

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings Edson

12:58 p.m.

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: We have quite lengthy introductory remarks here and just two people to listen to them, I guess, but I think they should be made.

We want to welcome you 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 are very happy to be here to receive your comments and consider your thinking with respect to our duties.

The commission is holding public hearings here in Edson 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 like to 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, places, and purposes of our public meetings, which we have done in this case.

After our report is published by the Speaker, we will undertake a second set of public hearings, as is required by the Act, and lay before the Speaker a final report by June 30, 1996. Again, the

Speaker shall make this report public and publish it in the *Alberta Gazette*.

If more than one report is submitted from among the members of the commission, the report of the majority is the report of the commission, but if there is no majority, my report, or the report of the chair, is the report of the commission.

The final report of the commission is then laid at the earliest opportunity before the Legislative Assembly, immediately if it is then sitting or within seven days after the beginning of the next sitting.

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

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.

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

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

The Supreme Court of Canada and the Alberta Court of Appeal have agreed that the right to vote under the Charter includes, one, the right to vote; two, the right to have the political strength or value or force of the vote an elector casts not unduly diluted; three, the right to effective representation; four, the right to have the parity of the

votes of others diluted, but not unduly, in order to gain effective representation or as a matter of practical necessity. The rulings of the Supreme Courts as well as the electoral boundaries Act must guide our decisions and ultimately the proposals that we make to the Legislature.

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

We have set forth our focus after preliminary deliberations. We have not reached any final conclusions. The commission wishes to hear the views of 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 electoral divisions.

At this point I would like to call upon our first presenter, the MLA for this constituency, Duco Van Binsbergen.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank you for accepting the onerous task of redrawing our electoral boundaries. Next, I want to express my appreciation for the fact that you decided to come to Edson to hear the views of the people in the West Yellowhead riding.

I would like to start by making a self-serving statement, and that is that I would appreciate it very much if you wouldn't make any major changes to the boundaries of the West Yellowhead riding. I've gotten to know and love every corner of this riding, and I would hate to lose any part of it. I realize it's a self-serving statement.

I think it's fair to say that your commission was established in order to ensure that the 83 constituencies in the province would be more balanced in terms of their population than they are at present and that if there were any deviation, it be properly explained and accounted for. However, in my opinion, there are good reasons to accept the principle of allowing fewer residents in rural ridings.

1:08

First of all, due to the geographic size of their ridings, rural MLAs are forced to spend a great deal of time on the road. For instance, although I'm centrally located in Hinton, it takes me roughly three hours to make a return trip to Grande Cache, and return trips to Edson and Jasper consume up to two hours. Obviously, a meeting with constituents in far-flung reaches of a rural riding tends to be far more time-consuming than visiting with urban constituents.

The second reason is that in addition to the distance factor, rural constituencies generally contain several population centres. As a result, their MLAs have to deal with a number of municipal councils, each with their own agenda. Furthermore, each of the centres has its own hospital, recreation centre, seniors' lodge, a number of schools, et cetera, et cetera. In the West Yellowhead riding each of the four towns has all of these institutions and more, while the four hamlets possess some of them. Obviously it takes time to stay in touch with all these organizations. Consequently, I request that you consider these specifically rural factors as you attempt to deal with the request for a more balanced population figure per riding. It appears to me

that these factors could be somewhat mitigated by allowing rural constituencies to have fewer residents, but as to the exact deviation, I leave it to you to establish a fair range from the average number of residents per constituency.

I thank you for your attention, and I wish you good luck in your deliberations and your conclusions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we want you to stay there because I'm sure we'll have some questions.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I'll stay here.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll start with Robert today.

MR. GRBAVAC: No questions.

MR. WORTH: Duco, I have a question about the boundaries of your constituency. The West Yellowhead riding does not take in all of MD 94; does it? As I look at the map, the boundaries of your constituency are coterminous with those of the two improvement districts 12 and 25 and largely with MD 94, but there appears to be a piece of it, as you get towards Drayton Valley, that is not included. Is that correct?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: That's true.

MR. WORTH: How big a piece is that that's not included?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Well, MD 94: that's the Yellowhead MD; eh? I never know the number. I think it goes all the way to Entwistle, Evansburg actually, whereas the West Yellowhead riding ends just 13 kilometres east of Edson.

MR. WORTH: Okay. So there's a substantial number of people in that portion of the riding that would include Evansburg and Entwistle.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yeah. I'm not sure what the number of people would be, but of course it includes the communities of Niton, Peers, Wildwood, Fulham, Evansburg, and so on.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. LEHANE: Duco, do you think that the boundaries as they are presently constituted for West Yellowhead sort of conform to the trading patterns of people in that area?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Probably as well as you can expect. You know, I'm particularly thinking of people from Jasper and Grande Cache often coming to Hinton, probably fewer from Edson because, you know, if they have to travel, they tend to travel to Edmonton. Yes, probably as well as one can expect. In the case of Jasper, there are some people who are interested in being in the same riding as Banff, and I think that's a matter of their particular interest in tourism and so on. In terms of the trading area, in terms of the general traffic I think Jasperites come this way more often.

MR. LEHANE: Do you have any idea what sort of kilometres you would put on your vehicle in a year on MLA business?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yeah. A hundred and twenty thousand kilometres in two years.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's 60,000 a year.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Sixty thousand a year, yeah.

MR. LEHANE: What time does it take you to travel from the Legislature to your constituency office here?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Three hours.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Duco, I'm just wondering if the people in this constituency are happy with the name West Yellowhead, or would they like Edson-Hinton-Grande Cache or Jasper-Edson?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Nobody has ever said anything about it, and I certainly personally like it, being used to it now. So I'm not going to ask for any changes.

THE CHAIRMAN: One thing has come up in respect to rural versus urban constituencies, as we've gone around. Somebody has suggested – the people who represent urban constituencies and rural constituencies get an allowance of so much per voter to run their constituency office and to pay for their secretaries and whatnot – that there is way more work in a rural constituency office and therefore maybe those people who represent rural constituencies should get one and a half times the allowance or twice the allowance or some such. Have you given any thought to this?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I haven't. All I can say is that we find it relatively hard to live within the budget that we get. Now, that is with one full-time constituency manager and a half-time secretary who gets paid \$6 an hour, which is not overly much. We can make it but not by a wide margin.

I think there is an argument to be made in terms of communication particularly. It would be nice to be able to send out more letters, but of course all that's costly. So I think a case could be made for probably more money per constituent in rural areas, especially if they have fewer constituents.

THE CHAIRMAN: Where do you have constituency offices?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Only in Hinton. We started off with getting a temporary office in Edson, and one of my people would go there for one day every two weeks. There was almost no call for that, so we did away with that. What now happens is that if I get calls from people in Edson, I come through Edson so often that we just meet in a restaurant or at their house.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you can appreciate that your constituency is – what? – I think minus 10 percent, and your constituency is sort of bounded on the north and the south. If we wanted to get your constituency a little better figure, I guess the only way we could go with your constituency is to the east. Would you agree with that?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Absolutely. Yeah. In fact I've dealt with people from that neck of the woods, in any event, because they tend to be concentrating on Edson as a main centre for them.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, as a result of the other questions do you have any further questions?

MR. WORTH: No. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No.

1:18

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to thank you for coming and talking to us and expressing your views. I'd have to say that you might be in a very safe position because of the way your constituency is surrounded, but we'll try our best to change it. [interjection] No. I'm just kidding.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next person is Mr. Craig Corser, representing the West Yellowhead Progressive Conservative Association. Go ahead.

MR. CORSER: Thank you very much, and I, too, thank you for taking the time to come to our community to hear the input that we have. I would say at the outset that I have to agree pretty much with everything our MLA, Duco Van Binsbergen, has to say on this occasion. My presentation is short and really reflects his comments.

We believe the key focus in your deliberations should be on effective representation. By this we mean the time and the effort required by an MLA to provide an adequate level of representation on behalf of his or her constituents. Rural ridings have a lower average population than do urban ridings. However, the travel time to cover larger rural ridings, such as ours, often makes up for the population differences. As you commented, our population is about minus 10 percent from the provincial average.

West Yellowhead presently fits into a geographical unit encompassing Grande Cache, Jasper, Hinton, and Edson. We see no opportunity to effectively fit any other additional communities into our constituency and strongly request that no increase to our size be considered. Further, we believe that most rural MLAs are well known within the communities they serve and therefore receive more requests for assistance than do urban MLAs.

In conclusion, we feel that the guiding principle of plus or minus 25 percent urban versus rural representation is both fair and effective and we strongly request that rural ridings not be increased in size. We also believe that the matter of the electoral boundaries review has been studied beyond any reasonable need in recent years and it is time to stop spending time and effort and get to a conclusion as quickly as possible. Our system of representation is working well.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you want to tell him why we're here, John?

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah. If I could just take a minute here to respond to your concern about why we're here. We, of course, are a creation of the Legislature as a result of the Legislature amending the electoral boundaries Act. The background, I suspect, to that amendment and the reason why we were created by the Legislature stems from two court cases. One is the Supreme Court of Canada case, the Carter case, dealing with electoral boundaries in Saskatchewan. They were dealing with very similar legislation and the same issues that we're dealing with, and that is the difference in

population density between the rural areas and the large metropolitan areas. The Supreme Court of Canada gave its decision through Madam Justice McLachlin, who ironically comes from Pincher Creek, Alberta. Basically the Supreme Court of Canada through her in summary said this.

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

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

So that's kind of what the Supreme Court of Canada said.

Then that decision was before the Alberta Court of Appeal when the Alberta government brought the electoral boundaries as we know them now before the Alberta Court of Appeal. The question that was asked of the Court of Appeal was whether the electoral divisions as we know them now infringed or denied the rights or freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and, if so, in what particulars. Now, the Court of Appeal said – I'll read the concluding remarks, and that'll perhaps explain why we're here and the dilemma we face.

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

This is the only review provided in the legislation before the 2001 census. So that explains why we're here and the dilemma we face.

MR. CORSER: Yes, I understand. But I guess counter to what Mr. Van Binsbergen indicated, your purpose is to review, not necessarily modify. Is that correct?

MR. McCARTHY: Well, just let me repeat what the Court of Appeal said. The Court of Appeal did say "review."

A new and proper review is essential before the constitutional mandate of the present government expires, and . . . before the next general election.

Then they went on to say this.

We reject any suggestion that the present divisions may rest until after the 2001 census.

MR. CORSER: Uh-huh. So that in fact mandates you to make some change, if they say they reject that. Is that the case?

THE CHAIRMAN: Not necessarily.

MR. CORSER: We're well within our 25 percent plus or minus. Is that not the Supreme Court's position?

MR. McCARTHY: I guess the Court of Appeal's decision has been subject to many interpretations.

MR. CORSER: Yeah. Right. Well, that's good. I mean, it's good to be able to give you our impression anyway and to look at the

issues and see how the balance of the effort, if you will, to provide representation maybe has to be balanced with equal population. I'm sure Mr. Van Binsbergen knows full well the effort involved in rural constituencies or something like Edmonton-Centre, not to say that Edmonton-Centre is without its challenges.

MR. McCARTHY: I take it you and Mr. Van Binsbergen agree on quite a few issues. Do you? Or is this just one?

MR. CORSER: We agree on these issues, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: Craig, where are you from?

MR. CORSER: I was born and raised in the Edson area, to the southwest.

MR. WORTH: Well, I'm glad to hear you're from Edson because I have a question and I was looking for some local knowledge.

MR. CORSER: Sure.

MR. WORTH: This is hypothetical. If you had to move to the east along Highway 16 in terms of adding a few people, how far would you go? What would make sense? Would it make sense to go down the highway so that you could encompass Peers and Fulham? How far would you go? All the way to Niton?

MR. CORSER: This is what you call a hypothetical question?

MR. WORTH: Well, nobody else on the panel has heard it before.

MR. CORSER: Well, I don't agree that our boundaries should be increased. With that being said, I guess the main difference between the folks to the east and the folks that now comprise West Yellowhead is that the folks to the east are more agricultural. Their economy is more agricultural and their lifestyles are more agricultural. To that extent it matches quite well with the body of the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency, which tends to be more agricultural. Including populations to the east would bring that element into play in West Yellowhead and the need for a better understanding of agriculture and the issues. We don't really have very good agriculture from Edson west.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No. No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: This thought just entered my mind, and maybe I should have asked this question of our previous presenter. We're in Edson, and I think we're in Edson because the last Electoral Boundaries Commission came to Edson. If you look at this constituency, maybe we should have been in Hinton, going by its population and whatnot. What's your reaction to where we should be?

1:28

MR. CORSER: Well, I think that the site of your hearings is not to serve a specific constituency, and Edson does provide kind of a regional centre to a larger area including Drayton Valley and Whitecourt.

THE CHAIRMAN: I appreciate that we're not only dealing with the West Yellowhead constituency. Other constituencies could come here and make presentations.

MR. CORSER: Yeah. Edson's quite central to that extent. The constituency used to be called Edson, and I think when it was changed to West Yellowhead, probably some Edsonites took umbrage at that, but I don't think it's a real issue. I think West Yellowhead is a wonderful name and reflects the geographic nature of the constituency.

THE CHAIRMAN: So you have no objection to the present name then?

MR. CORSER: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. I guess that's all the questions we have of you. Thank you for coming.

MR. CORSER: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have one more speaker, and that's Mayor Ross Risvold from the town of Hinton. You weren't scheduled till 2 o'clock, but I'm glad you got here early.

MR. RISVOLD: Thank you. Mr. Chairman and fellow members, first of all, on behalf of the town council I'd like to thank you for providing us with this opportunity to give some recommendations and input into potential boundary changes. We'd like to mention, though, that you're going to have a profound effect on the effectiveness of political representation enjoyed by Albertans at this moment, and I know that you won't take this job lightly. We're talking about effectiveness of representation.

We don't feel that adding a number of urban electoral divisions to Edmonton and Calgary is appropriate, and in fact it may be a recipe for injustice. It might create a better mathematical consistency, but we don't think it would necessarily be better for effective government. An example may be that more and more there are concerns about what's happening in rural Alberta and the development that goes on in rural Alberta. If you have additional MLAs from your urban centres, more and more they're going to determine what should occur in rural Alberta. An example of this is that we've just sent a letter to the Calgary caucus to visit Hinton, the model forest, because we know there are concerns coming out of the Calgary caucus with the Conservative Party about some forestry and forestry operations and to what's really going on with forestry practices in this province.

It used to be, with development and what was going on, that people said, "Not in my backyard." But right now what's going on is that they're frequently saying, "Not in your backyard." Again, this input and influence in the Legislature may create an imbalance in the potential opportunity for us to be able to live and retain the standard of living that we have right now.

So we think practical considerations have to be given so that MLAs can in fact interface and have a balance of power in the legislation. An example of this would be that you are centred in

Edson and we appreciate you coming here, but I know that there may be people in Grande Cache who may have liked to give a presentation, but you're talking about a two and a half hour drive, the same distance as going from Edmonton to Hinton in the time span. There are also seniors that can't get around quite as easily. I think this is a perfect example of why it's important to retain a practical approach so that MLAs in fact can represent their communities and people in those areas have access to them.

Another example is that this commission's public hearing schedule is a classic example of the problems of sparsity, density, and distance in effectively getting in touch with constituents. To the best of my knowledge – and I may be off a little bit – you've scheduled 35 hours in 14 locations to receive input from rural Alberta, 16 hours in three locations to receive input from Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer. It's a classic example of the necessity to retain the present boundaries or close to the present boundaries that we have right now. That recognition has been given by your board.

Mr. Van Binsbergen brought up the variety of people he has to represent. He has 17 local and regional authorities whom he has to deal with in this constituency.

So we don't think there's a compelling need to have major changes in boundaries. In fact, we're somewhat concerned about the injustice that may occur if the cities start to receive a higher balance of power. Again I'm going to go back to the reference of determining what's going to happen in our areas.

Another analogy that was used with a previous commission – I decided not to use it because there's some danger in it; I didn't know if I'd get your co-operation, to be honest, so I didn't want to do it – is that there was a native from Wabasca who came into the room, and he asked the chairman to go and pick up five stones from various locations within the area where the hearings were occurring. They timed him on the time it took that chairperson to do that. He then asked the chairperson to pick up five stones from five seats very close together and then compare the time. It had a dramatic effect, apparently, on the commission in that it illustrated the time that's required to represent rural Alberta in comparison to urban Alberta.

That's all I have for the presentation, other than I know political lines have been drawn on some occasions here and that some people think we should have it based on population alone. Also, to the best of my knowledge, both the Liberals and the Conservatives supported a triple E type Senate in which you may have five seats, three seats, or whatever from each of the provinces in Canada. So both of the major parties in this province, at least who are elected right now, have also accepted the fact that we don't always have representation based on population.

Thank you very much.

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

Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Ross, numerous people have suggested to us that we are overgoverned in this province and that some rural MLAs may have to meet with and discuss issues with in excess of 100 local municipally elected people. They've suggested to us that those municipally elected people should be making their job easier, as opposed to making it harder, in that they can pass on some of the concerns of the same people that both represent to the provincial government. I just wonder if you could comment on that. Do you feel it makes the MLA's job more difficult or that it makes his job a little easier to have the local officials within his constituency? I ask you that as, you know, the mayor.

MR. RISVOLD: Okay. I smile because I know when you're walking down the road to the next commission, you're saying: should we amalgamate the number of communities with municipal governments? I think it probably makes it more difficult. Duco could answer that easier. We all have our own agendas, and we're trying to achieve different things. So when Duco has to try to coordinate his time with Jasper, Grande Cache, Edson, Hinton, the MD of Yellowhead, I think that would make it more difficult than if he had fewer municipal bodies. But I don't want to prejudice any thoughts about, again, amalgamating municipalities.

MR. GRBAVAC: Could I just ask a supplementary question? Within your municipality, if you have a concern with the provincial government such as funding of infrastructure costs or your block grant under the municipal assistance grant program – I know they've been lumped now – do you go through your MLA when you speak with the various ministers of government, or do you speak with them directly?

MR. RISVOLD: No. Our philosophy – and we just had a meeting, actually, with our MLA last week – was in fact that we deal with the government of the day overall. There are, of course, exceptions to that. It doesn't matter if it's the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party. We deal with the government of the day in Ottawa; we deal with the government of the day in Edmonton.

I would put a caveat on that in that we would also then work with our MLA if we thought that we were not getting – because he is in the opposition – what we thought was fair treatment. Then supposedly they would probably bring up in the Legislature some of the concerns. The general philosophy is to deal with the government of the day, and not to do so would probably not allow us to be as effective as we would want. Again, it doesn't matter what political party that is.

1:38

MR. GRBAVAC: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: As a matter of interest, what do you do besides being the mayor?

MR. RISVOLD: I'm the director of the Environmental Training Centre in Hinton.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is that with the provincial government?

MR. RISVOLD: It is.

THE CHAIRMAN: I suppose that would deal with reforestation?

MR. RISVOLD: Yes. It was formerly called the Forest Technology School, but it's now much broader. It was very narrow in scope. We

were actually doing broader things, so it was decided to change the name. It's now the Environmental Training Centre. It deals with reforestation, forestry practices, et cetera, as one of the items.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally now has a question.

MR. WORTH: Just another question: where are the growth centres within this constituency? Would you say that Hinton is a growth centre?

MR. RISVOLD: Yeah. I would say that the constituency as a whole is a growth constituency. Grande Cache's economy is getting stronger. Jasper's economy is getting stronger. There are restrictions on development, but it is getting stronger. Predictions are that tourism internationally will increase dramatically, and exit surveys have indicated why people come to Alberta: the Rocky Mountains are number one. Hinton is a growth centre and also Edson, so I would say that the whole area is a growth area.

MR. WORTH: Would you hazard a guess as to the extent of growth since '91? I mean, is it 1 percent a year or 2 percent a year?

MR. RISVOLD: No. It would be very speculative on what that would be. Also, I previously was the mayor, and then I didn't run in the last election and came back in. So having just been elected, I have a knowledge of the area, but I don't have all of the specifics and maybe what had happened in the last three years.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MR. RISVOLD: You're welcome.

THE CHAIRMAN: What's your reaction to the 25 percent allowed by the Alberta statute? Why I'm asking this question is that Saskatchewan has now changed its statute to where there's only a 5 percent allowance.

MR. RISVOLD: And there's a big difference between 25 and 5. I guess I would want to, then, refer back to my comment about the amount of influence on what's going on with Acts and regulations and the potential development of any region in rural Alberta. I would feel very uncomfortable with it moving to a 5 percent variance. I feel far more comfortable with the 25.

Again, I can bring in personal experience. I was chairing the Alberta forest conservation strategy until my time just didn't allow it to occur anymore. Within that group we had a variety of people. The people from the academic settings and urban Alberta really didn't feel that we had the capabilities of determining what should be going on in rural Alberta, and these people have a lot of access to urban MLAs. Again, I think my concern is real. I would be concerned if urban areas received many more seats, because they don't appreciate what's going on. So I feel far more comfortable with the 25 percent than the 5 percent. If that variance is what's allowed, then I guess any speculation on my behalf is irrelevant. I do feel uncomfortable about the 5 percent, and again it's because I think we can best determine what should happen in rural Alberta.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Are there any other questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, I've got one supplemental. Ross, in light of that, I wonder what your feelings are with respect to creating a greater level of self-determination within your rural area itself. Would not your interests be better protected if we saw some

decentralization of power from Edmonton to the rural municipalities? I say that in light of the fact that the city of Calgary grew last year by almost twice the entire population of West Yellowhead. That's a reality that maybe can be ignored for now and next year or maybe three or four years. You know, we may see a potential for 100,000 people moving into Calgary before these constituencies are reviewed again. I'm suggesting to you that at some point down the road, the problem to which you are alluding will become more acute, and I just wonder if you have any perceptions of how rural Alberta can have its voice assured other than continually expanding the limits on the variance between the population bases.

MR. RISVOLD: Yeah. I think that decentralization is one of the ways, and I would be in favour of it but, again, with caveats. I don't want any government that's in power to take that as – you know, we had the struggles between the federal and provincial governments before. Both would take powers no matter what because there was always lots of cash. So I think that the decentralization of powers should be given serious consideration as long as there was cash that came along with it, because municipalities have a restricted number of ways in which they can raise revenue. But that would be one. I realize what you're saying, and I appreciate your bringing up the point.

I've done business in China and Hong Kong. I mean, I represent a community of around 10,000 people. That's not even one apartment complex in Hong Kong, but it's a homogeneous-type culture. It would be easy to represent a population of probably a million people in Hong Kong because you could walk from one end of it to the other. There's an analogy with moving into your urban centres. Even with the variances that are allowed at the moment, if they were reduced – I know where you're coming from, and I hadn't thought about it. So I appreciate your bringing it up. Maybe that's something that the governments should be giving serious consideration to. I do have a serious concern about the urban areas driving what's going to happen in the rural. We don't want to devastate areas or anything like that, but we do want our people to be able to work and make enough money so they can have food, shelter, and enjoyment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally? Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No. Thanks.

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

MR. RISVOLD: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you think we should have gone to Hinton instead of Edson, seeing as you're the mayor of Hinton?

MR. RISVOLD: No. I think Edson is appropriate because, like Craig had mentioned, this isn't just based on the constituency boundaries. There are concerns. People from Grande Cache can't come to Edson very easily, but if it had been in Hinton and people from Drayton Valley wanted to give a presentation, they would have had the same difficulty. So I think Edson was the appropriate place.

Now, if it had been the constituency, then Hinton would have been more appropriate because it's more central to all of the constituency.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Thanks for coming and making your views known.

MR. RISVOLD: Good luck. Have fun.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll need more than luck.

Well, that's all the presenters that we have scheduled for today, but we have provision for people in the audience who want to come and say anything if they like. I think everybody here has said something except for one gentleman back there. Do you wish to add anything?

MR. BOLES: I'm just here to observe today. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: To learn. That's the position I like to take.

Well, I guess, that being the case, we'll adjourn these proceedings. I want to thank you for coming.

[The hearing adjourned at 1:48 p.m.]

