



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 6, 2017

Day 62

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 33

Electoral Divisions Act

Mr. Stier moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the descriptions of electoral divisions referenced in the bill and described in the DVD tabled as Sessional Paper 624/2017 do not adequately provide for the effective representation of rural Alberta.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 5: Mr. Loewen]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I was last talking on this bill, I was going through, I guess, some of the trials that we see with some of the boundary changes and, in particular, some of the sizes of the rural constituencies. When I look at the minority report from Gwen Day, I want to point to one of her numbered comments here. It says:

3. Unnecessary disruption. In spite of population growth, many existing ridings could have remained unchanged and been within allowable variances both positive and negative. Because of the perceived need to reach voter parity, the final maps include significant changes to most rural and urban boundaries. This disruption, in my view, was unnecessary given the provision in the Act for justifiable variances.

Madam Speaker, the other day I tabled some maps where simple changes were made . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order (29)(2)(a).

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My hon. colleague got caught there in the middle of a sentence. I wondered if he just might like to finish it.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. I would love to finish my comments on that. These maps that were tabled in the Legislature the other day redrew the boundaries with minimal disruption. It basically took eight maps to change 21 constituencies, so 66 constituencies remained unchanged. There wouldn't have to be any name changes because there weren't any significant enough changes to change any names, and all of these ended up within the variances that legislation allows. So when we talk about unnecessary disruption, obviously there were simpler ways to do this job and still come up with the same result, which, of course, is making sure that we're within the variances of the legislation.

Now, when we talk about the commission and how they listened to different people that presented, well, I hardly know anybody that's happy with these constituency changes. I don't even think the people in urban Alberta are happy with these changes because they've done a lot of changes that were unnecessary. I think, you

know, there are a lot of problems with this and, like I say, unnecessary disruptions, of course.

Now, I do want to point out one thing here. Like I say, when I was speaking before, I talked about the size of my constituency and how I could drive to the Legislature in Edmonton in the same amount of time I could drive to the furthest community in this new constituency, and I'm not even in the furthest south community in the constituency. For me to drive to the Legislature is about a three-and-a-half-hour drive, and to drive up to the Worsley area is three and a half hours the other way. That gives you an idea of the size. Of course, Fox Creek is an hour's drive south of me, so to drive from the furthest communities within the constituency is actually four and a half hours. That doesn't take you to the farthest reaches of the constituency, but they're the furthest communities.

Again, like I mentioned the last time I was speaking, I'm not complaining about my job and what my job would entail. I'm happy to do my job. I'm happy to travel. I'm happy to visit the areas that I represent within the constituency. But I do think somebody should take into consideration the people that are being represented and the communities that are being represented and how they feel about having an MLA that has to represent 71 different communities – 71 different communities – eight different MDs and counties, four First Nations reserves, and this huge expanse of area. Of course, the main point is that it didn't have to be that way.

The relativity of this constituency as it's been redrawn: as far as how the communities relate to each other and travel corridors and different things like that, there's no relativity in it anymore. There isn't anything that the people of Fox Creek, let's say, have with the people of Worsley. Of course, they're all Albertans. They have a lot of things in common, but there isn't anything that they would be doing to ever meet up or have anything, you know, that would correspond with each other.

Now, when I read through the interim report, I was interested to read about some of the people that presented in the report and some of the complaints they had with it. I was interested to read about the Member for Calgary-Klein and what he said about his constituency. I'll just read a couple of paragraphs: while I have no real objection to the proposal of adding the communities on the east side of the Deerfoot, both north and south of 16th Avenue, I do believe that the commission should consider the fact that, like 16th Ave, Deerfoot is a natural boundary that, again, generally is not crossed to participate in school activities. So here he is concerned about crossing the Deerfoot within his constituency. The Deerfoot, for some reason, is this grand barrier, but 400 kilometres is nothing, I guess. I guess I don't understand.

But it goes on. It gets even better, actually: what's more, adding the communities east of Deerfoot and south of 16th Avenue makes the two farthest points at either end of the riding a great distance. It was interesting to look at the map and actually calculate how great a distance this is. Would you like to know how great a distance this is? Well, let me tell you how great a distance it is. Ten kilometres. Ten kilometres.

An Hon. Member: How much?

The Deputy Speaker: He's keeping the House in suspense.

Another speaker to the referral? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to an amendment by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod in regard to Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act. I know that this bill will get passed here. It's just a matter of time before somebody waves the white flag and the government votes on this and the bill

gets passed. But I have a job, to represent my constituents of a rural constituency, and I'm going to do my job and try to speak up for rural Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Bill 33 does a disservice to rural Albertans, and for that reason this Chamber should not proceed further with reading of this bill. I'm sorry to have to take this stance, but the Electoral Boundaries Commission took a tack that creates an unfair disparity between rural representation and urban representation. Should we approve the boundaries as proposed by the commission, it will result in a shift from which rural Alberta will never recover.

The crux of the issue is that the commission has decided that voter parity – that is, the principle of one person, one vote – is the be-all and end-all when it comes to redrawing the boundaries. As a result, representing rural Alberta will become more challenging after the next election, and it'll continue down that road in future redrawing of boundaries for the commission is setting a direction for future reviews, too. In other words, Bill 33 makes it impossible for rural MLAs to provide their constituents with the level of representation that they'll want to offer. Bill 33 indicates that it's not just okay, but it will apply in the future, too, because the most important factor for redrawing the boundaries is that populations remain relatively the same between all ridings in Alberta, rural and urban.

This is the first time a boundary commission has taken that stance. Previous ones made an allowance, as the court permits, and the reason for that allowance is that effective representation has been and should continue to be the paramount factor when redrawing boundaries. This report, however, dismisses the challenges of rural representation versus urban representation and even went so far – and all of us know how ridiculous this is – to suggest that rural MLAs could hire staff to drive them around so that the member could work in the vehicle while travelling. When you have statements like that and then you have the commission's first draft, that creates constituencies that run from just outside of Edmonton's border to the Saskatchewan border, you know that there are underlying problems.

7:40

Then, Madam Speaker, the commission went back to the drawing board, and while making some admittedly better rural constituencies from the trading patterns and common community interests, it continued the error of holding up population density as the most important factor. A result was the loss of rural constituencies, with growth in urban constituencies. But the real problem is that rural members will have to cover an even larger geographic area as we all know that there's no money to hire staff to drive them around, and if there were, taxpayers would not be happy.

The solution would have been to make effective representation the priority for both urban and rural residents. With that in mind, the boundaries would only have needed some tweaking. Since it is the members in this Chamber who know better than anyone the challenges of this job, it is now our job to correct the wrong that Bill 33 is foisting upon Albertans.

Madam Speaker, Bill 33 should not proceed any further. Alberta is better off with its current boundaries, and the precedent that this bill sets is simply wrong. We must put a stop to it now, or rural Albertans in the future, after the next election and further down the road, will not have the representation that they deserve. Making this assertion takes nothing away from urban Alberta as representation is markedly different and presents its own challenges in our cities. Geography, though, isn't one of those challenges. For the commission not to consider geography as a considerable factor and,

in fact, dismiss it in an offhanded manner bodes so poorly for rural Alberta that we must deal with it now, before it is too late.

Now, Madam Speaker, you know, I don't blame the commission. I think they did their good work, and they meant well. I think that if you look back in *Hansard* to when this commission was set up, I said in this House that, you know, when you're setting up a commission to represent and draw the boundaries for all of Alberta, it would be nice to have people on the commission from all over Alberta. There wasn't one member on that commission from rural, northern Alberta. There are two from the government side, two from the opposition. That has nothing to do with representing all of Alberta. I think that in the future, if the commission was set up to have representation from all over the province, it might do a better job of trying to decide what's best for the province.

You know, not to be partisan or disparaging to any member in the House – I know that everybody works hard – but maybe just something to think about. I know it's been brought up lots, about the sizes of the constituencies in Alberta. We've heard of constituencies from 90,000 square miles to six square miles. Distance has been talked about lots, Madam Speaker, but something else I want people to think about – just think about it – is that the city of Calgary has 14 councillors that represent all of the people in the city of Calgary, and they actually deal with issues affecting the people of Calgary, you know, on a more direct basis than having to deal with the people, yet there are 21 MLAs representing the city of Calgary. So if 14 councillors can do the job, why does it take 21 MLAs?

I know that there are lots of rural constituencies that you can refer to, but I know mine the best. Grande Prairie-Wapiti has 51 councillors that represent that same area and one MLA. So I guess that one rural MLA does the work of 51 councillors whereas in the city it takes 21 MLAs to do the work of 14 councillors. I don't know. You draw the conclusions from that. I don't mean to be partisan or disparaging, but when you just think about what I just said and the numbers, maybe you'll think that this should be done a little differently.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Speaking as one of the former 14 councillors, between 2001 and 2010, as it turns out, I'm not the only one in the House who's a former councillor in Calgary. The government's Finance minister and President of Treasury Board is also a former councillor.

You know what, Madam Speaker? I will say that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has made some good points, and I think they really need to be considered carefully. I would say to the member – I would ask him to say when I give him a chance here: what things are you concerned about? Let me say, because probably nobody else in the world calls it that but me, that it was the 2012 election, when I first came to this place, that I believe was the first time in the history of Alberta that urban ridings outnumbered rural ridings. I refer to it as the TSN turning point. I don't mean to be light about it, but the fact is that it's a shift in the balance of power.

Here's the problem with that. Cities where I represent need to be represented, but rural ridings need to be represented, too, because if Alberta is going to be strong, we need to remember that we're interdependent. While most of the wealth that's generated in Alberta gets administered within the cities, almost all of it gets generated in rural Alberta. So if rural Alberta suffers, Alberta

suffers. If urban Alberta suffers, rural Alberta suffers, and then all of Alberta suffers.

I would ask the member if he could enlighten the rest of us here about whether members or citizens in rural Alberta feel the same way, and maybe he could talk about some of their concerns. As this urban member of this House really believes, we need to look after all of Alberta, not just my riding. All of us in all 87 ridings need to worry about all 87 ridings even though we need to get elected in one. I'd like the hon. member to reflect on that if he would.

The Deputy Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good questions. Like I said, I don't mean to be disparaging to MLAs from Calgary or Edmonton or any urban area. I'm just trying to point out that there's a huge difference, and we have to be careful that just population isn't the only reason for drawing constituency boundaries. I mean, I've got seven municipalities. I go to municipal council meetings every year. I meet with all the councillors one on one.

But in rural Alberta my focus isn't to go door-knocking. I get caught up, and I go help some of my colleagues, but in the cities you go door-knocking. If I went door-knocking in rural Alberta, I'd be driving 10 miles, and at every door I went to, I'd have to go in and be a guest for an hour and have a coffee. You don't get anywhere. Madam Speaker, this last weekend I was in a Santa Claus parade. I go to auction sales. There's nothing better in rural Alberta than an auction sale. You get to talk to a thousand of your constituents, and you do it all year round. When it comes to election time, door-knocking isn't where it's at in rural Alberta.

If you do your job for four years and meet the people, get around your constituency, go to rodeos and fairs and auction sales and trade shows, that's how you meet the people. But when I go to a trade show in my constituency, every person there is from my constituency. When you go to a trade show in Calgary, there might be 10,000 people there. Maybe, if you're lucky, there would be a thousand from your constituency, so you don't even know if you're talking to your constituents or whoever you're talking to. In rural Alberta, if you go to an auction sale, you know that everybody there that you're talking to is your constituent. There's a lot better connection.

But if you stretch that out and make it impossible, like I said in my speech, if you start down that slope and we get a little bit this time and next time, you know – I don't know – it might take 20 or 50 years, but pretty soon there are only going to be a couple of us left representing all of rural Alberta. And, as my colleague said, that's where the resources are, that's where the riches are, that's what's growing in Alberta, and that's what's important to building this province. All the oil revenue doesn't come out of the cities even though Calgary thinks they're the oil capital of Alberta. The oil comes out of the rural area.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good evening. It is a pleasure to rise during the most wonderful time of the year and speak to Bill 33. We have heard a lot of very, very, very good arguments – maybe that's an overstatement – very good encouragement and discussion around this very important issue that's before the Chamber. I want to just encourage all members to think about the impacts and decisions that we make.

7:50

You know, oftentimes when we debate particular issues, it's very easy for us to get focused on how it affects the constituency that we

represent the most. And while that's a very important role that we have – we're elected by those individuals in our constituency to represent those constituents, to speak on their behalf. We're not addressed by our names but addressed as the name of our constituency because we speak for those constituents. I understand that that's a very important part of our role.

Particularly when we're talking and thinking about Bill 33, it's quite easy to think about how it affects the constituency we represent. But this evening I'd like to encourage members of the Assembly to take a very broad view, not just thinking about the nuances of their constituency but of our whole province. How does it have a positive or negative impact on our province? Certainly, this particular piece of legislation has a major, major impact on rural Alberta and, as such, a major impact on our entire province. I encourage members to think about that as they are voting on this particular motion, this motion that essentially states that the

Electoral Divisions Act be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the descriptions of electoral divisions referenced in the bill and described in the DVD tabled as Sessional Paper 624/2017 do not adequately provide for the effective representation of rural Alberta.

I think it's important that as we take a look at that motion and consider the fact that the commission – while I appreciate the work that the commissioners did, it is important that we consider what it means for rural Alberta, not just for rural Alberta but effective representation, which in many respects is a tenet of our Westminster democracy. It is so, so, so critical that we maintain those traditions that have been enshrined both in legislation as well as in case law and then through Supreme Court rulings to make sure that this very important clause of effective representation is considered.

You'll know, Madam Speaker, from being part of the debate over the last number of days, that many strong cases have been made that effective representation is not, in fact, a key tenet of what the commission did. I think that we ought to take some time to fix this problem. One of the ways that we can do that is to not make Bill 33 into law. Some would say that because the commission did their report, because the commission went out and travelled around the province, we only have the option of accepting the report. Well, that's just not true.

I think that we need to focus on what our job here is to do, and that is to represent all Albertans. In this case the legislation said: effective representation. That is not what has been delivered. So I think that we owe it to Albertans to make sure that that's what we deliver. I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this motion so that we can make sure that over the next generations effective representation remains an important tenet here in our Westminster democracy.

Let's just talk a little bit about rural Alberta and what that means and why it remains to be important. I think that in Commissioner Day's minority report she did a wonderful time, or a wonderful job – I'm sure she had a wonderful time – of describing the importance of rural Alberta and what it brings to the mosaic that is Alberta. And she does a wonderful job speaking specifically about the Charter and case law that lays the foundation for this effective representation tenet. It's a tenet that really has built our democracy. I know that folks in the city – and not all folks in the city, so that was a widespread generalization. But I know that there are a number of folks in the city who believe that because they have a slightly larger population in any one electoral division or another, there is a disproportionate amount of representation, but in fact the legislation provides for variances.

I'd like to talk a little bit about those variances and how they impact rural Alberta compared to the constituency size. If you look at a constituency, Madam Speaker, like Calgary-North, it has a

population variance of minus 16; Calgary-North East has a population variance of minus 14; Calgary-South East, minus 14 as well. Just in the name of fairness, there are a couple of constituencies inside Calgary that have a population variance of plus two digits as well: Calgary-Bow, plus 10; Calgary-Falconridge, 13. Those are the only two in that case.

I don't want to just highlight the minuses, but in this case you have a double-digit minus population variance in three constituencies in the city of Calgary. While I can appreciate that some of those constituencies will grow between now and the next Electoral Boundaries Commission, I also have some significant reservations that when you compare it to some more rural constituencies – even Spruce Grove-Stony Plain is a 10, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that I've highlighted on a number of occasions, is plus 15, the largest population variance of all constituencies, with a population of 53,809. Not only is it the largest population, but it also is in the top third of largest land areas. That should be concerning for all of us, that we're not going ahead and utilizing the population variances in rural Alberta to be minuses or slightly minus, making up for some of the additional tasks and the amount of travel that a rural MLA has to do.

As such, Commissioner Day spoke specifically about these variances and the use of these variances and how Supreme Courts have found these variances to be reasonable and within the limits. I just believe that in order to make sure that Alberta remains strong, all of the sectors of Alberta need to remain strong, and by sectors I mean regions, urban, rural, and what I like to refer to as rurban as well, these smaller cities that have significant impact on rural Alberta or that service large portions of rural Alberta.

8:00

When you have a strong rural Alberta, you have a strong urban Alberta, and I think that making sure that we don't diminish the value and the voices in rural Alberta but that we celebrate those is so critical to the success of our province. Even if you look from an industrial perspective, the industries that fund so much of our government, including the foundations of that – the education system, our health care system, our social services, this very Assembly – much, much, much of the revenue that is generated is, in fact, generated in rural Alberta. So it's important that we have this effective representation in rural Alberta.

You know, so much of Alberta's prosperity can be tied back to the amazing hard work and dedication of our folks in rural Alberta, and overreliance on voter parity and keeping the variances within 5 per cent in the cities – and I think Edmonton is a great example of that: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, minus 1; Edmonton-Castle Downs, minus 1; Edmonton-City Centre, 2; Edmonton-Decore, 5; Edmonton-Ellerslie, 3; Edmonton-Glenora, minus 3; Edmonton-Gold Bar, minus 3; Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, minus 7; Edmonton-Manning, 3; Edmonton-McClung, minus 5; Edmonton-Meadows, the only double digits in all of Edmonton, 11; Edmonton-Mill Woods, 7; Edmonton-North West, minus 3; Edmonton-Riverview, minus 3; Edmonton-Rutherford, 1; Edmonton-South, minus 2; Edmonton-South West, minus 2; Edmonton-Strathcona, zero; Edmonton-West Henday, minus 8; Edmonton-Whitemud, zero.

This overreliance on getting these city numbers so close to parity has actually come at a cost for rural Alberta, three seats in rural Alberta. In fact, rural Alberta has been weakened as a result of it. You don't have to just take my word for it. You can take the words of the AAMD and C, who spoke about this very issue and some of their concerns around the weakening of rural Alberta and about what fewer voices around the cabinet table or around the government table or even around the legislative table means for

rural Alberta. This is at a time when our economy is already in turmoil. Much of the turmoil has been created by the government, and I can tell you – I mean, I don't have to tell you. You know, Madam Speaker, being from a rural riding – and members of the government know that rural Albertans are feeling like this government doesn't take them seriously.

I get that the government didn't write the report – I'm not suggesting that they did – but the government does have the ability to say: "You know what? No. We're not going to accept the report as it was presented." Then they have some decisions to make about whether or not we go back to the drawing board, we have a new commission, we decide to delay the whole process until after the next general election and keep 87 members, whether we ask to reduce the number of constituencies. There are a lot of options, but rural Albertans have a real sense that the government doesn't take them seriously, and I know that we've highlighted a lot of issues in this Chamber about that.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: You know, in hearing my colleague explain to this Legislature that rural Alberta is critical and that we need to make sure we get this right the first time, I have to say that it's disappointing to see this bill, like the other bills that have just come in right at the end. What we're looking at here are some very large bills all coming in just before we finish the sitting of the House. That means that we don't have time to actually be able to take this bill in its final form – because there were changes made. Albeit they were minor changes, still changes were made to the recommendations the boundary commission had put forward.

Now, in our case I have to say that I actually will thank the House leader for co-operating on one of those changes, which was to make sure that "Bonnyville" was added to the name of the new constituency. I'm thankful for that. Thank you, Minister. In the end, it was named Cold Lake-St. Paul, and the new name is now going to be Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Again, you know, I do see that the government was willing to work with some of the MLAs that had significant townships lose their description within the boundaries commission, and it's good that they were willing to work with us on that.

What's disappointing here is that they're not willing to work with the fact that our boundaries have changed so significantly, especially with Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that it now makes it almost impossible for an MLA to effectively represent their constituency. You heard my colleague. He was outright saying that the new constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul is now going to be the largest constituency within Alberta for population over average. That's unbelievable. It's unbelievable that we have constituencies in rural Alberta that are larger than the provincial average. Not only is it unbelievable that it's larger, but it is the largest constituency above the provincial average. How a commission can justify that and sleep at night is beyond me. I will tell you that when it comes to effective representation, Bonnyville-Cold Lake's change goes against everything that I believe the commission should have brought forward.

If there is a legal challenge when it comes to Alberta's boundaries, it's going to be my constituency that's going to lead that charge because of what's been done by this boundary commission. It's shameful. We need to step back. We need to vote for this reasoned amendment, that says that this is not okay, that this whole boundary commission report is treating rural Alberta unfairly. I will admit – I will admit – that the commission worked very hard on this report, but putting voter parity first, above all else,

was not doing an adequate job when it comes to making sure that effective representation is for all Albertans.

To the member: do you feel that we are moving in the right direction? Have we set a precedent that Alberta now will follow, where rural Alberta is treated unfairly?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: Well, I thank you for your comments. I'm not entirely sure about the precedents, particularly because each commission does get to be the master of their own domain, but I do think that we are on a very dangerous road if we don't take proactive steps to ensure that rural Alberta remains a strong, vibrant voice in the province.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to stand and speak on Bill 33. Every member of this House should take this seriously – I'm sure they all do – not only for the sake of their own political and personal future but, rather, because they care about the future of Alberta. I've no doubt that every member of this House, from all sides, does care very much about the future of Alberta. Otherwise, they wouldn't be here.

That's kind of the nature of what I'd like to talk about here, what is in Alberta's best interest. What's in Alberta's best interest politically is to have people represented well across the province so that every voice is heard. Every voice matters, and every voice has value, and that can be demonstrated and represented in this important House, in this important room where we are right now. One needs to consider more than one variable when you're talking about that, and therein, I believe, lies the problem.

The boundaries commission, bless their hearts, did what we asked them to do. We asked them to look at all of Alberta, to take submissions from across Alberta and put together a plan to set boundaries for the next election, and they were successful in doing that. On that basis, we should say thank you to them.

Part of the issue there – and it's not their fault, but I think that this is a lesson for us. The next time this happens, perhaps we should give the boundaries commission a little bit more detailed instruction than what we gave them this time. What I mean by that is that they felt free to – and they were free to – make the decision on the boundaries almost exclusively on the one variable about the population variance between ridings. I have no doubt that in their minds and in their hearts they really felt that that was the right approach to take. You know, an argument can be made that all votes are equal, so that is expressed in the same number of voters per elected MLA.

The problem is, Madam Speaker, that that's actually not the reality. The problem is that out of 87 ridings, some probably had 40 per cent voter turnout – I know the statistics are in the report – and some probably had 60 per cent turnout. So right there the Albertans that expressed their franchise by voting, if they happened to be voting in a riding where only 40 per cent voted, would actually have their vote, just on that one variable alone, having more weight than somebody voting in a riding that had 60 per cent of people coming out to the polls.

Why do I say this? I say this to demonstrate, I think quite obviously, that parity in the number of voters does not guarantee equality of weight of the vote for the people that exercise their franchise by coming out to the polls and making an X beside the candidate of their choice, of their selection. There are other examples I could give, but time is short. I have more to say than the

time allows. I'll live with that one illustration to prove, in my view, that the same number of voters in each riding is in and of itself and all by itself not a guarantee of the equal value, the equal weight of each vote.

The other thing that needs to be understood and, I believe, embraced and dealt with is the idea of access, access of the voters to their MLA, access of the MLA to their voters. This matters. If you look at the report, they do make some comments about my presentation when they were in Calgary. I expressed to them then that in my riding of Calgary-Hays I can essentially walk across my riding in two and a half hours the long way and in probably one hour the short way, because it's not a perfect square or a perfect circle. Well, there are ridings in this province where, if you were to walk across it, it might take a season. It might take three months. In fact, it would take longer to drive across some ridings than it does to walk across mine. Why is that important? It's not about me. I used the example of my riding simply because it's obviously the one I know best because that's where I work to represent the people there.

The problem is that if you want to express your concerns to your Member of the Legislative Assembly, even in this age of voice mail and video chats and video calls, sometimes, many times, actually, there is no replacement for a face-to-face conversation in private with somebody about things that matter to you, because all the members of this House know that when people come to our offices, they don't just talk about wanting a road or a bridge or a hospital or a school – and all those things are hugely important – but sometimes they want to talk privately about: "My family member can't get into the hospital for an operation that my family member needs, and it's life or death." Sometimes you want to look the person in the eye that you're having that conversation with, and sometimes it's helpful to the MLAs to look the constituent in the eye when they're having that conversation so that they can really empathize – feel the joy, feel the pain, feel the concern, whatever the case may be – with that constituent, and you just can't do it unless there's access for the people to their MLA and for the MLA to the people. So distance matters a lot.

I mean, there's a bill in front of the House now, which I won't discuss. I'm not going into another bill, but as an example, Workers' Compensation Board claims: when somebody comes in with a personal Workers' Compensation Board claim, sometimes there are personal details involved that somebody may not feel comfortable doing over a video call, over a fax machine, or over an e-mail. Sometimes they're more comfortable if they can sit with their Member of the Legislative Assembly and know that that member is giving them their full and undivided attention by looking them in the eye and being in the same room with them.

In a small urban riding it's fairly simple as long as you can get an appointment with your MLA and your MLA shows up for the appointment because you can probably get there, if you live in the riding, if you have access to an automobile, in some cases, in many cases in 10 minutes and in most cases in no more than half an hour. But if you are from a part of Alberta that's on the border of British Columbia, on the border of the Northwest Territories, on the border of Saskatchewan, or on the border of the United States, you can't necessarily get there easily in half an hour, to where your MLA's office is. Further to that, it gets doubly complicated because your MLA may well be coming back from Edmonton after a sitting or a meeting in the capital and the MLA isn't even in their own riding as much because they have to travel four or six hours to get back, where they can have that access.

This report did not seem to give any weight to those many, many, many circumstances. The person with the WCB claim in Slave Lake is just as important as the person with a WCB claim in downtown

Edmonton and equally as important as the person in Rocky Mountain House, the person in Milk River, or Pincher Creek. All those files are equally important, yet they don't have equal access to their MLA as the riding gets bigger and their MLA gets further from the capital, and this report has ignored all of those important considerations.

That's why I say that the next time we do this, we probably need to give the people doing the report a little bit more instruction, to say: these things matter, too. We didn't, but because we didn't doesn't mean we should approve a report that is gravely short in consideration of these things, because if we do, we're saying to those Albertans that live near the geographical edge of the province – I think many of us consider where we live to be the centre of the universe, whether you're on the Alberta-Montana border or you're in downtown Edmonton, but the fact is that you are farther away from your MLA and have a tougher time talking about your health considerations, getting access to child care support, getting medical attention.

It's not the same, and this report treats it the same, which makes the report flawed, which makes the report not adequate. It actually doesn't disparage but it shortchanges rural Alberta in a very big way. And even those of us in urban Alberta that represent urban ridings, as I do, should care about this, should give it their full consideration, their full care, the full weight of their thought before they vote on this.

8:20

I know there are members on the government side that voted against the other report. The only comment I'll say about that is that I know there are members on the government side that I believe have the same concerns that I do. I'd like to think every member on the government side has the same concerns that I do, and I'm prepared to believe that they do. I'm prepared to believe that they do. I'm prepared to believe that every member on the government side cares as much about rural Alberta as they do urban Alberta because, whether you're asleep, whether you're awake, whether you live in urban or rural Alberta, all these issues matter. Correct, members?

That's why I would ask members to think, before they support this report, which has so many important shortcomings, of how this is flawed, how we can do better, how members of this House can say that this report isn't good enough. The rural members can say, "Darn it; I'm going to stand up for my constituents because it isn't fair to them," and the urban members can say: "Darn it. Sure, I support most directly the people that vote for me, but I take responsibility for all 4.3 million, approximately, Albertans because the considerations in this House affect all 4.3 million Albertans, and I do not want my Alberta brothers and sisters shortchanged." I really believe that that is something that we should all consider heavily.

There are so many examples, Madam Speaker. You know, I touched on some of them. You don't necessarily – in fact, it may not even be a family member. It may be yourself as a constituent, that you have some medical issue that's quite personal. A lot of medical issues are. I'm not going to be indecent here, and I'm sure you're all grateful for that. The fact is that some things are personal. With some things, it's a lot to discuss it with one other human being, let alone over a telephone line, over an e-mail, over even a video call. Sometimes you actually need to look your Member of the Legislative Assembly, who works for you, in the eye and say: you need to understand how much that means to me, how much that means to my family, how much that means to my community.

The equality of that access is barred by the current form of this report. I know for sure that wasn't the intention of the people that wrote it, at least as sure as I can be without spending hours talking

to them, because I'm making the assumption that all their intentions were good. Surely they did the job we asked them to do in terms of producing a report, and, bless their hearts, they produced a report. But they don't have the same experience as the people in this Legislature do. Consequently, they couldn't possibly know how important it is to have access between MLAs and their constituents, between constituents and their MLAs. This report falls woefully short. Not a little bit short; way short.

You know what? Again, I've talked to several members of my riding who are comfortable with the position I'm taking, that say: "No. We think that with 20-odd MLAs in Calgary and 20-odd MLAs in Edmonton and otherwise, there is a very high chance that urban Alberta's interests will be represented adequately." I haven't had one yet that said: "To hell with rural Alberta. Let 'em not be represented." No one feels that way, yet this report opens the door to treating rural Albertans that way.

That is why we ought not support the report in its current form, because Albertans understand that we're in this together. They understand that if rural Alberta fails and gets poor service, that hurts urban Alberta, and they understand that if urban Alberta fails and gets poor representation, that hurts rural Alberta. It's not an us-and-them thing. We ought not make it an us-and-them thing in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My colleague was cut off during his sentence there. I would love to hear the rest of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was waiting for you to recognize me. I just want to say that I feel so strongly that we should have what I believe is the same heart as Albertans. They don't want to put themselves in front of their fellow Albertans. I think they're happy to work with their fellow Albertans as a province to win or lose, to succeed or fail, to swim or sink, however you want to put it, as a group. I believe that Albertans, being the generous-of-spirit people that they are, the kind, caring, compassionate people that they are, do not want to see another part of their province suffer for their own benefit.

I'll tell you what else they don't want. They don't want to see another part of Alberta suffer to not give them more benefit. If you talk about the urban-rural comparison right now, urban Alberta already has, before we make any changes, more than half of the seats. You know, in a democracy it goes by the weight and the power of the votes, so urban Alberta already has, by virtue of population, the upper hand, if you will. I haven't heard any urban Albertan clamouring to me, saying: let's take it to those rural Albertans. Rather, they would say: "Let's work together. We want our rural partners to succeed. We want our rural partners to have adequate representation for health care, adequate representation for education, adequate representation for social services, adequate representation for transportation and infrastructure building."

They want their fellow Albertans to be well looked after because, on top of everything else, Albertans are pretty social people. I think you'd be hard pressed to find somebody in rural Alberta that doesn't have somebody they love in urban Alberta, and I think you'd find it almost impossible to find somebody in urban Alberta that doesn't have somebody they love in rural Alberta. So since Albertans don't want this to be an us-or-them thing, why would we make it an us-or-them thing in this House? It's not what the people we represent want. I don't think it ever has been. I don't think it ever will be.

This is an opportunity for us representatives of all Albertans. Yes, we all represent our own ridings, but every single one of us also represents all of Alberta. This is an opportunity for us to reflect the Alberta spirit of holding together, pulling together, working together, getting access to their elected people together, getting services that matter to Albertans together. Why would we not support that? I don't think there's anybody that's elected in this House that doesn't care about the whole province, yet if we pass this report, we're allowing a report to be passed that really favours one part of the province heavily over the other. That alone is a reason not to support this bill as it is.

It's not the government's fault. The government, like us, should have perhaps given different instructions to the committee. The opposition should have jumped up and said: we need to give them different instructions. You know what? We're all in this together. None of us did that. Even in this, we're together. Even in this, I can't say that it's the government's fault. In my view, even in this, the government can't legitimately say that this is the opposition's fault.

But what we can do together is to look at the report. What we can do together is to care about all Albertans. What we can do together is to say to Albertans: you all matter. There are no spare Albertans. There are no Albertans that can wait a little bit longer to get their question answered on health care, on education, on social services, on infrastructure, on child support payments, whatever it happens to be that we do. We all know what the important files are because we all have people coming into our offices every week dealing with these important files. I'm telling you that this urban representative in this House doesn't have any problem voting against this report to make sure that rural Alberta doesn't get trampled. All urban members of this House should vote against this report out of solidarity with their urban colleagues, with their urban fellow citizens. This is our opportunity to do just that. Please don't support this report.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I have to say that I believe that this commission – while I feel that they believe they did the right thing, I want to go through why I believe they have failed my constituency.

Now, I want to start with the fact that in the commission's report it starts off with something that is important to recognize, legal requirements. Legal requirements are right underneath there, on page 7 of the boundaries report.

In undertaking this work, the Commission is obliged to meet the requirements of the Act and to give due consideration to decisions of the various courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada and the Alberta Court of Appeal, regarding the creation of electoral division boundaries.

You know, I'm going to go through section 14. This is a clear sentence here on direction that I believe this Legislature gave this commission. I don't believe that there was a lot of leeway in this, the leeway they took, so I want to go to 14.

In determining the area to be included in and in fixing the boundaries of the proposed electoral divisions, the Commission, subject to section 15, may take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate but shall take into consideration . . .

And then it goes into (a) to (h). Very clear: "shall." It must – it must – take these into consideration. These were not optional. I believe that we gave a clear direction to this boundaries commission, which it ignored, and that is failure.

Now, I'm going to start with (a), which is effective representation, "the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." I along with seven colleagues wrote an article, that I will table tomorrow, that was called Effective Representation. We actually put some thought into this after the interim report. I'm not going to read the whole thing because I don't believe that that's going to help, but I will read parts of it.

Electoral boundaries are supposed to be determined by two things – population and extenuating circumstance. To calculate an average population per riding, the people who establish electoral boundaries take the total population and divide it by the number of ridings allowed by the legislature. This average is intended as a start-point or rough guideline only.

The second thing Alberta's electoral boundary people must do is obey the law, which obligates them to propose electoral boundaries that ensure "effective representation." This rule makes provision for extenuating circumstances such as distance, geography, etc. This is so important that Alberta's Electoral Boundaries Act actually says that to accommodate this objective, the population from one riding to another can "vary" by as much as 25%.

It's pretty clear.

Moving on further down in this article that we wrote:

"Effective representation" simply recognizes that some urban MLAs can drive across their constituencies in half an hour or less, and often have no requirement to interact with town councils, school boards, or junior governments. Conversely, in many rural ridings, not only is distance a factor, but [the] MLAs may have dozens of town councils with whom they have to interact, plus several school boards, [municipalities] or county councils, and multiple hospital boards.

The failure of Alberta's [Electoral Boundaries Commission] to establish "effective representation" in its recent recommendations for constituency changes prior to the next Alberta election has some observers suggesting that the Commission has circumvented an earlier decision by the Supreme Court of Canada. This was a 1991 ruling recognizing the importance of "effective representation." The EBC is proposing changes that would eliminate two rural ridings while increasing the size of rural districts.

That is what effective rural representation is. I don't believe that this commission adequately took that into account.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Now, moving on to (b), "sparsity and density of population," it's clear what they did. They divided our province, the population, by 87 and said: this is where we need to be. Clearly, this is the only factor that they have used. That's what it appears to me.

"Common community interests, community organizations, including those of Indian reserves." I have to say that when I presented before the commission, I had said that St. Paul and the Saddle Lake reserve needed to be put into the same constituency because they interact with each other. They have common interests. But also we've got a lot of area around St. Paul. What the commission did was that they lumped St. Paul and Saddle Lake into my constituency. Wonderful people. I'm honoured to represent them possibly one day, but the question is: is it effective representation? I'll tell you that my constituency right now is 15 per cent above the average population when you would expect a rural constituency to be below. That's truly shameful.

The other thing is Métis settlements. You need to be considering Métis settlements. I have two of those in my constituency.

Moving on to (d), it's talking about Edmonton and Calgary, which isn't relevant to my speech.

"Wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries." What happens here is that we need to be saying: can we take counties and municipal districts and put them within one constituency boundary? One constituency boundary. In that way, we're not splitting one MD between several different MLAs. One common interest, one common voice.

Now, "the number of municipalities and other local authorities." This is actually in it. It says that we need to consider this, that we need to consider the number of municipalities and school boards and hospital boards and all these other boards that are within these constituencies. It's unfortunate that they ignored this.

"Geographical features, including existing road systems." Well, I can tell you that my constituency almost, if not for sure, doubled in size. They doubled the size of my constituency. That's unbelievable.

Let's talk about the last one, "the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries." This is another one that is important. This is something that says that we need to clearly make sure that people understand the boundaries they're in.

To go through this, the boundary commission said: "Well, you know what? We're going to explain away what we believe is important." Number 1 on the general reasons for majority recommendations – you're not going to believe this – is relative voting power and voter parity.

The majority supports the following recommendations because they result in minimum variance from the provincial average electoral division population after consideration of all other relevant factors related to the effective representation within Alberta.

They're saying that this is the biggest, the most important thing, and that is not what section 14 says. Section 14 says that there are a lot of very important things that need to be considered. That's why I am saying that this commission has failed horribly.

8:40

Now, I'm going to go on to some of the rural concerns. This is number 2. What we've got here are direct quotes from the boundary commission, Mr. Speaker.

While increased geographic size will likely increase the number of elected officials, community organizations and others with whom an MLA must connect, the majority is not satisfied that the resulting demands have been shown to significantly exceed those placed on MLAs serving [in] smaller geographic areas, including those in cities. Each riding, no doubt, imposes its own particular claims on an MLA's time and resources; the majority does not accept that these demands increase only with an increase in geographic size.

This actually says the exact opposite of section 14, what they were mandated to follow. They actually put this in here. It's unbelievable.

Now I'll go on to another one.

While consideration of "common community interests" is such a factor, most existing electoral divisions outside of Edmonton and Calgary do not contain a single common community in total, or individually. These existing 43 electoral divisions together contain 16 cities, along with the large metropolitan areas [such as] Sherwood Park and Fort McMurray. Some are primarily agricultural in focus, but others [are] oil and gas . . . or a forestry, mining or tourism focus or some combination of all these factors. As a result, the majority could not conclude that those Albertans living outside of Edmonton or Calgary share a common community of interest for that reason alone or that each of these 43 constituencies share a common . . . interest one with the other.

So they literally just said, "I'm going to ignore more of section 14," more of the mandate we gave them. It's unbelievable that they even put this in the report because it actually says the exact opposite of

what we gave them as a mandate. It's unbelievable. It's truly unbelievable.

What we've got here is the next one.

The core concern that a reduction in the number of constituencies located in rural areas [within] the province will reduce the rural "voice" in the legislature, with the result that rural concerns will command less attention and fewer resources than they have in the past, was frequently raised. The inevitable result of applying the principle of representation by population as a relevant factor to constituency design is that as population shifts, the electoral divisions will also shift to ensure that all Albertans are effectively represented. To do otherwise would be to make some voices disproportionately louder than others, defeat the principle of representation by population and impede the effective representation in urban constituencies.

They literally, again, hammered section 14. This is unbelievable, that this is even in their boundary commission report. How can you say that your mandate is to follow section 14 yet throw out everything you don't like other than voter parity?

Now I want to go on to the one that I think is most important.

Further, where constituency size is large, satellite offices can be opened within it. This assumes that sufficient budget has been provided to their MLAs to allow for the hiring of staff and paying of additional expenses to meet these needs. While the funding model for MLA office budgets is well outside the jurisdiction of this Commission, improvements addressing the specific costs of additional staff and the operation of satellite offices for remote constituencies would certainly help voters in geographically large electoral divisions feel that they can more easily access the services of their MLAs.

Wow. They actually just mandated us to do something. That's remarkable. The commission had the incredible – they feel they have so much power in this that they can ignore section 14 and totally disregard it, and then they mandate us to do something, that we need to give more money to rural Albertans so that we can do our jobs. You know what? In the end, it comes down to the fact that they had decided that voters per electoral division was of the utmost importance. How? How can they justify this report?

The Acting Speaker: Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think we can just about all agree that our Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is certainly passionate about the Electoral Boundaries Commission and what happened to his riding. I'd certainly like to hear, as I think we all would, some more of what went on and what he believes has happened.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've kind of explained what happened with my constituency, but you know what? Unless you hear some of the numbers, hear what the actual boundaries commission wrote about Bonnyville-Cold Lake, it's hard to actually believe how poorly they've treated my constituency and other rural constituencies across Alberta.

It is recommended that the boundaries of the electoral division of Cold Lake-St. Paul be as shown on Map 56, resulting in a population of 53,809 [people], 15% above provincial average population size. The majority believes this variance can be supported as this is an area where future population growth is likely to fall . . . below the provincial average.

I don't remember seeing in the boundaries commission's mandate to start speculating on where populations were supposed to go. I understand that they are allowed to consider other things, but they disregarded most of section 14, in my opinion. Yet

somehow they have made the determination that my constituency is going to shrink. I cannot believe that they can do this, make a determination without actually backing it up with any factual evidence.

I can tell you that I put forward factual evidence to the committee, when I presented before them, that my constituency was going to grow beyond the provincial average – that was during the interim report period – yet somehow they determined that my constituency was going to shrink. Now, the only reason that I can come up with is that they determined that the NDP government's attack on my energy centre in Bonnyville-Cold Lake was going to literally put me out of business, if you will. It literally will destroy the towns and cities within my constituency. That's the only determination that I can come up with. It's unbelievable that they were allowed to make a determination like this with no facts. Unbelievable.

It is also a constituency that would be relatively small in geographic size, with the uninhabited Air Weapons Range being a large part of its geography. It is expected that by the time the electoral boundaries are next reviewed, the constituency population will be at or below the provincial average.

So now they're saying that because I had a smaller rural constituency, that makes up for the fact that they added a whole bunch of population to it, not the fact that a smaller rural constituency just has a lot more people in it.

The fact that we have a diverse group of different, incredible cultures within my constituency: this all was ignored. This was all supposed to be part of the government making a decision. This is why I'm telling you that should there ever be a court challenge on the validity of the boundaries commission and this report that they put out, they're going to use Bonnyville-Cold Lake to do that court challenge because what they've done to my constituency is an abomination. Fifteen per cent above the average population in Alberta is just unreasonable. Making unfactual determinations was well outside of the mandate.

8:50

It is unbelievable that we are here at this time debating this. What we should have done is vote down the motion that brought this forward. We should have said, "Let's throw this out; let's go with the old constituencies," because at least that's something we can work with. I'll tell you that I believe this boundaries commission dropped the ball, and it literally threw a ton of rural constituencies to the mercy of the wolves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I felt that I had to say something tonight given that I'm the MLA representing the largest by square kilometres constituency in the province, which has now become even larger. It now, in fact, is larger than the island of Newfoundland, which I think gives some people pause.

That said, I don't personally have a lot of disagreement with the recommendations for my own constituency. Grimshaw was added, which makes sense. They already come to my office in Peace River because it's much closer for them. It's only, like, a 20-minute drive as opposed to an hour's drive to get to Fairview. Tallcree First Nation: it's the same thing with them. It's much more convenient for them to come to Fort Vermilion, and I have these interactions. So the changes make sense, but it doesn't make sense to make it so big that it makes it even harder for me to be an effective representative. I do absolutely agree with the mover of this motion that the changes recommended "do not adequately provide for the

effective representation of rural Alberta." But at the same time I'm torn, and I'll tell you why I'm torn.

I have to say, though, about the commission that I attended their very first hearing up in Peace River. I didn't go to make a presentation. I just simply was going to be there to support it. But when they discovered that the local MLA was there, they had all kinds of questions. I tried, in answering their questions, to give them a sense of what it is like to be a rural MLA and to represent such a large area. I tried to give them a sense of the hours and hours and hours that I spend on the road driving. My constituency easily – and this is when roads are good – is six hours from south to north, six hours from east to west. That's just to get from one end to the other. That's not counting all of the areas in between. In winter you can multiply that by whatever, just depending on what roads are like. So it's huge. Recently I think I logged 2,000 kilometres over one weekend.

Those are hours where I'm not being an effective MLA because I'm in my vehicle driving. Yes, I listen to books on tape. I convert reports and things so that I can listen to them. I'm trying to learn French. I'm trying to be productive with it. But it's not me representing my constituents when I'm travelling on the road. I know that that's true of the other rural MLAs as well, so it's a huge consideration. I did try to help the commission understand that, and I believe that they were really, sincerely trying to do their job. I respect what my colleague here from Calgary-Hays has said, that, really, they were working with what they were given. They were given a mandate, and this is how they interpreted the mandate.

I also explored with them possibilities of some alternative things. If you're representing a large rural constituency, what other ways could you be effective? Could you do it with technology? I said that, absolutely, you could. There are ways to do those things. That's also true, though, of urban constituencies. You can use technology. You don't have to be face to face. In rural constituencies technology isn't all that reliable, and I did tell the commission that. There are areas of my constituency where we still have unreliable cell coverage. There is a large stretch where I drive where I have no cellphone, no Internet, nothing for hours at a time. So, you know, to say that that would replace it is simply not realistic.

We talked about having multiple offices and having constituency assistants do mobile offices, which mine do. However, there is a misunderstanding among many urban residents – I don't know about MLAs – that those of us in rural constituencies get extra budget to cover several offices, that our budget is large enough to cover two or three offices because we don't pay as high a rent as in the cities. This is simply not the case. We pay comparable amounts of money, and our staffing costs are identical. I cannot pay two full-time staff. I just do not have the funds for that in my budget.

I think this is maybe where the boundaries commission came up with the notion of recommending more funds to help support us, which, as my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake says, is quite outside their mandate. But, you know, certainly, it's worthy of consideration if it's something that we could do. I think they were trying really hard to do the right thing. I kind of hoped that they really got the message when they were stranded in Peace River because of bad weather and couldn't go to Grande Prairie the next day, because that's what we all put up with, but that somehow didn't really seem to get the message across. Again, I think that was no fault of theirs.

There are limitations when you don't live in a large rural constituency or even part of the province. You really don't understand what it's all about. I didn't. When I used to live in Edmonton, I never went to West Edmonton Mall because it was too far to drive. Now I think nothing of driving back and forth three

hours from Peace River to High Level several times a week. It's just part of my life. But if you come from an area of the province where you don't see that, it's hard to comprehend. Any time ministers come up, I try to make sure I get them on a road trip so they get a feel for what we're putting up with, and I think many of them who have come do understand that. I think that they're very, very sympathetic to the concerns that all of us here in rural constituencies are bringing up and my colleagues on this side of the House as well.

I think the question is: what does it mean to be an effective representative, and what does that really constitute? As I've already said, spending hours in your vehicle driving: that's not being effective. But there are a few other challenges that I don't know if they've really been identified yet. For a rural constituency like mine I have three distinct, very large industries that I must represent and lobby for their interest, communicate with. I've got agriculture, I've got forestry, and I've got oil and gas. In a town, say Calgary, for example, if you want to advocate for something like the green line, several MLAs can get together and work together and advocate for one project. I have multiple projects at any given time that I have to advocate for. Is it easy to be an effective representative? Well, I do my best, but it's a challenge.

We work collaboratively. I work with my colleague over in Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. I work with my colleague down in Lesser Slave Lake. We try to cover events for each other because there just aren't enough of us to go around. My constituents understand that. They're very, very patient. They know that if I'm at High Level for Canada Day, they're not going to see me again for another four years because I just can't get around to every community. Again, that doesn't mean that that's effective representation, you know. It really doesn't. I feel like the commission's report really has let us down in rural Alberta. It does really concern me, and I have to add that I have heard a lot. I've heard a lot from my constituents. I've heard a lot at AAMD and C, a lot at AUMA. I know that there are many, many in the province in rural Alberta that feel exactly the same way, and they're really asking: what can we do?

This is where I come up against the problem and why I'm torn. What can we do when we strike a commission that is independent and we ask them to make a report that affects every one of us here in this House quite profoundly, both negatively and positively, when it comes to political advantage? If we strike a commission, which happened some years back in the province – an independent commission was struck to recommend changes to salaries for MLAs. If that commission comes back and the MLAs say, "We don't like what you said, so we're not going to listen to it; we're going to do things the way we want it," what, really, does that say? That really concerns me. That's where I'm sort of in the middle here thinking: really, how effectively can we do this? Can we say to the commission, "Thank you; we appreciate the work you did, but we don't like the result, so we're going to go back to the drawing board"? Or do we find a way to live with what we've been given and ensure that rural Alberta is represented as effectively as possible through other means?

That's kind of where I'm standing on this issue. I'm hoping that we're going to be able to find some kind of a compromise, maybe, that will help those of us in rural constituencies be as effective as we can, because we certainly do need and appreciate that support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really want to thank the Member for Peace River for her words. I was recently up in her constituency for the first time over Thanksgiving because my partner's family lives up in High Level, and it is very different driving. My partner lives in Hinton, so I did Calgary to Hinton. Then we did Hinton to Grande Prairie and then Grande Prairie to High Level and then back, High Level straight to Hinton. It's a hell of a drive, I can say. Sorry. That's unparliamentary. But I can just tell you all that if you've never done that drive, it takes quite a lot out of you. I really appreciate everything that the member said, and I really appreciate the work that she does for her constituents. I know it's very difficult for many of my colleagues who are in rural ridings, who have to drive, like the member was saying, six hours from bottom to top. The member is right on the border of the Northwest Territories and goes right close to Grande Prairie. Most Albertans and nearly I'd probably say 90 per cent of Calgarians have not gone that far north.

9:00

So I really appreciate all that she does. I really appreciate her bringing the concerns of her constituents here to the House and just her words today to remind us all that this was an independent commission, that it was an independent commission that was hired by this House, and that we as members have a choice of whether we accept the commission's report or not. However, if we do say no, where does that put us? Where does that put us for future separate committees whom we have to hire, whether it be the next boundary commission or other commissions that we call? We can call as many commissions as we like and constantly say that we don't like their reports. That seems to be quite a waste of money. It seems like we are not agreeing – well, it's definitely not agreeing with their report, but it's also making them feel like we're just wasting their time. Pretty soon, if we keep doing that and we make a habit of doing that and this House makes a habit of doing that, it's going to be very difficult for us to find people who are willing to sit on those commissions.

That was a bit tangential. But I just once again want to thank the member for her words and thank her for the work that she does.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I was interested in your example about MLA wages. Now, let's say that we gave the commission, this independent commission, a mandate to look at MLA wages that said plus or minus 5 per cent, and the commission comes back with a 40 per cent increase in wage. Do you think that you would agree with that commission, or would you say, "You went well beyond what we mandated you to do"? That is actually what has happened with the boundary commission that we see with this act in front of us today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: I have to say that that's a really good question. I don't have a real easy answer for that. I think, though, again, that that's the risk that you take when you strike an independent commission to do something. You may get something back that you like; you may get something back that you don't like. You know, I do want to reinforce that I think it's really, really important that we not forget that rural Alberta is so incredibly important and that we find a way, all of us here in the room, to support the needs of rural Alberta, however that might look.

Thank you for that comment.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I'm sure everybody is waiting with bated breath for the speech I have before me. I want to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake as well as the Member for Peace River. You know, I think it's important for all of us urban MLAs to understand that rural representation – I don't want to state the obvious – is not the same as urban representation. Certainly, in my experiences with my rural colleagues, there certainly is a demand upon them to be at every event, every school, every graduation more so than maybe us urban representatives.

The other thing that I think we need to really understand here, which nobody has mentioned and I will from the urban perspective, is the toll on the family. The hon. Member for Peace River mentioned six-hour drives. When we think about it, you know, we're here from Monday to Thursday, and then there may be events on Friday and Saturday and Sunday. What is the time that these members are spending with their families? We talk about jurisdictions that are the size of Newfoundland, jurisdictions larger than Prince Edward Island. I mean, we're talking about areas within Canada that have their own governments, and here we have a single representative representing the provincial government, a single representative also representing the opposition side of a provincial party.

There's a toll. There's a toll on husbands, wives, partners, children. We have to take that into consideration when making this very, very important decision. Effective representation, yeah, absolutely, is important. It's hugely important. But so is the family. The family is hugely important as well. I, of course, support my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod in regard to Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act, and this amendment because of the toll it takes on the families, because of the toll it takes on the constituents.

Let's put this in perspective, right? I mean, we have colleagues here who are trying to ensure that the needs of his or her constituents are satisfied but also to balance work and life. You know, what's really sad is that if the hon. Member for Peace River indicates that a family member requires her to be somewhere and she's unable to make an event that maybe those people had been waiting for for months, is she the bad person here? No, not the bad person. She has a responsibility to her family member, but she also has a responsibility to her constituents.

You know, for me, I'm in a constituency where it's shaped like a nice little square. To be quite frank, I could probably go for a good run and cover pretty much the entire constituency, as I'm sure you can, Mr. Speaker, right? I mean, again, the demands that you or I have are not the same as what our rural colleagues have. So for those of us speaking out against this amendment who are from urban ridings, I think we really need to put this in perspective for our rural colleagues, the demands that they are facing through their constituents but also the strains on their families, which are quite intense.

I do of course represent the constituency of Calgary-West. I've listened with interest to all my rural colleagues and the difficult demands that these MLAs are facing. But the main concern that I as well as the UCP caucus have with Bill 33 is that the boundary commission chose to make this voter parity rather than effective representation, and that's concerning. In fact, in its report the commission repeatedly dismissed the challenges of travelling long distances for rural members: as I previously stated, six hours.

You know, I think about just from Calgary to Edmonton – and I'm sure that's nothing to you, hon. Member for Peace River. The first thing on my mind when I leave here tomorrow is getting to my family. That's still a three-hour drive. I just want to make sure that I'm there in time to tuck my kids in at the end of the night. I can only imagine having to drive the distance that you have to drive or that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake or my friend the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has to drive.

9:10

Quite frankly, when I got here from our previous legacy party and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti was the whip, I actually thought he lived closer to Edmonton than I did in Calgary. I'm a born-and-raised Albertan – right? – but again I don't travel that far north, which is to his point, why having northern representation input on this committee should have been very vitally important. We need to understand.

I don't dismiss what the commission was trying to do. I believe that they had great intentions. I think that they did the best that they could do, but if we are going to have proper representation, proper work-life balance, we have to have input from all stakeholders from every corner of this province. Although I think there were attempts made, from what I have heard from my friends from northern Alberta, maybe there could have been better input from them. Maybe the commission could have consulted a bit more, Mr. Speaker. I think that's very important. It's very, very important that we hear from our friends from northern Alberta and even my friends from southern Alberta.

I mean, I've heard the same stories from my friend from the Medicine Hat area. There are great distances. I can tell you that my friend from Strathmore-Brooks, when he and I were doing a couple of events regarding unification, Mr. Speaker, I remember commenting to him the great distance of travelling from Strathmore to Brooks. I couldn't imagine. Even then, that was only a portion of his riding. It is a huge riding, so to imagine that that riding, which I think is going to be broken up into Chestermere-Strathmore – then you have Brooks, and I think Brooks goes all the way to the Saskatchewan border.

These are long distances to travel, and we haven't even talked, as my friend here from Peace River did, about weather conditions. We haven't even talked about the safety concerns about having no cellphone coverage, about no Internet. It's not about doing work while you're driving. Let's just talk about general safety. To be in a position where you are travelling in northern Alberta with no cellphone coverage in areas where the weather is bad: that's unsafe. Are we talking about a bill when we talk about work conditions and being safe? That's not safe. For this member here to travel six hours when at times, as we get in northern Alberta, there's less light, right? So we're talking about in darkness, poor road conditions, cold weather, no cellphone coverage. Boy, I hope you've got a new vehicle, and it better be working properly. What else have we got, you know? Buses break down, too. No cellphone coverage.

I mean, you're going to have your driver. That was one of the most ridiculous, to be honest with you, things that I've heard. For some reason our friends in rural Alberta are going to require a driver, and they can sit in their car and do whatever work needs to be done. I mean, again, that's just not reasonable. That's really not reasonable.

I think that if we have that effective representation, we have to make sure that my friend from Peace River, my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake, my friends from all these other rural ridings can get from point A to point B within a reasonable amount of time – I know that's subjective – during a day and a reasonable amount of time to get home. I think that's another thing people need to

really take into consideration. When I go and do what I have to do in my job as an MLA, as a representative, will I get home to be with my family at the end of the night? From what I've seen listening to my friends here in rural ridings, the answer is no. You're not going to be able to get home. Is that reasonable? That's not reasonable. Selfishly, in my urban riding there are things I can do across the street, right? I went to a school opening that, really, was within walking distance. Two, actually, were within walking distance. Again, you know, people need to understand the difference between rural responsibilities and urban responsibilities.

I think that for all of our friends here who are representing urban ridings, before we're quick to pass judgment in support of this bill, each and every one of us from an urban riding really needs to sit down and talk with our friends in a rural riding and understand, you know: what are the challenges that you guys face that we don't face, and how is it that we can have that effective representation? We have to make sure that our constituents are represented properly.

When I hear stories about, you know, July 1 and "Maybe I'll see you in a couple of years" – and I know that she's talking about just to July 1 and stuff like that. But, for example, you know, for me, I attend an event for Remembrance Day in my constituency, and I've got nearly 2,000 people showing up, right? At the end of the day I just go home. Quite frankly, the longest part of my day is standing there and giving my two-minute speech. For you, hon. member, I'm sure it's the six-hour drive, if you can get there, and then doing what you have to do. Then, of course, because through no fault of your own you're there when you can be, every person wants to grab your attention – right? – whereas, for me, I'm just a guy in the crowd. A few people say hi. A few people thank me. But I understand.

We talk about rural representation. I talked to the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, right? When he's at an event – I mean, we all know he's a wonderful guy – I can tell you that every single person wants to talk to him, wants to have that engagement with him. That takes time. When we're talking about such large jurisdictions, again, let's put this into context. The size of Newfoundland: that, to me, just blew me away. And to think about you going from part of your constituency to the other part of your constituency in I think you said six hours: that's probably going slightly above the speed limit, right? I mean, let's be honest. If we're doing the speed limit, I'll give six and a half. My point is that that's a long drive. I think that if we are going to have this effective representation, if we are going to ensure that we have a work-life balance, ensure our families are taken care of, it is vitally important that every single one of us in this Chamber sit back and reflect. It's no disrespect to this commission, absolutely.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cyr: You know, I'm always honoured to represent my constituents, and I'm willing to put the hours in, to make sure that my constituents are heard, but I'll tell you that it is an impact to my family life, and I can tell you that I expect to hear from all of the rural MLAs out there that it's the same thing for them. It's ironic that that's not the first thing that I thought of, that it had to be an urban MLA that pointed that out, that this has an impact on me and my family.

Mr. Ellis: Children first.

9:20

Mr. Cyr: Children first. Exactly. I have to thank him for doing that and pointing out that there are more things than just being an MLA even though I feel so much honour to be elected.

Now, I was curious. My colleague has brought forward a lot of passion for family life. I guess my question to him is: if you were you to trade places with a rural MLA for even a week, what do you think that would end up like, sir?

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Wow. That's a great question because, to be honest with you, that is something that I have actually thought of, and sadly I think that what comes to my mind is the word "divorce." You know, my wife – and I say this with all due respect. For me to be away from her and my kids as it is puts a real strain on any relationship. I'm no different than anyone in this Chamber. Think of more time away, more driving time, you know, having to go to an event where it's not to give a quick speech, say a few words, and you're out but to have to go there and talk to everyone because, quite frankly, as a rural MLA you're important to that community. I mean, again, this is their opportunity to speak to a representative on a provincial level, so each one of these people – and you have to do this. I get it. You have to do this. You have to take the time to talk to every one of those constituents. I can tell that every single one of the rural MLAs here – and I've never heard anything bad about anyone who does not take the time as a rural MLA to talk to their constituents.

You know, as my friend from Grande Prairie-Wapiti said – I mean, we were talking about this just earlier – he has 51 councillors. Is that correct, sir? Fifty-one councillors. I have one that I share with, I think, two or three other folks in this Chamber, and I have, you know, one MP that I deal with, right? This is apples to oranges as far as I'm concerned. It's not the exact same representation.

Now, I will say this. From an urban perspective, I'm sure that I have challenges on a daily basis that are not the same as what rural folks have, right? I mean, I'm not saying that it's, you know, easy. I just have different challenges. I think that all the urban folks here just need to recognize that our friends from rural Alberta have challenges.

I'm not sure that this piece of legislation is completely fair or representative of our friends in rural Alberta, again, from a work-life balance perspective. That's serious. We all talk in this Chamber about how much we care about our families. This is supposed to be family friendly, right? This is what it was touted to be, a family-friendly Chamber. I don't see anything family friendly for my friend from Peace River. I don't see anything family friendly for my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I see challenges that each one of them has on a daily basis. I can only imagine what my friend here from Peace River has to do this weekend even to get to one event – well, first of all, to get home but then to get to one – let alone, you know, two or three. In my constituency we talk about challenges. Yeah, I get invited to a lot of things, so I, like you, Mr. Speaker, may go to two or three in a night. For my friend here from Peace River, you're lucky if you get in that one in a day, maybe two on the weekend.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill. First, I want to begin by thanking the Electoral Boundaries Commission for their work. They've put in a lot of time on this bill. I want to thank the minister responsible for democratic renewal – or was that Justice? – for bringing this forward.

An Hon. Member: Transportation.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, it's the thought that counts, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-West for his comments. He has come with me to Brooks quite a few times and has managed to see in just a small way the demands which rural MLAs have. He also, I thought, brought a good perspective forward on the different demands that urban MLAs have. I'm greatly sympathetic to the urban MLAs and rural MLAs who represent constituencies that are overpopulated.

There is a need to have an Electoral Boundaries Commission about every two elections. That's our general principle here. As much as possible we want the populations to be roughly equal when we're going to the polls. The Member for Calgary-South East represents a massive constituency that is almost the size of a federal constituency in terms of population. That is a need. I as a rural MLA can sympathize with him and other MLAs here who represent overpopulated constituencies and the demands it places on them. But I'm asking for some understanding from the MLAs representing urban constituencies here, for them to understand the very different demands placed upon rural MLAs. I'll speak about that in a second.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission was agreed to unanimously by all members of this House, all parties, even when we had more parties at the time, and my hope was that it was going to be able to do its job correctly. Now, I have some personal insight on this. My father-in-law actually served on an Electoral Boundaries Commission a number of years ago. I think that it was in the '90s or early 2000s, when Premier Klein was still in office. He was appointed to the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

I remember I had questioned the independence of the Electoral Boundaries Commission around him. I didn't make the joke at the time because I didn't see it, but I would have said, if it was now, that it's about as independent as I am. Now, he scolded me greatly. My father-in-law might be an older guy, and he was quite sick at the time, so you might think he's not particularly feisty. But I can't use words that are parliamentary to describe what he almost did to me when I accused the process of not being particularly independent. If it was independent or not, he certainly believed that it was, and he put the fear of God in me of ever questioning that again. I spent a great deal of time talking to him about the process and understanding it.

Now, it is inevitable that politics come into it. It's inevitably a political document. We all have vested interests in it. Three members are appointed by the Premier, two members by the Leader of the Official Opposition. We would be fooling ourselves to believe that there is nothing political about that. It is, nonetheless, a significantly more independent system than you see in the majority of the states to the south, where the politicians themselves draw the borders and gerrymandering is a horrible, horrible problem. In blue states Democrats gerrymander it for themselves. In red states Republicans gerrymander it for them. It actually bleeds through onto the federal level because these things are somewhat intertwined. That is possibly the worst possible system. If you're going to have a single-member plurality or first past the post system, you need to have a relatively independent way of drawing these boundaries. The United States is possibly the best argument I've ever seen for proportional representation, and I say this as someone who does not believe in proportional representation.

Our system in Canada, both federally and in Alberta, is significantly more independent and, I think, well thought out than in the United States, but it is not without its flaws. I think it behooves us to understand that, that it's not perfect. These are humans on the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and humans are not perfect. They're capable of making mistakes. They're capable of not getting it right.

To the members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission's credit, they recognized that they got quite a bit wrong in the first draft and committed to trying to get it right in the second. Now, unfortunately, I think they actually got the second worse than the first, particularly in some regions. I think that in the cities they did a pretty decent job. I think it's admittedly easier to draw the boundaries within the two large cities. You've got neighbourhoods that you try to keep together, but you're really moving boundaries around, generally, a couple of blocks one way or a couple of streets the other. It's not radically different. I think they did a very good job, with a few exceptions perhaps, within the cities, but in rural Alberta they made some very, very significant mistakes.

9:30

They are humans. There are five people, a commissioner and two others from each side of the aisle, and they inevitably can't know everything on the ground. One I think was from Acme, another one from possibly Clearwater county, one from Calgary, and possibly another from Calgary. They don't have someone in Brooks who knows the lay of the land, which is why in the first report, for my own constituency, they made quite a mess out of it. They separated Strathmore and Brooks, which had been together since the 1993 election, I believe it was. They took Strathmore, connected it with Drumheller. That wasn't an outrageous proposition. That was actually kind of a reasonable match.

It was everything else they did with the counties that was unreasonable. They took a small slice of Vulcan county and added it in. They threw in Siksika Nation, which was reasonable. But they took a slice of Vulcan county, just a couple hundred, maybe a thousand people in the Arrowwood and Mossleigh area, and threw it up into the new constituency for Strathmore and Drumheller. They sliced those people out of Vulcan county. They would have essentially alienated them from the vast majority of the population representing their municipalities. Then in the north they took slices of Stettler county but not all of it, roughly half of it, and added it in. They threw in the special areas and a whole bunch of other smaller municipalities that were cut up in that dog's breakfast of a constituency.

Then on the southern side they proposed something similar to what they've come up with in the second draft for Brooks-Medicine Hat, but they took Newell county and, for some odd reason, took a small slice out of it, the Rainier, Scandia, Rolling Hills area. The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park knows the area pretty well. Other than that, I think that very few people have heard of these places. They're hamlets with about 150 to 200 people. They don't appear on the map unless you zoom in really close on Google. But there are real people who live there with real needs, and they were sliced off and thrown into a different constituency.

What were they going to call it? It essentially went into Little Bow. Taber-Vulcan was what they proposed for that one. The Member for Little Bow right now was looking forward to getting some really good Conservative voters out of my neck of the woods for it. Alas, they put them back in with Brooks. It was just a few hundred people, again, that they had just taken out of the constituency in Newell county and thrown onto the other side of the Bow River. As hard as the Member for Little Bow works, it would be hard to blame him, if he's the MLA for there, if he was not able to pay these few hundred people the attention that he would pay to the people in Vulcan county, who have more homogeneous issues. At the same time, it would have thrown a few people from Vulcan county, at the northern end of his county, back up into the other end of my remaining constituency, alienating them.

So it wasn't a very good proposal. I provided a very detailed submission to the Electoral Boundaries Commission when they

came through Brooks. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East was there, if I'm not mistaken. Little Bow, I think you were there. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat was there and Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Schneider: And Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. Lethbridge-East was there.

We provided a very, very thorough submission about what to do on a regional basis. Strathmore-Brooks was the only large rural constituency in southern Alberta, out of the large rural ones, that actually had the appropriate population. We were within a few hundred people of being smack on the exact number of the average population of Alberta. There was no need to change Strathmore-Brooks.

Strathmore is a growth node. We've got a lot of hamlets on the west side of Wheatland county that are growing. Lyalta, Carseland, Speargrass, and Strathmore itself are growing quite quickly. So it was going to keep up with population growth around the province. There was no need to touch Strathmore-Brooks. All of those counties were intact. It was a really nice, watertight constituency. You had Strathmore with Wheatland county and everything in Wheatland county in a single constituency, then the same with Brooks and everything within Newell county. It made really good sense. I'll speak in a moment about why that's so important, and I'll discuss that with my urban colleagues. The demands on us are very different, especially with local municipal issues.

I had recommended keeping Strathmore-Brooks together, but we ought to deal with, obviously, the population disparities in the other constituencies surrounding us, so we put forward a thoughtful submission that would have corrected some of this. It would have taken what the boundaries commission had proposed for the rump of Drumheller-Stettler, so minus the town of Stettler but the rest of that riding, moved it down, continued south of the special areas into parts of Cypress county that they proposed to put with Brooks, and then move Siksika Nation and the sliver of Vulcan county back into Taber-Vulcan and given back to Brooks that section of Newell county that had been cut off.

Now, my counties and towns were all in agreement. They said that if you're going to separate Strathmore and Brooks, at least keep the counties together. The outlying communities identify with the larger centre in the middle, and it makes no sense to cut it off, and it's important.

The second round of the Electoral Boundaries Commission made things significantly worse, though. They restored the integrity of Newell county – they put those hamlets back in – but then they did something that not a single person presented in person on the Strathmore side of the constituency. For the first time in the modern history of Alberta they combined Strathmore and Chestermere, not a generally natural pairing. Strathmore is a rural town, with some commuters into Calgary. Chestermere is more of a suburban Calgary community with some of its own – they're different communities. Strathmore and Brooks were probably a more natural pair.

That wasn't unreasonable, though, to put Strathmore and Chestermere together, but what was unreasonable was that they cut Wheatland county, which for the last two decades had been in a single constituency. Wheatland county, only a couple of thousand people: they cut it into four separate constituencies. Now, the winner in this lottery is the Member for Airdrie, who would get some constituents of mine from the rural areas, in Nightingale and some little hamlets there. Again, most people here have probably not heard of these areas, but they're good people. She's getting some pretty solid conservative voters out of there. I go duck hunting

there pretty regularly, so she'll have to invite me to her territory if this is what goes through. But there are just a couple of hundred people at most – it's a very unpopulated area – and they identify with Strathmore.

Now, I'd chance to say that a large number of the people there who are going to be put into the Airdrie-East constituency under this proposal have never been to Airdrie other than perhaps a stop-through on the way. No offence to Airdrie – I mean that with all respect to the Member for Airdrie and her constituents – but many of the people from Wheatland county, the area north and northeast of Strathmore going to Airdrie-East, have possibly never been to Airdrie for more than a few minutes. They don't identify with Airdrie in any way. There's not a main transportation route to there. It's completely bogus.

Then there are the areas on the east end of Wheatland county: Hussar, Standard, Rockyford. We've got the village of Rosebud there. It's got some of the best theatre in Alberta. Its new executive director is the former short-term Member for Calgary-Elbow, Mr. Gordon Dirks. That area there, though, eastern Wheatland county, has been put into Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They'll become outstanding constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I suppose.

Rockyford, Hussar, Standard, in that area . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I would like to hear the rest of my colleague's statement there because I was very interested to hear what happened to his constituency. It sounds like he has a lot of the same challenges that I have in Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Thank you, sir.

9:40

Mr. Fildebrandt: I wanted to hear the end of my speech, too, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure all members look forward to it with bated breath.

But this area, these are a couple of little villages and some rural farms. I'm willing to bet 20 bucks to any member in this House that the majority of people in Hussar, Standard, or Rockyford have never been to either Olds, Didsbury, or Three Hills. They will be very surprised to learn that they'll be a part of a constituency that is named for places very, very far from where there are. It's going to disenfranchise them in many ways.

Then, the craziest of all are the hamlets of Gleichen and Cluny. They've been put into the – you can't call it Little Bow. You can't call it Vulcan-Taber. You can't call it anything but the hourglass of Montana or Montana's hat. It is shaped as an hourglass, and it goes from the Montana border at a pretty wide spread, comes in, gets real skinny on both ends as it squeezes its way past Lethbridge, and then it bursts out again, shaped as an hourglass, and comes all the way up and takes in the hamlets of Gleichen and Cluny, not more than a few hundred people. With all due respect to the Member for Little Bow – with all due respect – it's a couple hundred people. They're not going to be able to be effectively represented, no matter how excellent the MLA for that area is. They need to be with Wheatland county.

Now, the demands on rural MLAs are radically different. I did some back-of-napkin math, so bear with me. I travel about 38,000, 40,000 kilometres a year for the job. That works out to – at two kilometres a minute I spend approximately 13 days a year in my truck, 13 days a year just driving. I warn you to stay clear.

Now, the Member for Calgary-West explained about work-life balance. I actually didn't really realize how much I was working until I had a little more time on my hands. You know, I've got a

young daughter, and she had her first words just the other week, and I got them while I was in Edmonton, here. It was, you know, just FaceTime Live-ing her, and I managed to be there for that moment of her first words even though I'm very far away.

An Hon. Member: What were they?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It was "dada." Mama was not happy. I got to be there for that moment even though I'm very far away.

But I've realized in the last few months just how much I'm gone from my family, and I cannot imagine having to be gone even more. With these constituencies that are far flung, all the way to Saskatchewan in some cases, from areas that are nowhere close to it, we need to be aware of the human cost to this. But it's not about us. We need to be aware of what this does for our constituents.

You know, I'm going to say something that – it is parliamentary, but it's pushing the line. The hon. Leader of the Opposition said this to me once. Bear with me. He said: the difference between an urban and rural MLA is that we keep toilet paper in our truck.

Now, I keep jerry cans in my truck, and New Year's is coming up.

An Hon. Member: Happy New Year.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Happy New Year.

I have to keep jerry cans in my truck, and I'm sure the vast majority of rural MLAs have to as well, because, you know, I've had some pretty close calls. I'm very glad I keep at least one or two jerry cans in the back.

But these are issues that I just really want my urban colleagues of all parties here to appreciate. You have your own unique challenges that we need to appreciate, especially oversized constituencies, and that's an issue that needs to get fixed, but I think that this boundaries commission got it very, very wrong. There is never going to be a perfect report. There's never even going to be a right report. I know previous ones have got it wrong, too, and I won't tell that to my father-in-law. I fear him now. But this commission got it very wrong, and we need to go back to the drawing board.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and talk in support of the reasoned motion on Bill 33. First of all, I too would like to echo thanks to the five people on the Electoral Boundaries Commission and thank them for their effort.

I would also like to say to my colleagues that have spoken earlier on this that I'd very, very much like to thank them all and for the shared duty that we have to our constituents and to the province of Alberta and the hardship of a bigger constituency, of the long distance from Edmonton and the travel that that can take, and, you know, all the opportunities that this job provides but all the costs and the losses that it has as well. So again I thank all my colleagues for being so cognizant, both rural and urban, of what each of us has to go through to do our very, very best at being the best representatives that we can be for our constituents.

This reasoned amendment to stop this makes total sense. Mr. Speaker, there are three other things that I want to talk about that I don't think I've heard here tonight.

First of all, with this constituency boundary report it changed so much from the interim report to the final report. Of course, that final report was just given to us and given to the people of Alberta sometime around the end of October. We've been here, other than

a one-week constituency break, almost inclusively, so we haven't had much time to talk to Albertans. We haven't had much time to talk to our constituents about what they think.

It's easiest to speak about first-hand experience. Cypress-Medicine Hat and Brooks-Medicine Hat, what was Medicine Hat and what was Cardston-Taber-Warner, have changed so much from what they were in the 2015 election to what they were in the first report to what they were in the final report that I maintain, I have the absolute belief that this final report is so different from their interim report that they need to consult with Albertans again, that they need to start the process over. Because of what we're hearing tonight from NDP colleagues and opposition colleagues, there are so many areas where the report is lacking. Whether it was in the initial engagement and where they were supposed to start or whether it was in the implementation of trying too hard to make all the constituencies with the same population or have a crystal ball into the future as to what some populations may or may not become, Mr. Speaker, we've heard many, many reasons just in the last hour, hour and a half why, if this report goes ahead, it will go further to hurt democracy in Alberta than if it doesn't. That's why this report needs to end.

I want to talk about how badly it started. I want to talk about the confusion that that led to, and I need to focus on Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat because that's obviously the area I know best. The report came to us on a Thursday at 4 or 4:30 in the afternoon. For some reason the headline in the *Medicine Hat News* that morning – Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about the morning before the report came out – was something like: Medicine Hatters should be happy we're going to get three MLAs. Again, I'm talking eight or 10 hours before the report came out. Okay. I'm thinking: what the heck? We sort of have two. We do have two, but for those that didn't know, the Speaker represents just Medicine Hat, about 80 per cent of Medicine Hat. Cypress-Medicine Hat is 20 per cent of Medicine Hat, roughly, Redcliff, Foremost, Bow Island, Cypress county, Forty Mile county. Okay. From two to three: that sounds like a good thing.

When the report came out that day, I was flabbergasted. I was shocked. I was amused because Medicine Hat was becoming one big constituency. The north part of Cypress county was going to be joined with Redcliff and Brooks, if I recall correctly. For the south part of Cypress county, so all around the south of Medicine Hat – and we're talking from the Montana border, Saskatchewan, Alberta, so right at Montana-Saskatchewan-Alberta – it was going to run all the way at kind of a 45-degree angle to 20 minutes from Calgary. It was going to go past Vulcan, past Milo, past Mossleigh. It was going to be, like, a four and a half hour drive at 70 miles an hour. Yeah, we sort of had three. Only one had the name Medicine Hat in it, and two of them didn't represent any part of Medicine Hat, but it sort of looked like what was leaked was accurate.

9:50

Okay. The facts were still the facts, and this was just a newspaper headline. But, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, the confusion that that created in Medicine Hat, the confusion everywhere I went for a week or two. "We're going to get three MLAs": nobody saw the report. I would spend some time, and I would tell them exactly what the first report said and how it really wasn't and how, as a mid-sized Alberta city, the best mid-sized Alberta city – we're a ways away from Edmonton, but if you've never been there, it's a wonderful place. We are competitive with the Red Deers, the Lethbridges, the Grande Prairies. We want everybody to do well, but we want to do well, too, and it hurt our feelings that all of a sudden we were only going to have one constituency with Medicine Hat in it where

Lethbridge was going to have two, Red Deer was going have two, Grande Prairie was going have two, Fort McMurray was going have two. There are 62,000 of us. People weren't happy.

What this led to was that everywhere I went, councillors – I believe that the entire council of the city of Medicine Hat, I believe that the council of the town of Redcliff, Forty Mile county, Cypress county, I believe that Foremost and Bow Island, of all the municipalities in my constituency, sent a letter to the boundary commission review saying: leave it the way it is; leave it the way it is. A lot of them followed up with: at least make sure that we have two constituencies with the name Medicine Hat in them. Now, the board listened to that, and I'm glad they did.

One of the other examples I want to tell you about to show how flawed this was: when they came for the second time around, one or two people that presented pointed out that maybe instead of this great, great big constituency that ran all the way from Montana-Alberta-Saskatchewan to where you'd be voting with people from Calgary who just live on an acreage on the edge of Calgary, perhaps we were better aligned with people from Brooks. What the committee wasn't aware of, though, is that under the federal boundary changes Brooks had just been taken from the federal constituency and moved into a different one, and our Medicine Hat area had been put in more with the Cardston-Raymond area. That's fine. That's great the way it is. But there were some people that disagreed with that, and I think that's where the idea of being with Brooks came from.

I'm going to say to you again that the committee didn't do their job in looking at why that was being suggested. It was being suggested by people who maybe were unaware of how there are 87 MLAs but only 36 or 38 MPs and how it made some difference in the size of a federal riding compared to a provincial constituency. Mr. Speaker, I'm coupling this with the fact that something came out wrong, that was erroneous, that made it so that people in Cypress-Medicine Hat didn't understand the true way that this constituency boundary report was. Secondly, the committee didn't hear fully as to what the changes were, and we ended up with a report that doesn't really reflect what's best for us.

I want to go, though, to what I heard second. Everywhere I went, people said to me all through Alberta that it was just wrong to take out three seats from rural Alberta. Mr. Speaker, when you're in my constituency and you're standing in the Bindloss school after wildfires have just killed hundreds of cattle, hurt hundreds of lives – Maury, who was 89 and born in his house, was pulled out of his house with five minutes to spare before the house burned down. You're standing in the gym of a school. The school hasn't been open for 10 or 15 years, but that gym is still like you could play basketball in it tomorrow.

When you go down to Manyberries and you have the same instance, where you're standing in a school that is still in pretty good shape but there hasn't been a student in there for 10 years, when you go to Foremost or Bow Island and you know the changes that were made to the Medicine Hat diagnostic lab – now it's unclear as to whether the Foremost people can get their treatment

for their diabetes and their blood needs under the new structure, and it takes months to get an answer – Mr. Speaker, you know darn well why rural people are very, very concerned about losing their representation and their ability to have support. It's not because they want an advantage on anybody in Calgary and Edmonton. It's not because they want extra representation. They just want to make sure that they get treated like all Albertans. They just want to make sure that they have access and their children and their friends and their families have access to the things that, because of more people, because of more government sometimes, urban Albertans have more access to. They know that losing three seats – three seats in rural Alberta – will disenfranchise them, will make it so that they are less involved in the prosperity and the growth of Alberta. That is going to hurt us all. That is going to hurt us all.

The third thing I want to talk about. I don't really have to say much more. Mrs. Gwen Day, one of the five members, wrote a dissenting opinion. She said it all. One out of five people on this committee said: my committee got it wrong; all the constituencies don't have to be the same population. There are court cases. She put in one from Saskatchewan and one from Prince Edward Island where the Supreme Court said: no; you don't need exactly the same population in each one. There are other factors. You know, there are other factors that make it important and make it necessary as to why the rural seats, because of their size, because of their distance from Edmonton, because of the fact that the primary industries, forestry, agriculture, and oil and gas, where wealth is first created, are principally in the rural constituencies – maybe we've got to make sure that rural Albertans don't lose their voice.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end with a funny story. I got talking to several rural Albertans who were very upset and very concerned, somewhat despondent about this. "Okay. Here we go. Rural Alberta is taking it on the chin again. We're going to lose more. What do we do?" One of them, with jocularity and humour, as much as he hates the Canadian Senate, thought the only way to make sure that we had adequate representation for rural Alberta is if we go so far as to have a Mike Duffy and a Senate, as dysfunctional as that one is. My colleagues, I'm telling you – I'm telling you – that's how dissatisfied, that's how disengaged rural Albertans are right now, and this report exemplifies that.

So let's do the right thing. Let's put it on hold. Let's give all Albertans the opportunity to have their voice heard like they deserve to be heard. Let's do our best to ensure that they have the same level of service that all Albertans have. Mr. Speaker, thank you very, very much for listening to me. With that, I'd like to ask that we adjourn debate on this for the night, please.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to move that we adjourn until 9 o'clock in the morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:59 p.m.]

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