither take away from nor add to a constituency that is functioning very well, considering the handicaps involved.

Do you remember the old joke about you can't get there from here? Well, that certainly comes close to fitting the geographic logistics within this constituency.

This is my partner, Carol Dillman, who's just joined us.

MS DILLMAN: Hi.

MRS. LONG: There are times when you actually can't get from one area in this constituency to another. We have two semi-isolated communities that have only winter road service, and flying is not always the answer. As a government employee I've tried to fly into Garden River on more than one occasion when the weather was so bad we couldn't find the runway to land. There are approximately 300 people who live in Garden River, and they're very glad that Pearl is their MLA, but for most of them her trips to the community are their only chance to talk to her.

We have eight remote communities with populations of 300 or less scattered throughout the north. Most of these can be accessed only by gravel roads that can be dangerous to drive any season of the year. Government employees who travel to these communities are supplied with vehicles because of the road conditions. Pearl and her staff travel in their private vehicles.

There are 13 native bands and three Métis settlements, all of which she meets with on a regular basis.

Slave Lake and High Prairie are the two major centres, and they are 118 kilometres apart, at each end of Lesser Slave Lake. We have constituency offices in both of these towns, and the constituency assistant, Carol, drives back and forth between the two offices in her own vehicle with no reimbursement of expenses.

Our MLA must drive for three to four hours, depending on road conditions, from Edmonton before she gets to the constituency that she serves. She is the only northern MLA who has to drive to her constituency. All the others can take regularly scheduled airlines to fly within the boundaries of their ridings. I'm sure there are times when she feels like she lives in her vehicle, and that's almost true.

One thing that makes us all very equal is the amount of time that we have in a day, a week, or a year. No matter who you are, no matter what job you are trying to do, you still only get 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, and 12 months in a year. Right now Pearl Calahasen, MLA for the Lesser Slave Lake constituency, works seven days a week most weeks and 11 months out of the year. By working this schedule, she is able to accomplish the job she was elected to do. I can't imagine where she would find the time to take

on any more, nor would those she currently represents want to lose her.

You may have noticed that I speak of funding throughout this presentation, even though dollars are not the issue here. We're hoping that you pass on the message, while you're preparing your report, that the cost factor involved to serve a smaller constituency population scattered over such a large area should be reconsidered. Right now our MLA receives the same funding to maintain two offices, pay staff, and travel as urban MLAs who serve a larger population within a few city blocks. Somehow this doesn't seem equitable, and we hope you identify this problem in your report.

Representation by population may work in the cities, where an MLA can walk around their constituency in half a day or less, but it will not work in the north. There is a good reason why this electoral division has been identified as one of four which require special consideration. Please, gentlemen, leave the boundaries where they are.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Do you wish to add anything, Carol?

MS DILLMAN: No. I think Kay said it all quite well. Thank you. Sorry for the delay.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's all right. It's just part of the constituency work here.

MS DILLMAN: That's correct.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll just find out if any members of the panel would like to ask any questions.

MR. GRBAVAC: In your summation you are asking us to leave the boundaries as they are. Does that mean that you would be opposed to having the constituency reduced in size and population?

MRS. LONG: Yes, because I think you need to give special consideration to those people that were added to our constituency in the last change. They are, for the most part, northern native people. They perhaps had a little difficulty being adjusted the last time. I think that now they're happy with the MLA they have. To change them again would mean another disruption.

MR. GRBAVAC: You feel the consequences of that would outweigh the reduction in the size of the riding?

MRS. LONG: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No question.

MR. LEHANE: Are there no scheduled airline services at all from Edmonton into this area?

MRS. LONG: No. There have been several attempts. You may recall a few years ago when Larry Shaben was on one of those regularly scheduled airlines and they crashed. Since that time, I think we've had maybe one or two attempts at regularly scheduled airlines. It just doesn't seem to work. The only way you can get to the far north if you're flying is by charter, and that's, I feel, cost-prohibitive most of the time.

MR. McCARTHY: You could fly into High Level and Peace River, though, I think – couldn't you? – and drive to parts of the constituency from there.

MRS. LONG: Yes. Have you ever driven the road from High Level to Garden River, sir?

MR. McCARTHY: Yes, I have.

MRS. LONG: It's not very pleasant.

MR. McCARTHY: Yes, I've driven throughout the constituency quite a bit.

MRS. LONG: Okay; you know what I'm talking about then.

MR. McCARTHY: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you have any other questions, John?

MR. McCARTHY: No. Thanks.

MR. WORTH: In your presentation you mentioned that you maintain two offices. Where are these located?

MRS. LONG: One is in Slave Lake, and one is in High Prairie.

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MR. WORTH: So your only way of providing access to services in the far north, then, is to actually go out there to them. It's difficult for the people to come to the services.

MRS. LONG: Absolutely. A lot of those people have no transportation available to them. I don't know if you've ever seen a vehicle that has driven from up there. It looks like it's been painted in mud most of the time; that's on the good days.

MR. WORTH: I'd like to piggyback a little on my colleague's question because I was interested in your response when you said that rather than change the boundaries and reduce the size of the constituency, you'd like it to stay as it is because you're just beginning to develop a kind of a working community. But as I look at what they've been doing in the health area, I notice that right across the northern part of this province, almost from border to border, you have this northwestern health region. I assume that the centre of that is High Level. Would that kind of organization in your view make any sense in terms of electoral boundaries if one were to try to reduce the size of northern constituencies?

MS DILLMAN: I'd like to respond to that. Most of the people that we service in the Little Red area are of the Cree tribe and most of the people outside of that area to the south are Cree, whereas to the west we have mostly the Dene Nation or the Slavey. So if you're talking about intertribal connections as opposed to the natural flow, which is that their families would migrate to the Tallcree reserve, which is south of the Little Red – it's more of a family thing. I think that's one of the reasons that we're seeing a congruency of communities and the family, where the community is starting to build in the constituencies because we've got some continuity with each band and some familiarity as well. It's more of a cultural thing.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MRS. LONG: I'd like to respond to that too. I was with government housing for 17 years. Just before they changed the boundaries last time, housing had a complete change. They went according to the electoral boundaries at that time. They put district offices within each of the constituencies up here in the north, and then they changed. Right now with health, with municipal affairs, with housing, with everything government is going through some pretty drastic changes. Before we make any more changes to the electoral boundaries, we ought to wait and see if government is going to stabilize.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I want you to know we were told that the marriage with the health units is a marriage that's not going to last and we shouldn't follow that.

MRS. LONG: I think we may see a lot of divorces in government before we're through.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I guess those are all the questions. Kay and Carol, I want to thank you for coming and expressing your views to the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

MRS. LONG: Thank you.

MS DILLMAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm told that we're honoured by the presence of the MLA Pearl Calahasen, who I see in the crowd. That's using the term loosely. I'm going to call upon her next because I'm told that as a hardworking MLA she's got to be back in Edmonton by 4 p.m. So, Pearl, will you come forward and talk to us.

MS CALAHASEN: I guess you need this – right? – since you don't all know me.

THE CHAIRMAN: Otherwise, we might call you Kay, and Kay might be mad.

MS CALAHASEN: Yeah, that's right. She might get upset.

Thank you, first of all, Mr. Chairman. I intend to speak loudly, so you'll probably get some feedback here. I want to welcome you to part of the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. You know where you're at when you look at the Lesser Slave Lake constituency map. You are probably almost at the bottom of it and a little bit to the east, I guess. So you've got, I think, a very good idea of where the constituency is.

I wanted to make some comments because I think it's really important as the MLA to be able to give my view as to what has happened. I was really happy to hear some of my support staff, volunteers as well as people who are paid, come and speak, and I was really pleased to hear what they said. I wasn't privy to their information, so it was really interesting to hear.

As they said, this is the second-largest riding. It is probably one of the four that is considered to be at a variance of up to 50 percent. It is a huge riding. It's the only one in the north, as Kay has indicated, that you cannot fly into. There are two, actually, that you cannot fly into: one in the north, my riding, and one in the south, Shirley McClellan's riding. There are no scheduled airlines. Unfortunately, due to, I think, the fact that there are very few

passengers, there have been no airlines that have come into this place. They've tried a number of times and just have not been able to carry it through.

My constituency is about 98,000 square kilometres, maybe a little bit more, and it encompasses, as Kay has indicated, about 42 communities, of which we said there are a number of reserves and a number of Métis settlements and a variety of hamlets, as we go around, along with the two major centres.

Initially, I guess before the boundaries came to pass in the last while, there was a constituency of Lesser Slave Lake that included the Wabasca area, and at that point it was really culturally connected. In this round, with these new boundaries that were drawn up, it's become, I feel, even more culturally connected. There are a lot of the Cree that amalgamated, and they did start to come down to the south since Highway 88 has been almost completed. If you look on your map, you'll see Highway 88 down there. That has just come to pass, I would say, in the last four, five years, where it's the total connection that you can drive back and forth. But it's still quite a drive from where we're located. Like, I live in High Prairie, so from High Prairie to the Little Red communities it takes me about eight hours to drive up in that direction just to attend a function, but even with that amount of driving, it's still the connection of the cultural significance, in my view. So I think that should you be even thinking of changing the boundaries, some of those things should also be considered very, very much. I think that's one of the things that has to be part of the consideration when you're looking at your boundary changes.

The business connections. I understand you were asking some questions about health, and you're right. In terms of health, there are probably going to be some divorces there as we go. But I think that when we're looking at the changes and the business connections, the business connections have been consistently flowing to Slave Lake and to High Prairie. So what we've got is people who have been connected both from a cultural perspective as well as a business perspective.

When we're talking about the boundaries, effective representation comes into mind when we deal with this constituency. Effective representation, in my view, is different in an urban area. In an urban area people have to use different mechanisms and have different ways of being able to reach their people, but still they don't have to travel as much. When we're talking about effective representation, I think we should look at the disparity as well as the distance and type of people that are involved in the constituencies. I know those are the three that I really stress often in anything that I've ever dealt with. When we look at the disparity, we are truly a constituency, I think, that shows those extremes. When we're looking at distance, it's anywhere from 15 minutes to reach the communities that I represent to approximately eight hours, which is quite a different story when you're talking about an urban setting, where you can go around and drive around in 15 minutes some of the urban constituencies. It is very, very difficult at certain times. However, even that difficulty can be overcome as long as you know that the cultural connection is there, and I think that's an important part when we're looking at this constituency.

So I'm one who says to keep it as it is. If you want to make it smaller, make sure that you look at the cultural diversity that occurs here and the connections that are associated with everything to do with this constituency, that those things are taken into consideration as well as the distance that has to be factored in when we're talking about effective representation.

So my thing today is to say: keep it as it is. Look at what we've done, look at what the legal people have indicated in terms of what the constituencies are about, and look at the variance that has been allowed through the courts.

Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine.

Robert, do you have any questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: Yeah. I find it interesting for you to suggest that we leave the boundaries consistent with their current configuration, because we've been told by many people in rural Alberta, rural by a different context than your version of rural, that they were on the edge of it being almost impossible to represent a constituency any larger. Then we come here, and your constituency is maybe three, four, or five times as large, and you're still telling me it's possible. So I'm beginning to wonder how big a constituency has to be before it becomes impossible. I'm curious to know, if we were to reduce the size of your riding – we have the latitude, I believe, to take about 4,000 people from your constituency – is there an area where that wouldn't be as culturally disruptive as another area? I appreciate it's a hypothetical question.

1:32

MS CALAHASEN: Yeah, that's a really hypothetical question. To speak hypothetically about it and to address it in that sense, I would say that there's probably none that I would suggest. When you look at it, all the communities that are in this constituency presently are really quite intermingled. What is the population presently? I don't have that in front of me.

MR. GRBAVAC: I believe it's about 20,000.

MS CALAHASEN: Twenty thousand. That's since the last census; right? So there's no consideration taken in terms of the growth that has occurred in the past little while.

I would suggest that even at 20,000 I can adequately represent it presently, but it just is very, very difficult to try to make sure that you do every single one of them. I would suggest, as an MLA, that there is probably none of them that I even want to lose. I mean, I should be speaking for everybody else should I not be here in the future. I think that when you look at it, it's so culturally connected. At first I didn't think it was, but now when I look at it, there is the cultural connection, the business connection, and of course the kinds of things that people are looking upon to make sure that it's looked at in that respect. So I would say there is not any place. I wouldn't want to lose any one of them.

MR. WORTH: I'm interested in pursuing the business of cultural connection a little further, but I'd like you to sort of tell me something about the two adjacent ridings. In your judgment is Athabasca-Wabasca sort of culturally connected and interconnected internally like yours is, and does the same apply to Peace River?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, I don't know those two constituencies that well. I don't represent those two constituencies, so for me to be able to just answer that, I would be a little bit hypothetical in my answer.

What I would suggest, just concentrating on my constituency, is that in my view it is the cultural connection that – the Crees are all together, for one thing. Family connections are tied. You're Dr.

Worth – right? – who's been involved in some of the native education. When you think about what the cultural connection is, in my view and as an educator you begin to look at what the relationship is between the people in all the areas, and it's always the family ties. When you look at the family ties, the family ties not only connect from the Little Red to the Tallcree band but as well to Whitefish Lake and Peerless Lake and all the way down. So it's all the families that are connected in that way because they're all Cree.

MR. WORTH: I was really just trying to get a sense of whether or not similar family connections existed in the other areas, because I think it was Kay that mentioned that there was a different kind of family connectedness.

MS CALAHASEN: Yes, there is. There's the Dene in the north, and as you go further east there is the Dene and the Dene Tha'. So what you've got is a whole different cultural group in that area too. To the east in the Wabasca area there are some Crees too, yes, and there's still a connection there.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MR. LEHANE: Well, do they ever make government aircraft available for you to get around the constituency?

MS CALAHASEN: We're not allowed. Part of the policy is that we cannot use a government aircraft into our own area unless there are ministers coming in to do tours or to come and speak to people. Otherwise, we are not allowed to use a government aircraft into an area. You have to hire a charter. I've only done that I think twice from Edmonton, but I've had to get a special okay from the Leg. Assembly in order for me to do that. That's because of extreme emergencies where I can do that, and that's during sittings. In order for me to fly out of High Prairie, we have to charter to be able to go anywhere. It would probably cost twice as much if we were to use government aircraft.

MR. LEHANE: Would you find some provision for aircraft travel helpful to you in terms of accessing remote communities in your constituency?

MS CALAHASEN: I'm sorry. I didn't get the . . .

MR. LEHANE: Would you find that that would be a good provision for northern Alberta MLAs, to be able to access aircraft travel to service their constituency?

MS CALAHASEN: I think there must be some consideration to a number of areas when we're talking about distance. When we're talking about people wanting to see their MLAs, they have to meet their MLAs face-to-face. It just makes a heck of a difference. I think sometimes that if you don't meet your MLA face-to-face, it's very, very difficult. They're always wanting that. So I think there's got to be some consideration whether it's through a government aircraft that's made available or whether it's through some other consideration that has to be made. I don't know exactly what I would recommend at this stage other than, yes, there must be something that has to be done. I don't have any solutions to date.

MR. LEHANE: What sort of mileage would you put on your vehicle during the year?

MS CALAHASEN: I put on 200,000 clicks a year. We're only allowed to claim 65,000 in any constituency.

MR. LEHANE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Pearl, I appreciate that you've said you like to meet your constituents face-to-face, and I want you to know that a lot of people have told us that. That concerns me a little. In Alberta there are, I want to say, about 90 percent of the people that have access to phones now. I was just wondering. You represent several Métis settlements and Indian reserves up here. Would you be prepared to give us a percentage of those people that have phones?

MS CALAHASEN: Actually, I would say that out of the communities I do have, there are probably about five where three-quarters of them would probably be of nonaboriginal descent. That's only five. So out of the 42 we have, those are probably mostly of aboriginal or Métis descent. So what we've got, I would suggest, is up to 50 percent that don't have phones. There are a lot that still don't have phones.

THE CHAIRMAN: So 50 percent have phones.

MS CALAHASEN: Fifty percent have phones, and I would say 50 percent don't.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

I noticed that you talked about the highway that goes through your constituency which goes up to, I think, Fort Vermilion.

MS CALAHASEN: Yeah.

THE CHAIRMAN: Garden River was mentioned. I don't know where Garden River is, but I assume it's somewhere east of High Level.

MS CALAHASEN: It is, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: The access to your constituency up, I want to say – you can see where I'm pointing.

MS CALAHASEN: Yes, I can.

THE CHAIRMAN: From there north is difficult. I was just wondering what would be wrong with taking that portion of your constituency and putting it in with Peace River, because I think the communications there are, like, High Level, Fort Vermilion. I think there's a place called Fox Lake, which would be in your constituency. The roads are sort of running east and west rather than north and south. I don't think that means a lot of people. It would be the MLA for Peace River, then, that would service those people, and that may be too difficult for him. He may say that that's more than he wants. But I was just wondering what your comments would be in respect to that proposition.

MS CALAHASEN: Well, first of all, I think it was originally in the Peace River district, if you recall, in the last boundaries. That's

where it was. Not to say anything negative of MLAs of the past, but it was very rare that MLAs would go into those constituencies because the connection was not there culturally in terms of the communities they served as well as the three communities that are being served there. What happened there was that they didn't realize that government even existed in many instances.

So when we look at that, I would have a concern in terms of the cultural connection. I'm very strong on that aspect because I feel that that's probably the one thing that makes people get better and more progressive as they go towards developing in their communities. Knowing what needs to be done and what can be done is always so crucial when we're talking about development in those communities. If you look at the Tallcree reserve on your map, they're connected to this Little Red River band. You've got three communities that are always isolated if they're not connected in any way, shape, or form to anybody else. So what we get is a real concern about things like that.

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I'm very strong on the cultural aspect, you know. I think that's really important when you look at a constituency, making sure that it's connected and that there is that flow all of the time and that there is that increase in what I call, I guess, development. Chief Judge, I'm very, very strong about this. I really feel very strongly when they keep getting pushed apart and torn apart, and I don't think that's proper; I don't think that's right. I feel they've always been left behind, and it's not fair to them, and I think that's what we're talking about: effective representation. I think that's what we have to deal with in order for us to be able to look at what they also have to be achieving and where they're going and how they can also be involved in what I call the Alberta advantage.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Well, I want to thank you for coming, Pearl. Have a good trip back to Edmonton.

MS CALAHASEN: Good luck, eh.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know how you're going to make it for 4 o'clock.

MS CALAHASEN: I've got a standing policy committee meeting, so I've got to be there to chair it. Thank you very, very much and have a great trip around the province.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The next presenter is Robert Alford, representing the Alberta Social Credit Party. Mr. Alford.

MR. ALFORD: Yes. Well, thank you. I've enjoyed listening to these other comments, but I'm afraid I'm on the flip side of the coin.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you're entitled to be so.

MR. ALFORD: One of the things that I did notice in the opening comments was that our proposal doesn't even fit within the parameters of the legislation under which you're going to be studying this problem. So I don't know how much weight our comments are going to have, but I'd like to at least present them and take it from there.

One of the things that the Alberta Social Credit Party is very concerned about is compromises to democracy. Democracy has to be paramount in any decision as to how an area is represented. If we don't adhere to the democratic principles, we end up with people with special privileges, distinct societies, that kind of thing, and we're all aware of the kinds of problems that can arise from those kinds of situations.

If I could just digress from my written submission just a little bit. I came from probably the second smallest riding in Alberta, the Edmonton-Mill Woods riding, and that was a riding where you could actually walk around. I find it interesting that people are very concerned about maintaining cultural connections, because in the cities there is absolutely no consideration for cultural connections. You don't consider keeping the Chinese people connected. You don't consider keeping the Pakistani people connected. Like, that's not even part of the equation. In a rural riding it appears that it's quite paramount, and I don't want to belittle their concerns, but at the same time we have to consider the democratic principle of equal representation.

With that, I'd like to say that the Alberta Social Credit Party is very, very concerned about compromises to the democratic principle. Therefore, all electoral divisions in Alberta must be within the legislated variances regardless of size. The physical size is a problem, but it's the kind of problem that can be dealt with on a management kind of level, as opposed to a democratic compromise.

We also believe that currently 83 MLAs is excessive. It makes for overgovernment. Therefore, we'd like the number of MLAs to be reduced to suit more equal representation within the Legislature. We also believe there should never be any more MLAs in an urban situation, such as Edmonton, than there are aldermen. Currently Edmonton has more MLAs than aldermen, and I believe the same is with Calgary. Essentially what it is is that you've got overrepresentation of that city. We also believe that in order to address the natural somewhat misrepresentation of large ridings, what we actually would propose would be a change to how government itself works.

We'd like to see the Lieutenant Governor involved in the legislation of the province. We would like to see possibly as many as 14 regional districts established for the establishment of what would be termed as a senate. This senate would be responsible for testing all of the legislation that comes from the House for regional disparities. This same group of people, the Lieutenant Governor and council, would be responsible for introducing at the same time citizen initiative into the House and private members' Bills. This would make for a much more balanced kind of legislative power. The Premier and the House would not be able to govern unilaterally. There would be a check and balance in place as a result of this kind of proposal.

Now, I realize that these last few items are largely out of the scope of what you're considering, but when you consider the actual act of casting a vote, you're actually supporting a government and a philosophy of the government. These are the kinds of things that we'd like to see implemented, even though it's out of the scope of this hearing.

I'm at a little bit of a loss as to how to close, but that's essentially our position.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Alford.

We'll start with this end this time. John, do have anything? Joe? Wally?

MR. WORTH: You have based a good deal of what you've said to us on the assumption that we're overgoverned.

MR. ALFORD: Yes.

MR. WORTH: Why do you think we're overgoverned?

MR. ALFORD: Essentially, it's just an arbitrary number. At one time the Alberta government was 63 seats. It can be adjusted. I know, like in Edmonton, we certainly don't need 17 MLAs.

MR. WORTH: Well, when you make that statement, I guess I was asking for a little elaboration. Why doesn't Edmonton need 17 MLAs?

MR. ALFORD: Well, essentially, it's being proven that the city itself – I know I'm talking Edmonton in Slave Lake here, but that's essentially an outsider's point of view at this point in time. The city is being governed by 12 aldermen and the mayor, and they seem to be managing fairly well.

MR. WORTH: Just one follow-up. I think you and I could get into debate about the nature of the responsibilities that MLAs have as opposed to aldermen and vice versa. But one of the things the Supreme Court, in the judgment looking at the electoral boundaries in Alberta, commented on was that one of the alternatives for Albertans to consider would be more legislative seats in the Legislature rather than necessarily less. That was seen as a way that might provide for more effective representation.

1:52

MR ALFORD: Yeah. Essentially, more people do not necessarily make more effective government. That's my point of view. That's where the hard work has to come from, the bureaucracy. The MLA is there to manage the situations that they're asked to address. They're not there to attend all of the social functions and make speeches and attend fund-raisers and that kind of thing. They're there to work, and essentially that's what we'd like to see them do.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No, no questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Alford, my only comments are – and I think you appreciate this – that you've talked to us about a few things that are not within our mandate.

MR. ALFORD: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's not within our mandate to change the number of electoral ridings, but we don't mind you coming here and talking to us about it and expressing your view.

Then you talked to us also about the fact – you said the Lieutenant Governor and council should be elected. I'm trying to interpret what you mean by “and council.” I think I interpret that as the 14 Senators that you're proposing.

MR. ALFORD: Yeah, essentially.

THE CHAIRMAN: When you say a reduction in the number of MLAs, that there shouldn't be any more than they have aldermen in the city of Edmonton, and if you follow your principle of equality – and basically that's what the Supreme Court of Canada is telling us to do – on that basis, the riding of Lesser Slave Lake and Mr. Cardinal's riding next door, Athabasca-Wabasca, would become one riding. You've heard what Pearl Calahasen said about representing her riding. She puts on 200,000 miles a year; she can't get to part of her riding. Now, to give her that much more – I have a little bit of trouble saying, "Pearl, you can work that hard."

MR. ALFORD: I recognize those concerns, but if you look at the federal boundaries, the MP has almost that exact riding that you were just talking about, and he's dealing with that situation.

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

MR. ALFORD: Okay. Thank you for listening.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Good.

The next speaker we have is John Simons. Where are you from, Mr. Simons? Who are you representing?

MR. SIMONS: My name is John Simons.

THE CHAIRMAN: Simons. I'm sorry.

MR. SIMONS: I'm representing the Lesser Slave Lake PC Association. Basically, I had a very nice brief here, but a few people have stolen my wind already.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we have no problem with you going through it if you want to go through it.

MR. SIMON: Okay. Thank you.

I assumed there were ladies on the committee. I'm sorry; I addressed it, "Ladies and Gentleman of the Commission."

The Lesser Slave Lake PC Association requests that your commission recommend that there be no change to the boundaries of our constituency. As justification for this recommendation we wish to bring forward the following points.

This constituency is the second largest electoral riding in Alberta. I have attached a map there which I believe you are all looking at. It has a population of over 20,000, scattered over an area of roughly 88,000 square kilometres. I noticed Pearl mentioned 98,000; I would be happy to send you the exact figures when we verify it. It is approximately 200 kilometres from east to west and at least 500 kilometres from north to south, extending to the Northwest Territories border as its northern boundary.

Unlike the largest riding, Athabasca-Wabasca, there are no scheduled airlines which give access to the northern part of this constituency, nor are there scheduled airline services from Edmonton to any point within our constituency. Any flight required to serve the people of this constituency must be chartered, and the cost of charter flights is cost-prohibitive in these times of economic restraint and cutbacks.

Access to communities in this constituency is primarily by vehicle. Highway 2 runs east-west in the southern part of the constituency, and Highway 88, which is only partially paved, runs south to north in the middle of the riding. There are even a few

communities in the far north of the riding that can only be reached by winter road or chartered airplane during certain times of the year.

Until recently, the oil and gas industry has been the one dominant industry in the economic growth of this constituency. However, the area within these boundaries is currently experiencing major development in the forest industry. Economic development in these two industries is a major common denominator that binds the communities and people within this riding.

Our organization has an executive and board of directors totaling 68 people who represent every municipality, native reserve, Métis settlement, and remote community within our boundaries. Since 1992, when these boundaries were established, the Lesser Slave Lake PC Association has made a concentrated effort to include those communities and rural areas that were added to our constituency. Just as an aside, I believe Pearl mentioned that they were mostly in the north. They were native communities that were added there.

The adjustment has been made, and we have become a working group. To remove some areas or add other areas now would result in another period of major adjustment which we would prefer not to experience again.

We appreciate your time in hearing our submission. We realize that with the amount of traveling you've had to do, many submissions must sound very similar. However, we guarantee you that not only is our constituency unique, but our existing MLA is also a very unique person. I believe you've met her before. We respect her for all that she has done for our riding, even with the current budget constraints. We also wish to point out to the commission that it required tremendous effort and organization to co-ordinate and integrate such a large riding in so short a time. We do not wish and we do not think it is in the best interests of the government of Alberta to increase or change the boundaries of the riding of Lesser Slave Lake at this time.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Simons, I wish to apologize for mispronouncing your name to start with.

We'll see if we have some questions. Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Walter?

MR. WORTH: Yes, I have a question or two. You must have the largest executive and board of directors of any constituency association in the province . . .

MR. SIMONS: Thank you.

MR. WORTH: . . . just looking at the numbers. Does it ever meet?

MR. SIMONS: We meet once a month, 10 months a year. On normal, we have 10 to 15 people present.

2:02

MR. WORTH: Do you ever have them all present?

MR. SIMONS: At an annual meeting we would be extremely lucky if everyone attended, but we do rotate. There are different people coming at different times for different interests, so it's effectively a representation of the entire constituency then.



MR. WORTH: Well, I guess your description of what goes on in the constituency association sort of mirrors the size and the complexity of the constituency.

I'd like to come back to the idea that was mentioned in an earlier submission, I guess by Kay, about resources and about the need perhaps to provide additional resources to MLAs in constituencies like this one. Do you, too, endorse that notion?

MR. SIMONS: I believe there should be a factor rationalization which should take into account the total available distance that has to be done by vehicle. I don't propose and I don't think Pearl had ever proposed that you pay for charters once a week or something. What I would suggest, though, is that her travel is very legitimate and that it is physically impossible to see everyone and not put on a large number of kilometres. So I would think that, considering the distances from one end of the riding to another, not in square mileage but strictly in road mileage anticipation, you should be able to come up with some type of formula which should at least cover some of it more adequately.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: I just have one. Am I correct when I say that Highway 88 is paved going from south to north up to and including Red Earth Creek and that then it is unpaved from Red Earth Creek to Fort Vermilion?

MR. SIMONS: That is correct. It is a gravel road, but it's under certain weather conditions that it's good or bad. Fortunately, I have not had the opportunity to travel up the road myself, but Pearl and her staff have made numerous trips.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's not a relevant question but as a matter of interest: what do you do?

MR. SIMONS: It's stated at the end of my brief – I'm sorry I didn't mention it – that I'm a chartered accountant. I operate my own CA firm in town here.

THE CHAIRMAN: In Slave Lake?

MR. SIMONS: In Slave Lake, yes. Just to give you some idea of the perspective of distance here when you talk about people, local people, rural people, I don't have any clients in the next town, High Prairie, because it's too far for them to come. Can you imagine that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, fine. Thanks for coming and expressing the views of your association.

MR. SIMONS: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Mrs. Chris Jones from the Dunvegan Progressive Conservative Association.

MRS. JONES: Good afternoon, lady and gentlemen. I'm Chris Jones from the Progressive Conservative Association of Dunvegan. I just learned of this hearing the day before yesterday, so I was unable to get ahold of too many facts and figures. Anyway, we believe that the Dunvegan constituency should stay as it is and probably all rural northern constituencies too. They cover a much larger geographic area than the urban constituencies.

For example, the Dunvegan constituency covers 39,225 hectares, which is 5.9 percent of the province. It has 612 kilometres of primary highway, which is 4.4 percent of the provincial highways, and 619 kilometres of secondary highway, 4.6 percent, of which 62 kilometres are surfaced. There's a population of 26,047. There are five towns, eight villages, several hamlets, eight MDs, four hospitals, four school divisions, 16 schools, a number of Métis associations, agricultural service boards, and various other associations, societies, and groups that the government must respond to or be involved with. The MLA is expected to represent the whole of the constituency in a fair and equitable manner. The geography and services available in the north make it almost impossible to fulfill the responsibility an MLA has.

I would be interested to know how this constituency compares to the urban constituencies. Do they have the variety of issues and concerns? Do the MLAs have the geographical restrictions that are more recognized in the north? If the constituencies in the north were to increase in size, we don't believe it would be possible to have effective representation. Being fair does not always mean being equal. Geography and distance and simply the ability to get around with no scheduled air service must be considered in your deliberation regarding the constituency boundaries.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Does your copresenter there wish to say anything?

MRS. JONES-SHORT: No. That's fine.

THE CHAIRMAN: We would like for the purposes of *Hansard* to get your name though.

MRS. JONES-SHORT: Okay. My name is Dena Jones-Short.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you a mother and daughter team?

MRS. JONES-SHORT: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you're the first mother and daughter team that we've had.

MRS. JONES-SHORT: I'm actually from the Lesser Slave Lake constituency.

THE CHAIRMAN: I see. John, do you have any questions?

MR. McCARTHY: Just one question, and that is: how long a drive is it from, first of all, Grande Prairie to Spirit River?

MRS. JONES: Grande Prairie and Spirit River aren't in our constituency.

MR. McCARTHY: Well, Spirit River is. I just wondered. You were talking about air service. There's air service into Grande Prairie. How long a drive is that?

MRS. JONES: From where?

MR. McCARTHY: From Grande Prairie to Spirit River.

MRS. JONES: Oh, it's probably an hour. It's two hours for me from McLennan. I live in McLennan.

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah. So if you were flying, would you fly into Peace River, or would you fly into Grande Prairie?

MRS. JONES: I'd hate to fly into either one of them.

MR. McCARTHY: But if you had to, what's the closest?

MRS. JONES: Peace River would be closer.

MR. McCARTHY: Thank you.

MR. LEHANE: Where does the MLA maintain a constituency office?

MRS. JONES: In Fairview, which is 100 miles away.

MR. LEHANE: How long does it take to go from Fairview to Edmonton?

MRS. JONES: From Fairview to Edmonton? I would say about six and a half to seven hours.

MR. WORTH: What's happening to the population in the five towns that you referred to? Has the population been stable in the last 10 years?

MRS. JONES: Yes, it has.

MR. WORTH: Is it growing at all?

MRS. JONES: A bit. I'd say about 5 percent maybe.

MR. WORTH: Would there be a particular growth community? Is Grimshaw growing faster than Berwyn?

MRS. JONES: I think probably it is. I think Fairview and Grimshaw have grown a little bit. McLennan has grown a little bit, but it fluctuates up and down.

MR. WORTH: So you wouldn't be suggesting, then, that the population in the Dunvegan constituency has gone up much since the '91 census.

MRS. JONES: Not considerably, no.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Thank you.

MR. GRBAVAC: Chris, I find it interesting that a number of presentations we've had from rural Alberta suggest that they simply cannot service a larger constituency. The principal reasons or certainly a number of the reasons given are the number of municipalities, school boards, various levels of government, and organizations that exist within that municipality. Your municipality probably has twice as many or more of those organizations than some of the other rural constituencies that suggested they simply

couldn't service a larger area. Yet am I safe to assume that you're suggesting that your constituency not be reduced in size either, that the current configuration remain?

MRS. JONES: Well, I think we're happy with the way it is right now. We hate to see change in it because it's taken a long time to get equal representation all over the constituency. We live across the river, and it appeared that from time to time our end of the constituency was kind of left out of things. It's not being anymore because we're demanding that it be represented.

MR. GRBAVAC: Okay. Thank you.

2:12

THE CHAIRMAN: I want you to know this is not the thinking of the commission. I've been looking at the map of Dunvegan, and Dunvegan is presently minus 16 percent, which is within the 25 percent category. In attempting to equalize things, one solution is you could give Dunvegan Peace River.

MRS. JONES: You could give who?

THE CHAIRMAN: You could give to the Dunvegan constituency the city of Peace River.

MRS. JONES: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: That would, I think, bring you up to about the population you should have.

Another thing that you could do with Dunvegan is you could eliminate the Dunvegan constituency and give the west portion to Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the east portion to Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MRS. JONES: That would put it the way it was before?

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know.

MRS. JONES: The east portion: what portion is that? What part would that cover?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Fairview would end up in Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MRS. JONES: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: And Spirit River would end up, let's say, in Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MRS. JONES: Okay. What would happen to the other part of it, the part across the river: McLennan, Falher, Girouxville? Would it go to Peace River?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. That part could go to Peace River. I just want to test your reaction. What I'm saying is that in this there are several propositions. One is giving Dunvegan the city of Peace River, and that would bring you up to the proper population. The other solution is taking the constituency of Dunvegan and transferring it down into the two Grande Prairie constituencies basically. This part farther up north here – there are not many people in there. That's where Keg River is.

MRS. JONES: But it still has to be serviced.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd just like to hear your comments.

MRS. JONES: We were in the Peace River riding years and years ago, and it wasn't good. We never saw our MLA. We do see our MLA now, and I think that most of the constituency is happy with the way it is now. We liked it when it was part of the Smoky river constituency, and when they changed it, we've just got used to it being part of the Dunvegan constituency. We feel that we're being represented now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who's your MLA?

MRS. JONES: Glen Clegg.

THE CHAIRMAN: Clegg. Fine. Any more questions? I want to thank you for coming and making your views known.

MRS. JONES: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I think that's the last of our speakers. Now, we allow anybody in the audience who wishes to say anything as a result of what they've heard or to add to their submissions. I notice that we've lost some of our speakers. Mr. Alford is gone; Pearl is gone. I see that Kay and Carol are still here. Do you wish to say anything more?

Well, I guess if there's nobody else to speak to us today, we will adjourn these proceedings.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:16 p.m.]

