

**Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings
Grande Prairie**

7:04 p.m.

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: Can everybody please be seated. Welcome 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.

Let me 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 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 Grande Prairie 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 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 areas, boundaries, and names of 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 areas, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions. We are required to give reasonable public notice of the times, places, and purposes of our public meetings, which we have done in this case.

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

If more than one report is submitted from among the members of the commission, the report of the majority is the report of the

commission, but if there is no majority, my report, or the report of the chair, is the report of the commission.

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

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

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

I would like to start tonight's hearings by calling upon our first presenter, André Harpe, representing the Progressive Conservative Association of Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Go ahead.

MR. HARPE: Thank you, Chief Judge Wachowich and members. On behalf of the Progressive Conservative Association of Grande Prairie-Wapiti I'd like to thank the boundaries commission for coming up and hearing our concerns and comments.

This area is being effectively represented right now with the boundary divisions as they are. The constituency itself that is affected falls within the allotted guidelines of the population. Grande Prairie-Wapiti has close economic and social ties that must be taken into account when reviewing the boundaries. What happens outside of Grande Prairie affects the city itself. It is very important, therefore, to keep these ties represented in the Legislature. With Grande Prairie being split and combined with the outside rural areas it also makes accessibility a lot better for the people to hear its elected members. With the riding of Grande Prairie-Wapiti being well within the population guidelines and the close economic ties, it would not make sense to change these boundaries at this time.

There are many other good reasons why the boundary review commission should not change the boundaries. The Alberta electoral boundaries were just changed before the last election. It is too soon to go through that expense again, especially in these times of fiscal restraint.

Provincially, Albertans are well represented, with over half of our MLAs representing urban ridings. We must remember that there should be geographical restraints in some of our more sparsely populated areas of the province to give equal representation for all the people. Being that the current boundaries are one election old, the citizens of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and I think the citizens of all of Alberta do not want the unneeded expense of reviewing the boundaries so soon. To sum up the mood of the people: don't fix what isn't broken.

7:14

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine, Mr. Harpe.

Robert, do you have any questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: No, not at this time.

MR. WORTH: I have a comment and a question. One of the things that we're admonished to do by the legislation as a commission is to take account of municipal boundaries, community boundaries, city boundaries, and so on. The constituency that you're a part of, André, is unusual in the sense that we have split a city, we have split a municipality, there is a county that is split, and everyone seems to be happy. It sort of stands in conflict, if you like, with the legislation and the assumption underlying that: that we should try to make the boundaries of electoral districts coterminous with municipal or county or city boundaries. That's a comment.

The question has to do with basically the splitting of MD 16, where the western part is in Wapiti and you go down south but you don't go down all the way in the MD. There's a chunk that belongs where Grande Cache is located. In your view, is there some reason why Grande Cache should be excluded from this constituency?

MR. HARPE: I see no reason why Grande Cache should be excluded. Actually, myself, I live northwest of here. A lot of people from the Grande Cache area are using Grande Prairie as a trade area right now. So it follows with what I was saying: economic ties are being fitted quite well.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Thank you.

MR. LEHANE: André, what is the breakdown between the urban and the rural mix in the constituency in terms of population?

MR. HARPE: I'm not sure. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I believe they're roughly half and half.

MR. LEHANE: Do you think that that balance of being approximately half urban and half rural is a good balance in terms of a constituency that might be called 'rurban', partly rural and partly urban?

MR. HARPE: From the last election it seems to be working quite well. I believe the citizens of Grande Prairie, like the rural people, seem to be quite happy. The citizens of Grande Prairie seem to be quite happy with the way that it's split, because Grande Prairie right now is effectively being represented by two MLAs.

MR. LEHANE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: John.

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: André, Grande Prairie is different, I want to say, than the rest of Alberta. In the last Electoral Boundaries Commission when they tried to make 'rurban' ridings, the people basically surrounding Edmonton and I guess Calgary wanted no part of 'rurban' ridings; that's including part of the city and part of the rural area. It appears that in the last election Grande Prairie was made into two 'rurban' ridings. They split the city in half, and everybody to the west is in one constituency and then people to the east are in another constituency. I've heard no complaints about this. I'm under the impression that everybody's happy with this. Is this right?

MR. HARPE: I have heard no other complaints either, and I think everybody seems to be quite happy with the way that it's being split right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you offer any explanation as to why the rural people from Smoky trust the people from Grande Prairie or why the rural people from west of here trust the people of Grande Prairie?

MR. HARPE: Well, I don't know.

MRS. PATTERSON: It's northern hospitality, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll give you a chance.

MR. HARPE: I kind of look at this whole area as kind of a big community, and everybody is quite happy with everybody else. We've tried this for one election; it's worked very, very well. You know, everybody works together economically and socially. I'm a farmer outside of Grande Prairie. I do a lot of my business inside Grande Prairie. We are one big community, and we are working well together that way.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I have a theory, and I don't know whether you'll agree with it or not. That theory is that of the people who live in Grande Prairie, at one time probably half of them lived in these rural areas, and they moved into Grande Prairie as they went into business or retired. There's a common bond between the people of Grande Prairie and the rural area, and they trust one another as a result. I don't know whether this is correct or not.

MR. HARPE: I would tend to agree with you on that comment also.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, you come from the constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. What do you think of your name? Do you like your name, or would you like some other name?

MR. HARPE: I think we should keep it the same. We're just getting used to it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I have no more questions. Anybody else? I want to thank you for coming, André, and making your views known.

MR. HARPE: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Glenn Keddie.

MR. KEDDIE: Thank you and again thanks for giving us an opportunity to have some input once again into this.

THE CHAIRMAN: Could you put your sign up. We might call you André, and you won't like that.

MR. KEDDIE: I firmly believe that the boundaries for the Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky constituencies should remain the way they are. It has only been a little over two years since the present boundaries were established. We are now just starting to become familiar with them. The main population centre in the two ridings is the city of Grande Prairie. This accounts for over half the population base of the two constituencies. Dividing the city in half between Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti is the fairest way to have this large, sparsely populated geographic area represented in the Legislature.

If Grande Prairie was a riding on its own, the remaining area would be physically impossible for one MLA to effectively represent. The area would be approximately 200 miles by 100 miles. The city of Grande Prairie provides regional shopping, recreational,

cultural, health care, and postsecondary educational facilities for the area. The city is totally dependent on the forestry, agricultural, and oil and gas industries for its economic well-being. These industries are all located outside of the city.

The fairest way to effectively represent the needs of all people is to leave the boundaries the way they presently are so that each electoral district has a mix of urban and rural residents who are dependent on each other and must work together to achieve the highest level of economic and social well-being. A division of rural and urban residents in this part of the province would lead to perceived win/lose types of decisions. Our variation by population from the average is minus 10.2 and minus 8.6, well within the 25 percent. I urge you to leave the two constituency boundaries as is.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. We'll start with you, John. Do you have any questions?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. WORTH: Glenn, out of curiosity, where do you come from?

MR. KEDDIE: I live in the city of Grande Prairie.

MR. WORTH: You live in the city of Grande Prairie. Do you think the split within the city is an appropriate one? If you were to divide up the city, would you divide it up any differently than it is now?

MR. KEDDIE: No. I think the way it's done physically is fair, and we've learned to accept it. I mean, when it happened, you have your own ideas, but I think it's the best way it could have been done.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Thank you. A second question. As you can appreciate, if we change the boundary of any constituency up in this area, there is a kind of domino effect which then takes place. I guess my question would be: if you had to increase the rural part of either one of these constituencies, what kinds of areas might well be incorporated? For example, could you go north and take in Spirit River? Could you go north and east and take in some area there? Would you be better off to go to the south and east and take in Whitecourt? I don't know. What would make sense if the domino effect started to operate and one had to adjust the rural boundaries somewhat?

7:24

MR. KEDDIE: I guess if they were to be adjusted, you'd have to do it on a population basis. Certainly geographically there's lots of land up here, but populationwise going farther south, unless you took in Whitecourt, you would achieve nothing. Going north, you would hit the sparsely populated areas of Woking, Spirit River. You know, you'd have to take on a lot more land to achieve any more population. I think with that size of area, it would be really unfair to any one person to effectively represent that larger area.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, Glenn, this is a comment, and then I'm going to follow that with a question. I was appointed to this commission as a representative from rural Alberta, if you will,

although I have a little more difficulty in determining exactly what is rural and what is urban. I come from southern Alberta, and I can assure you that when Walter Paszkowski puts forward an initiative relative to agriculture, the city of Lethbridge's ears perk up, because frankly that city is comprised in large part of people who still have an interest in the rural farming community in southern Alberta. So it's still very much an agricultural community, although it is seen as an urban community.

However, this commission and those preceding it and those subsequent to it are going to be faced with a stark reality, and that is that the population base of this province is gravitating to the large urban or metropolitan centres of Calgary and Edmonton. The city of Calgary grows by at least the population of Fort McMurray every two years, and that's something that can't be ignored in the longer term. So in terms of rural Alberta retaining some level of equality, if you will, in terms of representation in the House, Grande Prairie – and I've been referring to Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat to some extent as well – is providing a possible solution.

The city of Lethbridge has not been particularly receptive to the idea of a 'rurban' riding, if you will. I'm curious whether you could enlighten me and maybe the rest of the commission as to the growing pains that were associated with this constituency being split with the city. We've been hearing from numerous municipalities, as Walter indicated earlier, that they would like to see an MLA represent an area somewhat coterminous with the municipalities. However, the municipalities, in particular in rural Alberta, are in considerable flux in terms of whether or not they will exist in their current form in the next five to 10 years. It is a question that remains to be seen.

I'm curious as to the growing pains that existed here. Could you give me an idea of just how that initial reaction was accepted by the community in terms of splitting the city? I'm going to ask Gordon Graydon the same question when he gets here a little later, but I assume the answer will be the same. I'm just wondering if you could tell me if that was imposed upon you with a certain element of reluctance initially or whether it was embraced and actually put forward as a consideration by the city itself. How did this happen, and what can you tell me about the pitfalls to be careful of along the way?

MR. KEDDIE: It all began with a group like this coming around saying we shall change you. Once that was accepted, our main concern, I felt, in the city was that we didn't become an urban riding, that we became a split riding. I think that was the biggest concern of the constituents here, that Grande Prairie was split and not one. So then there wasn't this huge area.

Everyone in Grande Prairie is affected by the rural area. We all derive our incomes off it in one way or another. We all like to work together. This is where the larger cities lose touch with reality. They have needs. There may be a hundred people in a small space, but they all have the common need, whatever that is, and that can be represented a lot easier than a hundred people out in a sparsely populated area like we have up here. No, it was not a problem in Grande Prairie. Our concern was that we have it split, not remain as one urban riding, that we did take in part of the rural area.

MR. GRBAVAC: So then, Glenn, do you feel that the city of Grande Prairie has two effective representatives in the Legislature? That's how you see it?

MR. KEDDIE: Very much so, yes.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, that's interesting, because I posed that same question to other municipalities. They said: we don't want three MLAs representing us; we want one. I asked them, "Well, wouldn't you rather have three voices speaking on your behalf than one?" The overwhelming response was, "No, we want a coterminous situation to exist as much as possible." So I find it interesting that you're extolling the virtues of the situation here.

MR. KEDDIE: Well, you know, it's sure proved very effective for this city and area having the two MLAs represent not only the city but the rural area too.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do the two MLAs come from Grande Prairie or from out of Grande Prairie?

MR. KEDDIE: One is from Grande Prairie, and one is from outside of Grande Prairie.

THE CHAIRMAN: I see. I'll give you an illustration. In Medicine Hat and Cypress they have part of Medicine Hat taken out to make Cypress conform with the population figures, and it's about 60 percent from the city of Medicine Hat and about 40 percent from Cypress because that's a very sparsely populated area. To bring that area up to what we call the electoral population quotient, we said to these people from Cypress: we would like to give you a few more people from Medicine Hat. They said no; they didn't want any more people from Medicine Hat. They said that they were just happy with it the way it is. I'm under the impression from what I've heard from Grande Prairie – and we haven't heard everybody yet – that we're going to hear basically that the people are very happy up here. Do you agree with that?

MR. KEDDIE: Yeah. In my opinion I hear very few dissenting comments about it.

THE CHAIRMAN: One of the arguments you use is you say that the MLAs, by creating the situation you have here, represent half of the rural area, which cuts the MLAs' work in half, or one MLA's work in half, I guess. We're told by everybody that the MLA that has to represent a rural area compared to an urban area has a lot harder job. Do you think the MLAs are happy with this situation?

MR. KEDDIE: I believe they are, yes. I see they're both here, so you will hear from them then.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll get a chance to talk to them.

MR. KEDDIE: I'd have to comment further on that. The MLAs out of Edmonton and Calgary must be very underworked then.

THE CHAIRMAN: I suggested that to one speaker, and that speaker said that those were my words and not theirs.

We want to thank you for coming and making your views known.

MR. KEDDIE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Lucille Partington.

MRS. PARTINGTON: Good evening. As you were talking about the north, the thing that of course strikes us is that we are a very friendly and adaptable people, and that's probably why we've adapted so readily to changes that have occurred in the past.

Going back in history, the church organization that I belong to in this province, which in fact has 10,000 members – I'm kind of surprised you couldn't find one to be on the commission. I see it's all gentlemen here, but I'm going to just assume that you're not like male wolves, who kind of mark out your territory in advance.

MR. GRBAVAC: I'm not going to try to interpret that.

MR. McCARTHY: If you're looking for a more gender-balanced panel, I'd be happy to volunteer.

MRS. PARTINGTON: Well, I suppose that's one of the things that makes us interesting in the north. We probably don't have too many of that kind of swing vote because we're still a pretty ethical kind of a people, you know, sticking to the old-fashioned morals. That's probably why we've learned to get along. When we first began, we thought McLennan was going to be the great centre of the north because that's where people thought the railroad was going to come, and that never happened.

7:34

In our church organization we have five MLAs in this diocese to keep informed on different moral issues, and of course I suppose that makes it a little easier for us than in some of the cities where there's a great deal of people. We know them well; we know what their views are on things. We've long been beyond the idea that city folk have certain needs and certain ideas and country folk have other needs and other ideas. I think people just don't want to see the political boundaries always changing. A lot of people that live right in the throes of those boundary changes have seen so many switches. I've talked to some of the people in our organization, that particular church organization, and their boundaries have changed, you know, often. Some of them have been in different constituencies four and five times in the last few years. I don't think they're interested in having any more changes.

We have a lot of other organizations here, too, that have just undergone boundary changes. As you know, our health authority, which also operates on a very good urban and rural mix, which gives them an excellent perspective on people's lives and their needs – they think regionally, and they work hard even though they have a regional hospital and many smaller hospitals. They've learned to try to balance the needs of those groups together. Our school boards, of course, have just changed too. They've found the same thing: people, after all, are just people. When you're talking about some of the difficulties in other areas, it's a real surprise to me, because that's what people are, just people, and certainly the more we get along the better off we are.

On a personal level, you know, I feel sorry for some of our MLAs in the north. If you want to separate urban and rural people again, you have to understand that my MLA, the Hon. Walter Paszkowski, already has a three-hour drive to get to Fox Creek. You're thinking about adding Whitecourt to the north; I don't think that's really too feasible, in my own opinion. Even if he starts out in Edmonton and drives, he still has the same problem. We don't have the luxury that you have in a lot of the rest of Alberta where you have airports in smaller towns. We have an airport here and that is in the city of Grande Prairie. Our MLAs are spending a great deal of time already in their cars. I don't think it would serve any purpose, when you're looking at northern Alberta, to make the physical regions that much larger when they're doing that amount of driving, but I know you're dealing with population problems. We're not talking really of isolation. We have a lot of towns here that are fairly large towns: Fox Creek, Valleyview. They all have schools; each has a hospital.

The MLAs have to be available to meet with a lot of those people, and you've already mentioned that they have to meet with IDs, MDs, towns, and so forth. I know you get that picture.

I think that all of our organizations – and I'm speaking only today about church groups, hospitals, schools, and political organizations in the city and near the city – have benefited greatly from having two MLAs. They serve on different committees in the Legislature. They bring different expertise to the table, and we know they work hard. Everyone that you talk to feels that their MLAs are just as great as we feel Wayne Jacques and Walter Paszkowski are, but we certainly know that we have two of the finest men in government. They're both good listeners; they have a strong moral fibre, a lot of honesty. Those are qualities that are important to us in the north.

It occurs to me that maybe, yes, they should have some say in this process because, after all, we're talking about their jobs. We can come in here and all of us can talk, but we can walk out of this room. They're the people that are left on a day-to-day basis serving these constituents, and I for one certainly wouldn't want to make their working conditions any more difficult than they are now. I certainly don't think another change at this time is going to enhance their ability to do the job.

So I don't think, as André said, that we should go off and make changes just for the sake of making changes. I know you'll find out today that we're really friendly, but maybe you could leave us alone this time, please.

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

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, just a comment. When we were in Lethbridge, one of the more eloquent presenters from the Cardston constituency suggested to us that moral density ought to be a very valid consideration when we conducted our deliberations with respect to constituency boundaries, and I'm glad to see that moral density is not without its advocates in the north.

MRS. PARTINGTON: Thank you.

MR. GRBAVAC: Don't ask me to define that, by the way. I assume we know what we're talking about.

MRS. PARTINGTON: And I won't define my wolves comment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. McCARTHY: Where are you from?

MRS. PARTINGTON: I am living in the small town of Sexsmith.

THE CHAIRMAN: You speak of church organizations. Do you represent some organization?

MRS. PARTINGTON: Actually, I'm a provincial representative and the past diocesan president of our church organization, which is the Catholic Women's League.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, you made a comment that there were no women on this panel.

MRS. PARTINGTON: It wouldn't be right for me not to.

THE CHAIRMAN: I want you to know that we didn't appoint the panel. The Legislature appointed the panel, and if you want to take issue with that, you should talk to your MLAs here.

MRS. PARTINGTON: No. Actually I was just being cute. I've been married to the same man for 27 years. I have nothing against men.

THE CHAIRMAN: In all fairness, the last commission did have two women on it. I don't know the reason why this one has no women on it.

MRS. PARTINGTON: Well, that's probably why we're so happy here. They made such an intelligent decision.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, I'll have you know none of their recommendations were accepted by anybody. It took a select committee to get the job done.

MRS. PARTINGTON: Well, I hope you fare better.

MR. McCARTHY: I'm from the city of Calgary. We've had a number of hearings throughout the province. We were in Wainwright, and a lawyer from the area in Hanna by the name of Eugene Kush, QC, didn't appear, but he put in a submission. I thought you'd find this of some interest. You were talking about people's intelligence. He says as follows:

It is a well known fact that larger centers create more crime and corruption than rural centers. We all know that a person's intelligence will be substantially reduced when he is crammed into an urban environment. Representation by population may have been a good idea in the early days of Alberta, but it is not practicable in today's society. It encourages larger urban centers whose myopic representatives get "tunnel vision".

So I'm glad to see that you welcomed me here tonight. I was beginning to get a complex.

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

MRS. PARTINGTON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Reeve Roy Borstad of the county of Grande Prairie.

MR. BORSTAD: Yes. Mr. Chairman, board members, I'd like to thank you for giving me a few minutes of your time. The council of the county of Grande Prairie No. 1 wishes to make this submission to the commission regarding the electoral boundaries. County council supports the status quo of our area for MLA representation. The county is currently being served by two MLAs, and we have found this representation has worked very well. We submit that the status quo be maintained and that there not be any changes in the current electoral boundaries.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Roy, I understand the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties endorsed on a unanimous basis an emergent resolution calling on this commission to not alter the status quo. Is that correct?

MR. BORSTAD: That's right.

7:44

MR. GRBAVAC: I'm a member of the association but obviously wasn't able to attend the convention this year.

I want to make a comment to you. It would seem obvious to me by studying the population statistics and the demographics that exist now in the province that it's only a matter of time until the population base in large urban centres – and I'm going to refer to Calgary and Edmonton specifically as those large urban centres – is of a nature that it simply will overwhelm rural Alberta in terms of representation, because we can only extend this latitude to a point. I mean, a 25 percent variance is an extreme, but even if we were to extend those ridings to that extreme, if current population trends continue, urban Alberta, if you will, or Calgary and Edmonton, will have the balance of power, so to speak, should they choose to exercise it, in the not-too-distant future.

I'm suggesting to you that maybe if rural Alberta is really serious about maintaining some control in terms of their own self-destiny, you may want to consider approaching your MLA with respect to either the creation of a bicameral House or at least the decentralization of some of the power from Edmonton so that in fact it's not quite as important whether or not we have an equal balance of urban versus rural MLAs. I say that in terms of the longer term picture. I'm just wondering if you would like to comment on that with respect to the influence that you have in a municipality with respect to governance, if you feel that that may be more of a viable option than for commissions like this going around the province hearing submission after submission from rural Alberta that in fact the 25 percent variance is acceptable because that's the way rural Alberta can keep an even balance within the Legislature.

MR. BORSTAD: Well, I think it's a known fact that Edmonton and Calgary are going to be the two major centres, but I still think that the rural representation has to be maintained in some way. What that might be, I guess that's why you're here tonight. There are a lot of people in the rural area. I know that we're getting more people all the time moving into the county out of the cities. I don't know. It's going to happen anyway regardless. Calgary and Edmonton are going to grow.

MR. GRBAVAC: You know, I'm from southern Alberta, and I can think of six or seven ridings that are right on the verge of the 25 percent. In some of those more remote ridings the higher grain prices, et cetera, I think will lead to an even greater exodus from those rural areas, because the older farmers approaching retirement age are now in a financial position to be able to leave the farm with considerably more financial security. I'm just suggesting that whether or not this commission opts to retain the status quo, as time proceeds it's going to be more and more difficult for us to maintain, and maybe the municipalities ought to be looking for some solution to this particular problem other than just approaching or pushing the envelope vis-à-vis the 25 percent variance. All I'm suggesting to you is that the ability of a commission such as this to actually address those issues is going to become limited, as it is now in southern Alberta where virtually all the ridings are at their maximum deviance from the norm.

MR. BORSTAD: Yeah. You're probably right.

MR. WORTH: Currently the county is split between the two constituencies, or the two electoral divisions. If you were to split the county, would you split it differently? Are you happy with the way the current division is?

MR. BORSTAD: I think it's split pretty well where it should be. It's worked very well and it's working very well.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. McCARTHY: How far does your county extend south and east towards Whitecourt? How far down does it go?

MR. BORSTAD: It just goes to Smoky River east and to the B.C. border.

MR. McCARTHY: Okay. So if I've got this right, then Fox Creek isn't in your county?

MR. BORSTAD: No.

MR. McCARTHY: What municipality?

MR. BORSTAD: ID 16.

THE CHAIRMAN: I gather, Mr. Borstad, that you're concerned about maintaining the rural representation in the Legislature. We've had a lot of people tell us how hard rural representatives work, how difficult their job is, how many miles they travel, how many different things they have to go to. It's quite common that the rural representatives, from what we're hearing, travel a lot more and work a lot harder, I think, because we're not hearing from many city representatives. One way of maintaining the rural representation would be to create more constituencies and give them to Edmonton and Calgary to get the population quotient equal, but at the same time we're also hearing, especially in the cities, that we've got too many MLAs and that we should be cutting them. If you cut the MLAs by 20 percent, that means rural MLAs are going to have to work harder and have bigger constituencies. We're told their constituencies are already big enough and they work hard enough. So that doesn't solve the problem. What's your reaction to creating more constituencies and giving them to the two cities?

MR. BORSTAD: I don't think we need more MLAs in the House. I think the House is big enough now. I think this could be worked out with the 83 that we have.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. Thank you. Any other questions?

Well, we want to thank you for coming and making your views known.

MR. BORSTAD: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Paulette Patterson. Go ahead.

MRS. PATTERSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and panel members. First of all, I'm from the friendly Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it more friendly than Wapiti?

MRS. PATTERSON: No, no. That's why we get along so well though. We're all very friendly, as was said before.

First of all, thank you for allowing me to make a submission to the review committee. Although I realize that the review is at the direction of the courts, it is my understanding that the courts simply asked for a justification of the current constituency boundaries and not necessarily for restructuring new ones. So when I looked at your paper that you sent out and what you were considering, I wondered why you had considered that before you heard from the people. I made a presentation at the last boundary review, and at this time it's my wish that every effort be made to accommodate the understanding that I have of what the courts had asked for.

The Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency is not an easy constituency to service. A large landmass dissected by a series of river crossings requires a lot of road travel. Our MLA, when I asked him, said that he drove over 50,000 kilometres last year. That in itself would require 500 hours of driving time, not to mention the additional flying time. I know that probably all of you have driven throughout Alberta and you are aware of the vastness of this province. When you consider that all the MLAs in Edmonton or Calgary can assemble probably in about one-half hour, our constituency in comparison would require two hours to assemble in one central point, and that is hoping the weather is good, not like we had last week with the slippery roads.

Since the last review made major changes to the Smoky River constituency, 65 percent of the constituents are new, and that concerns me. This review is not yet three years old. People are just getting comfortable with their ridings and speaking with their MLA. Quite frankly, the people that I've talked to are getting boundary fatigue. In particular they just can't understand why we're doing another review.

The Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency is a very diverse and active constituency, rich in energy, timber, agriculture, and tourism, all of which are growing very rapidly and contributing significantly to the provincial economy. All of these activities take more work on behalf of the MLA than does a normal city riding. Municipalities – whether city, town, county, MD, hamlet, or other locality – municipal college boards, school boards, hospital boards, recreational boards, and agricultural societies all draw heavily on an MLA's time.

The population in the western part of the constituency is growing rapidly and is projected to continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency would be better left as is.

I would strongly urge that the representation of 44 urban and 39 rural MLAs is likely as fair an arrangement as can be found. I believe that the city of Grande Prairie and area are best represented as it is now. Urban and rural must learn to co-operate and collaborate in this day of change. What better way to have leaders who must in their daily governmental duties see the mix of urban and rural? Not only is it logistical, but it is practical as well and I believe truly functional.

At present Alberta urban ridings have only 12 percent approximately more people than the average riding, which is far from the 25 percent variant allowed by the Supreme Court. Fair and equal representation has been defined by the courts as meaning more than an equal number of voters. Effective representation is

protected. I feel there is little justification for further boundary adjustments at this time.

7:54

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine.

We'll start with you, John, this time.

MR. McCARTHY: This question of why we're here has come up at almost every hearing that we've had. In the end we are a creation of the Legislature of Alberta.

MRS. PATTERSON: I understand that. My problem, John, was that when I read your paper, I could not understand why you were considering these things without first hearing. You've already put it in a paper. It almost makes the presenters feel like it's already done. In particular today I was very disturbed, Chief Justice. I just got this paper in the mail today, and I'm hoping that the press didn't report it properly, because I was disturbed with some of the things that this article said was happening. It said that you said

a realignment of the electoral boundaries is likely from this commission, due to a disparity in the population between rural and urban ridings.

I was quite disturbed that that would be said before the end of a hearing.

THE CHAIRMAN: What paper is that?

MRS. PATTERSON: This is a little Grande Prairie paper that just started up here a little while ago. The reporter was Ross Hunter, a senior reporter.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, I spoke to him, yeah.

MRS. PATTERSON: He reported that you also said that the MLAs are saying leave it alone "because they're Tories." If you did say that . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think he's . . .

MRS. PATTERSON: It's in quotes.

MR. GRBAVAC: There's a little licence there.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think he's taking a little licence on two things.

MRS. PATTERSON: I guess you can understand why I'm saying, you know, that it's a bit of fatigue and we wonder why we're here tonight making presentations when it would appear that possibly some – you said before you started that decisions have not been made, but it's perceived they may be. I was upset when I got this, and then I was really upset today when I read this. I don't care whether our two MLAs are Liberals or NDs or PCs. I think the representation should be as it is. Mr. Paszkowski and Mr. Jacques happen to be our MLAs at this time. They may not be in the next election, but if they're not, I hope we have the same kind of representation. I'm not into personalities, because as we know, politicians can be fired every four or five years by the electorate.

MR. McCARTHY: Well, maybe I could continue with my comments here.

MRS. PATTERSON: I'm sorry. I was so upset with this newspaper article that I had to get it out.

MR. McCARTHY: Again, as I say, we're a creature of the Legislature of Alberta. I think the reason we're here and why the Legislature reacted and appointed this committee may have its roots in two cases, one of which is a 1991 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. That case was a Saskatchewan case that was dealing with the same problem in the province of Saskatchewan that we're dealing with: the disparity between urban and rural voters. The case was decided and given by Madam Justice Beverley McLachlin, who is from Pincher Creek, Alberta, and eventually found her way to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada decision through her, if I could summarize it, said as follows:

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

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

Now, that decision was before the Alberta Court of Appeal when the government of Alberta brought the boundaries we currently have to the court for a determination as to whether or not they offended the Charter of Rights. The Court of Appeal in October of 1994, about a year ago, came down with a decision, and the decision, if I can read from the conclusion to summarize perhaps the dilemma that we're faced with and that the Legislature was faced with when it responded to the decision, stated as follows:

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

So that kind of summarizes the court decisions that we've been required to deal with.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. GRBAVAC: Not unlike your particular perspective I recognize that rural Alberta is a much more difficult place to represent, purely from a logistical point of view, than maybe some of the urban communities. I'm willing to concur in that. However, I guess it's a matter of compromise and degree. I can suggest to you that the greater the variance, the greater the separation, the distance from the norm – you say that the city of Calgary is about 15 percent and the rest of the ridings are about 8 or 9 percent, so we've got about a 25 percent accumulative variance – the greater the likelihood that this is going to go back before the courts. With the recent decision in Saskatchewan to allow a 5 percent variance I think there may be even greater inspection of what it is that this commission recommends to the provincial government. So I'm suggesting to you that we're not here by choice, but I don't think the solution is to have this continually go back to the courts and say that it's undemocratic.

I would like to hear from you. What do you think is a reasonable variance? Do you believe approaching 20 or 25 percent for the rural area is acceptable and approaching 15 or 20 percent in the other

direction, in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, is acceptable in the province? Do you think that represents a fair and equitable representation?

MRS. PATTERSON: Well, the Supreme Court says 25 percent, and if we're going with what the court says, that's what it is.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, the Supreme Court suggested that that is an extreme and we have to have very good reasons to allow or suggest that that extreme ought to be adopted. You know, all I'm trying to do is say to you that I don't want to be back here again.

MRS. PATTERSON: But one minute you can't use the court to use one thing and then use it for another. I mean, the court has to make its mind up too, and if the Supreme Court says 25 percent and it's only to be used in extremes, then that's a decision to be made. We have extremes in this province. We're not going to say, "Well, because of this we need more MLAs or less MLAs." I think what we're saying is effective representation, and that's all we want.

I think it would have even helped to have a map in here to show the people of Alberta. We don't have that map. The average person doesn't realize. The average person doesn't even know where the boundaries are, no matter where in Alberta. They don't know there are 83 representations for them in the Legislature. So I think you have to have a map. I think you have to use good common sense. The traveling is very, very important. I don't know if you flew here or if you drove here, but if you drove, you've certainly got an idea. Then drive up to High Level and see what happens. I mean, it's not pleasant, especially in the winter.

8:04

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, I'm going to suggest to you – and I'm not trying to advocate one particular position over the other. I'm just trying to give you a feel for what we're hearing in some of the more urban communities. They're suggesting to us that if that presents that kind of a problem, simply give the MLAs in rural Alberta greater resources: give them more money, give them more executive assistants, let them open offices in those various places.

MRS. PATTERSON: I don't want to talk to an executive assistant; I want to talk to my MLA.

MR. GRBAVAC: Fair enough.

MRS. PATTERSON: That's who gets paid my tax dollars. As far as I'm concerned, that's who I go to see if I have a problem with the policies of the government.

MR. GRBAVAC: And you want to speak with him face-to-face; correct?

MRS. PATTERSON: Not necessarily, but I think that's important at times, to speak face-to-face. Naturally we have phones. We have faxes. We have all of those things.

As I said, when I saw this paper, I had a bit of a problem. I just sat on the Lottery Review Committee, that was made up of five MLAs and five members at large, and we most certainly didn't put a paper out that said that this is what we've already decided or are deliberating on. To me, it sets me uneasy. I feel that if you're already deliberating, then there's a chance that some of us are not going to be heard.

I think you'll probably hear, Mr. Chairman, that rural Alberta, as you said, kind of likes it the way it is and doesn't want any more

changes. We're going through an awful lot of changes right now. As the other lady said, we've got hospital changes and school board changes, and I don't think that at this time and in this area we want to change.

I can't speak for the people in southern Alberta, of whether or not Medicine Hat people want to have an MLA that represents rural and part of Medicine Hat. I guess if in the decision, after you hear everything, you decide that they should have a split riding too, like there is in Grande Prairie, I think they'd find they'd get along just swell.

As I said, we're talking about cutbacks and collaboration and co-operation and using facilities. County versus city is not going to be any more. We can't afford that. We have to work together, and I think no better way than to have representation that represents both and has a good feel for both.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: When you say that there are 44 urban and 39 rural, what do you count Grande Prairie as?

MRS. PATTERSON: I count it as a split.

MR. McCARTHY: So is it in the 44 or the 39 category?

MRS. PATTERSON: Well, I would say that it's in the rural category, but again I think you have to live it to know. Before I wrote this, I talked to an awful lot of people, and they are happy. When I say they're boundary review fatigued, they think it's like watching paint dry. They just know what they want, and they talk to their MLA. They're really tired of boundary review. They don't really know what it means. It's hard enough to understand a lawyer's language let alone the legality of this whole thing. It wasn't the ordinary citizen that asked for this to go to court. It's political.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think it was the town of Lac La Biche. Getting into lawyers' language, that's exactly what my next question was. I want to quarrel with you in respect to a statement that you make in your submission.

MRS. PATTERSON: Okay. That's fair.

THE CHAIRMAN:

Although I realize that the review is at the direction of the courts . . . The court said it should be done. I agree with that. . . . it is my understanding that the court simply asked for a justification of the current constituency boundaries and not necessarily for restructuring new ones.

Now, that is not what the court said. The court said that they should have been justified. You're moving it one step further saying that all you have to do is justify it, and that's not what our task is. Our task is to divide Alberta into 83 constituencies, and when we do it this time, we have to justify our constituencies in view of what the court said.

MRS. PATTERSON: So I guess what you're saying is, then, that the last review was not properly done and was not justified.

THE CHAIRMAN: Correct.

MRS. PATTERSON: Could you not have tried to justify what was done without going through new boundary reviews and saying things like: we're thinking of merging a number of rural electoral divisions? Why would you think that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we wanted to give the people a focus. You said the word "decided." That's not decided. We were just giving the people a focus. There was one of two focuses we could give them basically. We could have said that we were going to do nothing. We debated this for a long time.

MRS. PATTERSON: I'm sure you did.

THE CHAIRMAN: If we'd have said, "We're going to do nothing about these constituencies and that's our focus," then maybe nobody would even be coming out to this thing and that also might have been the wrong thing to say. So the focus wasn't the decision. I think we made that clear in our opening remarks tonight.

MRS. PATTERSON: Yes, but I didn't hear those opening remarks till I got here, sir.

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

MRS. PATTERSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Mayor Bob Zahara from the town of Sexsmith.

MR. ZAHARA: Thank you, gentlemen. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to come here tonight. The town of Sexsmith is concerned a little bit differently from previous speakers. We're concerned that the commission may be looking at downsizing the number of constituencies in Alberta. The Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency, which we're in, is already one of the 10 largest constituencies in Alberta. Northern Alberta, from pretty well Edmonton north, has only six MLAs to serve a very large portion of the province. If downsizing is being considered – and I'm not sure if that is a mandate of this commission – it would increase the size of this area. This would have a major impact on the amount of time that the MLA would be able to spend in the constituency and on his ability to serve the population. It has been mentioned before that our MLA, Walter Paszkowski, travels 40,000, 50,000 kilometres a year. That works out to a lot of man-days just spent in a vehicle.

We feel that the current boundaries, that had been established for the last election, serve our immediate needs and also the needs of our rural and urban electorate. The boundaries for Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti conform well with municipal boundaries. The two MLAs interact well and currently serve us very satisfactorily. We would urge that the present boundaries continue to be the way that they have been established.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

We'll start with you, Robert. Any questions?

MR. GRBAVAC: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions.

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

MR. ZAHARA: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is John Fraser.

MR. FRASER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and board members. I represent the Grande Prairie Regional Agriculture and Exhibition Society board of directors, and I appreciate the opportunity to voice our views on electoral boundaries in the province of Alberta. I just have a few comments to make in regards to the commission. You answered some of them already, of why there was a boundary study. I think that's been discussed pretty well tonight. It is a concern of some of the board members that several commission studies have taken place in the last six years and why we continue to do this. Another point was that one election has been held with the new boundaries. Many voters are only getting to know what constituency they live in now, and I don't think it is fair to try and keep confusing people.

Rural ridings should have special consideration due to their large geographical area, transportation barriers, and widely varying industrial and cultural demographics. The ag society is in Mr. Jacques' constituency, and I live in Mr. Paszkowski's constituency, so I kind of represent both. When I'm at work, I'm in one, and when I'm at home, I'm in another. They are large constituencies. It's been mentioned several times already the amount of travel that these fellows have to do, and they do an excellent job of looking after our concerns.

8:14

Also, Mr. McCarthy read out the court decisions on studying the matter, and I think I'll take that back. It was our concern that the current electoral boundary laws meet all the equal and consistent concerns. There again we're restudying them.

In closing it is our opinion that the present boundaries are not to be changed. The present boundaries give every Albertan accessibility to their MLA and equal opportunity for both the rural and urban populations, especially in the Grande Prairie area where we have the situation where approximately half the city is in Grande Prairie-Wapiti and half is in Grande Prairie-Smoky. The rural and urban get along very well, because the urban centre relies heavily on the rural population of this community.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to address you.

THE CHAIRMAN: John, any questions?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: Not a question, just a comment. I think your message comes through loud and clear, John.

MR. FRASER: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to sum up your message, John, by saying that you're in favour of what we call these two 'rurban' constituencies up here.

MR. FRASER: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you agree they're what we call 'rurban' constituencies?

MR. FRASER: Urban?

THE CHAIRMAN: 'Rurban.'

MR. FRASER: Okay. Yeah, I'll agree with you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. FRASER: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the next presenter is the Hon. Walter Paszkowski, the MLA for Grande Prairie-Smoky and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: First of all, welcome to Grande Prairie and welcome to Grande Prairie-Smoky. I have one complaint, and I'll come forward with that very quickly. I wonder if you could make these a little longer for people with names like mine. I would appreciate that.

THE CHAIRMAN: They don't give any consideration to Polish people.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: No; I can see that. We won't call discrimination though.

Nevertheless, as I said, welcome to Grande Prairie-Smoky. We certainly appreciate your taking the time and spending the time with us here today. I want to give you just a bit of a background about the constituency. I think it's fair that you have a better reflection, a better understanding.

It would fit, as you called it, the 'rurban' category. Slightly over half of the population is in the city of Grande Prairie with slightly under half of the population in the rural area. It includes towns like Sexsmith, Valleyview, Fox Creek, the eastern part of the county, and the northeastern part of the municipal district of Greenview No. 16. It stretches by road 178 miles north and south and almost 90 miles east and west. Because of the many rivers and the few bridges, there is only one option to travel to most of the communities. So there are no short cuts. I average somewhere in the area of 50,000 kilometres a year and fly most of the time, and that's over a hundred flights a year.

The region is served by two regional hospital boards with headquarters in Grande Prairie and Westlock and five regional school boards with headquarters in High Prairie, Whitecourt, and Grande Prairie, and that doesn't include the many private schools. Though the number of boards has remained the same, the boards service well over double the number of school facilities and hospital facilities than what they used to serve out of the constituency. When you compare this to Calgary and Edmonton, the MLA really would only service two school boards and a hospital jurisdiction. So there is quite a differentiation as to the amount of time that a rural MLA has to spend relative to the urban MLA.

In short, with regionalization additional pressures and responsibilities have been placed upon the rural MLAs; as well, a great deal of additional time and driving requirements, because now I no longer have to stay within the constituency boundaries to service my region. I've actually got to travel well beyond my constituency boundaries in order to service parts of my constituency. So, ultimately, it's requiring considerably more time than it did before the last boundary review.

I would seriously urge the committee to either leave the boundaries as they are and provide validation for that which the previous committees felt they had done or consider providing more representation to rural communities. It is the rural part of the province that provides the major resources for the stimulating economic generators that the province has been able to successfully develop. This takes a great deal of the MLA's time, working in consort with other government levels and in partnership with private enterprise, to see that in Grande Prairie-Smoky's case things like agriculture, forestry, energy, tourism all continue to grow in a suitably structured manner.

The Grande Prairie-Smoky riding, not unlike other vast areas in the north, has its share of complex social problems, many of which originate with a higher than provincial average in illiteracy. These people do not have either the opportunities or the accessibility to services that are available in the two larger centres. The last redrafting of the new constituency boundaries has not been in place for two and a half years as yet; it will be another month and a half before we actually achieve two and a half years. In our particular case, as has been mentioned once before, 65 percent of the constituents are new, so we're dealing with a lot of new people who have to get acquainted with their MLA and vice versa. With so many changes in delivery of government services it's also important to develop continuity and stability. The two have really come together at the same time, where we've got new constituents to work with and we have a new process delivering government services.

With the threatened closure of the Edmonton Municipal Airport, this will take a great deal of additional time for rural MLAs in terms of traveling time. This time could be better spent servicing the needs of the constituents in the constituency. In an area such as this it can require two or three hours' travel time to meet an MLA, whereas in the cities the entire group of MLAs can be assembled within a period of a half hour. The whole city contingent of MLAs can come together in half an hour.

To summarize: leave the total Alberta constituencies at 83, justify the existing boundaries, and, if this isn't possible, consider the abilities of the rural constituents to access the MLAs in a fair and a responsible way. As the MLA for Grande Prairie-Smoky I feel comfortable working with the city of Grande Prairie as well as the rural constituents.

Just a comment to the question that was asked: does the city seem to feel that perhaps we should have fewer members in the Legislature? I can believe that and I can understand that, because when you can access your MLA within 15 minutes, that's not a problem. When you've got to drive three hours to see an MLA or vice versa for the MLA to see the other, that's when it becomes an issue and becomes a far more difficult problem to deal with. So I can well understand why the cities are saying fewer MLAs, whereas the rural, which has all the difficulty in accessing proper representation, has just the opposite concern. I'm not at all surprised to hear that.

The issue of the paper was brought forward. This has caused some concern. There appears to be a thought – and I've received several phone calls regarding this – that this is simply a process that we're going through, that there is a predetermination. It's a little

unfortunate. I understand the thought provocation that was coming forward, but it has not been understood properly in many quarters. There is a feeling out there that this is simply a posturing and a process that's been gone through, that the decision is already made.

THE CHAIRMAN: I can assure you there have been no decisions made yet.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It might be wise to get that message out, though, because there is an undercurrent out there that thinks the decision has been made in light of the fact of the original boundary representation followed up with the newspaper article here. There is a strong feeling and it's developing a bit of resentment, where people are saying, "Well, this is just a facade, just a process that we're going through."

8:24

MR. GRBAVAC: Walter, first of all, I'd like to suggest to you that from my perspective – and I'll speak only from my own perspective – I think you have done in these two ridings a very reasonable thing. You've combined the urban with the rural constituency base; you've got two ridings that vary by no more than 10 percent. I don't think too many people would find fault with that in terms of what is reasonable in terms of representation. I'm not so sure that's true in other parts of the province, but particularly for these two ridings I don't have a problem, to be honest with you, although I want to make a comment to you and I'd like to get your perspective on it.

The bulk of our time is being spent in rural Alberta. If you notice our schedule of meetings, the bulk of our time is spent in rural Alberta. We're hearing time and time again of the fear of the two large urban centres simply controlling the destiny of this province, that in fact somebody from downtown Calgary or Edmonton will be determining my destiny in rural Alberta. I'm curious to hear your insight with respect to the working of government from an insider's perspective. Is that in fact the case? Is that a legitimate fear? Do the urban members of the Legislative Assembly view rural Alberta in a different light, and in fact is that fear substantiated?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, I think the whole process that we're going through is to try and find and determine a process that's fair. That's what the people are asking for, and ultimately that's what we have to ponder. That's your role. That's going to be your task and your responsibility, to find a trade-off between the needs of, say, an urban client and a rural client. The accessibility factor is a key factor; it's important. The whole final line at the end of the day and what you have to be able to do in the morning is wake up and say, "I've done something that I think is fair for all Albertans," and the closer you can come to that, the more successful you're going to be.

MR. GRBAVAC: How would respond to the sentiment that was put to us in one of the urban hearings that many rural MLAs may have within the boundary of their constituency in excess of 100 elected officials – be they from towns, villages, counties, MDs, special areas, et cetera, et cetera – and that those people don't so much make his or her job more difficult; they may make it easier if in fact that person can call the reeve and the reeve can call the minister on their behalf. The rural MLAs are telling us: "No, no. We've got to keep those people informed of government initiatives, et cetera, et cetera, and it makes our job that much harder." So it's interesting that we're seeing two different perspectives. The urban person says, "Well, there's only one alderman for me and the next constituency and part of the third, and in the rural area there's 100 elected officials, be they school board, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera." Could you comment on

that? And I come to you as someone with 15 years' experience in a rural municipality.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: In the previous constituency, before the boundary changes took place, I had 124 elected officials to meet with, so I know the experience and I know the feeling. You have to spend time with each and every one of them, remembering that we come from a very diverse area here. No two areas are alike. What the needs are in Grande Prairie are entirely different in the Valleyview area, for example, or Fox Creek. So when you come from an area that's 175 miles long, you almost have to accept the fact that there's going to be a huge diversity. Consequently, you're going to have to be able to spend more time throughout the area in order to be fair and to represent it in a fair and proper manner. You can't simply put Alberta into a bag and say that everyone should be treated exactly the same way. You can't do that.

MR. GRBAVAC: Thank you.

MR. WORTH: As has been previously mentioned, one of your colleagues in the Legislative Assembly suggested to us that while one may adjust boundaries to take account of the area of a region, the population in a region, and so on, in many sections of rural Alberta that isn't enough. What is needed is that the MLA needs more resources, needs to be able to call on more resources, for example, like travel. One of your colleagues in the Legislature reported to us that she drove 200,000 kilometres in a year, yet she can only charge for 65,000. How do you react to the notion that rural MLAs, particularly those that are really out on the fringes, should have additional resources given to them to enable them to travel more or at least charge for more travel and get compensation for it, to be able to provide more communication by way of mailing and in other ways with their constituents, to operate more than one constituency office if the centres within the region support that kind of idea? What's your response to that kind of suggestion?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, from my perspective, the greatest resource that I can have is time, being able to spend time with the people and to hear their ideas and views and concerns. That's the greatest resource. It's time. Money can't buy that. Consequently, it's the division of the boundaries, it's the opportunities in your deliberations that you're going to provide for me to be able to spend time with constituents in a fair and equal manner that is the greatest resource I could draw upon. Money can't buy that resource.

MR. WORTH: Okay. But it is interesting, because your position leads logically, then, to what we have now, which is an equal allocation of resources to rural and urban MLAs, and we have heard in other regions that that's not equitable.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's only part of the formula though. The way the constituencies are distributed is the other part of the formula. You've touched on half of the formula; I'm touching on the other half of the formula.

MR. WORTH: And maybe we can meet somewhere.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I would hope so.

MR. GRBAVAC: Walter, could I get you to expand on that? We were out in the eastern part of the province, and almost without exception the MLAs said they drove to Edmonton once to twice a week. I suggested to them that given, you know, the compensation

that's paid for mileage and given a value that you would put on their time, wouldn't it make a lot more sense to run a chartered aircraft service a couple of times a week back and forth, from Edmonton to St. Paul, Wainwright, Hanna, Drumheller, Medicine Hat and back again? I mean, wouldn't that give you more time? So wouldn't money equate to more time if you didn't have to spend your time driving, keeping the highway hot between here and Edmonton?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: With the closure of the Municipal Airport that may be something that may have to be considered. That's going to be a very, very difficult decision as far as rural Albertans are concerned. That's going to impact in a very, very negative way. It doesn't matter how you look at it; it still takes you almost three-quarters of an hour to clear from the International. It takes me 10 minutes to get to the Legislature from the Muni. Obviously, there are going to have to be some different considerations given as a result of that.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, it just seems to me that it's awfully wasteful to have someone from east-central Alberta driving to Edmonton and back twice a week on a regular basis. That's seems like an awfully poor use of an MLA's time.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I agree with you. I consider my driving time, unless you can spend it on the phone, which I understand may be somewhat illegal, unless you can spend your time effectively – you want to utilize your time in the most effective manner, because the most precious resource that we have is time.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yeah.

MR. LEHANE: How long does it take you, Walter, when you leave your Legislature office and fly to Grande Prairie? I assume you have your constituency office here.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: In Sexsmith.

MR. LEHANE: In Sexsmith?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes.

MR. LEHANE: So what does that trip take from the Legislature?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: From the Legislature until I arrive in the office in Sexsmith is probably somewhere in the area of two and a half hours total.

MR. LEHANE: Driving and flying?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Flying. Driving will be four and a half, five hours; double. If you do that a hundred times a year, you're suddenly looking at a lot of additional hours.

MR. LEHANE: Would you make that trip on an average of once a week?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: No. The flight? Or driving to Edmonton?

MR. LEHANE: The travel from Edmonton to your constituency.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: To Edmonton I would say probably twice a week.

MR. LEHANE: So then you're obviously spending a lot of time traveling one way or another, whether it's from the Legislature or within the constituency, which you feel isn't being spent effectively in terms of . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It's not the most productive of my time, no.

MR. McCARTHY: Maybe this was answered but I've forgotten it. What percentage of yours is urban and what's nonurban?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: About 54 urban to 46 rural.

MR. McCARTHY: So it's fair to say the majority is urban then?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It's close.

MR. McCARTHY: I have nothing further.

8:34

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to thank you for coming today, Walter, and giving us the help we need here. I don't know if it's going to solve our problems.

One thing I did want to bring up is that as I've been traveling across this province, I've been telling people that, as far as I'm concerned, Grande Prairie is now two `rurban' constituencies and that the people are happy with this. I felt they were happy because I heard no complaints. Would you say that that's a safe statement to make?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I would hope they're happy. We'll find out in the next election.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. I'm not speaking of you as the MLA.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I see. Okay. Well, the two are related though. There is a fairly close relationship there.

THE CHAIRMAN: But in Grande Prairie you're not getting the people saying, "We want no part of the rural people" or the rural people saying, "We want no part of these urban people."

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, I'm delighted to get into this discussion. Being the minister of agriculture, I think that it's very critical that we understand this province was built on the roots of the agrarian development of this province. This hasn't left us. As a matter of fact, agriculture is now starting to play a more increasing role in the development of this province than it ever has in the past. Consequently there is a clear understanding in Grande Prairie of the role and the contribution that agriculture makes to this city as well as of the role and the contribution that the city makes to agriculture. The two work very well hand in hand, and there is an understanding. As long as that understanding is there, the communications are there, and then you have the compatibility that is clearly needed for a successful development of the province.

MR. GRBAVAC: Do you mind if I ask Walter one more question? We've been hearing from virtually every rural MLA that they travel to and from the Legislature approximately a hundred times a year. That seems to be a figure we've heard on a number of occasions. On the surface – and excuse my ignorance – that just seems like a waste of time to me. Would it not make more sense to travel to the Legislature 52 times a year, once a week, and then have the House adjourn on Thursday and give you an extended weekend so that you

wouldn't have to spend all of that time traveling to the constituency twice? I'm more familiar actually with federal representation. Maybe you could accuse those people of hiding in Ottawa; I'm not sure. They wouldn't attend a constituency a fraction of that, and I'm just wondering: why is it necessary?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Different rules and different responsibilities of different levels of government primarily. The jurisdiction of the federal government is entirely different than the jurisdiction of the provincial government. The provincial government has far more direct jurisdictional control over things like health care, education, which are on a day-to-day basis. Trade issues, international policing, international trade agreements, those types of issues really don't affect the constituents in a day-to-day manner, whereas education, health care, social services, those types of activities are necessarily a day-to-day type of discussion.

MR. GRBAVAC: You know, when we were in Cypress, Dr. Taylor told us that he spent four and a half months on the road. That's over a third of the year, and if you take 200,000 kilometres – one of your colleagues told us she put 200,000 kilometres on her car. I've worked that out. On a daily basis she has to drive something in the order of 200 miles to get those kinds of kilometres. That's just about a full-time job in itself. I'm just wondering: is there not a way to facilitate the travel arrangements of rural MLAs? That seems to me an awful lot of time for our elected people to be spending on the road: a third of their year.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It is a lot of time, but in order to serve the people properly in a sparsely populated area, there really is no other way. It's as simple as that. Yet those people certainly have the right to the MLA's time just as much as any other person anywhere in the province of Alberta. I don't think that is going to change, but I think that's part of your challenge. That's part of your deliberations and part of your decision-making: to allow for proper representation for those people that live in sparse areas.

As far as economic generation is concerned, some of those sparsely settled areas provide far more grassroots economic generation than do some of our more densely populated areas.

MR. GRBAVAC: That's why I pursued this point so vigorously. If that is in fact the case, that two trips to a constituency every week are required to effectuate effective representation, then it does have a significant impact on how we view the population variances.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Just recently – in fact I think it was about two or three months ago – a poll was taken in Alberta, and it was something like 65 percent of Albertans felt that the provincial government responsibilities and decisions have the greatest impact on them. Then the balance was split between municipal and federal. When it's 65 percent, that's fairly high, and consequently it's going to be fairly demanding.

MR. GRBAVAC: Thank you.

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

MR. GRBAVAC: Mr. Chairman, is the first paragraph of this report accurate: "Another review of Alberta's electoral boundaries is a waste of time and money, say Grande Prairie's two MLAs"? Or is that as accurate as the rest of this report?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That isn't my report. I don't know where you got that from.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, I see our reporter is consistent anyway with his licence.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Reeve Ken Mulligan of the municipal district of Greenview No. 16.

MR. MULLIGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the board. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address the commission this evening. I'm going to skip over a lot of my remarks; I'd be repeating what has been said earlier.

Since the change to the boundaries in '92 there have been changes that have created problems for MLAs that represent the ridings and the constituents within them. I think Albertans are fortunate to have inherited a tradition of stable and good government whose power and authority are derived from the people. Unfortunately, I think far too many people take democratic government for granted, which is a mistake since democracy is easily eroded. Once elected, an MLA must be able to hear and listen to the wishes of his constituents. The ability of the rural MLA to listen and meet with his constituents becomes increasingly difficult when that constituency becomes too large because of the depopulation that seems to continue to occur.

Speaking of the MD of Greenview, it covers an area of approximately 34,000 square kilometres from southeast of Fox Creek to north of Valleyview, west to DeBolt, and south to Grande Cache. The B.C. border is our western boundary. Inside of our boundaries there are three towns: Valleyview, Fox Creek, and Grande Cache. Our MLA, the Hon. Walter Paszkowski, at times has had a hard time making himself available to his constituents in our municipality. This is not because of time commitments, although it could be a factor, but because of the distance that is required to travel to see them. For example, he could leave his constituency office in Sexsmith, travel to DeBolt, have a meeting with some concerned ratepayers, travel to Valleyview, have another meeting, travel to Fox Creek, have another meeting. When he gets home, that day is done, and he has met with only three groups, whereas an urban MLA may have met with 30 groups in that same period of time.

I think that as government continues to shrink, it becomes more and more important to continuously inform and keep in touch with our MLA to ensure that our voices and our concerns are heard. This can only be achieved if the MLA has a reasonably sized constituency to work from and a population base that reflects and is coterminous with the size. Therefore, continuing to increase the size of an electoral boundary will only decrease the access to our MLA and widen the gap of political equality, which then defeats our democratic purpose and process.

The Alberta Court of Appeal has found that the current electoral boundary laws meet all legal and constitutional tests. Therefore, it seems that what has recently been changed presently works, and in our municipality we don't like to try and fix something that works. We've had no problems at all with the boundaries as they are now.

8:44

I think all governments at all levels have to be more accountable to the people that elect them. To create larger electoral constituencies would only create an unfair and unjust system of representation. I think that governments must focus on the needs of the people and not create further barriers that would hinder them.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I believe that your commission must look at providing good government through fairness and definitely not just by numbers. I think this can be achieved by recommending

the status quo with slight changes until such time as there is a major variance in population where unfairness would take place, and I don't believe that case is true now. That concludes my remarks.

I'd just like to maybe comment on some questions that were asked. The balance between the urban and rural – I honestly believe that Edmonton and Calgary can feed themselves and live on their own. I think they would dominate any rural areas immediately around them due to the lack of sensitivity, whereas you won't find that in Grande Prairie. The city of Grande Prairie cannot survive if they have nothing absolutely to do with the people in the rural areas surrounding them. It wouldn't be long before they'd be only a town. We've worked with the city. Our people have relatives in the city. They shop in the city. They do their business and their banking here. I think there are very similar community interests in both rural and urban areas up here.

I think it would be very easy for you to split up the constituencies by population. It would be very easy, but I think it would be totally unfair and definitely unequal if you did it in that manner. I would suggest that the 25 percent variance be the absolute minimum. I also think that you could look at unusual circumstances and consider them in the population variance. As municipal councillors some of us represent 1,100 or 1,200 people, and our councillor from Grande Cache only represents 200. We have no problem with that. I think some of the bigger cities could quit crying a little bit and be happy with what they've got.

Thank you, gentlemen.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
We'll start with you, Robert.

MR. GRBAVAC: No questions.

MR. WORTH: You've indicated to us, Ken, that the MD of Greenview No. 16 is quite content with the way in which their MD is split up over three constituencies.

MR. MULLIGAN: We are represented by three MLAs. I think it makes sense. The Grande Cache area is a long ways from here, and a totally different type of people live in our municipality there. They're native, almost all of them. Traditionally they have always gone the other way to do their business: Hinton and Edson, Jasper, Edmonton. It wasn't until Highway 40 came through that there has been any amount of them commuting this way.

MR. WORTH: So to that extent you disagree with André, who spoke to us earlier. When I asked him that question, he said: oh, you could probably include Grande Cache. I suppose it also suggests that if your view were to prevail, we would need to adjust the municipal boundaries then and get Grande Cache in its rightful place.

MR. MULLIGAN: I would suggest, sir, that it would be totally impossible for you or any other commission to try and have all boundaries coterminous, whether they're hospital, school, municipal, ambulance, or provincial constituency boundaries. It's a totally impossible task.

MR. WORTH: Well, I wasn't volunteering for this commission to take it on. It was just an observation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. McCARTHY: You should be aware that I don't sense that the larger metropolitan areas – and I'm from one of them – are complaining to any great extent about this. What seems to be the problem, if I could call it that, is a difference of opinion between the Legislature and the courts. That's the essence of the problem.

MR. MULLIGAN: I have no comment. We're happy. If you've got a problem around the cities or in southern Alberta, I'd suggest you fix it. Leave us alone.

MR. McCARTHY: Well, we've got some people here – you know, your comment is a justifiable one. Just let me read you some passages from this court decision just so you can understand the problem that the Legislature must have been aware of to amend the legislation and create this commission. Again, as I say, the courts were dealing with the electoral boundaries as they presently are, and I'm going to quote two or three paragraphs here just to highlight the dilemma that we face and to highlight my comment that we're into what I regard as a possible collision course between the Legislature and the courts. The court said:

The Chairman added that “. . . the first priority would be to respect existing constituency boundaries, if possible . . .”. This is, of course, a simple way to assuage the concern of some voters.

The new electoral map . . .

And that's the one we're faced with now, that we've got now.

. . . clearly shows the result of that approach. For example, it was common ground before us that the population figures indicated the need, in the absence of any special considerations, to reduce the number of divisions in southern Alberta by two. Mr. Bogle acknowledged this in his affidavit . . . but explained that the committee chose instead to reduce the number of divisions by one, despite the fact that a further reduction would eliminate one of the smallest divisions in the province, which, by happenstance, was that for which he was then the sitting member. One reason he gives in his affidavit for this decision was that a further reduction “would have meant a sudden and substantial reduction in the level of representation.” This is, we observe, exactly the concern of some electors. The concern, we feel constrained to add, of other electors, those in Metropolitan Alberta, was that their existing inadequate level of representation would remain reduced.

With respect, this very natural concern of an elected official for the “comfort zone” of a vocal portion of the electorate is not a valid Charter consideration. The essence of a constitutionally-entrenched right is that it permits an individual to stand against even a majority of the people. Put another way, Canadians entrenched certain traditional rights for minorities in the Constitution because they do not trust themselves, in all times and circumstances, to respect those rights. The fact, then, that a significant number of Albertans do not like the results of an equal distribution of electoral divisions is no reason to flinch from insisting that they take the burden as well as the benefit of democracy as we know it.

I'll read one final paragraph just by way of explanation. They have under their title Possible Solutions:

As we have said, the origin of the problem before the Legislature is the historic imbalance in the level of representation between agrarian and non-agrarian populations in Alberta. Each year this problem worsens, because each year urban populations increase and non-urban populations decrease. We call this a problem because it impacts significantly on the right to vote of urban Albertans. This cannot be permitted to continue if Alberta wishes to call itself a democracy. The courts, and the people, have rejected the notion of mechanical one-person, one-vote equality. That does not mean we can or should accept significant disparities without reasoned justification just because some members of the population resist change.

We don't hear this as much in the urban areas. As I say, I'm trying to highlight what I would describe as rather harsh comments from

the courts, which I'm assuming the Legislature reacted to by creating us. This particular court decision is a problem.

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

MR. MULLIGAN: Thank you.

8:54

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Lloyd Steeves.

MR. STEEVES: Chief Judge Wachowich, panel members, welcome to Grande Prairie. I'm here representing Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd. We are a large forest products company operating in Alberta. We have operations in Grande Prairie, Grande Cache, Slave Lake, Edson, and Drayton Valley.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide the Alberta electoral boundaries review commission with three additional considerations. These are: to include as a consideration the unique geographical aspects of Alberta as a resource-based province; to consider the forest industry as an important contributor to the social and economic well-being of the province and the implications that revised boundaries may have on this industry; and thirdly, to maintain the status quo for the electoral divisions of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

As an overview, the Electoral Boundaries Commission has identified four main types of electoral divisions according to population and variance: special consideration electoral divisions, of which there are four; Edmonton electoral divisions and Calgary electoral divisions, 18 and 20 divisions respectively; and other electoral divisions, of which there are 41 – thusly the number 83.

With respect to the unique geographical considerations, according to the Northern Alberta Development Council northern Alberta covers 60 percent of Alberta's area and has 10 percent of the population. A line drawn across the province from west to east delineating this area would start just below Grande Cache, continue across the province just south of Whitecourt, and finish just south of Bonnyville and St. Paul. It would not include Edson, Edmonton, or Lloydminster. The area described north of this line is resource rich: 90 percent of Alberta's forests, all of Canada's oil sands development, one-third of Alberta's conventional oil and gas activity. It also includes 20 percent of Alberta's agricultural land. Simply put, the resource-rich areas of the province are the most sparsely populated.

One of the challenges facing the resource industries is to find effective ways to communicate with the larger urban populations that can have significant impact on resource issues through their elected representatives. While not exact, the electoral divisions previously described could be classified on the basis of the commission types into a broader classification of urban and rural. The reason this is significant is that representation by population is an implied heavy bias in the commission's considerations. We do not disagree that this is an important bias. We would ask the commission to include as an equally important consideration the geographical nature of Alberta as a resource-based economy and the fact that these resource-rich areas are sparsely populated.

Now, about the forest industry. According to the Alberta Forest Products Association the forest industry is currently Alberta's fourth largest industry and directly employs just over 40,000 Albertans mainly in smaller communities. These communities tend to be in the north or the less-populated areas of the province. The forest industry is represented by approximately 16 electoral divisions of the total of 83. These are: Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Grande Prairie-Smoky,

Dunvegan, Peace River, Lesser Slave Lake, Athabasca-Wabasca, Bonnyville, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Barrhead-Westlock, West Yellowhead, Whitecourt-St. Anne, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Rocky Mountain House, Banff-Cochrane, Highwood, and Pincher Creek-Macleod. These divisions represent two-thirds of the landmass of Alberta and a total population of 413,398 people out of a total of 2,544,779 residents of Alberta. This is according to your data in your publication here.

The variation from average of these electoral boundaries is minus 16.1 percent. If the special consideration electoral divisions of Athabasca-Wabasca and Lesser Slave Lake are removed, the variation from average is then minus 12.5 percent. We would submit that neither of these variations from average is unusually large. When compared to the range of variability in the commission's electoral divisions population and variance data, and if you can exclude the special consideration electoral divisions, the range is anywhere from plus 24.3 for Edmonton-Rutherford to minus 24.5 for Rocky Mountain House.

The conclusion of this analysis is that the forested areas of the province are the larger geographical, less populated areas. Companies like Weyerhaeuser Canada are faced with extraordinary communication challenges when we consider how to go about consulting with the concentrations of population in the major urban centres of Edmonton and Calgary.

Today there are many interests in the public eye regarding forestry. These include Special Places 2000, a program designed to identify and set aside a land area that could be excluded from resource development; the forest conservation strategy, a multi-stakeholder, multiyear approach to redesigning the forest management policy in Alberta; and the general discussion on what the sustainable annual allowable cut should be for the province. The level of public consultation occurring in local communities where forest companies operate is unprecedented.

Of course, government plays a very important role in the issues affecting the forest industry. Our elected officials are responsible for setting policy in legislation which governs our industry. It seems reasonable then to expect that government should have representation from the areas where these issues occur. The current level of representation with 16 electoral divisions out of 83 representing this important resource sector should not be reduced.

The status quo for Grande Prairie. The two electoral divisions Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti share an average population of 27,884 residents. The variation from the average is minus 9.4 percent, or 2,896 residents on average below the commission's electoral quotient of the ideal 30,780. This is not a large variation. These two divisions encompass a unique blend of rural/urban population. This blended makeup of the population facilitates managing the public issues facing the resource sectors. It requires a balanced approach to be taken. It requires that elected representatives have an understanding of both perspectives on any specific issue. It allows for two elected representatives, which in itself is important. A little-known fact about Grande Prairie is that it's approximately 300 kilometres west of Edmonton. It's the major regional centre for all of northwestern Alberta. For these reasons, electoral divisions in Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti should remain as they are.

In summary, Weyerhaeuser Canada would be pleased if the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission would review three important considerations: one, unique geographical aspects of Alberta as a resource-based province and the fact that these resource-rich areas are sparsely populated; two, the location of the present electoral divisions with respect to the forest industry; and three, the unique population distribution in the present electoral

divisions of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti. We agree with the commission's review to ensure that representation by population remains a key principle in the design of Alberta's electoral divisions. For Weyerhaeuser Canada, we believe it is important for the commission to balance the representation of the resource-rich, sparsely populated forested areas with the idea of representation by population. We believe these other considerations to be just as important. Respectfully submitted by Weyerhaeuser Canada.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Robert?

9:04

MR. GRBAVAC: No questions. The position was well articulated. I congratulate you on a very concise presentation. I think your point was made very well.

MR. STEEVES: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally.

MR. WORTH: I simply concur in my colleague's comment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe.

MR. LEHANE: I agree. No questions.

MR. McCARTHY: No questions. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm not sure that I want to be as complimentary. No, actually it's a good presentation, and I want to thank you for coming.

MR. STEEVES: Okay. You're welcome.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Gil Balderston.

MR. BALDERSTON: Thank you, and I'd like to welcome you to Grande Prairie. The presentation I have to make will be a repeat of some things that have already been said, but I want to repeat them. I think they need to be. It always bothers me when we start to make changes to satisfy large urban centres. Rural Alberta is a very large and vast area, and if we are not allowed to have some combined rural and urban constituencies, the rural MLAs will have a terrible task. Rural Alberta doesn't have a large population, but it adds a lot to our province's resources. In this area the rural population does a great deal of their business in Grande Prairie. Just ask a businessperson what their cash register is doing when the farmers are busy.

MLAs in Grande Prairie and Calgary can get to any part of their constituency in a short drive. In rural Alberta the MLA generally has a long drive home and a lot more driving to do their constituency work.

If the boundaries in Alberta are going to be determined by population alone, rural Alberta will be adversely affected. I think it is a shame when we try to plot rural and urban Alberta against each other. From the time that I've been able to vote – I was originally in the Grande Prairie constituency. We got a whole lot of Grande Prairie into a rural constituency and back into Grande Prairie now. I can tell you that as a farmer I'm really happy with where I'm at today.

MR. McCARTHY: Where's that?

MR. BALDERSTON: I'm in Grande Prairie-Smoky. We're quite happy. I think the people in Grande Prairie understand the farmers, and I can't live without Grande Prairie and the businesses that are here and the things that go on. I need them.

MR. McCARTHY: You live in Sexsmith; don't you?

MR. BALDERSTON: Yes. I just live on a farm.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert.

MR. GRBAVAC: Just a comment. When it rains, the city of Lethbridge gets pretty busy too. That's not a unique situation in Grande Prairie. However, what is unique about Grande Prairie is the fact that you've made a rural/urban constituency work, and actually I congratulate you on that. I think our task would be much facilitated by areas like Lethbridge and Red Deer looking more seriously at what you've in fact managed to accomplish here, because it does give a large rural geographic base the opportunity to fit well within the variances that the courts have prescribed as reasonable. I frankly congratulate you on the ability to make this rural/urban constituency work.

THE CHAIRMAN: Wally?

MR. WORTH: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to thank you for coming forward and making your short version known to us.

MR. BALDERSTON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Mel Knight.

MR. KNIGHT: Good evening, gentlemen. My name is Mel Knight. I'm a representative of the Progressive Conservative Constituency Association of Grande Prairie-Smoky. I'm in the unfortunate position of being 95 miles from home just now. So when we get finished, I've got about half of Walter's drive to get home. I'm down in the southeast corner, about 35 miles from the southeastern edge of Walter's constituency.

MR. McCARTHY: Where are you from? Fox Creek? Around there?

MR. KNIGHT: Actually, Little Smoky, 30 miles this side of Fox Creek.

Again, quite a few of the comments that I have for you have certainly been aired, and before we get finished tonight I would hazard a guess to say that you'd be bloody tired of it. Nevertheless I think it is my duty to expand on these things a little bit, bring them up again. I have a couple of ideas that I don't think are new by any means, but I don't think they've been addressed here.

One of them is that there is a concern here that if we continue in the vein that we're on right now with the boundaries in the province of Alberta, in a short space of time the cities of Edmonton and Calgary will certainly be very badly underrepresented in the numbers game. I would submit to you that if you take a look at changing the system we're using in Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti to give the city of Grande Prairie an MLA, that would not be a very forward-thinking thing to do. How long will you be in the city of Grande Prairie before you have it in the same circumstance that some ridings in the other urban areas are in now? I'm sorry; I don't really know the statistics, but if you take a look at the growth rate in the city of Grande Prairie, I think on a per capita basis it's probably growing more rapidly than almost any area in the province of Alberta. So by defining Grande Prairie as a constituency in its own right, I can only say that that's just a short-term fix. You're talking about 2001. By that time I'm sure you'd be faced with a problem in Grande Prairie anyway. It would be short term in any event.

Another thing is that I do agree that the cities of Edmonton and Calgary are certainly growing rapidly, but a thing that you should consider, I believe, is that the growth in those cities is not downtown. If you look at Edmonton – I'm not as familiar with Calgary – the annexed areas in Edmonton are absolutely massive, and the population increases there are basically covering up some pretty damn good farmland. I don't see any reason at all why there couldn't be consideration taken in the outlying areas of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary to include some rural area with the expansion that they've done and call them, if you want, 'rurban' ridings or whatever they are, a mixed riding. I think we proved that it works. It can work very well, and all it takes is a little bit of effort I think mainly on the part of the MLAs. I don't believe it makes a bit of difference who elected them. I mean, as far as parties I don't think it makes any difference if the MLAs had a commitment to make it work. It's been proven here. It can work very well.

Another thing I would like to bring up is quite simply that this is the fourth time in six years, I believe, that the boundaries are being reviewed. They've been in place now less than two and a half years, and we don't have any new statistical information provided since the time of the last review. It's difficult to assume that there's any new, useful guidance that's going to be provided to you that would assist you in making some kind of a better division.

The Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency is not the easiest to service due to its geographical nature. It's unlikely that a better configuration could be developed for our area. As Walter said, the constituency is approximately 175 miles by 90 miles, and that's if you look at the distances on the road. There's only one main road that services the area. We've got a limited number of river crossings. So, really, you don't have a lot of choice. There's a lot of highway travel, which you've heard about. The majority of the population in the constituency, of course, is centred around the Grande Prairie area, which is 300 miles, approximately, from the Legislature, and with the added threat that the Municipal Airport in Edmonton may not be able to service us, it's going to be increasingly more difficult for us to have the kind of contact that I think we deserve with our MLA.

It's my view that the province should maintain at least 83 constituencies. Cost seems to be the thing that drives these things. I don't believe that the Legislature or the number of MLAs is a real pressing issue, if you look at the thing as an overall picture.

If there are to be any changes, I would suggest that serious consideration be given to adding constituencies, particularly in the areas outside the two major cities, Edmonton and Calgary, and I think I've alluded to how it might be done. It's in these areas that

cultural and community needs vary significantly. Serving multiple school boards, hospital boards, municipalities, as well as libraries, ag societies, agricultural service boards all take additional time over that of a city constituency because, of course, of the distances involved. It's imperative that local concerns be allowed to be properly addressed, and every Albertan should be allowed to have equal access to liaise with his MLA.

9:14

The committee was asked to justify the boundaries of each constituency. I'd suggest that the Grande Prairie constituency meets the criteria for a constituency. It covers a large geographical area, has limited road access, there is the distance from the Legislature, a diversity of community interests, generally conforms to the municipal boundaries as much as possible, and it has an acceptable population level. Our MLA travels approximately 50,000 kilometres a year in our constituency now, and if this territory were increased, our access to equitable representation would certainly be jeopardized. The fast-growing city and region are better served by two or more MLAs.

Really that's all I have to say. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Knight.

Robert.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, just a comment I'd like to make. I've certainly looked at this situation exhaustively with respect to the two cities. The situation as it exists though – the majority of the ridings around Calgary and Edmonton are certainly well within the parameters. They really don't need any more population. For example, Banff-Cochrane is only minus .6 percent, and that's half of the west boundary of the city of Calgary. Highwood, the rest of the west side of Calgary, is only at minus 6 percent. Where we run into problems is in the more rural areas, and short of having a little sliver that extends right into the city, which is probably not practical . . .

MR. KNIGHT: Why would it not be practical?

MR. GRBAVAC: To go from Chinook all the way into Calgary?

MR. KNIGHT: Well, we go from Edmonton all the way to Grande Prairie.

MR. GRBAVAC: It's a novel concept. Shirley McClellan could drive all the way to Edmonton in her own constituency then, I suppose. But, you know, that's what it would take, in all honesty. I'm not trying to be facetious. I'm just suggesting that it's not quite that simple, although I appreciate that probably part of the answer is there. Those areas are growing in population, as you suggested, and many of those areas like Banff-Cochrane, Olds-Didsbury, and Highwood in fact may be in a positive situation this next election. The problem, in all honesty, is southeastern and southern Alberta, where the population in those rural constituencies is not likely to grow.

MR. WORTH: Mel, I have a question to direct to you in your capacity as a member of a constituency association. I've been waiting to find someone. Paulette was from a constituency association as well, and she talked about the importance of collaboration and co-operation between the rural/urban people in this kind of a constituency. Just for my own edification: have you done anything special in organizing and operating your constituency

association to ensure that collaboration and co-operation between the rural resident and the urban resident?

MR. KNIGHT: Yeah. We've gone out purposely and contacted people in the whole area – and I mean the whole area: each and every one of the towns in the area, the city of Grande Prairie, and in the rural areas – to ask them if they would like to come and be involved. Quite simply, in the first instance there had been some concerns, mostly concerns from rural people, no different than you're going to hear from somebody outside Edmonton saying that Edmonton's going to swallow up everything. You'll get somebody from Valleyview saying: "Grande Prairie is a sin bin. They're going to eat us alive." So you say: "Look, if you think they're going to eat you alive, you'd better get in your car and drive over there and talk to those people face to face. If you don't, they will." It has worked. The people in our areas, from my experience, have taken a positive side to the thing and got involved.

MR. McCARTHY: Maybe after you could privately let me know where the sin bin part of Grande Prairie is.

MR. KNIGHT: I don't know where it is, but I'm saying that there are people in our constituency that feel that way.

MR. McCARTHY: We know it's here somewhere.

MR. LEHANE: Mel, I think there's been a fairly common thread to all of the presentations tonight that what's here now is working. We've had concerns expressed at other locations about this type of constituency, so this appears to be a good example of one that's working well. I ask you this question: do you think one of the reasons it works well is because there's a relative balance between the urban population and the rural population in the constituency?

MR. KNIGHT: I don't personally feel that that's a major issue with the thing. To tell you the truth about it, as I've said already, I think the major reason that it works is that the MLAs put a lot of effort in to try to make it work. The other thing is that if you look at the history of the area, it has been a trading area and an area that's been, you know, used by people from the majority of our constituencies for a number of years, no different, I don't suppose, than you see in Red Deer. I mean, the people from the outlying areas around Red Deer use that city. You'd probably be able to find, you know, a reasonable fix in a place like Red Deer to do the same thing that we do. It would cause some concern from people both inside and outside to begin with, but I think we're living proof of the fact that it'll work. It does work.

MR. McCARTHY: I have a question here. How many people live in Fox Creek?

MR. KNIGHT: About 2,800, I believe. I could stand corrected, but let me say that it's between 2,000 and 2,800, I believe. I'm not sure.

MR. McCARTHY: This isn't really relevant to your constituency but just for my own information: would you be able to tell me how many live in Whitecourt?

MR. KNIGHT: Whitecourt I think right now is about 8,200 or 8,500, something like that.

MR. McCARTHY: There's not much in between those two centres; is there?

MR. KNIGHT: Oh, yes, there is. Oh, yes, there's a hell of a lot in between. There's Moose Row.

MR. McCARTHY: I guess I'd better say in population terms.

MR. KNIGHT: No, there are no other developed areas.

MR. McCARTHY: I have driven it, and that was my recollection, so you really had me wondering whether I was going out of my mind or not. Okay. Well, that's sort of consistent with what I thought.

MR. KNIGHT: A tremendous tax base, though, between Fox Creek and Whitecourt.

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah.

MR. GRBAVAC: It's a good thing you have the moral density to deal with it. You'd hate to see Grande Prairie have a disproportionate say in that tax base.

MR. KNIGHT: I suppose I'm fortunate, but I'm not problemed with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mel, I want to thank you for coming. I want to tell you that you're probably the first person that has told us that 'urban' will work in Edmonton and Calgary.

MR. KNIGHT: I can't see why it won't work. You just need the will; that's all.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Trenton Perrott, Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce.

MR. PERROTT: Thank you. Welcome to Grande Prairie. I'm here on behalf of our president, Mike O'Connor, who was unable to attend this evening, so the presentation has his name on it. As you can probably gather from most of the presenters tonight, among all the different arguments there's a fairly strong economic argument for the current constituency arrangement. Our presentation is short and deals with that basic area.

On behalf of the Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation regarding current electoral boundaries relating to our area. The Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce represents over 500 businesses in the area. Established in 1915, our chamber has long represented both the interests of business in the community but also the community itself in terms of the economy. The chamber co-ordinates the Greater Grande Prairie Economic Development Council, which is a consortium of business agencies including both the city and county of Grande Prairie. While our focus is local, we also work with other economic development groups both in the south Peace as well as the Peace country as a whole.

The prosperity of our city is based on the primary resources, which include agriculture, petroleum, and forestry, as well as the retail and service sectors. For these two latter sectors, retail and service, we depend on industrial activity that takes place outside the city itself. Agriculture is the foundation of our local economy, as is true of most of the province, but we also have forestry and petroleum, which are industries that continue to expand and develop.

Our situation is a little different from Lethbridge and some of the other communities, Red Deer, where there is no forestry and in some cases not the petroleum industry. So we're based on the three industries, which are vital to our local economy. Local businesses serve those three industries directly, so you can see that the economic health of our community depends on those industries.

9:24

We believe that having representation at the provincial Legislature regarding regulations and policy that impact those primary industries is critical to business in our city and our area. Under the previous electoral boundaries the Grande Prairie constituency included both Grande Prairie and the area west, basically. Our local MLA represented both urban and rural constituents, and that was very positive. Very positive. That positive arrangement was multiplied when Grande Prairie was split and became represented by two MLAs, which definitely increased our contact with the provincial government.

There were other positive results as well. Now in terms of provincial issues that affect business, we are connected to the entire area business community through the two constituencies both east and west. While Grande Prairie serves the entire Peace country, the south Peace, which is covered by the present Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky constituencies, is brought closer to our work as a chamber. We are active with the Alberta chamber, and each year when the Alberta chamber meets, throughout the year actually, we deal with issues that affect the resource industries, for starters. So having that representation in our entire market area is very important to us.

There are other factors that are positive about the urban/rural mixed constituencies. The most important from the chamber's point of view is the positive relations it builds between the city and county residents as well as the municipal governments themselves. That extends beyond the county of Grande Prairie and the city of Grande Prairie to the towns of Valleyview, Sexsmith, Beaverlodge and the municipality of Greenview. We are in a time when working together from an economic perspective is more important than ever, and current boundaries facilitate direct relations between the city and county, between rural residents, et cetera, et cetera.

To conclude, we have a unique economic situation here in Grande Prairie. The city does depend on the industries from the area, which is a little different than you could say of Calgary or Edmonton and maybe some of the other centres. The people up here have their own character. We're all independent, whether you're talking Grande Prairie or Sexsmith or Beaverlodge or Valleyview. Lately we've been working sincerely to improve the economy of the area, and certainly having the two constituencies with the urban and rural mix is very positive from an economic development point of view. These days economic development only takes place when you build alliances, partnerships, and consolidate what economic resources you have, and I think we've only begun to work in the area to maximize on what resources we do have from an economic development point of view. So it's a simple perspective that the chamber has, but on the other hand there are many implications in terms of the prosperity of the economy.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: So in a nutshell, you're telling us that you're happy with how the constituency presently is.

MR. PERROTT: That's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No questions.

MR. WORTH: Let's assume your economic development efforts are going to pay off. What would you forecast would be the impact on the population in Grande Prairie, say, over the next five to seven years?

MR. PERROTT: Perhaps not as great as some are thinking, some are hoping. There are different scenarios, both high and low, but I don't see it changing by figures towards 10,000, probably more in the range of 5,000, if that. It's kind of a wild card in terms of really where the economy is going to go, but we are in a growth stage, that's for sure.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we want to thank you for coming and making the chamber's views known.

MR. PERROTT: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now the next speaker. I see you've been waiting, Mayor Gordon Graydon, and I have two other speakers. Do you mind if I call them first?

MR. GRAYDON: No, I don't mind going last. I was going to be late because of a council meeting, so I knew I was going to be last. So that's fine.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll then call on Mr. Terry Clackson.

MR. CLACKSON: Your Honour and committee members, thank God we live in a democracy, because I'm about to disagree with everything you've heard, and I know that everybody in this room would defend to the death my right to do so.

MR. McCARTHY: Should we take a little straw poll on that?

MR. CLACKSON: Well, they may want my neck after I'm done.

The first thing that came to my mind when I learned that this commission was going to be visiting Grande Prairie was: thank goodness we're going to have another opportunity to consider this issue. The reason I say that is because we had a riding in Grande Prairie in 1989 that consisted of this city and encompassed the smaller communities to the west of us, and frankly it's never been satisfactorily explained to me or indeed to any one of the members of the community that I've spoken to as to why that ever changed. Why was our community split in the middle? We haven't received, in my submission, any kind of an answer to that question. Is everyone happy? Everyone in this room seems to be ad idem and reasonably satisfied with what's going on in our community. I'm not so sure that one could extrapolate from that that everybody in this community is happy, but indeed everybody that you've heard from so far this evening is.

The brochure that the commission put out suggested an electoral quotient of 30,780 persons. This community – and I'll defer to Mayor Graydon because he'll be able to tell us exactly – I would guesstimate is within 1,500 persons of that number. Secondly, the community of interest that Grande Prairie represents is obvious. It is the city of Grande Prairie. City council represents the city of Grande Prairie. The city of Grande Prairie has an interest that is not on all fours with the surrounding rural community. We don't always agree on everything, and I don't say that derogatorily. I'm not here to suggest that we ought not pay attention to the fact that we are based on an agrarian economy, that we are dependent on the resource industry. The fact of the matter is that I was dependent upon my parents for a while, and I grew up and my attitudes are different from theirs, and my need to express myself is different from theirs. So too with this urban municipality. Our interests are not always going to be identical.

The kinds of difficulties that can occur in this kind of a split riding are patent. We're fortunate to have two good MLAs who get along and who communicate with each other, but it's not difficult to imagine what would happen if those two MLAs came from two different parties. What then will happen if Walter wants to do something with Highway 34 and Wayne wants to do something with Highway 40? How is the city of Grande Prairie going to be served by that dichotomy of interest? It's not. What's going to happen if for some reason or other we host the Winter Games again and we need to go off to the province and get some cash and the two politicians representing Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky don't see eye to eye on things? It's a limited sum of money that's available in this province for expenditure on capital projects. Who's going to get that money? Is it going to be the city of Grande Prairie, or is it going to be an interest in the rural riding of the representative who happens to be sitting in government? What happens if the city decides that it wants to annex some of the rural subdivisions that are on our borders? If Mr. Jacques, as an example, represents both the city and those rural interests, can we, the city, look to Mr. Jacques to speak on our behalf to support this annexation and call upon him to be schizophrenic, or is he going to be representing the rural interest? Frankly, those kinds of issues are issues that are not properly addressed by splitting what is a community of interest right down the middle.

9:34

Maybe the most eloquent comment on the topic that I heard tonight was Walter Paszkowski's comment. That was in response to a question from one of the commissioners, and I can't remember which one. He said: this is a huge riding to cover; there's a lot of traveling involved in this riding; you know, the needs of Grande Prairie aren't the same as the needs of Valleyview and Fox Creek. He said that to us. Exactly. That's why consideration of making Grande Prairie an urban riding is, in my submission, essential.

It would be remiss of me not to deal with what would happen if for some unknown reason this commission decided that everybody else in this room was wrong and I was right and decided to make Grande Prairie an urban riding. What would then happen to the rest of the electoral map? I'm not a genius, but I have some ideas. Recognizing that the population base in the ridings of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky pretty much follow – with the exception of a goodly rural population that is farm related, the major centres of population follow the highways. So if you look at the border of Dunvegan with Grande Prairie-Wapiti on the western border with British Columbia and follow the highway lines, that is also the major population centre. If Grande Prairie is hived off and made into a separate electoral division, then the combination of

Grande Prairie-Smoky with Grande Prairie-Wapiti could effectively achieve the result that I'm suggesting is appropriate.

All right. I'm ready to take my licking.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's makes a pretty big constituency; doesn't it?

MR. CLACKSON: It's a large constituency, Your Honour, but reasonably speaking, the constituency runs an additional let's call it 70 kilometres west of Grande Prairie. It's not going to run much south because there's not much population south.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll start the questioning with John, if he has any.

MR. McCARTHY: No. But if anybody in the audience wants to slip me a note, I'll ask one.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No. I have no questions.

MR. WORTH: I have a question and a comment. First, I admire your courage.

MR. CLACKSON: Somebody has to say it.

MR. WORTH: My question is really just an observation. You said that you had to speak to the question of what happens to the rest of the area. I think that if you were simply to combine the areas that are currently in Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky that aren't in Grande Prairie proper, you wouldn't have enough population without going a long way north and probably having to move into Dunvegan maybe as far out as Grimshaw.

MR. CLACKSON: What I had understood and had heard from Mr. Paszkowski is that the split in population is right around 50 percent; I think he said 52-48.

MR. McCARTHY: Fifty-five, I think, or 54, something like that.

MR. CLACKSON: Whatever the number was, it was approximately half, and I think Paulette Patterson advised us from Wapiti that the population split was about half. I offer the same comments to you.

MR. WORTH: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, all I want to say is that you're the first one that we've heard today stating that the city of Grande Prairie should be one constituency and the rural area surrounding Grande Prairie should be the other constituency.

MR. CLACKSON: That's my view.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MR. McCARTHY: And you live here in Grande Prairie?

MR. CLACKSON: I do. I have since 1980.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's too bad you didn't bring more supporters.

MR. CLACKSON: Well, I'll say that I'm representing everybody else who's not here tonight.

THE CHAIRMAN: You're alone so far tonight.

MR. CLACKSON: I certainly am.

THE CHAIRMAN: But we haven't heard everybody yet, so there may be . . .

MR. CLACKSON: I suspect I'll still be alone.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, thanks for coming, Terry.

MR. CLACKSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next speaker is Mr. Ken O'Shea representing the Grande Prairie and district Catholic schools.

MR. O'SHEA: I thank you, Chief Justice and members of the board. Welcome to Grande Prairie. Before I start I'd like to commend you on your decision not to give Mayor Gord Graydon preference, because if you had, I'd sic Paulette Patterson back on you.

MRS. PATTERSON: Thanks, Ken.

MR. O'SHEA: My brief is very short, but I felt compelled to make one. The Grande Prairie and district Catholic schools board of trustees would thank you for the opportunity to respond to the question of boundary reviews. Our school district spans three constituencies. We have 10 schools and in five different communities. Our schools in Fairview and Spirit River are served by the Dunvegan constituency. The schools in the south end are served by Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

At the most recent meeting of our board of trustees we came to the conclusion that we would support the boundaries that would give a balance between representation by population and distance covered. We have had a variety of boundaries in the past. Each has served our needs well. We will work with the MLAs in whatever form the boundaries take at the time.

In summary, then: if it don't scratch, don't itch it. If it don't itch, don't scratch it. I had that one backwards.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just a second. Robert?

MR. GRBAVAC: No. I wouldn't want to follow that one. No questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm not going to scratch.

MR. WORTH: You're not going to scratch. Okay.

MR. LEHANE: To be clear then, Ken, you're happy with the status quo.

MR. O'SHEA: What's the status quo? I think the so-called 'rurban' worked very well, but it takes a quality of representation that we have experienced in the Grande Prairie area, and I think it would work in Edmonton and Calgary. It's just that the will has got to be there.

THE CHAIRMAN: John?

MR. McCARTHY: No questions, thanks.

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

MR. O'SHEA: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: We're now left with two speakers. One is Mayor Graydon and the other is Wayne Jacques, the MLA. Who would like to go first?

MR. GRAYDON: Wayne wants the last word, I guess.

Well, good evening. I did leave a basic letter at the back, that you will see. It's basically from the city supporting the status quo, and that is the position adopted by a vote of council. We attempted to get input from the public on this issue. We published a phone number, also an Internet address, to get up in the computer age. We received very limited calls. I would suspect that satisfaction doesn't get you a lot of phone calls, but the calls we did get were overwhelmingly in support of the status quo.

I don't want to re-cover the ground about area and the problems of distance and those sorts of things because I think you've heard that several times, but I would like to talk a little bit about the city and why we favour the status quo. Certainly we're a small city, 30,000 in the city limits. We're a very vibrant and growing city. I would go so far as to say that we're the most vibrant city in Alberta, and if you get me going, I can back that up with statistics based on building permits, housing starts, those kinds of things, which would support that we are probably the most vibrant city in the province at this time.

9:44

There are several things contributing to our vibrancy. It's our broad-based economy certainly. We have petroleum, forestry, agriculture. Something of late which is really contributing to our economy is our regional nature. Without the regional population around the city I think we would still be a sleepy little town, but we're not. To duplicate the services that we have in Grande Prairie, you would either have to go to Prince George on the B.C. side or Edmonton on the Alberta side. I had some guests here from the council in Fort McMurray that were at a Northern Alberta Development Council meeting a few days ago, and they commented that Fort McMurray can't come close to matching what we have in Grande Prairie when it comes to retail and service, and that's because of our regional population. That's why it's the way it is.

Now, we work extremely closely with the county of Grande Prairie. It hasn't always been that way, but it certainly is that way now. We have several examples of how we work with them. We have a joint general plan, which covers an area around the city of Grande Prairie. Both the city and county are signatories to that plan. In that plan we outline what kinds of subdivisions can go in that area in the county. We have an annexation schedule so that when it comes time for the city to grow, it's predetermined that certain areas of the county will come into the city if need be in three years, five years, whatever. That's all laid out in the plan. The plan, as I said, covers subdivisions, and knowing that we will eventually take in some of that land in the county into city limits, we have a say in what's going on around our city.

We have a revenue sharing agreement with the county of Grande Prairie, which was negotiated; it wasn't forced on either of us. It says that new industries coming into our joint plan area around the

city, if there's a new industry that comes into the county, the taxes from that industry will be shared between the city and the county.

We're working together looking at the Grande Prairie airport. I'm sure you know that the federal government is getting out of the airport business. Somebody has to take it over. The first group that we thought of working with was the county. So we have a committee – the city, the county – and actually the chamber of commerce is involved as well. We've hired consultants, and we're working on a plan that if all comes about, eventually we will operate that airport as a joint authority of some sort with the county of Grande Prairie, as I see it. We won't be doing it independently.

We work with the county on economic development. If somebody comes along, we both put money into the pot to go to trade shows. We put money in to host visiting delegations to the city. We work very, very closely together.

Now, as I mentioned, that situation hasn't always been that way. You know, I won't be modest; I'll take some of the credit because it did change when I was elected three years ago. With me is a very supportive council in the city of Grande Prairie that wants to work with the county. On the county side there's Reeve Borstad, who works very hard at getting along with the city, and he has the support of county council as well. Then we have our two MLAs, who represent part of the city and certainly part of the rural. It couldn't be better. I don't know of any arrangement that we could have that would foster urban/rural co-operation better than the situation we have now with our two MLAs. That's why we are strongly in favour of the status quo.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine.

We'll start with you, John.

MR. McCARTHY: In the last, let's say, three or four years what's been the annual population growth of the city, and what are your projections in the next period?

MR. GRAYDON: We went through a period – when the last big bust came about in 1980 or whenever, we stopped growing one year, but we never went backwards. Then we went through several years of between 1 and 2 percent growth. This past year, 1995, we are probably at about 8 percent, and in 1996 we're predicting 5 percent as well. A lot of that's based on the developments in the forest industry.

MR. McCARTHY: Thanks.

MR. LEHANE: Gordon, can you tell us what the population change has been since 1991? The population statistics that are being used by the commission are based on the last decennial census of the federal government, which was in 1991. They're being used essentially because they're consistent across the province rather than picking some populations from here or there that may have changed. Can you help us in terms of indicating what the population change has been since '91?

MR. GRAYDON: We had a census last May, and it was 29,600. There's been considerable growth, and if we took one now, we would be over 30,000 for sure, based on the number of housing starts and apartment construction, that kind of thing. There are no vacancies in town. The vacancy rate in Grande Prairie is .2 percent, which means there are two apartments out of a thousand for rent right now. So knowing that there were 250 single-family homes built, for example, and working out three people per household, et

cetera, we can guess that there are now 30,500 people in Grande Prairie.

MR. LEHANE: Can you give us an idea of what the population would have been in 1991?

MR. GRAYDON: It was stuck at around 26,000 for a while there. Going up by 1 percent, you know, you don't get much growth; 1 percent is a couple of hundred people.

MR. LEHANE: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, using those figures and if they're divided equally between the two divisions – and I don't know if they are – the Grande Prairie area would be very close to zero percent. That's the two constituencies. Unfortunately we can't use those figures.

MR. GRAYDON: Yeah.

MR. GRBAVAC: Gordon, in light of what's happened in Fort McMurray with respect to the municipal structure of government there, I'm just wondering if in fact you envision in the short-term or intermediate-term future more regional municipal government. I mean, do you think that's within the realm of possibility within the mandate of this commission and the time frame that we're dealing with?

MR. GRAYDON: I don't see it happening here because we're both too wealthy. The county has too much money, and the city isn't that poor either. It's economics to me that will drive amalgamations like that. I can see some small towns and villages, that kind of thing, giving up their franchise, but I don't see us having one regional government here. It would be different if either of us were hurting for money.

MR. GRBAVAC: The other question I would have. It would seem to me that if an MLA were faced with two different schools of thought with respect to a municipal issue, would that not facilitate a compromise as opposed to an MLA holding a rigid urban view and a rural MLA holding a rigid rural view? I mean, it would be a lot easier for the two respective MLAs because they practically could sit back and oppose each other. But where one person is faced with that balance of interest, it seems to me it would facilitate a compromise and maybe a very creative one if the MLA has any future in retaining his or her seat.

MR. GRAYDON: Oh, it does. As I say, I'm more than prepared to give some of the credit for the co-operation that exists between the city and the county to our MLAs, because if we do get into a bit of a disagreement, we can certainly call on either of them as a bit of a mediator. They are, if you will, a neutral party, but they see both sides of the argument.

MR. GRBAVAC: They would also be motivated by some self-interest, and I'm not saying that's bad. That's not bad.

MR. GRAYDON: No. That's right.

MR. GRBAVAC: It's kind of like the profit motive in the political sense.

MR. WORTH: Gordon, in your planning that you've done with the county, will that lead to any disproportionate growth in the two parts of Grande Prairie that are in rural areas?

MR. GRAYDON: No. Right now the bulk of the residential growth is in Grande Prairie-Wapiti, on the south side of the city. The residential seems to be going that way and more commercial and industrial on the north side, but there is a major residential subdivision actually in Grande Prairie-Smoky too.

As far as acreage development and that, as well it would tend to be more south of Grande Prairie. That's where the river is and sand dunes and land that's probably better suited to acreages than it is to agriculture. So that's where the subdivisions seem to be going.

MR. WORTH: So there's a reasonable balance then.

MR. GRAYDON: Yeah.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want you to know that when we arrived here tonight, I offered Robert Grbavac the opportunity of running the airport. He said that he wasn't interested.

MR. GRAYDON: The province, too, has told us that.

9:54

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we want to thank you for coming and giving us the information that you have.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: We will now call upon Mr. Wayne Jacques, the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti; is it?

MR. JACQUES: That's correct. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In view of the fact it's only 2 minutes to 10 and also because, more importantly, my wife said to keep it short, it will be short. I did not register because I wanted to see if there was any time, and I would just make a few comments and perhaps make myself available for questions, which maybe is more relevant.

THE CHAIRMAN: I want you to not be concerned about the time limit. We're prepared to work overtime.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. I have to bear in mind the comments of my wife and no doubt the audience we're in.

Mr. Chairman, I've only walked this walk for 29 months and five days, but I'm not counting. For 54 years of my life I really wasn't involved in big P politics or in representing vast numbers of people other than for one term on city council. So my experience to date is relatively new as an MLA, I guess, expressed in terms of being a rookie. Obviously at this age I'm also not going to be a career politician. Therefore, in trying to approach this subject, I'll try to give you the most objective comments and try to set aside as many political items as I can that may creep in from time to time.

Speakers before me have made reference to the north. I also serve as the chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council. There were some numbers thrown out earlier, and I will not repeat those, other than to emphasize the fact that 60 percent of the land area of Alberta has 10 percent of the population. Obviously that means 40

percent has 90 percent of the population. I suggest to you that there are probably characteristics and uniqueness geographically and demographically that at some point have to be recognized in whatever distribution formula there is.

I've also had the experience of serving what some people have called a 'rurban' riding. Back in '91, when the commission at that time had issued, as it turned out to be, five minority reports, quite frankly at that point in time I don't think I was very convinced as a citizen of the idea that had initially been broached about splitting the city. Indeed, when it did happen in '92, I probably even questioned it at that point. However, having served in this position now, in terms of my ability as an individual to serve the people, particularly of the city and of the county and in some cases of the residents of the MD of Greenview, I believe that my representation is much more effective on their behalf because essentially I have the responsibility to deal with the issues that impact each jurisdiction. In other words, they don't stand by themselves.

It's probably worked out much better, quite frankly, than what I thought. I know there have been reservations expressed by some MLAs on both sides of the political equation that 'rurban' ridings may not be the most effective, and indeed are they even workable perhaps in southern Alberta. I can't speak for the tradition of southern Alberta; I can only speak for the north and what we've seen happen in this area.

I think, too, that if you look at some of the changes that have occurred recently which tended to result in fewer jurisdictions such as regional health authorities as well as school divisions, indeed you do see for the first time in many years the effectiveness in the long run – I hope it will come up in the long run – of jurisdictions working with each other which previously didn't because of, again, geographic interests or perhaps even parochial interests at times.

I think the evidence that we've seen in this constituency could serve as a model, I would hope, for some of your ideas. I had the opportunity of being one of six members of government caucus who were charged by our own caucus to review the court decisions and all the other supporting material, so for the first time I really got familiar with the subject earlier this year. I don't envy you your position. I found it very difficult going through as an individual, let alone as a group of six, in terms of interpreting that court ruling together with the backdrop of the various Supreme Court decisions as well.

One thing I do want to comment on is that the court did refer to the fact – if I could just briefly refer to the wording. I think it may be what one of your members has been perhaps alluding to. It was under the heading Possible Solutions. In there one of the comments was, "There are only three possible solutions to the historic disparity." I guess one could challenge that on the basis that perhaps it is a very narrow interpretation, saying that there are only three. Those three are:

First, a mixing of urban and non-urban populations in electoral divisions of equal size, second, more seats over-all, or third, fewer non-urban seats.

In the rationalization process, they basically went through and said that Albertans on average rejected the mixing of urban and non-urban – and I think you've alluded to that – as well as of more seats overall. I don't think there's any question about that. So I think it was rational, therefore, to concentrate on that last one, which is "fewer non-urban seats."

I would suggest that you perhaps expand the envelope a little bit – and I don't have the answer – and rather than going down the path and necessarily looking at that last one, to perhaps pursue either a combination of items or particularly the mixing of urban and nonurban populations. I think there is evidence to suggest, certainly

from the two immediate ridings in here, that it can work, does work. There are obvious issues that involve personalities, involve politics, but I think you have to try to set that aside and say: does it make sense in a situation that we have where there is, if you like, such an integration of wealth and issues and effectiveness between the various communities? I suggest to you that it does, and that's why it does work.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude my comments unless you have any questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll start with John.

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah. I think you're right when you comment on that decision. It says, "The people of Alberta must understand that this last is the only solution unless they soften their attitude towards the other two," one of them being the one you've just mentioned. So they do sort of give that kind of flexibility.

MR. LEHANE: I guess this is more by way of a comment, Wayne, than a question, and I've made this comment previously. I think that perhaps if the judges and the Alberta Court of Appeal had the same opportunity that we've been given to travel throughout rural Alberta and get a better understanding of what's required by a rural MLA to see that his constituents are effectively represented, they wouldn't be driven so much by the numbers in terms of the solutions that they're looking for. They'd be placing a greater emphasis on the other considerations that have been set out as being appropriate, both by the Supreme Court of Canada and the legislation. I just offer that by way of comment on those decisions.

MR. GRBAVAC: Wayne, I'm really intrigued by this Grande Prairie experience. I want to put it into a specific context, and I may have a bias in that I sit on a voluntary hospital board in Lethbridge. We have two MLAs in Lethbridge. I see that our contrary presenter must have gone home. In any event, we have that situation in Lethbridge. We have an MLA from the Liberal Party and we have an MLA from the Conservative Party, as you're well aware.

10:04

When it came to establishing the representation on the Chinook regional health authority, what we got was that it didn't matter what particular party those two urban MLAs were from; the rural MLAs were going to ensure that their constituency base was well represented. I don't blame them for that, but as a consequence we ended up with 10 representatives from the rural area – incidentally, each one of them had a hospital – on the regional health authority, which represented about 50 percent of the population of the Chinook regional health authority, and five from the city, which represented again about 50 percent of the population. So we had a 2 to 1 representation on the regional health authority.

Frankly, from my biased perspective, if you will, I think what we've created there is a recipe for confrontation in the longer term. I'm curious how you dealt with that situation here. Could you explain to me how your representation was struck, what kind of input you had into that, having to represent both the rural interests and the urban interests with respect to health care? I'm curious how the two MLAs, working from a rural and urban perspective, were able to deal with that issue of representation on the regional health authority.

MR. JACQUES: Well, in our particular health region there are actually four MLAs that are impacted by it. The process, just to recap quickly, was, as you recall, one of a public advertisement

application. There was an arms's-length committee that had been set up to review all of those and to make recommendations to the minister. So the MLAs were not part of that process.

At the time the minister got her shortlist, as I recall, I think she touched base with the various MLAs to see whether they had any basic problems with some of the individuals. You know, were there some reasons that were dark and deep that nobody was aware of? But as far as the MLAs being involved in deciding or making the decisions that they should be in a certain area, it didn't happen in this area.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, can you explain to me the makeup of the representation? I assume Grande Prairie is where the regional facility is.

MR. JACQUES: The acute care facility is, the regional hospital.

MR. GRBAVAC: What is the breakdown in terms of representation on that regional health authority? How many from the city of Grande Prairie?

MR. JACQUES: That are residents within the city of Grande Prairie?

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes.

MR. JACQUES: I think there are 13 on the board. I think there are two out of 13 that are actually residents in the city.

MR. GRBAVAC: Maybe this, then, wasn't the best example to use. It didn't really serve my purpose.

MR. WORTH: I have a relatively simple question. You mentioned the demography of this area, and others have alluded to it but not as specifically as you did. If you look at the age profile of people in this region, what's it like? I mean, when you look at the age profile of southern Alberta, you see it's skewed towards the upper end, in terms of seniors and mature adults. Is that true here, or is there a difference?

MR. JACQUES: Well, you actually find a difference. In the city there's no question that it's skewed downwards. It's a very young population. I've seen numbers like 25 or 24 or something on average.

MR. GRAYDON: Second only to Fort McMurray.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah. Okay, the second youngest population, and it's within the city. My own observation is that when you tend to get into the rural areas and to the towns and villages and hamlets, generally you're looking at the reverse.

There are some exceptions. I think, for example, of a community like Wembley, which is about 20 minutes on the highway west of here towards the B.C. border. It serves more as, quote, a bedroom community. They don't like to use that term, but they do themselves. A good number of the people, in fact the majority of the people, that actually live there probably work in the city of Grande Prairie. So they tend to be younger families.

MR. WORTH: Now, does this younger age group correlate with transiency? Is there a lot of mobility in and out of Grande Prairie in that age group?

MR. JACQUES: In my observation there has been, yes.

MR. WORTH: Which impacts, then, again in terms of the ability to represent a rather floating population and its interests.

MR. JACQUES: That's true. Although I think most people who come here really love it, so they stay.

MR. WORTH: We'd stay if we could.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Jacques, you told us how on the road to Damascus in 1991 and '92 you became converted. Do you think there's any hope that Mr. Clackson will become converted?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Not really. I think he was playing a paid-for role.

THE CHAIRMAN: He was being the devil's advocate; was he?

Well, I want to thank you for coming and making your views known. It's really a treat to have two MLAs here tonight who have a lot of experience in respect to representing their constituencies to give us their views.

We now provide for walk-ons. Anybody who didn't register and would like to say something or somebody who did say something and would like to say something more, come forward.

MR. BALDERSTON: I would like to respond a little bit to Mr. Clackson. That's why we have trouble in this world, you know. When you're going to come after me because I'm rural, when he wants to put me out there and put me down, it bothers me. The city of Grande Prairie made the same motion this year, and I think they got a loud and clear message that, hey, guys, we add a lot to your town. We care about your town. We've got a deal here. Don't put us out in the bush and run over us. We don't like it. That bothers me. As I said, it really bothers me. I'm not against Mr. Clackson or anybody else, but we've got to work together. We've got to live together. I see the county working together. I see the city working together. I need to have those people working together. I'm sorry that somebody feels like that.

We had the games here last year. It was wonderful. Ask the people how many rural people came into Grande Prairie every day to help with those games. You know, it's important. We've got a regional ag society down here. The city of Grande Prairie fought that for a while. Everything that goes on there brings money to Grande Prairie. I'm happy to have it there. I'm happy it's there, and I'm happy Grande Prairie's benefiting from it. If we're going to live in our society with everybody wanting to get the most for it, somebody's going to end up short, and that really bothers me.

I appreciate you guys being here and listening to us. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: You're Mr. Balderston?

MR. BALDERSTON: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: The reporter wanted to know your name. It shows you how soon you're forgotten.

Mr. Steeves.

MR. STEEVES: Yeah. A personal comment if I may.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. STEEVES: I really admire the task you've taken on. I can see it's going to be very, very difficult ahead of you. I have no wisdom to share with you that will make it any easier.

In fact, I'm going to add another straw onto the camel's back here, I think. Just an observation. I don't have an answer for this, but I think it needs to be observed. The city of Edmonton has 18 electoral districts within its boundaries. They have 12 city councillors; right? Calgary has 20 electoral divisions. They have 14 councillors. A place like Grande Prairie has two electoral divisions, and we have eight councillors. Now, what that says to me: there's a ratio there between MLAs and councillors, and the two major urban centres, Edmonton and Calgary, have more MLAs than they do councillors. I just find that an interesting observation. There are more people located in Edmonton and Calgary to run the provincial government than there are to run the city. It's the reverse in Grande Prairie here. We have two MLAs; we have eight councillors. It would be interesting to know what that ratio is for Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, et cetera. I'll bet you it's close to Grande Prairie's. Do we need that many people concentrated in two major urban centres to run the province when they don't even have as many within the city to run their own city?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think you might find that a lot of people tell you that you don't, but you have the Charter.

MR. STEEVES: Yeah, and I agree with it, by the way. That Charter's important. I think it's one thing to look at the Charter and apply ideals to it – and we have to have somebody watch out for that, I agree – but it's another thing to look at what I would call commonsense reality and get down to: how many people do you need to do what? Where does the wealth of the province come from? You know, you have to look at those things too, and I don't think one should outweigh the other. It should be balanced.

10:14

MR. GRBAVAC: Lloyd, I think what you've done is you've quite aptly demonstrated the shortcomings of a unicameral House. Frankly, that's the problem. You know, the city of Calgary, as I said earlier, grows by approximately 30,000 people on an annual basis, or maybe more than that. I mean, if CP Rail decides to move its headquarters into Calgary, you may see a growth within the city comparable to one of the whole constituencies here. But when you have a unicameral House, you've got to walk a tightrope. You've got to create some sort of a balance, and this is the kind of problem we get into. I think that's why we've heard numerous representations from Calgary – well, not from Calgary, but I suspect we will; we certainly did in Edmonton – that we ought to limit the number of MLAs to two per federal riding or reduce them to 40 or 65 or some other such number. It's because I think they also recognize it, but I don't think they really recognize the demands that are placed on an MLA representing one-eighth of the provincial land base.

So I think we have a problem, and frankly I'm not so sure that this process will serve that problem in the longer term. I would hope that our legislators would look at the long-term picture and recognize that with this unicameral House, if our population densities are going to continue to build around the two urban centres, this problem is only going to get worse.

THE CHAIRMAN: I want to give you a bit of information. The Saskatchewan government under its electoral boundaries Act has now said that the tolerance is only 5 percent, plus or minus.

Apparently they've done their boundaries, and I think the maximum variation is 2.8, but most of them were right around 1 percent.

MRS. PATTERSON: But all of those people are moving to Alberta.

MR. McCARTHY: Further to that, your comment is correct. I think that in Calgary there's about one alderman or councillor for every 50,000 people. When you look at the growth figures, the city of Calgary every couple of years grows more than the size of the city of Grande Prairie. So there is rapid growth everywhere in Alberta. There are different degrees.

THE CHAIRMAN: I was hoping you had a solution. Thanks.

Well, we want to thank everybody for coming. We ran 20 minutes overtime. I hope you don't mind. We enjoyed coming here and listening to you people, and we hope that you'll pray for a sensible decision from this group.

[The hearing adjourned at 10:17 p.m.]

