

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings Olds

1:02 p.m.

[Chairman: Chief Judge Edward R. Wachowich]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I want to welcome you to the public hearings of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. My name is Edward Wachowich, and I'm the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I am also the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta.

I would like to introduce you to the other members of the commission. On my far right is Robert Grbavac of Raymond, on my immediate left is Joe Lehane of Innisfail, on my far left is John McCarthy of Calgary, and on my immediate right is Wally Worth of Edmonton. The five people you see before you make up the commission, and I want to say that we are very happy to be here to receive your comments and consider your thinking with respect to our duties.

The commission is holding public hearings here in Olds 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 with you.

I want to assure you that every member of the commission has reviewed the law and the literature which has been recently written concerning electoral boundaries in Alberta. So I want to tell you that our minds are open inasmuch as we have not reached any conclusions. We have given this matter a lot of thought, we have reviewed the law, we have reviewed the work of previous commissions and committees who have studied boundaries in Alberta, and we have reviewed what the courts have said about electoral boundaries in this province and in Canada.

I would put before you for your consideration the following summary of the law of Alberta with respect to electoral boundaries. One, our function is to review the existing electoral boundaries and to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly about the area, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions in Alberta.

Two, we have very limited time to accomplish this task. We must submit a report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly setting out our recommendations with respect to area, boundaries, and names of any proposed electoral divisions, with our reasons, by the 31st of January 1996. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly shall make the report public and publish the commission's proposals in the *Alberta Gazette* as soon as possible.

Three, the commission is required to hold two sets of public hearings. This is the first set. These hearings are being held before we make any report or proposals to the Speaker. The second set of hearings will be held in 1996, probably in March, after our report to the Speaker has been made public. We are required to hold the public hearings to enable representations to be made to us by any person or organization in Alberta about the area, the boundaries, and the names of the electoral divisions. We are required to give reasonable public notice of the times, places, and purposes of our public meetings, which we have done in this case.

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

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

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

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

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

In respect to population, population means the most recent population set out in the most recent decennial census of the population of Alberta as provided by Statistics Canada. We are also required to add the population of Indian reserves that were not included in the census as provided by the federal department of Indian and northern affairs. But if the commission believes there is another provincewide census more recent than the decennial census compiled by Statistics Canada which provides the population for proposed electoral divisions, then the commission may use this data.

The second rule is that the commission is required to divide Alberta into 83 proposed electoral divisions. The commission may take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate, but it must and shall take into consideration the following.

One, the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; two, sparsity and density of population; three, common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements; four, whenever possible existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary; five, the existing municipal boundaries; six, the number of municipalities and other local authorities; seven, geographical features, including existing road systems; eight, the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

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.

At this point I wish to proceed with the hearings. The first presenter that we will be calling upon today is Pat James, the reeve of the county of Mountain View.

1:12

MR. JAMES: Thank you. The council of the county of Mountain View has a concern over electoral boundaries as they could affect our region. Council did express grave concern over the proposals originally presented during the last boundaries review. However, they were pleased with the final outcome; i.e., the current boundaries of the Olds-Didsbury constituency. We would be very concerned if changes were made to alter that which is working very well in our region. We offer the following reasons in support of our position.

One: industry. Our region is comprised basically of small towns in a rural area with strong agricultural pursuits, an oil and gas industry, and logging.

Two: trade. Our community strongly supports local businesses, and it is felt that an adjustment of boundaries could detract from this.

Three: population. The Olds-Didsbury riding is well within the recommended and accepted variance for constituencies throughout the province.

Four: community interests and services. The towns and rural areas within the Olds-Didsbury constituency for many years have shared in these aspects; i.e., ambulance, education, fire, recreation facilities, FCSS, et cetera.

Five: culture. Our riding has strong support for its hockey teams, local theatres, musical productions, historical societies, et cetera, and demonstrates much community spirit. We feel boundary adjustments could well negatively impact these areas.

Boundaries. Our riding largely conforms to the existing county of Mountain View boundary and extends eastward and southward to similar rural areas which are very compatible. It is our understanding that the vast majority of ridings in the province of Alberta are very close to being the right size. We would urge the commission and provincial government to channel our tax dollars where they could be used to greater advantage, taking into consideration the magnitude of cutbacks all municipalities have been experiencing for the past several years.

Thank you for your favourable consideration.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. James.

I think we'll start the questioning today with Robert Grbavac.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Pat, did I understand you correctly? Your municipality is entirely within the confines of the Olds-Didsbury riding; is that correct?

MR. JAMES: Yes, it is.

MR. GRBAVAC: And how many other rural municipalities?

MR. JAMES: Parts of Rocky View.

MR. GRBAVAC: That would be in the southwest, I take it.

MR. JAMES: Yes. And probably parts of Bighorn. I think that's probably all.

MR. GRBAVAC: All right. Do you have many common interests with those other two municipalities? Obviously, I mean, you share boundaries.

MR. JAMES: In the agricultural aspect we do, and of course in the gas and oil industry, as we've stated, there are a lot of common interests.

MR. GRBAVAC: All right. Thank you.

MR. WORTH: Pat, we have received two written submissions from residents in the southwestern part of this constituency requesting that when the boundaries are changed, that area be moved back into an area that involves Cochrane. If we were to accede to that request, we obviously would have a domino effect at work which, as you said in your brief, could conceivably impact upon this particular constituency. If we were to make some adjustments in the boundaries, taking into account that some people in the south would want to go into the Cochrane area, would movement over into the area towards Three Hills make some sense?

MR. JAMES: I would wonder if moving north would be more advantageous, into the Bowden area in particular, although the municipal district of Kneehills is certainly not incompatible to our way of thinking.

MR. WORTH: Okay. 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 attending these hearings today, Mr. James, and making the views of the county of Mountain View known to us.

MR. JAMES: Thank you for your time, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

We will now call upon Doug Wagstaff as our next presenter. It would help if you turned the sign around. I don't think you have to know your name as much as we should know it.

MR. WAGSTAFF: One of the things I wanted to comment about was that in theory and practice I felt our electoral system must permit the will of democracy to find a balance between the ability of residents to express themselves and at the same time allow the widest amount of participation throughout a constituency. I felt that democracy wasn't just merely one person, one vote, but it entailed much, much more.

In the past Alberta has been a proud supporter of the principles of a triple E Senate and has triumphed and advanced principles of equality and effectiveness, and I wanted to present that those be a couple of the principles that are taken into consideration when looking at realigning some of the ridings. I didn't want to see a system that was entrenched intrinsically from Edmonton and Calgary, that would present the scenario that the west has faced from Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. I don't want to see that happen to the rural areas in the same manner it has on a national scale. Inarguably the interests of the majority should take precedence. However, I reject that it should always be the criteria that we take into account when we're looking at electoral boundaries. The notion that representation by population prevails under all circumstances will result in rural irrelevancy. I think the rural areas, unless we plan on having an upper House within our province, should take some consideration when we're looking at how we divvy up the seats in the Legislature.

I think there is a distortion in the level of representation between rural areas and urban areas already. There are inequities that are obvious because there is a concentration of population in Edmonton and Calgary. Edmonton and Calgary are well represented in the fact that their municipal governments are full-time and they have a number of MLAs also representing them and their interests, whereas MLAs in the rural areas tend to be one MLA trying to get the collective thoughts of a number of municipalities, both counties and towns, which for the most part, with the exception of our smaller cities, have part-time representatives. Moreover, there are also the barriers that MLAs have to face in ridings that are sparsely populated and they have to travel. It's much easier for those to represent and have access to their constituency when it's in a confined area of a city. So I'd like to present the fact that as much as their electoral quotient is quite above the average, they are well represented.

Further to that, rural MLAs have to deal with the fact that the mass media, both print and electronic media, focus on the cities, again compounding the fact that there's a wealth of representation coming from those ridings. Beyond the major centres the only time the rural areas really get a true focus is if there's reporting on a ministerial duty.

There are also other obstacles which come from rural areas. There is a definite difference between the rural areas and the urban areas. In the communication links there's also a breakdown in the fact that there are many small community papers which have limited distribution, and again the print media focuses on the two larger centres. There are many differences in the manner in which rural and urban communities interact, and this difference is even greater pronounced when it comes to politics. It is essential for balance and fairness that the attention of the province does not always focus on the perspective of larger centres.

In order, I feel, that the rural areas have a fair chance in presenting a perspective that is different than that of the urban areas, we need to have innovative ideas that continue to develop genuine principles of equality and effective representation with a balance in our electoral system. Otherwise a friction between the rural and urban areas and the communities will worsen.

I feel that merging the rural electoral divisions into divisions that are of a similar nature of economy, of industry, and of social value is something that is crucial, and I'll relate to that later. I feel that merging those kinds of divisions is a much more positive aspect than having something like a 'rurban' riding, where you combine part of an urban area with a rural area. 'Rurban' ridings are a very limited solution that does no justice to the fairness and the representation of a constituency. It is merely a code phrase for the most populous area to dominate an entire constituency. A small portion of a highly populated city or area just outside of a city may dictate the agenda of the whole constituency while the large rural area may have concerns which become less precedent because of less population.

The need to add seats to the Legislature I believe is inevitable. I suggest to you that we address this with immense caution because this will cause a greater imbalance in the electoral quotient. If we add seats, it will lower the electoral quotient and make some of the rural areas need more people within one constituency, just compounding the problem. However, this could be countered with a combination of adding seats to Calgary, realigning seats in Edmonton, and realigning rural divisions. I came to that conclusion when I looked at the sheet that you had published in the newspaper type of production that went out to the MLAs. It appeared that Edmonton had a number that was very close to the average and only a few that were very high above the average. I felt that Edmonton could be looked at in the way of realigning versus adding seats to Edmonton, whereas Calgary tended to appear to be above average by quite a bit in all of its ridings. So just glancing at it, I felt it looked like it was more feasible to add seats there than in Edmonton, with no slight to Edmonton, and realign rural divisions to keep together those similarities in economies and social structures.

There is a new structure in municipal government that I think has created quite a different political landscape for Alberta, and I think it could be utilized for greater efficiency. New public school boards present an opportunity where previously nonaligned constituencies are now combined. I think it's inefficient for municipal boundaries to flow one way while the provincial boundaries flow another, and at least for the constituencies I'm familiar with that happens quite a bit in central Alberta. When school boards coincide with municipal districts or counties, then it will help MLAs to represent a collective group that is predominantly of the same sort of community. Even if using some of these school divisions causes some rural ridings to be above the electoral quotient, I think it's better than options where differing communities with very different perspectives are merged.

Specifically I'm going to suggest some realignments in areas which I had mentioned I'm familiar with, and those are the counties of Red Deer and Mountain View, which have recently amalgamated their school boards. This partnership may be easily drawn together. I'll reserve my comment on my belief of why they should or should not have been drawn together, but the reality is that they have been and they have to work together in the future. So it may be natural to look at those types of situations as there are many more in the central Alberta region, as I'd mentioned, where the municipal districts have combined one way yet the provincial constituencies flow another.

The counties of Stettler and Paintearth are combined, yet there is the provincial boundary of Lacombe-Stettler. Ponoka and Lacombe have combined in their school divisions, yet Ponoka and Lacombe are not in any manner connected in the provincial boundaries. The Three Hills school division has gone with Drumheller, whereas it's a Three Hills-Airdrie constituency. Those are some of the examples in central Alberta that I suggest could be looked at to find where the communities flow more together.

Another suggestion is that Airdrie has much more in common with the outlying areas of Calgary, like the community of Bearspaw

or even some of the parts of Calgary itself, than it does with Three Hills-Beiseker. It may be efficient to draw similar divisions in other central Alberta constituencies.

I realize the electoral system is complex. It is as a result of many decades of experimentation, but it's still being improved upon. As the evolution of Alberta's electoral boundaries continues, I hope it will permit the will of democracy to be balanced with a fair and effective means of representation.

I thank you for the opportunity of allowing just an individual to come forward to a committee, not having it closed and having a select few individuals but opening it to the entire population of Alberta. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Doug.

We'll let the questioning start with John McCarthy.

MR. McCARTHY: No questions. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. WORTH: I'm probably the only one in this room that's old enough to remember that we once had a commission called a coterminous boundaries commission, which many, many years ago went about this province to try to bring some similarity in boundaries between municipal districts and school districts. The result basically was what we have in the county system in this province. As I listen to you talk, I hear an echo of that same kind of thinking that went on then.

You're suggesting that in terms of electoral boundaries they be made coterminous with school division boundaries, or at least looked at, and similarly you may be implying that we should do the same thing with municipal boundaries. I'm not sure. That's a long way of leading into the question. I'm just trying to clarify. Your position would be that we would be better off to have groupings, let's say, such as: let's put together Stettler and Paintearth. Even though that area might be quite large in population, that would be preferable to having a mixture that was incompatible?

MR. WAGSTAFF: Especially when you're specifically talking about Chinook. I mean, unfortunately there's no way of getting around Chinook. It's going to be a large constituency. With it and the constituencies in the north I think that's going to unfortunately be a reality. So, yes, something like adding Stettler into Chinook's region would be preferable to a forced, unnatural type of – like Lacombe-Stettler hadn't been previously a natural type of co-operation, whereas Stettler has a lot to do with the area of Consort, Hanna, and those areas.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MR. GRBAVAC: Doug, I just want to preface my question with an observation, and that is that there are a number of areas within the province where so-called 'rurban' ridings seem to work. I'll cite that probably the most obvious example is Grande Prairie. It's split down the middle. The people in Grande Prairie the other night suggested that that worked very well, that their MLA having to represent both a so-called rural and urban constituency was in a position where he would have to in fact balance the interests of both rural and urban people, and in fact that facilitated probably the most expedient compromise possible because it was in the best interests of everyone that a resolution be arrived at in a particular conflict between a rural and urban area. However, it's hard to define sometimes what is rural

and what is urban, particularly in communities like Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Medicine Hat.

MR. WAGSTAFF: And the outskirts of Edmonton with Strathcona.

MR. GRBAVAC: And the outskirts of Edmonton; that's correct. There was a suggestion that if the rural community had to roughly be equivalent or slightly exceed the population of the perceived urban community, they felt that was a reasonable balance and a 'rurban' riding could work. I'm curious if that would skew your concern at all about a 'rurban'.

MR. WAGSTAFF: I think when I made that comment I was really putting it in the context of the ridings I was familiar with in central Alberta, in particular this riding. I don't think that would work as well in a riding where you're starting to take in a small portion of a large city versus in Grande Prairie it's pretty much equal. It might work if you were to do it in a situation like Lethbridge or Red Deer. I'm not suggesting that would be the case, but as an example, if Red Deer-South were to take a segment of the outskirts of Red Deer in the current Innisfail-Sylvan Lake or the current Lacombe-Stettler riding on the other side and to the north, Red Deer-North, I think in that situation you're right; it would work. I don't think in the situation of this riding or trying to combine ridings to the east of Three Hills-Airdrie works as well. I feel there's also that same problem with the Three Hills-Airdrie riding as there would be if you combined this riding with a segment of the outskirts of Calgary.

1:32

MR. GRBAVAC: The reason I suggest this, Doug, is that I come from a pretty rural area of Alberta, and I recognize and have recognized for quite some time that the population dynamics will probably not change in Alberta and, for that matter, North America. We're seeing, with the population densities in the cities, that it's just a matter of time before they in fact will dominate, in the absence of a bicameral House or some sort of regional representation or decentralization of power to the municipal level where it's not quite as relevant what goes on in Edmonton. However, this may be an intermediary or certainly a short-term solution to the problem, if in fact we can incorporate a segment of what we would call an urban community, and I'm not sure that some of the communities around Lethbridge aren't every bit as urban as the city of Calgary. I think of Okotoks and, you know, bedroom communities. Strathmore, for that matter, I think is becoming a bedroom community. So that's why I wanted to explore this with you, and I'm glad to hear that your mind's not closed on the issue.

MR. WAGSTAFF: With the example of Strathmore or Drumheller or Camrose, who are smaller, growing cities – I think it works better with the smaller cities. They tend to have an industry which is tied to those smaller communities, whereas communities on the outskirts of Edmonton and Calgary and some of the larger centres on the outskirts of Edmonton do not necessarily make that same tie in mind-set. Drumheller clearly has, you know, some relationship with the smaller communities around it, as does Camrose, as does Stettler, although it's not as big. I would say that Airdrie doesn't have those same kinds of connections that those other communities I had mentioned do.

MR. GRBAVAC: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Doug, I sort of summarize your presentation on this basis. You're saying that there's more to this job than one

person, one vote and that we should look at effective representation. I want you to know that the courts have also said that this is a very important aspect of electoral boundaries, and we've had a lot of people from rural Alberta basically making the same presentation that you're making. They're saying that there's more to this business of dividing Alberta up into electoral divisions than one vote, one person. I think we've got a pretty good message in respect to that.

I would like to, first of all, ask you a question that you don't have to answer if you don't want to. How old are you?

MR. WAGSTAFF: Twenty-three.

THE CHAIRMAN: Twenty-three. And what do you do?

MR. WAGSTAFF: I work at Olds College right now, just part-time work, trying to save to go to school.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to congratulate you. You're probably the youngest person that has appeared before us since we started these hearings, and you did a very fine job.

MR. WAGSTAFF: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter is Dave Bell. Go ahead, Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: I didn't come to make a presentation. I thought I'd ask a few questions, as I live in Airdrie and am involved with a certain Liberal Party. We have had to live with the situation of two major towns in one riding, which is a very difficult situation. As you know, you have people in Airdrie and you have people in Three Hills, and then you have all the other little towns strung in between. I think you are to be congratulated for recognizing this and making the change. Only what you have done now is you've combined Strathmore and Airdrie, so I'm not sure that it's really that much better. I mean, it's strung out a long ways.

I notice Mr. Wagstaff made reference to the idea of the 'rurban' situation, where we have the Bearspaw combined with Airdrie. That certainly doesn't fit very well, because I think for 80 to 90 percent of the people living in Bearspaw, Calgary's their town. Calgary's where they go. We hardly ever see them. We call a meeting, and it's almost impossible to get anyone from Bearspaw to come out. So I think when you're combining these kinds of things – you know, putting these hilltoppers, I call them, with a rural area – it's a mixture that doesn't work very well. The idea of putting them back in there – we had some of it last time, the last shift, where you mixed up the 'rurban' area with a rural area. It hasn't worked too well.

So I would appeal to you to take a hard look, and if you can, if at all possible, put most of Bearspaw back into Calgary where the people would like to, because there I think you can have a workable mixture, not the other way around. That's basically all I wanted to bring out.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we have on our panel here a resident of Calgary, John McCarthy, so I'll let him start the questioning. I'm not sure he wants these hilltoppers, as you're calling them.

MR. McCARTHY: All I can say is that it's kind of a catchy name. We'll have to remember that if we have to rename any of the constituencies in Calgary.

The only other thing is that I just wanted to correct the one statement I heard you make, I think, and that is that Strathmore and Airdrie are combined. To my knowledge – certainly that isn't the

case now. There have been some proposals which have suggested that, but there's been no indication by the commission that that will be done.

MR. BELL: Oh, sorry. I've never really seen the map yet or any proposed map, but this was a good rumour that came around the other day, that they were to be combined, so I was quick to take advantage of that rumour. That's all I had.

MR. LEHANE: Sir, do you represent the Three Hills-Airdrie Liberal association?

MR. BELL: I'm a member of the association.

MR. LEHANE: We had a presentation last night in Calgary from the provincial Liberal association. Their position was that there should be four rural ridings that should be taken out and disappear, and two of those should go into Edmonton and two of those should go into Calgary. Is that the same position as the Three Hills-Airdrie association's?

MR. BELL: Well, I think we'd have to have a little discussion with them on that one. I haven't heard that rumour.

MR. LEHANE: Could you perhaps just give us your thoughts as an individual.

MR. BELL: Well, as I say, I think put more of the hilltopper ward back in with Calgary, and if Three Hills has to branch one way, go farther east or west. I think we're up against Mountain View now and it's worked quite well, but that could be juggled around a little more to get some numbers.

MR. LEHANE: We don't have to do anything, you know. We're charged with reviewing things and only making the changes that are required by the courts and the legislation. But do you see a situation where you would, after things are juggled, like to have a larger riding in terms of area?

1:42

MR. BELL: I'd like to get away from the thing I originally mentioned, where you have two major centres in one riding which are equal in number, which are very, very hard to work with. That's why I'm pleading that you divorce Three Hills from Airdrie or Airdrie from Three Hills. In fact, certainly Strathmore would be better than Three Hills because it's not that far apart. I could see a riding running more east and west for Three Hills. It would make it much more serviceable as far as a riding where you could communicate with the people, because this way we have about five local papers and each one is dominant in its own area, and it's very hard to communicate with them.

MR. LEHANE: What part of the riding do you live in?

MR. BELL: I live right in Airdrie, but certainly I have a lot of connections in Three Hills.

MR. LEHANE: Do you see Airdrie as having a closer connection to Calgary than to Three Hills?

MR. BELL: Oh, yes. Sixty-five percent of the people in Airdrie work in Calgary. We have that problem as well, you see. Calgary is their town. No. I could see what the provincial Liberal Party is looking at. There is some connection that way between the two.

MR. LEHANE: That's all my questions.

MR. WORTH: I note that you have expressed to us how difficult it is when you have two fairly large centres in a constituency. I put to you that it would be pretty difficult to create a constituency in the area that we're talking about here without having a couple of major centres in them, because you're either going to have to go Airdrie-Strathmore, Airdrie-Three Hills, Airdrie – what? Crossfield? Carstairs? I don't know. It's pretty difficult to avoid that dilemma I think.

MR. BELL: Well, I think the actual physical distance between the two is a problem. Like, Airdrie-Strathmore isn't too bad. Airdrie-Crossfield would be beautiful. Airdrie-Crossfield and Carstairs would be great. You see, it's a good long hour's drive to go from Airdrie to Three Hills, and then beyond that there's Trochu again, which doesn't seem to want to relate too much to our group. They look upon Olds and Red Deer as their major towns.

MR. WORTH: Okay. Thank you.

MR. GRBAVAC: Just a comment, Dave. I think a lot of rural constituency residents would like to have the problem where there was only an hour from one of the communities to the other, but I can appreciate what you're saying.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Dave, I'm a bit of a history buff of Alberta, and I've never heard this word "hilltoppers" before. I've heard of hillbillies. I was just wondering how you came up with this word to describe these people in Bears paw.

MR. BELL: Well, if you've ever driven down 567 from Airdrie to Cochrane, you'll notice that three-quarters of the acreage people are on top of a hill.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, I see.

MR. BELL: As in most parts of Alberta, you know.

THE CHAIRMAN: So that's the Alberta name for hillbillies in the States.

MR. BELL: Oh, no, no, no. You won't catch me on that one, no. No way. Not hillbillies.

THE CHAIRMAN: You don't want to take responsibility for that.

MR. BELL: No. No. I heard a good definition of a redneck the other day: that's some guy that's failed grade 4. That fits in.

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

MR. BELL: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next presenter we're going to call upon is Alan Taylor, the mayor of Olds.

MR. A. TAYLOR: Gentlemen, you've been in a lot of places in the last few weeks and listened to a lot of people. I'll keep my comments mercifully brief.

I've polled the town council, and they have told me that they are perfectly satisfied with the electoral boundaries as they are laid out.

The population density in this area is such that it is very close to the average. We went through this a few years back, where we were about to be twinned with Rocky Mountain House, and there was a great uproar. I've talked to people on the street, and the consensus from the people I've talked to is that every time one of these commissions comes about, the comment is, "Oh, the politicians are at it again." I think we're in a dangerous position of building animosity, I hesitate to say, between politicians and the people they represent, but certainly cynicism is entering into the picture. With that, you're going to get more and more public apathy, and I think that came through in the last municipal elections loud and clear. We're getting into a position where 30 percent of the people of the electorate are electing the government of the day. If the boundaries are left as is for the people to get used to and let the politicians then decide the issues among the people, I think we'll be much further ahead.

As I said, I'm going to keep it mercifully brief. Any questions?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll start with Mr. McCarthy.

MR. McCARTHY: Yes. I'm just curious: what is the population of Olds, and what's its annual growth rate?

MR. A. TAYLOR: I'm sorry?

MR. McCARTHY: What's the population of Olds, and what is its annual growth rate?

MR. A. TAYLOR: Six thousand right now and an annual growth rate of about 5 percent.

MR. McCARTHY: Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Joe?

MR. LEHANE: No questions.

MR. WORTH: You mentioned Rocky Mountain House and the fact that they tried to put you in bed with them a few years back and you decided you didn't want to get in between the sheets. As you know, Rocky Mountain House, to the west of you, is dangerously close to exceeding the tolerable limits in terms of their population that the Supreme Court has suggested would be acceptable. One of the problems we have as a commission is: what are we going to do about Rocky Mountain House in order to build up the population in that region? Obviously, the only thing you can do is go east. It's been suggested to us that the Sundre area probably has a fair amount of commonality with parts of the Rocky Mountain House area and if one were going to move east at all, that might be one area to move into to pick up some additional population for the Rocky Mountain House constituency. What's your reaction to that?

MR. A. TAYLOR: I would hesitate to speak on behalf of the citizens of Sundre, sir.

MR. WORTH: That's a good factual answer. Let me put the question another way then. Is the economy of Sundre agricultural or is it more related to forestry? What's the nature of the economy in that area?

MR. A. TAYLOR: Sundre is a mixed bag. They've got forestry; they have ranching. I wouldn't call it farming. They're too high up

in elevation to really do much farming. But ranching, yes, and gas and oil field servicing.

MR. WORTH: Thank you.

MR. GRBAVAC: Well, a comment, I guess. I concur with you. A degree of cynicism certainly crept in with the electorate on probably all political fronts, but I suggest that maybe the source of their cynicism in this case might be with the courts and not the politicians because we are a creation of the Legislature. That's unquestionable. However, what preceded that was the Alberta Court of Appeal's ruling with respect to the previous boundaries and the fact that they needed to be reviewed and reasons given for the deviation from the electoral quotient. However, from your riding's perspective you're not that far off. So if it's any consolation, that probably sets you in fairly good stead with respect to any kind of drastic change.

However, I want to suggest that we don't want to be doing this again and we don't wish anyone else the problem of doing this again either. So we're hopefully trying to come to a resolution of this that will set us with a common set of boundaries for a considerable period of time.

Thank you for your comments.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Taylor, I have no questions. I want to thank you for coming today and representing the town of Olds and expressing their view. From what you've told us, you surveyed your council and also talked to the people in the streets before you came here to give us your views. Thanks for coming.

MR. A. TAYLOR: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: We had one presenter who said that they were coming, and I'm told by the staff here that she's not here, but I just want to check. Is Dorothy Moore-Anderson here? Well, I guess she hasn't showed up.

Well, the last presenter that I have on the list is the MLA from this area, who we're very fortunate to have, and we'll call upon you, Mr. Brassard.

1:52

MR. BRASSARD: Well, thank you, Your Honour and members of the panel. I appreciate your leaving me to the last for a number of reasons actually. I feel this to be a little self-serving, being here in defense of the current boundaries. Secondly, I wasn't sure that I was going to make it, because I was out of town and only at the last minute I was able to be here. So I'm doubly blessed.

Having mentioned the boundaries, I would like to keep my comments anti boundary, if I may, and more dealing with equality of representation. I think you coined the phrase "effective representation." I think that's really what this is all about, and effective representation in my estimation has to include more than just equal representation, and by that I mean: one man, one vote. It must also include access.

There is a significant difference – and I'm sure you've heard it many times already – between the rural representation and the urban representatives. Here in Olds-Didsbury we represent five towns, two villages, two fairly significant communities. We have a school board that has just amalgamated to the north, but we have Rocky View that we represent as well. As an example, I opened a new learning centre in Sundre, 25 miles to the west of here. I was supposed to attend two more openings in Innisfail today, but because of this meeting I wasn't able to attend. It is a busy, busy riding to be a rural representative in. That's not to denigrate what the urban

representatives have to deal with at all, but the structure is different. As was already pointed out, I deal with five towns and two village councils and the school boards, and we have also three hospitals in my constituency. All of these have boards of directors or at least some representation that we deal with as opposed to most certainly the major urban communities that have 18 or 20 MLAs to deal with what is already established as a more aggressive municipal government in those areas.

In representation we must include, in enjoining together those to be represented, a community of interest, people that have similar concerns. The towns that I mentioned are very much a part of the agricultural base that surrounds them and the oil and gas industry that's very active in our constituency. They are dependent on these industries for their growth in turn. They share many of the same facilities, from recreational to economic and commercial. There is a natural trading pattern that exists in the Olds-Didsbury constituency because of that relationship.

Another issue that isn't very often discussed but certainly is relevant is communication within a rural riding as opposed to an urban riding, where major newspapers and radio stations and television all originate to get that same message or concern of what's happening in the constituency. A rural area is a totally, totally different issue.

The Olds-Didsbury constituency is an agricultural-based community, but it also has a very high percentage of oil and gas industry.

Mr. Worth asked what went on in Sundre. I can tell you that they're very much an agricultural-based community, but theirs is a different agriculture. They grow an awful lot of forage and now are packaging that up and shipping it to Japan. It's become a tremendous boon to our area, but the oil and gas industry is also very much a part of the Sundre area.

Tourism is a major part. We have between 1,500 and 2,000 full-time, year-round spaces in our parks for tourists because of our location in the foothills. We have the third largest guiding and outfitting industry in that area alone. We have people that raise ostrich and emu for a living. It is a very diverse area, as is the rest of the community.

I guess my plea is one for acknowledgement of the guidelines that are in place now. The 25 percent variance I believe is a very, very workable solution to a mix of urban and rural centres, such as Alberta is comprised of. It would be ideal if we could have more coterminous boundaries. I think the last committee that studied this issue did their best to try and bring that about. Certainly it put all of the county of Mountain View in the Olds-Didsbury constituency, where it wasn't completely enclosed before. But we also have the MD of Rocky View and we have some of Clearwater as well in our constituency. So it's almost impossible to try to have coterminous boundaries, and as was pointed out, it's been studied before. I hope it'll continue to be studied, because it would certainly make life easier for a whole lot of people.

Bottom line, my plea is to acknowledge the need for this variance. It has been established at 25 percent. I think our riding right now is somewhere in the vicinity of 9 percent, and it works very well.

I'm going to leave it at that. I could branch out and start talking about boundaries, and I don't want to do that, because I think that's for another day and another committee.

I'd also like to just take this opportunity of welcoming you to our constituency. I think the process is excellent, and I really do compliment you for your open forums that you're holding and the opportunity for everybody here to express himself. So thank you on behalf of the residents of Olds-Didsbury.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you, Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: It's Roy, please.

THE CHAIRMAN: Roy, we don't want you to leave.

MR. BRASSARD: No, I'm not going to.

THE CHAIRMAN: We like to leave MLAs to the last because we feel that we have no time limit with them and they have . . .

MR. BRASSARD: All the time in the world.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no.

. . . a wealth of information, and we like to talk to them about the problems that we have.

I'm going to start the questioning today with Robert Grbavac.

MR. GRBAVAC: Yes. Roy, we have a concern or certainly I have a concern about the Rocky Mountain House constituency, not necessarily looking for change for change's sake but the fact that it's sitting at minus 24.5 percent. I hear you loud and clear with respect to your variance. However, that borders on being a special consideration riding. I heard you when you suggested you didn't want to get into specifics about boundary changes, but you share a common boundary with Rocky Mountain House. I see Sundre sitting there. Is that a possible solution to the potential for Rocky Mountain House exceeding the 25 percent variance?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I don't want to get into boundaries or drawing lines.

MR. GRBAVAC: I know. It puts you in a difficult spot.

MR. BRASSARD: I suppose it's practical. There has been a very strong alliance with Sundre and the Olds community, both in many of their older residents and long-term care residents. In the past the hospital facilities, as they are now, are tied in with the Red Deer region, but the alliance with the hospital in Olds has always been very strong. Much of the trading patterns currently exist between Sundre and Olds. If you were just looking at numbers and drawing lines, I suppose we could slice this up any way, but I think it's absolutely necessary that community of interests and trading patterns do be a part of the consideration.

MR. GRBAVAC: No, no. I thank you for that. There are some other possibilities, not to suggest that we have to, although when you're getting that close to the exterior, you're really pushing the envelope there. Certainly, you know, there's Rimbey on the periphery of Rocky Mountain House, potential for a 'rurban' kind of encroachment, so to speak, into Red Deer. There are a number of things that maybe could be done to ensure that Rocky Mountain House falls within the 25 percent.

MR. BRASSARD: I'm sure there are.

2:02

MR. GRBAVAC: One of the obvious ones is the Sundre situation. That's why I asked you . . .

MR. BRASSARD: Sundre has a population of 2,500, but there are probably at least 2,500 in the rural surrounding area. So you're looking at about 5,000 people in that area.

MR. GRBAVAC: Thank you.

MR. WORTH: Mr. Brassard, I would like to raise another kind of question with you. It concerns the role of the MLA. Yesterday we had a discussion with some individuals about that matter, and out of that discussion came the notion that there are two components to the MLA's role. One of these is what you might call the legislative or the policy role; the other you might refer to as a kind of a service role. The argument, as I followed it yesterday anyway, was that when you talk about effective representation with respect to the policy or the legislative role – that's where one person, one vote and parity, if you like, of the power of a vote is most important, because you're making policy for the entire province, that affects everybody in it. When it comes to the service function, that's perhaps where you need to take into account time and distance and area and so on. So if you follow that along, the argument was that somehow or other you can deal with then the legislative function and improve it by the way you handle boundaries, but you also have to deal with the service function in the same fashion. What I would like your comments on would be if you think that's a legitimate way of looking at the MLA's role; then, secondly, I'd like a follow-up question.

MR. BRASSARD: I'm not certain of the weight that is being given to the policy establishment role of an MLA, because with the exposure that we have in the Legislature in the formation of Bills, I don't believe that it is that simple for one area of the province to dominate another, in this case the rural as opposed to the urban. I think that's where you're coming from, where the same number of MLAs from a rural area could carry the weight of a Bill representing basically less of a population. I sincerely believe that with the procedure given for the construction of Bills, that shouldn't be a major concern. With all of the exposure that we get through our media and everything of Bills coming forward, I think there's a balancing effect to all of this.

Certainly the access role, one of personal representation, I guess, in the constituency, is a significant role for the MLA. I think that perhaps because of the more personal nature of the smaller towns and everyone knowing everyone, the role of the rural MLA is quite different from the urban MLA's, I think it's safe to say. I routinely meet with every town council. I routinely meet with, well, all of the councils, school boards, and so on. My office is a five-days-a-week office. We open at 9 and close at 5, and I am there most of the time. I generally have a full agenda, from a personal contact standpoint. I can't really comment on that role of an urban representative because I don't know just how busy they are. I'm sure they're busy. I do know that people come to me for all kinds of things, a lot of which has nothing to do with my job, as a matter of fact, but they come to me almost as a last resort in some cases.

So while I give a great deal of credibility to my responsibilities as a lawmaker, I don't think it can be overshadowed with the representation that I make on behalf of the residents of Olds-Didsbury. I take that very seriously.

MR. WORTH: My follow-up question has to do with helping the rural MLA better perform the service function, the information or access function. It has been pointed out to us that, you know, they spend a lot of time on the road, that they have great distances to travel, that they are dealing with a population scattered over a large area. Currently, MLAs receive basically the same kind of allowance to run constituency offices for mileage and so on. One of the ideas that has been presented to us from time to time has been that perhaps what we need to do in addition to playing around with boundaries is

establish a differential set of allowances for MLAs based on their distance from the Legislature, based upon the size of the area that they have to service, and so on. How do you react to that?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, certainly in some of the rural areas, up north for instance, I'm sure that the only way the representatives can get around is by air, at least to be effective. I don't know if I want to go as far as enconcing air travel into part of our representation.

You know, Mr. Worth, in today's technology world we've been able to neutralize an awful lot of this. I keep in constant contact with town councils and other boards through the fax machine. I'm in touch with my office in Edmonton with my computer and so on. I think that we're gradually averaging that out to a degree with technology. I wouldn't be in favour of necessarily changing the remuneration plans or allowances for MLAs until I better understood the role of an urban MLA. I suppose that after having heard both sides of it, you'll come out with a far better evaluation of that than I would. I know I can get around on the allowance that I have to work with, and I do it. I'm not able to put out some of the publications that are done in urban centres, but that's a different story. That's because of their congestion or the location of their constituency. Some of the urban constituencies are confined within, you know, a very small distance, so they can do things with communication that I'm not able to do, but for the most part, we are working towards easier communications with our technology means. The answering machine, surprisingly enough, has made my life tremendously simpler. I had it all worked out; I would average five and a half calls to get someone home in the past. Now most of them have an answering machine, and I can at least leave a message that I've called. So there are things like that that are helping a great deal.

MR. WORTH: Well, I'm pleased to hear from an MLA who is making use of modern technology, because we've heard in some areas that you can't apply modern technology to the extent that we think probably they should be able to.

MR. BRASSARD: I have a little laptop that's no bigger than – well, you know what a laptop is like, with a built-in modem, and almost anywhere at all I can plug this thing into a telephone line and fax a message to my secretary. I'm in awe of all of this. I'm of an age that really, you know, I've watched a lot of this develop, and I am constantly amazed at the ability of some of this technology. I'm really very much impressed.

MR. WORTH: Well, thank you for your comments and information.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

MR. LEHANE: Roy, where do you maintain your constituency office?

MR. BRASSARD: Here in Olds.

MR. LEHANE: You just have one constituency office.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, just the one.

MR. LEHANE: How long does it take you to travel from there or from home to the Legislature?

MR. BRASSARD: I'm just about 20 minutes from home from here. It's centred in Olds primarily because it's always been here. The office has probably been located here for close to the last 30 years,

and it serves the Sundre area as well as the Carstairs and the Crossfield areas. We have recently taken on the Bears paw area, that borders on Calgary. We've already heard Mr. Bell talk about that area, and I can identify with his concerns that were expressed, but I haven't really found the need to move the office. If I did, it would be closer to the Bears paw area, but there really isn't an identifiable location where I could have an office in that area.

2:12

MR. LEHANE: How long does it take you to travel to Edmonton?

MR. BRASSARD: Two and a half hours. Just a little under if I go – yes, two and a half hours. We'll leave it at that.

MR. LEHANE: You'll have to be careful with the chairman in terms of how you answer that question.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. It's a two and a half hour drive.

MR. LEHANE: How many trips would you make during the year? Any idea?

MR. BRASSARD: I'm in Edmonton at least twice a week, I would say, generally. I'm on a number of committees. I chair a couple. When the session is on, I go up first thing Monday morning and come back Thursday night. When the session is not on, I quite often go up on a Monday or a Thursday or whatever, but one or two times a week I drive to Edmonton.

MR. LEHANE: What sort of mileage or kilometres would you put on during a year in terms of serving your constituency?

MR. BRASSARD: I travel somewhere in the vicinity of about 4,000 to 5,000 kilometres a month, perhaps a little bit more at times, depending on the circumstances. This evening I would have, under normal circumstances, been in Bears paw. I was in Sundre this morning, and I should have gone to Innisfail. So today I probably would have put on, you know, 200 or 300 kilometres at least.

MR. LEHANE: Well, 5,000 kilometres a month would be 50 hours of traveling, if you were at 100 kilometres an hour.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. It's a lot of traveling. I do a lot of traveling.

MR. LEHANE: So there's a lot of time taken up with that?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. I try to use it making telephone calls, and sometimes I dictate letters. Cruise control is another one of those modern technologies that I take advantage of. Yes.

MR. LEHANE: I appreciate your opening comments about feeling that it might look a little self-serving, but when I ask you this next question, you know – I know that the commission is interested in your answer, and we're not going to accept it as self-serving because I think it's an interesting question. If some rural constituencies had to be merged – I mean obviously that means some are going to be larger than they presently are – do you feel that it would be manageable for you to effectively represent a larger constituency in this area? I'm not speaking of you personally. Let's say any MLA who happened to be here.

MR. BRASSARD: Yeah. Okay. I know how busy I am. I am generally going flat out. Quite aside from just the daily functions,

I am usually attending functions in the evening. Midway school is a very small school that is – what? – 30 kilometres or something from here. I don't know how I could get to as many people and represent them to the degree that I do with a larger constituency.

Now, population base. Taking on Rocky Mountain House or something like that is not the issue. It's just the travel. Dealing with one more town council or a group of people who need access to me is not the issue. It's getting to the people I need to see.

I don't know how people in the north can take on any larger constituencies than they have. I look at the Chinook constituency, and I'm amazed. It's not a great population base, but it's tremendous to get around to those communities to just give them the assurance that you do care, that you do attend whether it's their Christmas party at school or whatever. That takes time, and I don't know how I could squeeze any more time into it than I'm doing and still have a life with my family.

I guess that's the other side of it. In a rural community, as I mentioned, everybody knows you and you know everybody. So it's not uncommon to be phoned at home. In fact, I have a constituency office phone in my home to cut down on the long-distance charges of some of the residents that are out of the Olds exchange. I know how many calls I get at home. I have an answering machine on that phone now, because if I'm out, I can call back. It's a busy time. I'm sure that it's busy in urban centres. I don't mean that, but to enlarge my constituency much more would have to impact on my effectiveness. I can't help but feel any other way.

MR. McCARTHY: Just a couple of informational questions for my own assistance here. How many hilltoppers do you have, so to speak?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, my Bearspaw residents are not hilltoppers, but they are urbanists, if I could call it that. I don't know. Mr. Bell was very right when he said that most of the Bearspaw area residents work and socialize in Calgary and formerly were represented by the Banff-Cochrane constituency and feel a little bit disenfranchised. They feel even more a part of Calgary than they did, I'm sure, of Banff-Cochrane in the past and certainly now of Olds-Didsbury. I've worked very hard at trying to be abreast of the issues in the area, such as the gravel pit and others, and being on top of that, those kinds of issues, but they do very much feel like they're part of Calgary. I would say I've got probably about 5,000 constituents in that area, maybe a little less. There's a development going in just outside of Cochrane, a 900-home development, that is going to impact on my constituency as well. Although they, too, will feel very much more like a part of Cochrane, they live in the rural area and I'm sure will come to me for representation as that development gets going.

MR. McCARTHY: That will be included in your constituency then?

MR. BRASSARD: That area would be included in my constituency right now and, of course, all of the relevant intrinsic traffic problems and everything. A lot of people who live in Cochrane work in Calgary. A lot of these 900 homeowners will work in Calgary, and all of them go down the same highway. So you get drawn into some of these issues that are around you. I think that my area is growing; I guess I can put it that way.

MR. McCARTHY: Yeah. That's consistent with a constituency like yours that is sort of on the perimeter of Calgary.

I'm just also curious as to what the populations of Crossfield, Carstairs, and Didsbury are. And how many of those people work in Calgary, or are you able to comment?

MR. BRASSARD: In Crossfield probably 20 percent of the workforce works in Calgary. They have a population of about 2,000 to 2,500. Carstairs is about the same; just under 2,000 I believe it is. Seventeen hundred in Carstairs. Didsbury has 3,500. Olds has 6,000. I thought it was a little less, but it's 6,000. Sundre has 2,500. All of these communities have kind of a rural base of their own that they draw from. The county of Mountain View surrounds most of these, although Crossfield is in the MD of Rocky View, but they all impact on a lot of the services, such as recreational and so on. So it's hard to say that there are 6,000 people in Olds because Olds really is made up of the surrounding community as well.

MR. McCARTHY: Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Following up on Mr. McCarthy's questions in respect to the population in your constituency, you appreciate that the figures we have in our brochure come from the 1991 census. We're now in 1995 and soon going to be in 1996. When you get an area like Bearspaw, which I think is a growing area – there are more hilltoppers by the year – what do you think your constituency population is now, if you were to try and project the figures?

MR. BRASSARD: What are the current figures?

MR. McCARTHY: Well, the 1991 figures that we have, just for your assistance – so we're talking four or five years ago – in 1991 we have 27,893.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, when I look at every town around – Crossfield I know has increased significantly; Carstairs is growing. In Olds-Didsbury I would say that we're going to be well in excess of 35,000, if we're not there now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thirty-five thousand or 30,000?

MR. BRASSARD: What are we at now?

MR. McCARTHY: We were 27,000.

MR. BRASSARD: Twenty-eight thousand in 1991. I would say that, yes, we're going to be at the 30,000 mark here, if we're not there already. I know that Olds has grown significantly; I know the development in Didsbury and other areas. I would say that we're pushing 32,000 to 35,000 now.

2:22

MR. McCARTHY: I was just going to say that if you have a 900-home development, that's got to be another 2,000 right there.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, that's not up yet, but it's going to be. And I know that in Didsbury they converted a bible college to a seniors' independent living accommodation. I don't know how many people they've put in there, but 200 or 300 at least.

I know Didsbury has grown by about 2,000, I'm sure. Well, maybe not 2,000, but 1,000 or 1,500 in Didsbury alone since 1991, in the last six years. And Olds and Carstairs I'm sure have come up a few hundred. Crossfield has come up. Yeah, I think 32,000 would be conservative.

There's kind of a natural boundary that we have too. We go to the foothills, of course, to the west. We go almost to Three Hills in the east. We don't take in Bowden. I suppose we could, but we stop halfway to Bowden to the north, and we bump up against Calgary to the south. So we're kind of confined, if you will, to a natural boundary.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the purpose of my question was that I would like to be able to say that your constituency today, if we could use those figures, is right on the electoral quotient or very close, rather than being 9 percent under as our statistics show.

MR. BRASSARD: I would think that yes, Mr. Chairman, that would be a fair statement.

THE CHAIRMAN: I understand, Mr. Brassard, that you used to be a car dealer. Is that correct?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. Please call me Roy.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Roy, I've been waiting for a long time for this opportunity.

MR. BRASSARD: To talk to a car dealer?

THE CHAIRMAN: I chaired the conflict of interest commission in Alberta about six years ago and am somewhat responsible for the present Conflicts of Interest Act. We interviewed quite a few American politicians in respect to their problems there, because they had a lot of states that already had legislation dealing with this. A very common expression used by American politicians was that politicians were, on a social scale, just below car dealers.

MR. BRASSARD: I know where they are on a credibility level.

THE CHAIRMAN: When I see you here, I just want to comment that you're the first person I ever ran into that has taken one step down on the social scale.

MR. BRASSARD: That was a surprise to me too, Mr. Chairman. I really didn't realize that.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm just being facetious, Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Yeah, I know. I recognize that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Don't take it the wrong way.

Well, I want to thank you for coming and expressing your views. Maybe you have some questions of us.

MR. BRASSARD: No. I want to thank you again for bringing this committee to our community and allowing us the opportunity to give you the input of our concerns and thoughts. So thank you again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Well, we have Dorothy Moore-Anderson, who I guess hasn't shown up for some reason.

We also allow at these hearings for people in the audience after they've heard what everybody's had to say or anybody who's even said something, if they want to come back and tell us something more. Are there any walk-ons? Are you interested, Madam?

MS BARR: Could I ask a question?

THE CHAIRMAN: Come on up and give your name for the *Hansard* reporters, because they want to know who you are.

MS BARR: I just want to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Can we get your name, please.

MS BARR: My name's Pat Barr, B-a-r-r.

THE CHAIRMAN: Pat Barr.

MS BARR: Yeah. You read out the variation in constituencies, plus or minus 25 percent, and for some constituencies, plus or minus 50.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just minus 50.

MS BARR: Just minus 50; that's right. I'm sorry. Yeah, minus 50. Of the figures given in the pamphlet, there isn't one constituency that is outside those parameters. So is this just an exercise in democracy you're going through, or is there meaning in it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, you're asking the question a lot more politely than a lot of people ask the question. You know, some people come here and say, "Why the heck are you here wasting the money and holding another set of hearings when all you have to do is look at those figures and they're within the legal limits?" But we had the courts make some directions in respect to those figures, and I'd like to ask Mr. McCarthy. He's our specialist now in answering this question.

MR. GRBAVAC: He's a river-hugger, by the way.

MR. MCCARTHY: Yeah. I'm not a hilltopper.

This question has been raised many times. Let me give you the chronology of it first, and then we'll get into the issue. There was a Supreme Court of Canada decision back in 1991 which dealt with this particular issue in the province of Saskatchewan. Our boundaries, as you're looking at them on that sheet of paper, were approved by the Legislature of the province of Alberta, and then the government of Alberta presented them to the Court of Appeal after the last election in order to find out whether or not they conformed with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Then as a result of that Court of Appeal decision, the Legislature of the province of Alberta amended the legislation and created this commission. I suspect it's as a result of that Court of Appeal decision, although we have a member of the Legislature here that may be forced to come back to the table and respond after I'm finished.

Anyway, let me just review, because it is really the nub of why we're here, the Supreme Court of Canada decision. The Saskatchewan legislation was essentially, in the key elements, the same as what we're dealing with in our legislation right now. Since then it's been amended, but at the time the Supreme Court of Canada made its decision, it allowed for this 25 percent variance and the 50 percent for the special areas.

The decision of the Supreme Court of Canada was rendered through Madam Justice Beverley McLachlin, who, ironically, was born and raised in the Pincher Creek area, so we're going to be careful about what we do in the Pincher Creek area. In any event, the Supreme Court of Canada said this in 1991.

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

of which equity is but one. The section does not guarantee equality of voting power.

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

So that's where we were at in 1991. Then in 1994 the Alberta boundaries as they are in front of you right now were presented to the Court of Appeal, and the concluding remarks were as follows. I'll read a couple of other remarks just by way of explanation of why we're here and the dilemma we face. The conclusions were 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.

It's my understanding that this is the only review between now and the 2001 census that's been provided for.

2:32

Now I'm going to back up. That was the concluding remarks, just so you understood what the Court of Appeal said, but there were a couple of other instances where they kind of described the problem. They said:

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.

So that's, I think, why the Legislature reacted and amended the legislation and created this commission. It has also created a huge dilemma for this commission.

MS BARR: Yes, I can see. Thank you very much for explaining it. Thank you for the opportunity to ask a question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. Thanks, Ms Barr.

Is there anybody else who would like to say anything?

Well, if we have no more presenters or comments, I'm going to adjourn our hearings at Olds, Alberta, and we're moving on to Red Deer.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:34 p.m.]