

**Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings
Fort McMurray**

7:10

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think maybe we should start. I want to welcome you two gentlemen and the media to the public hearing of the Electoral Boundaries Commission here at Fort McMurray.

I see there's somebody coming in the door. I don't know whether they're coming to hear us or not.

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'd like to introduce you to the other members of the commission. There is Robert Grbavac of Raymond on my far left, Joseph Lehane of Innisfail on my immediate right, John McCarthy of Calgary on my far right, and Walter (Wally) Worth on my immediate left. The five people you see before you make up the commission, and I want to say that we are pleased to receive your comments and consider your thinking with respect to our duties.

The commission is holding public hearings here in Fort McMurray 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 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 in 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 areas, 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 the areas, 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 proposal 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 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 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 and effect when proclaimed, before the holding of the next general election.

With 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.

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 us in our decisions and ultimately in the proposal 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 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 areas, the boundaries, and the names of all electoral divisions.

I regret to say that we don't have a very good turnout in Fort McMurray tonight, but I see we've been joined by your MLA, Mr. Germain, thankfully. Good evening.

The first presenter, I'm informed, is Mr. Ed Kamps.

MR. KAMPS: Good evening.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening.

7:20

MR. KAMPS: I was told if I made a presentation, I would be eligible for the door prize. Being first, maybe I get two chances.

Just a couple of brief comments. I know there are a number of different objectives you're trying to reach, and I think one of the overall objectives, as much as possible, should be to seek out ways of reducing the number of constituencies across the province, for a couple of reasons. One is just the economics of it. We're looking at reducing government spending in a variety of manners, and if there are some ways of doing that, I think that should be a key objective.

Secondly, if we are moving to a time when government is taking a less active role in the economy and is less activist in our society generally, perhaps there's less reason to have as many MLAs as we might have had at one time. I'm not sure if that's really the extent to which the government is going or not, but that might be another thing to consider when looking at the number of constituencies we actually need.

In terms of our constituency here, as you know, we are presently Fort McMurray, but over the last while we've gone through the experience of the municipality merging with the improvement districts. I think for that reason we have a sound argument to suggest that we have a new constituency here that represents the municipality, that follows the same boundary. The municipality is

a fairly large area, but our municipal council has made that adjustment, we have the health authority that's made that adjustment, so I think our MLA could quite easily make that adjustment. Certainly there are a number of cases already, I believe, where our MLA is responding to the requests for information or other needs by people from outside the constituency just because they live close to the area, even though they're not officially in this constituency. So I think from a representation point of view, that would be something to look at.

In terms of the percentages, I think I read somewhere about maybe 10 percent in terms of how much the constituencies vary. I don't think that's realistic. I think the 25 percent is reasonable. There's some flexibility built in there to achieve some of the other objectives, so I think the 25 percent gives the guidance that should be appropriate.

You mentioned the word "names" of constituencies. I guess we're in the municipality of Wood Buffalo, so if we are going to change the constituency, there's a name you can look at.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you prefer Wood Buffalo to Fort McMurray or Wood Buffalo-Fort McMurray or Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo?

MR. KAMPS: Yeah.

THE CHAIRMAN: Where do you live?

MR. KAMPS: I live in Fort McMurray. One could be just the constituency of Wood Buffalo. Another option would be to include the words Fort McMurray in there as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: John, do you have any questions of Mr. Kamps?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe? Wally?

MR. WORTH: Perhaps not so much a question as an observation, but it may end up in a question.

We have heard from you this evening about the desirability of perhaps setting the constituency boundaries coterminous with those of the municipality, and indeed we've heard that in the other written submissions that we've received from this area. The difficulty we face is that the legislation under which we are operating restricts us to a plus or minus 25 percent or a minus 50 in the case of very underpopulated regions. When you take the city of Fort McMurray, you're looking at somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 34,000 people I think. Add to that what's out there at Fort Chip and in other areas, another two or three thousand, and we're well above the plus 25 percent that we're allowed to use by the legislation. Here, where we have what sounds like a sensible idea to me, is something that we're not in a position to be able to implement, and so it seems to me we're left with probably only one alternative, and that is to leave things the way they are. I guess it's an observation and not a question.

MR. KAMPS: Could it not fit in one of those other guidelines? You talked about some exceptions to that.

MR. WORTH: But that's to allow for regions with small populations who might be as much as minus 50 percent in terms of the population. That's of course how Athabasca-Wabasca and Slave Lake came into being.

MR. KAMPS: Yeah. But we would have a relatively low population per square kilometre, too, though.

MR. WORTH: Yeah.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert, do you have any questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to thank you for coming, Mr. Kamps, and making your views known.

MR. KAMPS: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Mr. Tony Koopmans. Go ahead.

MR. KOOPMANS: Good evening. I wasn't going to present; I was going to listen. But since you don't have that many people here, I did make a few notes. A couple of things have bothered me over the last few years. One is the number of MLAs we do have in the province, and I'm not sure if that's something you can influence through this commission. I think we have too many ridings, having 83 MLAs. You know, we're having a real effort to downsize government, make the government smaller, yet we have the same number of MLAs. I've seen some studies that show that Alberta has more MLAs per capita than any other province in Canada. We have more MLAs than B.C., and we have more MLAs than Saskatchewan, and they've reduced their number of MLAs. That's on a per capita basis. So I'd like to recommend that Alberta should have about 42 MLAs in the province. I don't see any reason for having 15 or 16 MLAs in a city like Edmonton. Why couldn't they do with eight? I just think we have too many politicians.

That's about basically all I wanted to address to your commission.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Koopmans, the presentation that you're making we're hearing from quite a few people, and we're hearing it more from city people than we are hearing it from rural people. Rural people, a lot of them, are saying: "Don't make our MLAs do more work. They've got too much work as it is."

I want you to know that your submission is not part of our mandate. Our mandate is that we are told we have to divide the province into 83 constituencies. Whether we will make this part of our report by way of arbiter when we turn in our report we haven't decided yet. It is not really part of what we are supposed to be doing, but in view of the fact that we're getting so many people talking about it, we may find it necessary to make it part of our report.

Robert, do you have any questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: No, I don't.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: Sure. I'll ask Mr. Koopmans a question. As I understand your rationale for having fewer MLAs, you related it largely to the general downsizing that's going on in government, perhaps the implication being that we're overgoverned. Do you see that in any way as sort of impeding effective representation? Many of the rural constituencies that we've been in have been arguing with us that you can't reduce the number of rural constituencies because

they're necessary in their present form to enable the rural voice to be heard effectively in the Legislative Assembly. So I'm wondering if you think, even though we might reduce to 42, as you suggested, we could still have effective representation.

MR. KOOPMANS: I think so. Things are a lot different now than they were 10 or 20 years ago. You've got video conferencing, you've got fax machines, you've got computers, and so on. We're really a lot further ahead than we were. All the MLAs don't have to travel so much. I mean, they can do a lot of this stuff with communications. Ourselves we're using video conferencing a lot. That could be used and so on. I think that it's just such a big expense to have all of these people. If you compare it to the state of Montana, they have many fewer representatives there with about the same population, and they don't have any debt either. So the more politicians you have, it seems that they just get us into more trouble.

MR. WORTH: But in terms of the Wood Buffalo area is it safe to assume that while there may be a lot of people who are technologically literate in Fort McMurray, once you move out of Fort McMurray is the level of technological literacy apt to drop or plummet dramatically?

MR. KOOPMANS: Certainly. Yeah.

MR. WORTH: Yeah. Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: We've been saying to people what you've been saying, that there are now faxes, telephones, and all of the different ways of communicating with one another. But a lot of people have been replying to us stating that it's important that you meet with your MLA face-to-face. They don't want to deal with him over the phone or by fax. I appreciate what you're saying, but that's how it's being rebutted by a lot of rural MLAs.

Joe, do you have any questions?

7:30

MR. LEHANE: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: Just one observation. My understanding is that the state of Montana has fewer people than the city of Calgary.

MR. KOOPMANS: I'm not sure. I just know that the MLAs there don't get a salary. I think they're all volunteer.

MR. McCARTHY: They're all part-time. They're not full-time.

MR. KOOPMANS: Yeah.

MR. McCARTHY: The reason I made the observation: I was uncertain as to the quotient of the member per number of population.

MR. KOOPMANS: The proper comparison should be to B.C. and Saskatchewan and so on, and I think you'll find that their number of MLAs per population is lower than ours.

MR. McCARTHY: I think you're right about B.C. I'm not as sure about Saskatchewan.

MR. KOOPMANS: Well, if you do hear it often enough up to the end of your hearings, I hope you will add it into your report.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that's all the questions, Mr. Koopmans. We want to thank you for coming and helping us out with our hearings here and participating.

MR. KOOPMANS: All right. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Well, we've reached the end of the presenters. I was just wondering, Adam, whether you would be prepared to come and talk to us about your proposal that you wrote in your letter to us some time ago. I think we would like to discuss it with you.

MR. GERMAIN: Okay. Only with the view to keeping you company because I didn't plan on making a formal presentation.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wasn't going to bring up the fact that the people in this area said that they didn't want to meet their MLA face-to-face.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, I can certainly understand that. When you have a face like mine, they're being kind.

Mr. Chairman, I've spent a lot of time pondering this issue. I've lived in Fort McMurray and this northern area for 20 years and have seen an evolution. If I can take a moment to give you some more ancient history, when I first came to Fort McMurray, the population was just evolving here and the community of Fort McMurray was really represented by an individual living in Lac La Biche. As the population grew here, it ended up where our MLA was a resident of Lac La Biche and we didn't have any effective local representation.

Following a boundary reassortment at that time, we ended up with an MLA that basically presided over an area that is almost similar to the present area of the Wood Buffalo municipality. It picked up somewhere to the south of Fort McMurray and I know radiated all the way up to Fort Chip. It went to the Northwest Territories boundary and extended east to the Saskatchewan border and west some distance.

The concept of an MLA restricted to the community of Fort McMurray – and this area looking like a doughnut, to the centre of a doughnut, from its surrounding trading area – is an extremely new idea. It's only been in existence since the election of 1993.

I have no objection expressing my view to this committee. I know that in some ridings you've attended in rural Alberta the MLAs have joined with their constituents in saying: "Let's leave our boundary alone. Let's not touch our area." This is perhaps paradoxical and unique, because I think this riding of Fort McMurray should disappear and there should be a new riding called Wood Buffalo that should follow the municipal boundaries. I recognize the difficulty you have which would make it a nearly 40,000-person riding and over the population and perhaps outside of the formal mandate and outside of the court cases. However, if you come to the decision, following all of your thoughts on this, that this really does make the best sense and that you are limited only by other factors, I would hope your report would reflect that that was an appropriate and a reasonable idea and is stopped only by the mathematics of it.

I think the reason there is no crowd here today, if I could be so bold, is not because people have any dissatisfaction with their MLA. Quite the contrary I would argue. There's no crowd here tonight because I think many people in Fort McMurray are almost

convinced that's what's going to happen because it happened so smoothly for the municipality. I had so hoped tonight that you would receive oral or written submissions from the outlying areas, areas like Sapræe Creek to the south, Janvier, those areas, and Fort Chipewyan.

I want to say that my adjacent MLA the Hon. Mike Cardinal does an excellent job of trying to get around this very vast area. It is an unbelievably large area with an unbelievably sparse population, and it's very difficult for Mike Cardinal to get around. I say that by pointing out that when people in the surrounding area need access to government agencies, departments, government information, or simply some help with completing their passports or commissioning documents, they do not jump into their car and drive down to Athabasca or Calling Lake, where Mr. Cardinal has his office. That is not out of any disrespect for that gentleman or a lack of appreciation for the job that he's doing, but we're practical and we understand that if somebody lives 10 kilometres from Fort McMurray and there's an MLA that can get them government information 10 kilometres away, they're not going to drive 250 miles for that same information or same service.

What has effectively happened in the Fort McMurray area is that the public doesn't recognize any boundaries and the area is reverting to its natural trading connection. So that's the point I make in my submission, that we should have the one riding of Wood Buffalo.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine.

John, do you have any questions, comments?

MR. LEHANE: Adam, based on the '91 population figures, which are the ones that we're probably going to have to use as a result of the legislation, there are just over 41,000 constituents in Athabasca-Wabasca, and Fort McMurray. Now, you've indicated that your proposal would take Fort McMurray to approximately 40,000; is that correct?

MR. GERMAIN: No. I just saw some information produced by the municipality of Wood Buffalo where they have a new stat, and I think they feel that the population of this municipality is about 37,000 people.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's our figures.

MR. LEHANE: Do you know what that population figure is based upon?

MR. GERMAIN: I can't tell you that, sir. I don't know what census material they've done or whether they've done any new assessments or new polls. It would seem to me intuitively correct, because in the municipality of Wood Buffalo now Fort McMurray is virtually a hundred percent of the population. Then we have some southern-based hamlets, and we have the little community of Fort Chipewyan to the north, which is about 1,800 people.

If I could just think out loud a little more, gentlemen, I recognize that the options that have been expressed here today are: create, if it's permissible, this new riding; leave the existing ridings alone. The only other option that really exists is that you in some fashion tinker with a part of Fort McMurray.

Now, let's analyze those potentials. If you took Fort McMurray and you divided it roughly down the middle so that you started with a nucleus of two ridings of about 15,000 people each and you radiated one of them north, east, and west until you picked up your

target percentage and did the same with a riding radiating south from Fort McMurray, what you would effectively do, I say just thinking out loud – it would effectively mean that there would be likely two individuals elected resident on a full-time basis right in the community of Fort McMurray, because even that much population in one core would control and dominate two ridings centred around this community. I think there would be a legitimate grievance that that type of divisional scheme prejudiced against the rural area in favour of Fort McMurray. You'd effectively have a city of 30,000 people that had two resident MLAs, where in another area in southern Alberta a city of 60,000 people might have that same number.

Now, what you would do with that type of division is you would create two rural/urban mix ridings with additional expenses, traveling expenses, and you would also likely create two ridings with two municipal offices right in Fort McMurray. Again, the public would have anxiety about that. In our community, for example, schools are closing, and our hospital is reducing in size. There you'd have two MLA offices in the same community, so you could sense that that would be a political nightmare.

7:40

So what's your other option? You take a core of 30,000 people from Fort McMurray and you slice off a few subdivisions and add those to another riding. What that would effectively mean is that those subdivisions would always be, in their own mind, disenfranchised. They would never have an MLA able to get elected from those subdivisions, and they would constantly use the existing Fort McMurray main MLA as their MLA. So that type of a division, where you simply lopped off a little bit of Fort McMurray to balance another riding, would seem to those people who were lopped off to be not fair. So when you analyze those pluses and minuses, you either are left with the earlier comment, that you leave things alone here and perhaps try and find another population base to add onto Athabasca-Wabasca, or you bite the bullet and create a riding parallel to the municipal boundaries.

There are no easy solutions in this corner of the province because of the disproportionately large population centred in Fort McMurray in contrast to the vast tracts of land and the limited population elsewhere.

MR. LEHANE: If I could follow up, Adam, on my question. It appears to me that within the city of Fort McMurray there's probably more of a commonality in terms of issues and needs and so on with respect to their MLA, and once you get outside of Fort McMurray, you get into an area that may have other native and cultural concerns and needs that are somewhat different than those in the urban centre. I guess what concerns me is that I think the area outside of urban Fort McMurray is an area that, because of sparsity of population and geographical area and so on, takes some significant time to service in terms of getting out to see the people and the people getting to see you and that sort of thing. If, in fact, the Wood Buffalo area were added to Fort McMurray, you would have an area left in Athabasca-Wabasca of, say, 13,000 constituents, which creates a problem even as a special area because it probably exceeds the 50 percent variance that's allowed under the Act. It seems to me that there's still, because of geography, a significant constituency to serve out there and that it's not something that could be added to Lesser Slave Lake, for instance, because over there I think the MLA already has her hands full in terms of distances to travel and that sort of thing. So when I look at your proposal, it leaves me struggling in terms of:

what do you do with the rest of Athabasca-Wabasca to bring it within the guidelines of the legislation? I'm asking if you could give us any help in that area.

MR. GERMAIN: Your comment is very fair. The Lesser Slave Lake riding – and I believe the MLA is Pearl Calahasen – is another giant riding with a large territory and small population. What we presently have is an MLA who's based in Athabasca and Calling Lake overflying Fort McMurray to service Fort Chipewyan, Chip Lake and that sort of thing. So we've actually compounded the struggle of that riding that didn't exist prior to the 1993 division. I do not know what public input you've received in the Lac La Biche-Athabasca area, and of course that would be an important public input. It seems to me that the Athabasca-Wabasca riding would, by inference, then have no choice but to either extend farther south or extend farther east from its present boundaries, because clearly you couldn't add it, I agree with you, to the Slave Lake area. It would have to find its population base elsewhere, perhaps in Lac La Biche, perhaps in the St. Paul area. I know that the folks down there have very strong views about some of these issues, and I don't claim to talk for them or about this issue on their behalf.

MR. LEHANE: Do you think that the geographical area and the distance, the difficulty in serving it because of the sparsity in population and the way the population is spread out, justifies the balance of Athabasca-Wabasca as a special consideration riding?

MR. GERMAIN: I think a fair argument can be made that Athabasca-Wabasca is a special area, excluding the population base of Fort McMurray. I think most Albertans would recognize the sparsity of that population and the vastness of the land.

One other comment that you wanted to raise that I wanted to deal with, if you don't mind, and you did bring it up: the commonality of interest. We should talk about the commonality of interest a little bit. For example, we have the odd and awkward situation now – you gentlemen and your support staff flew in and landed at the airport. As you were coming in to land, if you happened to look out your window, you would have noticed a residential subdivision called Sapræ Creek. This is basically an acreage subdivision of people who consider themselves Fort McMurrayites but who want to live on larger acreages. That subdivision is not in the Fort McMurray riding. It's in the Athabasca-Wabasca riding. Virtually 100 percent of the folks who live there are employed in Fort McMurray or employed in the oil sands industry or service industries in town. They've made a lifestyle choice to live there.

If you go a little farther south, you come to a provincial park called Gregoire Lake with a Gregoire Lake recreational subdivision where people live all year round. They've made a lifestyle choice to live there. Virtually all of them are involved in some fashion with the related jobs in this industry, primarily the oil sands industry. You go farther down the road to Chard, Janvier, and Conklin. Their efforts are tied to logging, tied to oil sands, tied to some of their own industry in their area.

You go north to Fort Chipewyan, and the individuals there are either involved in the commercial fishing industry or involved in the oil sands industry. They're constantly working with our two major employers in this area, Syncrude and Suncor, the oil sands plants, on how to integrate into that type of work environment. The number of individuals that are still engaged in the historic cultural jobs of trapping and fishing and strictly native industries are an ever

diminishing number in this community. Their interests are important, but their numbers are ever diminishing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Adam, I've got a question. I'm certainly hearing what you're saying, and there seems to be a lot of solid rationale for your position, but we have a logistical problem, and that is with the numbers. I'm not even sure we have that yet; there seems to be some contention with respect to the numbers. I'm just wondering: what if we carved off that panhandle, the southern extremity of the constituency from about Calling Lake south? Athabasca I guess would be the principal community there, would it not? What effective population would we be looking at in that particular area, basically from the 19th baseline, if you're familiar with that, south, basically Calling Lake south? I appreciate it's no longer coterminous with the municipality, but it may help us with our numbers.

MR. GERMAIN: Our municipality doesn't radiate that far.

MR. GRBAVAC: Oh, I see.

7:50

MR. GERMAIN: Our municipality only goes down approximately, I think, to Mariana Lake, which is a little service station about 60 miles or so south of here.

MR. GRBAVAC: Oh, I see.

MR. GERMAIN: The difficulty is that if you took away another 4,500 people, roughly, from the Athabasca-Wabasca riding, you would be . . .

MR. GRBAVAC: No, no. I'm suggesting that if that were taken away, then the numbers would allow for there to be just the one riding, you know, consistent with the argument you're making. Fort McMurray and the surrounding area then would fall within those population deviances.

MR. GERMAIN: The present population of the Wood Buffalo municipality is approximately 37,000 or 38,000 people. So you can see that based on the census information that you used for your literature, I think it's about . . .

MR. GRBAVAC: Okay; well, that's where I'm making my mistake then. I was under the assumption that that was appropriated in the municipality, which it is not.

MR. GERMAIN: No. Our municipality does not go down as far as Athabasca and Calling Lake. It's a good thing our mayor isn't here tonight, because given that they have the big Al-Pac plant down there, if you said that out loud too often, he'd be wondering about expanding the municipality to that area too, but we don't go that far.

MR. GRBAVAC: The town of Lac La Biche: their representation to us alluded to that as well.

MR. GERMAIN: Yeah. If you have to rule against a Wood Buffalo riding on the basis of strict population numbers – I know you'll do

what you have to do, but it certainly seems to me that if the idea has merit, then that merit should be expressed in your report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No. I have no further comment except to say that I very much welcome your analysis of the other options, as well, that you set out for us. I think that we are faced basically with either leaving things the way they are or acceding to the wishes of the people of this area in trying to set a constituency boundary that's coterminous with the municipal boundary. We'll just have to look at that.

MR. GERMAIN: If I could just respond to that. The optics of the situation is that I do not believe the residents of this community would feel that they in some way had been prejudiced by that. A comment was made earlier and there had been some comments about the representation: people don't want to lose their voice. Well, it seems to me that it's the quality of the voice that people have to represent them, not the quantity of the voice, that should be the benchmark. I think that the people of Fort McMurray – if I might, I believe that in Mr. Kamps and Mr. Koopmans here today you received a pretty good cross section of the view of the citizens of Fort McMurray, which is that they want less MLAs. You can call them perverse, if you want, but if it comes to a choice of having an MLA or having a school, they're going to vote for the school every time. So that's the bottom line.

The citizens of this community, as far as I've been able to see, believe in less, not more, government, and these are important issues to them. So even if Fort McMurray was to become a municipality of Wood Buffalo and become a little larger, I think the community would accept the rationale of that argument and would not say: oh, we're now underrepresented compared to Edmonton or Calgary. I think that would mean that if the number of MLAs in the province ever did decrease, if there was ever another study and the number of MLAs in the province did decrease, this municipality would already have its decrease cushion built in.

MR. McCARTHY: Just to explore those comments. I read your comments in *Hansard* in the debates on this issue where you were discussing the prospect of . . .

MR. GERMAIN: You must lead a very lonely, lonely life.

THE CHAIRMAN: He does; I can answer that for him.

MR. GERMAIN: A very lonely, lonely . . .

MR. McCARTHY: I only read them once.

MR. GERMAIN: Oh.

MR. McCARTHY: In any event, my recollection is that your comments were consistent with the other two presenters in that you were suggesting fewer MLAs, and in particular, I believe the number you used was 65. Now, we're moving into an obiter here because we're beyond our mandate, but I'm just curious about your thought process there. Assuming that there were 65 MLAs, I'm curious as to how you would think the split of those should be between the two large metropolitan areas and the rest in general terms. Have you thought about that at all?

MR. GERMAIN: I don't have my materials on that debate with me, but it seems to me that at 65 MLAs the population per riding works out to about 50,000, if my math is correct. Fifty MLAs at 50,000 is 2.5 million, isn't it?

THE CHAIRMAN: That's right.

MR. McCARTHY: Fifty MLAs times 2.5 million. I don't know.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's right; that's right. Your math, for a change, is correct, Adam.

MR. GERMAIN: Okay. I'm just trying to go back to it. There were several reasons for the reduction in number of MLAs to 65, and one of them was that it represented about a 20 percent decrease in the number of MLAs, which was consistent with the Premier's target about reducing governmental services by about 20 percent. So there was that starting threshold of consistency, but more importantly we thought it was a number that was consistent with other provinces and other ridings, other communities.

We have mixed ideas about that too. I mean, I've heard the suggestion that we should have 52 ridings in this province. Then you'd take the federal ridings, let them do all the work; take the federal ridings and just have two MLAs for each federal riding. Then your boundaries commission simply has to draw a line 26 times, and you could rely on someone else. There's a lot of work and cost and effort in these boundary debates. So some people have suggested that. The figure that was expressed here tonight is presumably not unworkable in today's technology. I do know that in the Legislative Assembly the size of the room and the number of people leaves the room looking very crowded, clearly a room that was built for a smaller time.

Now, nothing has changed in the province of Alberta since 1905 in terms of size, yet we have significantly more MLAs today than we did in 1905 when the land mass was just as big, only then they had not one single modern convenience that we have now. In the history of our little community, lawyers, for example, coming to this community used to pack their laundry, their law books, and whatever liquor they wanted to pack and get on a train in Edmonton ready for a five-day trip to Fort McMurray to dispense justice. They would come out here in a coach with the judge. This is in the history of this community in its old days.

Our province has shrunk because of technology, and conversely our number of MLAs has increased. Beyond that, I'm not able to provide you any more scientific analysis of the selection of that number, but it does represent about a 20 percent decrease and would make the ridings each about 55,000 people.

MR. McCARTHY: Okay. Then just to explore that one step further, have you got any thoughts in general terms? I understand you don't have any scientific analyses, but in general terms I'm curious what your thoughts are on the variances as they are set out in our legislation. And I guess further to that, on the assumption that there'd be 65, how would they be split as between the two large metropolitan areas and the rest?

MR. GERMAIN: Well, I think beyond that, you'd go back to a population representation. It seems to me that the fewer the ridings, the fewer of these nonfitting ridings there would be. Here's a perfect example. We spent the night debating the municipality of Wood Buffalo, whereas it would be no debate if, for example, we had 76 MLAs, because if I'm just doing that math right, that would bring the numbers up so that it was about 40,000 per. Obviously, if you took

this thing to its logical extreme, if you had only two MLAs in the province of Alberta, there sure wouldn't be a lot of boundary fighting, would there? You'd draw a line roughly at Red Deer, and that would be a done deal. It seems to me that the problem becomes harder the larger the number of MLAs you get as opposed to easier.

MR. GRBAVAC: Adam, I appreciate that this isn't within the context of our mandate here, but I don't see anyone breaking the door down to get in tonight and make a presentation, so excuse me if I get a little off the track. It seems to me that we've gone through this process approximately four times in the last few years, and we potentially could be shifting these boundaries again. Every time these boundaries are changed there's a consequence, you know, that goes along with it in terms of constituency organizations reorganizing, et cetera, et cetera. Then I submit to you that if we reduce the number or if a subsequent commission reduces the number of constituencies again, you'll see almost a decade of continuous change in this province. You know, I'm not suggesting that that isn't what's going to happen. I'm just suggesting that that's not in the best interests of stable government, to be redrawing the map half a dozen times in 10 years.

MR. GERMAIN: You raise a fair point, but you're going to always in this province have population shifts. Fort McMurray is a very interesting example, because in 20 years it went from 4,500 people to close to 40,000 people and then has slid back to a little smaller number. That has happened in the space of very recent history.

I think that the province of Alberta as a whole is maturing. I think it's predictable that we're going to continue the move towards urbanization. By definition, therefore, if we want to accept the basic premise of democracy, of equal representation, you're going to have changes. It seems to me that there are some ridings in this province that don't make a lot of sense. If you have a big city riding – and I won't mention any of the cities – that consists of 11 square blocks of high-rise apartment buildings compared to a riding like Mike Cardinal has, which represents just about an eighth of the landmass of the province, people intuitively sense that that's not working either.

8:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Adam, I want to thank you for coming and being so frank with us. I want to acknowledge on behalf of the commission that when we received your letter, you were the first person to make a submission to the commission after we were appointed. I don't know whether that's because you work so hard or you had a lot of time on your hands. From what you've said to us tonight, it's obvious that you understand the problem that we have with respect to your submission and what can happen with the Fort McMurray riding.

There's one other alternative that you haven't discussed which I want to tell you about but which also doesn't work. In view of the fact that you're doing the work for the people surrounding Fort McMurray, we could give you those people, and you still wouldn't be over the 25 percent quota. But if we took those people away from Mike Cardinal's riding and gave them to you, Cardinal's riding would be in trouble because it would go over the 50 percent mark I think. I think from what you're saying, you'd have no objection to receiving those people surrounding Fort McMurray, like at the new subdivision and at the lake and, I suppose, Waterways or MacKay or whatever towns are left up there.

MR. GERMAIN: Let me say that there's nothing in this for me personally. I don't view this as personal, like a young lad collecting

hockey cards where the more cards you have, the more bragging rights it gives you. Nor do I complain about serving the people who come in. I mean, if somebody is up here from Calgary and they need some government service that they can't get – they're a taxpayer in this province. They pay their taxes, and it's taxes that pay my salary. So please understand that I was neither complaining nor criticizing Mr. Cardinal. He has a major, large area, and he can only live in one place and he can only be in one place at a time. The reality is that I live here in Fort McMurray, and I'm here often, so people will come looking for the information.

It matters not to me how the boundaries are dealt with in this community. It's only an issue of what's fair for the people of Alberta. That's my only interest in this. There is nothing personal at stake. I don't mind working, going up to Fort Chipewyan, going to Chip Lake. I go there as often as I can, and I'm happy to do so. Sometimes I go there to assist Mike Cardinal, and sometimes I go there because I'm invited there myself. It doesn't matter to me.

Adding to the Fort McMurray riding. If you look at those people who live immediately around Fort McMurray and ask them where they feel most identified with, if they were here tonight, they'd probably say, "Yeah, we feel identified with Fort McMurray." I mean, that is a possibility, but I recognize what it does to the Athabasca-Wabasca riding.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you. Any further questions? I want to thank you for coming and being so frank with us and helpful.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, on behalf of the community I apologize for the slight turnout. Will you be coming back after the preliminary report is assessed? That might create a little more action, depending on what it says.

THE CHAIRMAN: We haven't decided what it says. Let's assume we leave it the way it is – and I'm not saying that that's what we've decided. With this turnout and if we leave it the way it is, I don't think that's going to excite much interest. But if we follow the unworkable solution that you mentioned of dividing Fort McMurray in half, that might stir a lot of interest. I don't think there's much hope of that, Adam.

MR. GERMAIN: I think that's a fair analysis.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

Well, you two gentlemen that have been listening and have heard a little more said, do you have anything more you want to say or add or bring up?

MR. KOOPMANS: No. I just agree with what Adam was saying. If you reduced the number of constituencies, it would make it much easier. You could combine Athabasca-Wabasca with Lac la Biche. It all makes sense to me.

THE CHAIRMAN: It would be very simple if we went down to 50 ridings, like Adam suggested, for this part of Alberta.

MR. KOOPMANS: I hope that you guys will look at the other provinces and look at the populations that they have.

THE CHAIRMAN: But we just came back from southern Alberta, I can tell you, and that wouldn't be acceptable to those people down there. So you get different views in different parts of the province.

Well, I want to thank you all for coming. We'll adjourn this hearing. We may see you again in March, or we may not.

[The hearing adjourned at 8:06 p.m.]