



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

Dr. Keith Archer
Peter Dobbie, QC
Brian Evans, QC
Allyson Jeffs

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

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Ben Armstrong, Reeve, Wheatland County
Karen Bartsch, Strathmore-Brooks Progressive Conservative Constituency Association
Karen Bartsch and Susan Chomistek, Grassland Public Schools
Joel Bulger
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[Judge Walter in the chair]

Ms Friesacher: Our first presenters are Mrs. Karen Bartsch, president of the Strathmore-Brooks PC association, and Mr. Arno Doerksen, MLA, Strathmore-Brooks.

The Chair: Good afternoon. Since we're being recorded by *Hansard*, we'd ask you both to give your names and your positions.

Mrs. Bartsch: Okay. I'm Karen Bartsch. I'm president of the Strathmore-Brooks PC association.

Mr. Doerksen: I'm Arno Doerksen. I'm the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks.

The Chair: Go ahead.

**Arno Doerksen, MLA
Strathmore-Brooks**

**Karen Bartsch, Strathmore-Brooks
Progressive Conservative Constituency Association**

Mrs. Bartsch: On behalf of the board of directors of the Strathmore-Brooks Progressive Conservative Constituency Association I would like to welcome you to our constituency, to thank you for making Brooks one of the venues for a public hearing, and to thank you for this opportunity to make this presentation. It is obvious from our written submission that we are very concerned about the changes to our constituency boundaries as proposed in your interim report. I will outline our concerns, and Arno will present possible solutions.

To be honest, we were shocked when we read what would happen to our constituency. We thought we had the perfect situation, and after studying the primary factors, which guided your recommendations and are listed in your report, we thought we were the poster child of what a constituency should look like. We had the correct population, our boundaries are coterminous with two municipalities, the county of Newell and Wheatland county, and these boundaries are clear and understandable to our constituents.

We have strong community ties and interests within these boundaries as well as common industries and similar irrigation districts. Trade and commerce flow east and west through our constituency along the Trans-Canada highway. We are between the Red Deer and Bow rivers, which clearly define our communities, and given that we are a rural constituency, we have a reasonable travel distance. Most important, we feel we are effectively represented.

The proposed changes clearly negate most of these factors which had to be considered and that ensure effective representation. The proposed changes split our constituency in thirds, and I would like to speak to the effect this has on those three areas. One-third of our constituency would become part of the new Chestermere-Strathmore constituency. What has happened is that part of the county of Newell has been sliced off. This area includes the village of Rosemary and the hamlet of Gem and their surrounding areas, which is a rural area with little population. This rural area, along with most of Wheatland county, has been married to the town of Chestermere and its surrounding areas.

Our constituents do not have the same issues and interests as the metro area of the town of Chestermere nor the same issues and interests of the rural residential component on the perimeter of Calgary. Wheatland county and the county of Newell are rural

based, not urban based, not acreage based, and the constituents in this area are very concerned about losing their rural voice.

Another part of our constituency would be added to Little Bow. This includes the hamlet of Cluny and the small surrounding rural area south of highway 1, which also has very little population and has been sliced off of Wheatland county. Constituents in this tiny area would have to cross the Bow River to get to their new constituency. As a result of this natural river barrier, the people in this area have no community ties to Little Bow.

Also added to Little Bow is another area sliced off the county of Newell. This part takes in the town of Bassano, the hamlets of Rainier and Scandia, and the surrounding rural areas, which also have very little population. The Bow River is between them and the Little Bow constituency, and bridges across the river are few and far between. As a result, the people in this area are also not a part of the communities in Little Bow.

Finally, the third part slices off quite a large section of the county of Newell and adds it to the new Brooks-Drumheller constituency, which is across the Bow River, where, once again, bridges are few and far between. The river acts as a major barrier as far as community interests and even trade. I live in Brooks, and the rare time I take highway 36 north is to travel to Red Deer or Edmonton. I know very little about the communities along the way.

We do not want our constituency and the counties we live in to be sliced apart. We hope the presentations today will give you a better understanding of the Strathmore-Brooks constituency and the communities it serves. We hope you will better understand the commonalities between Wheatland county and the county of Newell and why we want them to stay together. Both are rural-based counties with a small urban centre at their core, Strathmore and Brooks. Both house large irrigation districts, the EID and WID, where water usage and storage is a common concern. Both have agriculture and oil and gas as their main industries, and highway 1 is a connector between the two counties. As a result, when we have meetings with our MLA, we discuss similar issues and concerns with a common voice.

We hope you will better understand the importance of the rivers, which largely define our county boundaries, our community interests, and our community ties.

Both the county of Newell and Wheatland county have been in existence for about 60 years, a long time to develop community bonds and history, so it isn't surprising that over 30 per cent of the written submissions responding to the interim report were from our area. Our constituents are upset at the thought of dividing us and having representation by three MLAs, who would know a little about some of our communities, versus one MLA, who would understand our community as a whole.

Finally, I would like to address the factor of representation by population, a very important aspect of effective representation. We understand why you have attempted to limit the variations in the average population per constituency, but in our case I feel we have been treated as numbers to the detriment of all the other factors that were to be considered in guaranteeing effective representation.

We are not just numbers. We are citizens who are passionate about our communities and the relationships we have built within those communities over many decades. We are citizens who are passionate about our government representation in Edmonton. We want to stay as we are. We meet the criteria to do so, and it would result in continuing the effective representation we presently enjoy.

1:35

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you. I also want to welcome you to Brooks and thank you for accepting the many invitations that you received

to hold a public hearing in this constituency. I very much appreciate the opportunity to present to you today as well.

Since the middle of March I have participated in no less than 10 public meetings in this area where significant concerns and questions have been raised about the interim report. I'm not suggesting those meetings were all about the electoral boundaries review, but it came up at quite a number of meetings that I've been at. There is clearly concern.

Karen has accurately explained the concerns that are common in this area. I concur with the perspective that Karen has provided, and I've heard a significant degree of frustration from residents of this constituency with how the implementation of the interim report would impact residents of this region more than just Strathmore-Brooks.

I also want to acknowledge the significant and passionate written response you have received from constituents of Strathmore-Brooks. I want to say that this response is unsolicited from myself except in concert with the commission's invitation to Albertans to respond to the interim report. You've heard from grassroots Albertans who are practically concerned about the effective representation for their communities.

We propose that the present Strathmore-Brooks constituency be maintained. I've discussed this proposal with MLA colleagues from the current neighbouring constituencies of Drumheller-Stettler, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Little Bow, Highwood, Foothills-Rocky View, and Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and understand that presentations have been or will be made that support this proposal from neighbouring constituencies.

The current Airdrie-Chestermere constituency is the one area outside of Calgary in southern Alberta that is significantly above the target population of 40,880, at approximately 53,600, I believe. We understand that this population overage could be absorbed by neighbouring constituencies that are well below the population mean, the targeted mean.

The areas immediately adjacent to the city of Calgary will likely continue to see the most rapid population growth outside of the city for years to come. Given that the existing Strathmore-Brooks constituency comes so close to the average population target and has well-defined and understood boundaries, we believe it should be maintained. I appreciate that, "the Commission recognizes the confusion created for electors by continually changing electoral division boundaries," as stated on page 7 of the interim report.

It is my understanding that most residents of this area would prefer to see minor adjustments to the existing electoral divisions to achieve more balanced population numbers rather than the significant redefining of electoral divisions that the interim report is proposing for much of southern Alberta. This should be achievable in view of the fact that the number of constituencies in southern Alberta outside of Calgary is not changing.

Again, I want to say that I appreciate the time and effort the commission has given to this task and thank you again for the opportunity to present to you here today.

Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mrs. Bartsch and Mr. Doerksen. I appreciate your presentation. One of the issues that came up in our discussion of this part of the province was the growth that was taking place not necessarily within the city of Calgary but in the area immediately adjacent to Calgary, and those population shifts have had an effect that reverberates out, I think it's fair to say, into ridings outside of their immediate area. Airdrie, for example, in our interim report has a population that warrants a constituency on its own, so it was taken out of the constituency that it shared with Chestermere. That just results in lots of changes that are taking place in the north.

Then if you look in the south and at the growth in Okotoks and High River and those areas, you get a sense that although the commission assigned the four additional seats as two to Calgary, one to Edmonton, and one to Fort McMurray, the population adjustments over the last decade or so have had an effect just beyond the cities themselves. I just wanted to provide a little bit of context in that way.

Now, we've heard a number of presentations this morning suggesting that, really, a key principle that we should be bearing in mind is not splitting the county of Newell into three constituencies and using the Bow River as a boundary for a constituency instead of highway 1. I was just looking at the data that we have – I don't have all of the current data in front of me – and I notice that Bassano has between 1,300 and 1,400 people. Do you know: if we move that part of the county of Newell back into the rest of the area, how many people would we be losing from the Little Bow constituency?

Mr. Doerksen: You're talking the line just in the county of Newell or the county of Wheatland as well, everything east or south of highway 1?

Dr. Archer: I think, certainly, the discussion thus far this morning focused on the boundary as it affects the county of Newell, but if it includes Wheatland as well, then that's certainly the data that we'll have to look at once we get back together after the public hearings.

Mr. Doerksen: In terms of the county of Newell I think your numbers are roughly close. I don't have those numbers exactly either, but I think there are around 1,300 people in Bassano and then a smaller rural population that would live south of highway 1 and still in the county of Newell.

Dr. Archer: Someone last night suggested it was probably about 2,000 people.

Mrs. Bartsch: Yeah. That would be about right.

Mr. Doerksen: Oh, for both counties probably.

Mrs. Bartsch: Probably with both counties, yeah, because there's that little section, too, between highway 1 and Siksika reserve in Wheatland, and there's just that little town and county and a few rural residents in there. So I would think altogether you'd probably have 2,000.

Dr. Archer: Right. If we take that population out of Little Bow – Little Bow right now is about 3 per cent below the provincial average; 2,000 people corresponds roughly to about 5 per cent – that recommendation would lead us to have a population in Little Bow that's 7 or 8 per cent below the provincial average, and by implication it would mean that some areas would have to be a bit larger. Are you comfortable with that kind of shift taking place in this part of the province, in which one constituency like Little Bow is a bit below the average and another constituency – and perhaps it's a constituency that has the county of Newell, possibly with the county of Wheatland; I don't have those numbers in front of me – may be with the new configuration a bit above the provincial average? Would you be comfortable with that kind of solution?

Mrs. Bartsch: I would be very comfortable with that. Like I said, this just isn't about numbers. Numbers are important, but equally important are our community ties to each other. We know that in rural Alberta to do that, you're going to have those fluctuations.

I know I read the submission by Barry McFarland. I think he'd be

very happy with that idea as well because he has a lot of places and municipalities to look after, and now he's got this little slice of two other counties as well.

Mr. Doerksen: I would concur with that. If my numbers are correct – and I certainly concede that they may not be exactly correct because there have been lots of numbers floating around with regard to the sizes of some of these constituencies – the current size of Strathmore-Brooks, the way it is today, I think, is between 41 and a half and 42,000 maybe. That's the number I've seen. The proposal that you're suggesting in the interim report for Chestermere-Strathmore has over 44,000. I mean, I don't think there's an issue there even in relation to numbers at all, and there's nothing unique about the Strathmore-Brooks constituency in terms of boundaries. Those are coterminous. There are no lines on the map that are unique to Strathmore-Brooks. That's quite an interesting achievement in the province, I expect. You've looked around. I'm sure there are not that many constituencies that don't have some unique boundary lines in them somewhere.

Dr. Archer: Great. Thanks. That's all I have.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mrs. Bartsch and MLA Doerksen. Nothing really to add. What we're hearing, again, is a consistent theme from you. The only thing that I would add that may be of some reassurance is that when we were in Red Deer, we heard specific representations from a number of people within Red Deer that suggested that our proposal to have two and a quarter constituencies associated with Red Deer – there are about 10,000 more people in Red Deer than two constituencies would normally hold. The strong representation we heard from there was to keep those 10,000 people within the two constituencies in Red Deer. As a result, that takes those 10,000 people out of adjacent constituencies, which will have a cascading effect that gives us some more flexibility down here.

1:45

The summary of what we're hearing is looking like it is going to result in some more flexibility for us. Part of this process is to determine at what time a city like Red Deer wants to maintain its own boundaries and when a 'rurban' riding works. So the clear facts you put forth today are helpful. Certainly, I think that the Little Bow riding, with no significantly larger towns, presents a real challenge for effective representation if it gets too large, and I think it should be a little lower than the provincial average.

Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you both for coming this afternoon. More of just a comment, really. As we're travelling around the province, we heard in the first round of hearings – and also we've heard since the interim report came out and people are responding to that – that often people in a constituency will look right, look left, look in their constituency, and say: boy, we're just perfect how we are. We have to unfortunately take a bit of a step back and look at a whole region and ultimately the whole province. There were some very, very significant changes outside of Calgary with Airdrie growing to the point where it really required its own constituency and breaking up Airdrie-Chestermere. I don't want to leave the impression with people that: "Well, here's a riding that works. What can we do to that?" That's not our approach.

I appreciate the feedback on the specifics with respect to what we might try and do with the boundaries. I think the status quo is a bit optimistic, but at the very least we've heard loud and clear that it's important to make some attempt to keep the county of Newell together and in whatever configuration that requires. I don't know if you want to respond to that. I don't have any other questions.

If not, then, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mrs. Bartsch and Mr. Doerksen. Clearly, we have heard about the importance of keeping the county of Newell in one constituency, and we've also heard that there is a bit of a distinction between the far western end of your constituency and the eastern end. You have two counties there. If there is to be any change whatsoever, I take it, then, that that would be in the Strathmore area. I'd just be curious about whether you see any logical north-south orientation from Strathmore up towards Drumheller. Maybe you're not familiar enough. I'm sure Mr. Doerksen is, but, Mrs. Bartsch, you may not be familiar enough with that area to make a comment. Any suggestions that you might have or observations would be appreciated by the commission.

Mrs. Bartsch: I guess you're right; I don't have a lot of knowledge north. I do know that there are special areas north of the river, which is a completely different governance structure than what we are used to. I think with our connection with Wheatland versus going north: we have no river dividing us, we are joined at the hip, and we do have all the commonalities of the irrigation and the agriculture. So from my side, I see that as more of a fit than going north of the river. I know that I've read some of the submissions from north of the river, and though we respect each other, we also both have expressed interest that we'd rather not be together.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you for that. That's very clear.

Mr. Doerksen: I would say particularly on the east side the connection is in a quite sparsely populated area as well, so you have to go quite a way to get to any kind of a population centre. Of course, it's a little different than that in Drumheller. But I would agree with what Karen said, that the natural fit has certainly been east-west.

Mr. Evans: East-west. Okay. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Bartsch: Maybe if I could just add to that, too, a little bit of our history here. We became Strathmore-Brooks in 1997. Before that we were Bow Valley, and that change went from us, the county of Newell especially, being joined with people like Redcliff and east of us to Jenner. When we became Strathmore-Brooks, there was no question that, yeah, this'll work, and the reason it will work was all the commonality. So we didn't have to come to a commission like this. We were very happy with that. We saw that fit right from the beginning, when we became one constituency.

Mr. Evans: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you both very much. We are certainly hearing a consistent type of presentation, and we're going to listen.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, again, very much.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenters are Mrs. Karen Bartsch, board

chair of Grasslands public schools, and Mrs. Susan Chomistek, superintendent, Grasslands school district.

The Chair: Now, again, for *Hansard* we'll have to have you both give your names and positions.

Mrs. Bartsch: I'm Karen Bartsch. I'm chair of the Grasslands public school board.

Mrs. Chomistek: I am Susan Chomistek, superintendent of Grasslands public schools.

The Chair: All right.

**Karen Bartsch and Susan Chomistek
Grasslands Public Schools**

Mrs. Bartsch: On behalf of the Grasslands school division I would like to welcome you to our community and to thank you for this opportunity to make this presentation. As our written submission stated, we are very concerned about the proposed boundary changes as presented in your report and how it will affect our school district. I will outline our current situation, and Susan will present our concerns with the changes.

We are a small school district whose boundaries are coterminous with the county of Newell. We have 12 regular schools, one outreach school, and seven colony schools within our district. We have about 3,500 students and 500 staff. It is a very tight-knit community. We value the opportunity and believe it is an expectation for our school division to communicate with both our municipal and provincial governments on education issues of importance to our community. We also feel it is important that those who influence funding and other resources as well as influence the direction of education in the province hear the voice of our local community.

Up until now we have had several face-to-face meetings with our MLA, Arno Doerksen, and it has been easy for us to set up these meetings. We have built a strong relationship with our MLA, and this has resulted in him being very knowledgeable about our entire district and the concerns of each of the school communities within our district. We feel that we have been effectively represented because of his one strong voice that speaks for our entire district.

Under the proposed boundary changes our school district along with the county of Newell will go from being one cohesive unit effectively represented by one MLA to being divided up and added to the fringe of three constituencies. We have provided a map of our district with the new boundary changes. As you can see, our Rosemary and Gem school communities would be on the edge of the new Chestermere-Strathmore constituency. Our Bassano and Alcoma school communities would be on the edge of the Little Bow constituency, which is across the Bow River. The rest of our school communities would be on the southern edge of the new Brooks-Drumheller constituency, and that constituency would be mostly north of the Red Deer River.

Now Susan will speak to the impact of this fractured approach.

Mrs. Chomistek: If you look at the boundaries before you, the red dotted areas show the present boundary of Grasslands. This is also our current reality as to where most activities are for our students and their families. In the present system our MLA advocates for all areas that impact our students. To be able to communicate regularly with only one MLA allows us to go into the depth that is required for all of the programs and issues that impact our students. It would be much more difficult to inform three MLAs of the concerns and hopes in the depth that we have been able to presently.

Education for our students is not only within the confines of a school day. If you look at the Chestermere-Strathmore area, for example, the Gem and Rosemary schools are a part of this area. These students participate in music festivals, attend sporting events, use the recreational facilities, including the rec centre in Bassano and in Brooks and the ice arena and swimming pool in Bassano, and they are within the sports leagues within these areas. In addition to this, the Gem and Rosemary students use the libraries in both Bassano and Brooks, yet these communities that they are involved in are not part of the changed boundaries.

1:55

With Rainier and Bow City, which is in the Little Bow area – Rainier is just slightly south and east of Bow City – a similar pattern exists, with the focus of these communities and schools being the city of Brooks. In Bassano, which is part of this area, many opportunities are available within the village of Bassano, but these parents and their families also access a lot of the facilities in Brooks.

The next major center, if we were in the Little Bow constituency, would be Lethbridge, yet that's not the area where our families go to the music festivals. Those areas are in Brooks. When we do the field trips, a lot of them are highway 1, so it would be more Calgary-Medicine Hat oriented.

Our MLAs advocate for school sites and for cultural and recreational facilities that our students use. An MLA in a different constituency would not realize the impact, for example, that the swimming pool in Bassano has on the Rosemary and Gem students. This is not their area. It is a similar case for our students in Rainier and Bassano. The MLA would not realize the impact that facilities in Brooks have on these students.

Education does not only occur within the confines of our schools; it is much broader than that in our global society. We are involved extensively with children and family services and with our health authority. The centre for these organizations is once again Brooks as this is where our main offices are located. Our MLA understands our needs with regard to these agencies and works to advocate for services for our students in these areas. This inclusive, all-encompassing, wraparound approach works for the students who have been entrusted to our care, and keeping all of our schools in the area where they receive the most services with one representative would be better suited to our approach and model.

This is Education Week, and the theme is Education, the Heart of our Communities. We are a community within Grasslands. Our municipality and city have the same boundaries. We respectfully ask that our electoral boundaries be considered as far as education for Grasslands students is concerned.

The Chair: Thank you.

Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman. Thanks to both of you for that presentation. I'm curious about other school divisions in Alberta and where they would be relative to where you are in Grasslands in terms of whether in rural Alberta the norm would be all of a school division being within one county. Or is that the exception? Is it 50-50? In terms of representation from MLAs your current example, where you have Mr. Doerksen as the sole MLA responsible for Grasslands: is that more the norm, or is it more the exception in other parts of rural Alberta?

Mrs. Chomistek: I would say that it's quite varied, and my counterparts in education will speak to advantages of having several MLAs advocate for them. What I see with our approach is the depth

of knowledge that one MLA has and the understanding of the complexities of the communities. We have urban schools. We have Hutterite schools. It is a real variance. Particularly because we are in the same health authority, it is nice to have someone who knows everything within that, yet there are definitely benefits for having more than one. I have discussed this with people, but I still believe that this approach is better for us.

Mr. Evans: Would that have something to do with just the effectiveness of Mr. Doerksen? I don't want to embarrass him, but he seems to have a fair bit of support in his constituency. Is that really a significant factor?

Mrs. Chomistek: That is definitely a factor. Arno has been relatively new to our constituency. Even in considering that, when we put our submission together, I tried to be extremely unbiased. Even taking what Arno has done for education in our system, I still believe in being able to speak with one person and give them that in-depth knowledge and the time to go through the complexities of it. Arno has been quick to try and understand our involvement with children and family services and with our health authority. The students in our schools have many and complex needs, and he has taken the time to go through our schools – I think he has been in every single school – to listen to presentations. I just do not know, if there were three different people representing different communities and advocating for health authorities or recreational facilities from a different perspective, if they would have that all-encompassing view.

Mrs. Bartsch: I think that from a trustee's point of view, having talked to other districts, it is true. There is a variety out there. You would say Little Bow, where Vulcan is all one in itself, but then Barry has sections of others. There is a variety. In talking to the trustees, in a way they kind of envy us that we have that one focus versus several focuses even though the potential is there to have some advantages. I think there's a little envy there of having one to talk to and to meet with.

Mr. Evans: Right. Thanks very much for that clarification. That's my only question, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for being here this afternoon. Just following up on what Mr. Evans was saying, we do hear very different things from very different areas in the province. We have heard in some areas, where the municipal boundaries straddle provincial constituencies, that those municipalities and school districts very much like having more than one MLA. They talk about having two MLAs although I'm not sure there are too many of them that have three. Certainly, they talk about having more than one MLA and appreciating that, so there are clearly some regional differences.

What's interesting as well to me: is there something particular about the history that the school division and the municipal district are so in line with one another? I don't think that's consistent across the province. I mean, if we split one, we're splitting them all.

Mrs. Chomistek: Well, we did not used to be one school division. There used to be two school districts. Within the city of Brooks there was Brooks school district, and then within the county of Newell there was the county of Newell school district. When we amalgamated in the early '90s, we looked at what would be appro-

priate for school districts to move from approximately 140 to 62. So you looked at your neighbours and decided which would be the best fit. At that point in time we were one of the first divisions to amalgamate. It just looked like it made sense because we were all within the county of Newell and had that similar trading area, similar areas of interest.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. So these boundaries for the school district in the county of Newell have been consistent since the early '90s, basically?

Mrs. Chomistek: Right, and before that, before they were amalgamated, because the county of Newell schools were within those bounds.

Ms Jeffs: So the divisions that amalgamated were always within the county of Newell even prior to amalgamation?

Mrs. Chomistek: Right. Yeah.

2:05

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you very much. That's all I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for your clear presentation. Two quick questions for you, Mrs. Bartsch. Are you here as a result of a board resolution supporting the position that you put forward today?

Mrs. Bartsch: Yes. It was a motion at our board meeting.

Mr. Dobbie: Was that motion unanimous?

Mrs. Bartsch: Yes.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. Those were my questions.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mrs. Bartsch and Mrs. Chomistek. As I understand the situation, your school division is within the county of Newell. If we were to prioritize your wishes with respect to electoral boundaries, would it be fair to say that the highest priority would be to ensure that the county of Newell remain as an integrated unit within a constituency and that, secondarily, it would be desirable or not – I'm not sure of your view on this, I guess – to ensure that the county of Newell is with the county of Wheatland in the current constituency or that as long as the county of Newell is an integrated whole within one constituency, it could make sense to look around at what other units can be brought into that area for a constituency? The highest priority – I guess that is what I'm trying to get at – is to ensure that the county of Newell remain integrated.

Mrs. Bartsch: Yes. Our highest priority is that our school district is one which is coterminous with the county of Newell, so it goes hand in hand.

Dr. Archer: Right. I'm asking that because we've had some presenters today suggest that a linkage between Drumheller and Brooks/county of Newell can make some sense. One of the challenges that we're going to have when we go back to the data and the drawing board after these public hearings is to find out where the numbers work and where community interests are best reflected as

well. What I'm hearing you say is that the key community of interest to reflect is the integration of the county of Newell into one constituency.

Mrs. Bartsch: Right. That would be in the best interest of our school district, and that's what we're focusing on.

Dr. Archer: Right. Thanks so much. That's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you both. We'll certainly take this in. It makes quite a bit of sense.

Mrs. Bartsch: Thank you.

Mrs. Chomistek: Thank you. Our students are really following this process. They're quite excited about it, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mr. David Andrews, Eastern Irrigation District Landowners Association.

The Chair: Good afternoon. Mr. Andrews, would you for *Hansard* give your name and who you are presenting on behalf of.

David Andrews
Eastern Irrigation District Landowners Association

Mr. Andrews: My name is David Andrews from Bow City, Alberta, and I represent the Eastern Irrigation District Landowners Association.

I want to begin by thanking the commission for accommodating our concerns by having a hearing here in Brooks today. I don't intend to reiterate the written submission that I sent in, so I'll be fairly brief.

The Eastern Irrigation District Landowners Association was formed quite a few years ago in response to the need to provide landowners with advice on how to deal with, primarily, resource companies on surface rights issues. I'd like to recognize the founder and past chairman of the organization, Tom Livingston, who is right here behind me, so I have to behave. It was Tom who initiated a meeting that we held. It was a little bit out of our purview, but because we had the resources to have a public meeting on short notice, we did organize a public meeting held in Duchess, and that was attended by about 45 citizens of mostly the county of Newell, some from the county of Wheatland. There was consensus there among that group that there was a need to express concern about the proposed boundaries. Of course, we recognize that we failed to get involved at a more appropriate stage in the process, which would have been at the beginning, and probably like many who didn't realize what we had until we were threatened with losing it.

As I said, I'm not going to reiterate the presentation that was written. I thought that maybe, instead, I would just give you my own personal situation as an example. I live in the community of Bow City. I'm in the little part of the county of Newell which is hived off the southwest corner of the existing constituency, moving the boundary from the Bow River to highway 36 and the Trans-Canada highway. The communities in that area are Scandia, Rainier, Bow City, Bassano, and Cluny. Two of those communities, Scandia and Bassano, the village and town, are located on one side of the highway, but you have the agricultural community that's part of that split by using the highway as a boundary.

The other point that I'd like to make is that using the Bow River as a boundary makes a lot of sense, not just because of the river.

The Eastern irrigation district, as you well know now, shares boundaries with the county of Newell. It's fairly densely populated because of the irrigation. South of the Bow River from where I live in Bow City and most of the way along the river, there's very little settlement for several miles, in some cases a lot of miles, because there's a lot of Crown grazing lease land there.

We really don't have much in common with constituents of Little Bow. I happen to have known Barry McFarland for many years, and I respect him as an MLA and a friend, but, frankly, we don't trade that way. We trade with Brooks. All our social stuff, our 4-H clubs, and our recreational and athletic activities are focused towards Brooks. We would really feel quite uncomfortable as part of the constituency of Little Bow if we were separated off from the rest of the county of Newell.

That's really all I have to say. Again, I said I appreciate you coming today. If you have any questions I'd be pleased to answer them.

The Chair: Just a comment. Bob Chrumka, who appeared, certainly reinforced what you're saying. Your friend Barry McFarland said that he'd be happy if you were back in Chestermere-Brooks.

Mr. Andrews: Well, in fact, I farm land on both sides of the river, so I do own land in Little Bow as well.

The Chair: But you were most kind to him, too.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Andrews. Just one question. We heard a couple of times today that the county of Newell and the Eastern irrigation district almost completely overlap. Before we leave Brooks, I probably should make sure I have a good understanding of where you don't overlap and if there's an important issue somewhere in this area where the two don't overlap and if we may need to take this into account in our subsequent discussions.

Mr. Andrews: You know, I'm not entirely sure, but I can tell you this. If there's an area where the county of Newell is larger than the Eastern irrigation district, nobody lives there. On the west side there are some parts of it that are not part of the Eastern irrigation district.

Dr. Archer: Okay. But the more important boundary, as I understand it, is the county of Newell, not the EID, that we should be taking into account.

Mr. Andrews: Yes, I would say that, I think, for many reasons. It's not just the county of Newell. The fact of the matter is that we have a very neat relationship between the Eastern irrigation district and the Western irrigation district and the county of Newell and the county of Wheatland. We're very similar in our activities because of the irrigation.

2:15

Dr. Archer: Right. Thanks, Mr. Andrews. That's all I have.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Andrews. The argument you're making about the area north of the Bow River and south of highway 1 is similar to one we heard from Fox Creek saying: you're moving us from marginally close to the centre of our constituency to being at the far end, and the effectiveness of representation we will receive will be dramatically affected, not just marginally. So, again, it is helpful to get that on the record.

Thank you.

Mr. Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Andrews, for coming today. I don't have any questions. I thank you for a very clear presentation, very helpful and concise. That's all I have.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Again thank you, Mr. Andrews. The EID's position and the overlap between the EID and Newell county is very clear. So thank you.

Mr. Andrews: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Again, thank you very much. You've reinforced what we've been hearing from many sources.

All right, we don't have our next presenter until 2:30. Is there anyone else here who is scheduled to present?

Ms Friesacher: The next scheduled presenter is Mr. Joel Bulger.

Mr. Bulger: Lady and gentlemen of the commission, I'm representing primarily myself and my wife, who is the literary co-ordinator.

The Chair: For *Hansard* they would need your name, if you would.

Mr. Bulger: My name is Joel Bulger.

The Chair: Thank you.

Joel Bulger

Mr. Bulger: I'm representing primarily myself and my wife although I suppose I could be speaking for the people in that strip west of Bassano through to Crowfoot or perhaps Gleichen who have been included in the riding of Little Bow. I've made a written submission – both I and my wife have – and I'll quote a bit from that. My written letter verged on the, shall we say, impolite. The point that I would like to draw to your attention is that while rivers and roads do provide boundaries, clear and understandable boundaries, sometimes they do not. Sometimes railways and, especially, land claims provide such boundaries. This is particularly obvious with this portion of the county from Bassano west towards Gleichen and south of highway 1.

As you may be aware, the CPR main line was put through this area in 1883, and when it was put through from Bassano to Gleichen, there was a light confrontation between the railway builders and the Blackfoot, according to Pierre Berton, anyway. The land north of the railway was ceded for white settlement, and an adjustment was made on the south side of the reserve to accommodate the loss of land that the natives suffered there. So from the time of settlement this railway has always provided a boundary between the Blackfoot, or the Siksika nation, and the white settlement.

In the last few years, say since about the late '60s, the Blackfoot have become sensitive to trespassers. Most of us on the north side of the reserve, at least, respect the rights of the Indians here. These are fair and just, and it's not an issue for anybody. While the reserve gives access into the Little Bow area, the access is restricted. There is a crossing only at the Crowfoot ferry, which runs Crowfoot ferry-Majorville, I suppose, a crossing at Cluny, Cluny-Milo, and a

crossing at Gleichen-Arrowwood. Again, while it doesn't cut off north-south traffic, it tends to restrict it. Most of the people on the north side of the highway or on the north side of the railway use the east-west connection of the highway. Our business tends to go east or west or sometimes north.

The railway itself is a fairly hard boundary. Between Bassano and Cluny there are three crossings, and to my knowledge – I may be mistaken about this – there are at most two and perhaps only one between Cluny and Gleichen. So access there is restricted.

Again, as has been pointed out to you previously, the commerce tends to run east-west. I have heard it mentioned a number of times by Bassano merchants that the town was deprived of a southwest hinterland by the fact that the reserve is in place, by the fact that there are restricted crossings, and the fact that the reserve itself is not heavily settled from the Crowfoot ferry line eastwards. There are only a few houses in there. Again, commerce is east-west, and we're cut off from Little Bow in this respect.

I would respectfully suggest that in its approach to the county of Newell and particularly in having the Gleichen-Bassano portion of the Strathmore-Brooks riding into Little Bow, there should be a bit more consideration given to the interests of the people here and, I suppose, their day-to-day awareness. I mean, this is the main line, and perhaps – I don't know – 20, 40 unit trains go through there every day. So the nature of this boundary is, if you like, underlined daily probably to every person along this line simply by watching those trains roll through there.

The railway provides a column in history in another way that's perhaps not quite relevant to the decision on county boundaries, but you may find it of interest. When the railway was put through, as you're probably aware, it was given a land grant of 25 million acres. There was a condition to the grant that the land had to be – I believe I'm quoting accurately here – “fairly fit for settlement.” When they took the southern route from Regina through Calgary, Kicking Horse Pass, the railway passed through some land that had been deemed, if not uninhabitable, at least agriculturally useless by Palliser and Hind. It was only later, under John Macoun, that there was some insight that it might be useful for agriculture. So the railway delayed the decision in taking their land until they were put under pressure by the Liberal government and the ministers of the interior, Sifton and Frank Oliver.

In 1903 they chose their land, and what they did was that instead of the usual pattern, where they took alternate odd numbered sections on the townships east of the railway, they blocked it. They took all of every section on a line that runs north-south between the Bow and the Red Deer rivers roughly 22 miles east of Brooks to a line running north-south just east of the city of Calgary. These lines coincide roughly with the current boundaries of the county of Newell and the county of Wheatland. The people here have a common background. Most of the settlers bought land from the CPR, and the CPR blocked this land with the intention of providing irrigation, both, well, for settlement and to provide rail traffic. Then in 1903, I believe, they put the diversionary dam in at Calgary, and just shortly before the war the Bassano Dam was put in.

So there's a common history there, and there's a current leftover from this. When the CPR sold the land, they graciously relieved the buyers of any trouble with the mineral rights. Except for the occasional settler that was in before the CPR chose their land, the mineral rights are almost entirely in the hands of the CPR, or EnCana now. So there is a bit of, shall we say, associated interests there.

Really, that's about all I have to say.

2:25

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was very interesting.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mr. Bulger. I think that was a compelling historical account of the area, so thanks for sharing that. Now that we've had an opportunity to come and listen to a number of people in the area and receive feedback and look at that pretty closely, it has become more apparent the degree to which the river serves as a barrier in that area, the difficulty of north-south transportation routes south of the highway. Certainly, that will be an important part of our discussion from this point on.

I don't really have a question, just that observation. Thank you.

Mr. Bulger: If I might respond to that, sometimes the river provides a boundary. In this case I think the land claim is important. It seems to me that because they have a homogeneous interest, presumably anyway, it's important that the reserve itself be included in one riding or the other so that the Siksika can focus on one MLA.

Dr. Archer: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Bulger. One thing I would suggest to you, given your clear interest in matters historical, is that if you take a look at the website, it will have a transcript and an audio recording of the submissions and comments made this morning that give a bit of perspective on our thinking.

We were, I guess, challenged on the issue of not taking community of interest into account enough. A little bit of the challenge there is having the time and ability to actually determine those from the time we're appointed to the time we have to get an interim report out. I had suggested to, I think, the mayor of Bassano that in future it might be helpful, even if you think you're in the perfect constituency, to let another Electoral Boundaries Commission know that so that there is some testing.

Part of what we've done here is that we've looked at a hypothesis that maybe an alternate structure here could work. With the argument of multiple MLAs, I know that in some cases it works well; in some cases it doesn't. It wasn't for a lack of caring, but just administratively it was very difficult to solicit a clear understanding of communities of interest.

What you in this community have done is really come together well and laid out the effect of the changes on effective representation. We've heard in other places: we play hockey together; therefore, we don't want to be in a different constituency. The simple response to that is: well, we're not preventing you from playing hockey. You know, how will a different MLA affect it? In this area, though, we've heard very clear and, I'd say, compelling arguments as to how a change in the number of MLAs in this county could negatively affect representation. So thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Bulger. I was also very interested in the historical account. I'm a bit of a history buff, so it's always nice to hear a bit of the local history. It's not obvious from looking at the map. I very, very much appreciate having that perspective. We have heard a lot about the sliver of the county of Newell including Bassano that is in Little Bow and some of the barriers to that, so I appreciate hearing some more.

I don't have any questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I don't have any questions for Mr. Bulger either, but I do appreciate the historical review. We haven't heard much of the history of many areas that we've attended, so it's a refreshing change of pace. Thank you very much for that.

The Chair: Again, sir, thank you very much. We really appreciate it, and it does give us a better background to come to the right decision.

Mr. Bulger: I'd like to thank the commission for hearing me out and for coming down and hearing the community in general.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mrs. Glenda Goudie, chairperson for Grasslands Regional Family and Community Support Services Society.

The Chair: For the purposes of *Hansard*, since we're being recorded, could you give them your name and the group that you represent.

Mrs. Goudie: Yes. My name is Glenda Goudie, and I represent the Grasslands Regional Family and Community Support Services Society.

The Chair: Please proceed.

**Glenda Goudie, Chair
Grasslands Regional Family and
Community Support Services Society**

Mrs. Goudie: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the proposed changes to the Strathmore-Brooks constituency. The two letters that I was involved in writing state that the Strathmore-Brooks constituency is comprised of two counties, Wheatland and Newell, which are a natural fit. All sectors in both counties work together in areas such as water, irrigation, agriculture, oil and gas exploration, social and economic development, and tourism. To break up the constituency would break up the continuity of working with one MLA.

My first letter was as a resident of the county of Newell. In our constituency, with the Red Deer and the Bow rivers as boundaries and the Trans-Canada highway as a major transportation route, the trading is east and west rather than north-south. The proposed changes would disrupt this natural flow by splitting the county of Newell into three constituencies that would go north and south. The proposed split to the county would impact the municipalities within the county, the Grasslands school board, health services, and organizations providing programs and services throughout the county. All of the aforementioned have dealings with the local MLA.

I have lived in this area since 1981, and I have observed and/or participated in the partnerships that have been created within the county and along the area of the Trans-Canada highway from the county of Wheatland to Medicine Hat. I have observed the county of Newell council as they have worked to establish partnerships with the then town, now city of Brooks, the municipal councils of the villages, and the committees in the hamlets. This is consistent with the message from the provincial government to constituencies to build partnerships and share resources. The representatives from the municipalities within the county, I'm sure, will be providing you

with a detailed list of these partnerships. The proposed changes to Strathmore-Brooks would certainly cause problems to all involved in continuing these established partnerships.

A partnership that I participated in. In 1985 a group of health care professionals recognized the need for a program that would provide seniors throughout the county of Newell with services that would help them to remain independent. This program was implemented in March of 1986 as the Brooks & District Seniors Outreach Society. I was the co-ordinator from 1986 to 1992. This program developed partnerships with seniors' centres in the county, the hospitals in Brooks and Bassano, the home-care program, service clubs, and other community organizations.

Our MLA at that time was Tom Musgrove, and he was supportive of the program. If the proposed changes had been in effect at that time, it would have been a challenge to keep three MLAs informed and up to date on what was happening. Brooks & District Seniors Outreach continues to provide programs and services throughout the county, and again the proposed changes would certainly increase the workload of staff if they were dealing with three MLAs.

I'm wishing that in the presentation you have in front of you I'd actually put the next statement in bold because I think this is very important. The county of Newell was incorporated in 1953, and although there have been changes to the electoral boundaries, the county has always been included in a constituency as a whole.

2:35

As chairman of Grasslands Regional FCSS I would like to address the impact the proposed changes would have on our organizations and the local voluntary sector. Grasslands FCSS is just one example of how municipalities within the county came together to form partnerships. In 2004 the board members from the county of Newell and the city of Brooks gave up their positions and dissolved their boards. The villages of Duchess, Rosemary, and Tilley agreed to come together with the city and the county to form a regional organization. The new board was formed with equal representation, two members, from each municipality. Grasslands FCSS has operated as a society since 2005.

We fund many local nonprofit organizations and provide community development services throughout the county of Newell. Examples of some of the organizations that we provide funding to are Brooks & District Child Development Society; Grasslands school division, their education and prevention programs; Brooks & District Seniors Outreach Society; SPEC association for children, their after-school program; Brooks Pregnancy Care Centre; the Francophone Association; the Rainbow Coalition for Human Development; Lifetalk counselling; Ashton's Place Youth Center; Newell Integrated Child Care, their summer program; Meals on Wheels and home cleaning programs; the Diabetes Association (Brooks & District), we fund their healthy choices school program; Food Coalition and the community kitchens program; the Newell Regional Expo Society. Two programs that we run in-house are the citizen and junior citizen of the year and the Volunteer Resource Centre.

We have concerns regarding the continued successful partnerships if the electoral boundaries are changed. The present county of Newell boundaries have served to ensure that the integrated programs and services are ongoing and provide rural and urban communication. Many of these voluntary organizations have partnerships with and/or report to the provincial government. These voluntary organizations are stretched to the limit because of funding cutbacks. The proposed changes would fracture the connections in place and would cause considerably more work for them in having to co-ordinate and communicate with three MLA offices. One MLA has served us well.

It's difficult to find words to describe how the proposed splitting of the county of Newell would affect the voluntary sector. It could be compared to how a divorce affects a family. All of the organizations that I previously listed could be used as examples of how the changes would affect them. We will use the Newell Regional Expo as the example. The board and staff of FCSS are concerned how the changes would affect the Newell Regional Expo Society. The theme of this three-year project is Celebrating Community Diversity, Pride and Partnership: Past, Present and Future. This project has received funding and support from the provincial government, the federal government, the city of Brooks, the county of Newell, Grasslands FCSS, and the local business community. Phase 1 was engaging the community; phase 2, building a welcoming community vision; phase 3, keeping the vision alive.

Residents throughout the county of Newell have bought into the concept of building welcoming and inclusive communities with healthy economic and social systems. The society has formed partnerships with the Canadian badlands tourist association and Alberta Agriculture. Citizens throughout the county are working on a variety of sustainable projects to promote and strengthen the area. Our MLA, Arno Doerksen, is aware and has participated in this initiative. The project has fostered a feeling of family throughout the county, and we think that the proposed changes would have a similar effect as a divorce.

The current electoral boundaries wisely consider the natural boundaries, the rivers, the historic routes, and the social, agricultural, and community relationships of the county. We also understand that the population within the existing district is consistent with the suggested population guidelines. The present boundaries well reflect our informal and formal relationships and partnerships.

The cost of creating additional seats is a concern, particularly during tough economic times. One MLA in our county ensures consistent, ongoing communication at all levels, and we are confident that our MLA will continue to provide an effective voice to parliament that reflects the realities of this area.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mrs. Goudie. A very complete presentation. Certainly, one can't help but be impressed with the good work that the society is doing. Thanks for all your good work.

Mrs. Goudie: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: One of the things that strikes me in listening to the presentation is the strong connections that seem to exist between the society and the county of Newell. I didn't get as strong a sense that the relationships are as strong with Wheatland county in that it seemed to me that the presentation that we heard earlier from the school district as well seemed to overlap very closely with the county of Newell's. The conclusion I drew from that was that as a highest priority it's probably important to ensure that the county of Newell remain within one constituency and, as a second priority but probably somewhat lower on the priority list than the first, to look at retaining the constituency in its present form. The latter will probably be a bigger challenge for us than the former, but I certainly take from your message that you have some remarkably well-integrated partnerships in the county of Newell that we need, you know, to take into account in our discussions. Have I characterized your presentation appropriately?

Mrs. Goudie: As far as FCSS is concerned, yes.

Dr. Archer: Okay. Thanks so much for that. That's all I have.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Goudie, thank you. I'm not familiar with the funding of FCSS. I've helped make breakfasts. I've worked on it in the Vegreville and county of Minburn areas. Can you answer two questions for me? The first is: what proportion of the FCSS funding that you receive is from the province, and what proportion is from the various municipalities?

Mrs. Goudie: Eighty per cent of our funding comes from the provincial government, and then the municipalities make up the 20 per cent.

Mr. Dobbie: My second question: is the 80 per cent funding you get from the provincial government strictly on a per head basis, or are you able to apply for extra funding based upon projects that this FCSS area is proposing?

Mrs. Goudie: No. It's based on a per capita.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mrs. Goudie, for coming down this afternoon. Just carrying on with that issue with the FCSS, does the FCSS, then, operate through the county of Newell? The per capita funding is through the municipality – am I correct about that? – or, I should say, through the various municipalities.

2:45

Mrs. Goudie: Our unit authority is the city of Brooks. The provincial money comes to the city, the city then bills the municipalities, and then the cheque is forwarded on to our society.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. So it comes through the city of Brooks, basically. That's the link to where the funding application comes from? It's centred in Brooks. Am I correct about that? The application comes through the city of Brooks?

Mrs. Goudie: I'm sorry. I'm just not quite following.

Ms Jeffs: Well, I'm just asking: it's a program that's funded municipally and provincially, so this FCSS program is based in the city of Brooks and is basically funding programs in that immediate area.

Mrs. Goudie: No, no. There are five municipalities involved. Because of the FCSS mandate we have to have a unit authority, and that is the city of Brooks. Basically, all they do is handle the transfer from the province. The 20 per cent comes in from the municipalities, and then the money goes directly to our society. But all of our programs are pretty well county-wide.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. Sorry. I got confused when you brought in Brooks. It's basically throughout the entire county that you operate, and the funding supports the programs throughout.

Mrs. Goudie: Yes.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. Thank you. Sorry about that. That's all I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mrs. Goudie. Having served on a regional FCSS board in my past, I do understand the efficiency and effectiveness of a regional board and, certainly, the efficiency and effectiveness of having one MLA to both respond to and to deal with in terms of the issues. It's very clear to me and very clear as well how this relates well to the relationship with the county of Newell.

Thank you for your presentation.

Mrs. Goudie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. This was a very well-organized presentation.

Mrs. Goudie: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Mrs. Anne Johnson.

Anne Johnson

Mrs. Johnson: My name is Anne Johnson. I'm familiar with the area since the early '50s. I have worked with the chairmen of the hospital boards, several lawyers, had very intimate information about a lot of groups, and lived for a time in Vegreville. I see very conflictive interests. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be a good thing to address the problems because I see several of your presenters making very good points, including Mrs. Chomistek, Mr. Bulger, and the last presenter. I have very strong opinions. I am sure that everyone does the very best that they can with the information they have, but I'm also aware that they do not have the knowledge or information to move ahead to a better way of doing things.

I see the county, the region – and I take the region from Strathmore south all the way to Buffalo, Atlee, Jenner, Arrowwood, Gleichen, and Cluny – and we haven't once talked about money, honey. It's like a divorce. You can have whatever you want providing you get the money to operate it, and I think that's the basis for a lot of things. The commonality with the Western irrigation district and the Eastern irrigation district and the proposal to move ahead with whatever, whether it's providing more irrigable land or facilities of any kind, whether it's a school or a hospital or whatever, all boils down to money and who is controlling what. Most especially, there's a great interest in the, let's put it, subterranean gas and oil revenue or land development for recreation.

I do not see any commonality with the Drumheller region, and I live there. I live on a very nice property, 880-2nd Avenue West, right on the river, and went to a beautiful school district, which hired teachers because of their expertise rather than their status. Mr. Gordon Taylor made it very clear that the teachers in his constituency were hired because they were the best, and I have to agree with him. They were.

The area also has a 75-year history of music festivals, et cetera, compared to Brooks, which only for two years now has had music festivals. I volunteered when I was in Vegreville to work with the festival because I had really good training with them from my schooling between Edmonton, Calgary, and Drumheller.

I chose at one time not to let my children go to school in the Buffalo area, where my ex-husband and I had acquired some

property now owned by Majestic Ranches. My first concern was: “Well, I’m pregnant, and I have a child. My God. Where would he go to school?” The kids that were there were riding seven, eight miles, some on horseback, going to school, and others being 30, 40 miles into Medicine Hat, so I became very familiar with how it operated. I said, “Not for me, baby.”

I have a daughter. I’m also aware that she and her husband chose to remove their children from school at Tilley because there were so few children there and not enough interest to create a permanent interest in education for their children. It was very effective. They loved a bigger school. I’m also aware of people who chose to tell me how they had to take their children out of one school or another because of conflicts within Duchess or Iddesleigh or whatever. You can’t fix the problem if you don’t address the problem.

My main interest here is that I see a whole lot of conflict where the status quo sees none. I see it because I’ve had a background of experience of having to address those very issues. I think, as I said, every MLA that we have had has dealt as well as he could with the backing that they had and the knowledge that they had at the time. I really choose to believe that most people operate within that sphere provided that they have access to information, and I do not believe we have access to information which is sufficient to give us the best interests of the public.

This is evident within the city of Brooks. Right now we have a whole new community being built on an area of Lake Newell, which has a sewer system, a paved road, houses that average at least \$500,000 and up, at the expense of unfinished business within the community of Brooks, including the road to the college. I didn’t even know this until a few weeks ago, and I thought: well, what is this concern about the road? Try taking the road out to the college. The college is right here. The county of Newell and the city end right here. It seems to me that we have to have better working relationships and go into finishing businesses that were started within the city of Brooks.

2:55

Forty years ago a lot of land was expropriated for the purposes of a better road, better access, everything else – 40 years ago – including some land which I had an interest in and, by the way, have not been paid for yet. It is now being developed. The topography is changing a great deal, and I’m sure very few people even bother to drive out and see it.

Anyway, I think there are a lot of people who have a lot of information about all of the areas that are affected provided you give them an opportunity to speak out. We have a population of – what? – 15,000 in the commercial area. There are very few people who really speak out against anything. I think the opposing interest to the status quo is underrepresented. That’s my main point of being here.

I hope you will consider and take in the point of view of Mr. Bulger. Certainly, the native interest in their area has to be protected. I’m sure he was hinting at that. I don’t know if I’m right or wrong, but that was the perception that I had.

I will thank you for the ear. Take it for what it’s worth. I’m sure you’re all doing the best you can with the knowledge you have, only you might have to increase what it is.

The Chair: Keith, any questions?

Dr. Archer: No. Thanks for your presentation, Mrs. Johnson. I appreciate it.

Mr. Dobbie: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: No. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your presentation, ma’am.

Mr. Evans: Thank you very much, Mrs. Johnson.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Reeve Ben Armstrong with Wheatland county.

Mr. Armstrong: Good afternoon, panel.

The Chair: Good afternoon, Mr. Armstrong. Since we’re on *Hansard*, would you be so kind as to give your name and position?

**Ben Armstrong, Reeve
Wheatland County**

Mr. Armstrong: Yes. I’m Ben Armstrong from Wheatland county. I’m the reeve, and I’ll be presenting on behalf of the council today. A lot of what I’m going to go over has already been spoken to and probably much better than what I’m going to speak to today. I’m going to be speaking to a motion that council had passed, so on behalf of council thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to make the presentation.

Wheatland county council submitted a letter to the Electoral Boundaries Commission requesting that the constituency electoral boundaries remain as they currently are in order to promote rural-based communities, and that was a unanimous decision by council. Wheatland county believes it is paramount that effective representation takes into account the community’s socioeconomic mosaic, commonalities, community interests, and history. Wheatland county shares strong ties, common interests, and exciting relationships with the county of Newell and the city and towns and villages within, those being the city of Brooks, the towns of Strathmore and Bassano, the villages of Rockyford, Hussar, Standard, Tilley, Rosemary, Duchess, and numerous hamlets in both areas. We work well together with these communities, which all share like interests and a similar socioeconomic makeup, and we would like to remain in the same electoral area.

Our provincially elected representative can more effectively represent our communities when the communities within the electoral boundaries share similar social and economic backgrounds. In situations where there are varied backgrounds and a diverse social mosaic, we feel that effective representation may not be achieved. There may be too much diversity within the communities, thus making the elected representatives’ positions in effectively representing his or her constituents very untenable. Having one provincial representative to represent the interests of an urban centre like Chestermere along with the interests of the small rural communities within Wheatland and parts of Newell will not be effective representation, nor will it be an effective voice for the residents within this rural electoral boundary.

For these reasons Wheatland county would like to remain in its current electoral boundary. We believe that this boundary falls within the required population levels and that our provincially elected representatives can effectively represent our interests. We strongly promote electoral boundaries that are coterminous with municipal boundaries and do not fragment communities that share a common history and economics. We’re opposed to fragmenting the communities within the existing Strathmore-Brooks electoral

boundaries into parts of five different constituencies. Three of these would be in Newell and two of them in Wheatland.

Please accept this letter as Wheatland's request to have the entire municipality of Wheatland and the county of Newell remain within the same boundaries. Thank you for that. I would like to answer any of your questions if you had any.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Brian.

Mr. Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Reeve Armstrong. Just looking at the map of the proposed Chestermere-Strathmore constituency, it certainly seems to me that the municipalities that you're referring to are all east – well, at Strathmore and east. Would I be correct in assuming that you feel, really, that the commonality pretty much ends at your western boundary of Strathmore and then is much more apparent as you go east?

Mr. Armstrong: Yes. There's still some agricultural land west of our western boundary, but the majority of that is almost priced beyond agricultural pricing. The development of that is becoming urban development in those areas. The area around Chestermere and west of Chestermere is basically an urban community, and there is very little to no commonality between what they're looking at and how their growth is. When you look at what's happening between Strathmore and Brooks, the area between Strathmore and Brooks is a good rural beef and grain industry. It's got lots of offshoots. The idea that Strathmore is on the west side and Brooks is on the east side with strong urban municipalities supporting that area makes a lot of sense, but west of that we don't have anything in common with them. There's just nothing there that is similar.

Mr. Evans: Well, thanks to my son's minor hockey, I've spent a lot of chilly hours in the stands in Strathmore, Chestermere, Indus, Rockyford, et cetera.

I'm more concerned about that area around Indus, Dalemead, not so much Langdon because there's a fair bit of residential subdivision growth there. Do you have a sense of how those folks would react to being advised that the separation point is really the western boundary of Strathmore? Wouldn't you think that Indus would feel more aligned with the eastern part of the constituency than they would with, say, the Chestermere area and that even though they are fairly close to Langdon, that wouldn't be their first thought for being aligned with a community?

3:05

Mr. Armstrong: Truthfully speaking, the communities west of our western boundary, to me, are so urban oriented that we have very little in common with them. I know we do participate in, like you say, some of the sporting activities and other interests, but there are no other commonalities between them and where we're at. Part of our fear is that in the new alignment with Chestermere-Strathmore – and that's basically what it would become, Chestermere and Strathmore – we would lose our rural identity within a very short time. With the population growth in there the numbers would grow to such a point that the rural part of that constituency would be lost.

Mr. Evans: Thanks for that, reeve.

My last question, then, would just be to ask you for kind of a general comment on Strathmore itself. It is becoming more urbanized and, certainly, more oriented towards that Calgary area as well. I know that there's a lot of traffic that goes from Strathmore

into Calgary, particularly into that northeast end of Calgary. Isn't that a reality? Is that something that this commission should be considering today, or is it something that will have to be considered by commissions in the future?

Mr. Armstrong: It is a reality that a good number of those residents do flow to the west, but I think it's still – as far as representation through the province the MLA that's in our area is still representing that area fairly decently. I agree that the flow of some of the workers in that area goes towards Calgary, but there's still a strong rural, agricultural concept in that same area. The closer you get to Chestermere, the farther that gets away from anything rural.

Mr. Evans: Okay. I hear what you're saying. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you very much, Reeve, for coming today. Can you tell me what the population is of the county of Wheatland, if we're looking at it as a block to move?

Mr. Armstrong: About 8,500 to 8,700.

Ms Jeffs: About 8,500 to 8,700.

I think we have pointer there. Can you just remind me on this map where your boundaries are?

Mr. Armstrong: Where they are currently?

Ms Jeffs: Yeah, with respect to the proposed Chestermere-Strathmore riding. I know that the portion that's in Little Bow is part of that sliver, that piece that we took.

Mr. Armstrong: Seven miles west of Strathmore is our west boundary, and then this little portion down here is Cluny.

Ms Jeffs: Yeah. That little sliver that's in Little Bow.

Mr. Armstrong: Yeah. I've talked to Barry McFarland from the south side down here, too. That's already been mentioned today. I shouldn't say that he has no interest in it, but it would be tough for him to represent that. There is quite a significant buffer with the river and the reservation in between.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. We've heard some presentations on that today, that that's a significant concern.

And then how far north do you run?

Mr. Armstrong: Our boundary runs up in here.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. And takes in that area. All right. Thank you. That's the only question I had, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Mr. Chairman, thank you. Reeve Armstrong, thanks for coming today. What your presentation does is that it helps me to summarize, I guess, a better understanding of how we can make distinctions. It seems to me that what we're hearing in this constituency and also what we heard in the areas south of Calgary is that we can make a distinction between a small city like Brooks and a small

city like Chestermere or High River on the basis that Brooks has grown up in sort of a symbiotic relationship with the neighbouring community whereas these other ones have probably grown quickly as a result of commuters wanting to get out of the city and perhaps relocate. So the interests are different. It helps me to have that summary when I'm trying to justify a distinction between a community such as Chestermere fitting in one constituency or another. Is that an accurate summary of your position?

Mr. Armstrong: Somewhat. I understand what you're saying, but part of my problem when I think of that – and I understand that a lot of the people, like you said, are flowing into Calgary for work purposes. I think that when you represent an area as an MLA or as a councillor in a municipality in a situation like that, the residents that you are representing, if they're not – I don't know how to put this. If they're living there but the representation that they're looking for is to represent them in another area because of where they're going for their work, somehow that doesn't – that's part of the fear. The flow is to the Calgary metropolitan area, and what they're looking for in representation has to do with issues in that area, not issues within the area that they're living in. That's what the MLA or what the councillor has to look at in those situations: how his representation affects those areas. If he or she gets drawn into representing an area outside of their jurisdiction, then their usefulness to the area that they're representing becomes less.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. I think we're agreeing. I just may not have stated it as clearly.

Again, I would look at people living in Brooks as really deriving their livelihood to a large extent from the areas around Brooks. People living in Chestermere don't. If we're going to make a distinction between a city of 10,000 or 13,000 people, that's an important factor to look at. I was just saying that that's sort of how I'm summarizing it, and it is helpful for me to start to look at those distinctions. For High River, you know, we've heard that we could use the same argument as to where it might be fitting best.

Mr. Armstrong: I understand what you're saying now.

Mr. Dobbie: This helps me, too, if I look elsewhere in the province and kind of watch how these cities have grown. If it's tied into the regional area, that's one thing. If it's not tied into it, if there are people escaping to live there, it may be another.

Thank you.

Mr. Armstrong: That's right. Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Reeve Armstrong. I guess I would start with a clarification just so that the members of the boundaries commission are all working with the same set of assumptions with respect to the numbers that we're working with.

When you gave the population of Wheatland county, my understanding is that your population data excludes Strathmore. That's not how we're going to be thinking of it because if the community is right in the middle, it's going to be part of the unit that we're moving around, as it were. The data I'm looking at has Strathmore at about 12,000.

Interestingly, the county of Newell is about 20,000 when you include Brooks, and Wheatland is about 20,000 when you include Strathmore. Those become for us almost the fundamental building blocks of constituency map-making because if they're not, then we get the kind of response that we heard earlier today; that is, if you break up a county, then you begin to weaken other connections that people have.

The challenge we have, just to put on the table what I think will be some of the discussions that we have flowing from here – we're still doing some tweaking of the boundaries of constituencies right outside of Calgary, especially the area that used to be part of Airdrie-Chestermere. We have Airdrie as its own constituency, maybe including a little bit to its east, and it looks like there may be a constituency that encircles the top part of Calgary. I'm not sure exactly at the moment where that's going to end. If it ends at the county line, then that would be convenient for all of us, I think, in the sense that it would enable us to then go east and look at a couple of building blocks that are 20,000 population each. That's a great starting point. Our challenge will be if the fit isn't all that tight in that part of the area around Calgary.

The other change that you should be apprised of – and, again, none of this is finalized. In the interim report for Red Deer we used highway 2 as the dividing point, and we received a lot of feedback saying: don't think of that highway as a dividing point; have those constituencies bridge the highway. So there's likely going to be some movement of population in our constituencies east of the highway as well.

3:15

Again, we're just trying to put the puzzle together in a way that makes sense. I understand from your perspective that the Wheatland county-Newell county constituency is very sensible. We will certainly take that under advisement but recognize that probably the first thing to bear in mind is as much as possible to keep a county unit as a unit, and then, you know, attach other municipalities and counties to that as we can.

Mr. Armstrong: Yeah. If I can respond to that. I understand what you're saying, and you're right. With the numbers as they are now, if you take the boundary and move it where you're looking at moving it, you'd change the dynamics. The numbers change. The numbers don't concern me that much. If we're a little less or a little more, that's not an issue; it's the dynamics of what you're making that area into. Our concern to a large part is: yeah, there are issues with us and Newell maintaining that urban-rural mix that works so well together, but if you split it like you are, our fear is that now you're turning this more into an urban area than a rural area. Out in the east part, where I currently live, that becomes a real problem because then you lose your distinction, and eventually you lose your representation.

Mr. Evans had asked a question earlier about the Drumheller area and going to the north. In '97, because we were part of two different areas in that area, we lobbied the government to find a way to make that so that we were represented under one municipality rather than two because we were having real difficulties getting representation out in that farther area. When they made the changes, they did put us all into one, and it made a big difference in how we were represented and how we got our voice heard up in Edmonton when we needed anything done up there.

Dr. Archer: Right. Thanks. I appreciate the comment. We've heard it from a couple of people who've said that in the rural constituencies close to the big cities if there's a need to have the population a little bit above the average, people are prepared to live with that as long as there's a recognition of the community of interest that exists. That's another message we're taking away from this.

Mr. Armstrong: Okay.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate what you've put before us, and we're certainly going to consider it seriously.

Mr. Armstrong: Thank you, again, for your understanding and listening to us today.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we have our next presenter scheduled for 3:50. We probably have a little time. Melanie, could you advise if our next presenter is here?

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is here. He is Mr. Ken Sauve.

Ken Sauve

Mr. Sauve: For reference I'm Ken Sauve. I live, farm, and ranch just north of the village of Gleichen, the hamlet of Gleichen I guess it is now; it's gone down from one to the other. I also am a councillor in Wheatland county and a director of the Strathmore-Brooks constituency association, but I'm here representing myself and my family as residents of the now existing Strathmore-Brooks constituency.

First off, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation before you today. I would like to see the Strathmore-Brooks constituency stay in its present form and have several very good reasons for my views.

I believe that having boundaries that are easily defined are important as they encourage voters to exercise their privilege on election day and to avoid confusion. Our present constituency has all of the Newell and Wheatland counties and the municipalities within their boundaries making up the entire constituency. This makes for an efficient area with common concerns and interests and a rural perspective.

Our census of 2008, which is the most recent that I could obtain, was 41,755 between the two counties and all the communities within their boundaries. I believe this to be within 875 people of the target for a constituency size recommendation. I believe that removing the east portion of Newell county – Bassano, Brooks, and a portion of Wheatland county south of highway 1 – which are rural and rural-servicing communities, including Chestermere, which borders Calgary and has similar urban issues and concerns, into the Strathmore-Brooks riding would be a disservice to the electorate. I would like to encourage the commission to keep the Strathmore-Brooks riding as it is presently, without any adjustments.

I would like to also thank you again for this opportunity and for having this meeting in the rural area so we could participate. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Mr. Sauve. I hope you've heard that we have heard very clearly about that area south of the Trans-Canada highway to the Siksika reserve. We heard it from MLA McFarland yesterday, and we've certainly heard it loud and clear today in terms of trading areas, ease or difficulty of transportation routes, et cetera. That's, at least in my view, not even an issue although we are going to have to deal with, you know, the population issues and how we are to deal with the current alignment of Strathmore-Brooks. Do you have any comments yourself on the importance of the entire county of Newell and the importance of the entire county of Wheatland being within one constituency?

Again, you probably heard that we are very much respectful of the

desire to keep the county of Newell and the EID boundary all within one constituency, and the same with Wheatland. Because of the changes that we are dealing with from Red Deer south and east of Calgary and then south of Calgary, we're not sure until we spend some more time whether we can actually keep that alignment even though the numbers certainly work well. We've also heard that this union of the two counties has been quite effective for a pretty substantial period of time. Do you see as a councillor, as a rancher, as a farmer in the area, and as a member of the constituency association any other realistic alignments for the western part of the constituency? Again, that would really be a focus on the county of Wheatland.

Mr. Sauve: Well, you had spoken before about the area around Indus, which I gather you're familiar with.

Mr. Evans: Somewhat, yeah.

Mr. Sauve: I can sympathize with the people that are in agriculture there, basically, with the representation, how they would like to be in a more rural area, but the boundaries have to be drawn someplace. Before I came to this meeting, in a little preparation I talked to the Reeves from both Rocky View and Mountain View. They said that they had made presentations in Calgary and Red Deer respectively that dealt with these issues, where the boundaries should be. At least I understood from the conversations with both those Reeves that leaving the boundary on the east end of Wheatland county was workable, if that helps. I don't know how definite that is, but that was the opinion that they gave me. Adjusting their boundaries in between the two of them north of Airdrie, I guess in the Crossfield area, would make that population work. As far as population it would fit within the mandate.

3:25

Mr. Evans: Yeah, it would certainly work for Mountain View, and it would work for Rocky View. Then the question is, you know, how far does it have to go? For example, Rocky View is really a C, or horseshoe, around the city of Calgary to the north of Calgary. I don't think that eliminates how we are going to align things. I'm not sure if that does eliminate the issue further east of that county boundary as it is now, but we will look at that. Assuming, again, that there is still an issue, if you would for a moment, does it make the most sense to you to move north towards Drumheller?

Mr. Sauve: Not that so much. Maybe if you wanted to change it a little bit, it would be to take in the area around Indus and Langdon and add that to our area, I guess. But as far as adding Drumheller into this or Chestermere, I think that would unbalance the rural-urban that we treasure so much.

Mr. Evans: Do you see a distinction, because I do, between Chestermere and Drumheller? I mean, just in terms of the distance from Calgary there is an obvious distinction. Is it more substantial than that, or do you think it's less substantial than I'm thinking it is?

Mr. Sauve: You had mentioned before that in Strathmore most of the people commute to Calgary, but the industries in Strathmore – and I'm not that familiar with the industries in Drumheller, but I would imagine that for the industries in Drumheller their business is with agriculture and the oil and gas industry. I know it is in Strathmore. I know there are box stores there and whatnot that service the community, but I would say that to encourage industry – real, good, viable industry – into those communities, it would be

nice to see them stay rural and not be influenced by the majority or have a representative rely on most of his votes from an urban setting like Chestermere. I can't think of any industry, as I drive by there, that is in Chestermere, where Strathmore and Drumheller as well as Brooks are the same.

Mr. Evans: All right. Thank you very much. Those are my questions. I appreciate your input.

Mr. Sauve: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for coming today, sir. If I understand correctly, obviously you would like Wheatland county to stay together and to stay together with the county of Newell. I'm guessing that if you've been here, you understand that that's a bit problematic in terms of: that now becomes a 40,000 block of population that we have to adjust, bearing in mind what effect it has in the surrounding area. We do have the proposal that you alluded to around Calgary, and we haven't looked at the fine-tuning of those boundaries and those populations in terms of relative voter parity.

You know, I take it that if we're going to leave Wheatland county as much as possible as a single entity, you don't see any place else that it could go. You're not keen on it going to Drumheller. Where else would you see it potentially fitting? Because we may have to look at a northern alignment, or we may have to look at something else in order to balance the population.

Mr. Sauve: I just love it where we're at.

Ms Jeffs: I know.

Mr. Sauve: I don't know what else to say. You can twist my arm and beat on me, but I'm going to stay with Newell if I can.

Ms Jeffs: Well, you know, if we had to break up that happy marriage, where would you be?

Mr. Sauve: Well, I'll tell you. I didn't come here to ask to do your job because I've studied it a little bit and what you guys are doing. I'll stick with mine as a councillor and farmer and rancher – thank you very much – and I'll leave the other up to you because I don't know how to answer that, really. On behalf of the Wheatland county we're just so happy to be in part with Newell and be, the whole two areas, under one constituency. I think it's a very, very fortunate situation to be in. We share so much in common with the oil industry, the irrigation industry in both of them, the agriculture, cattle and grazing with some of the big feedlots in both areas. You just couldn't design one any better than this.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Well, we'll see how that works. We unfortunately have to step back and look at not just this constituency; we have to look at the entire south region, and we have to look at some relative voter parity. I mean, we've had a number of presentations as we go across the province where people look around and say, "Yup. Our constituency works just perfectly dandy," but that doesn't necessarily work within the region or the area in order for us to follow the guidelines in the statute and in the case law.

Mr. Sauve: Yeah. But my intention in coming here today was to defend it as is, and then let you folks make your decision.

Shirley McClellan said the other night when I was chatting with her: if you ever get offered the job of sitting on one of these with these guys, don't take it.

Ms Jeffs: Well, that's good to hear.

Mr. Sauve: Because it's a tough job, and you have to make some decisions that aren't going to be too popular.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you very much. I don't have anything else, Mr. Sauve.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Sauve. The only thing I'd say is that, frankly, I am convinced that even if it's going to take an order in council creating the new county of Wheatland and Newell or vice versa, with two Reeves, I'm going to be pushing hard to do what you're asking us to do because I think it makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Sauve: Well, thank you very much for that, Peter. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Archer: I have nothing further to add, Mr. Sauve. Thanks for your comments.

Mr. Sauve: Well, thank you for that, too. Thanks, folks. I appreciate your having us out in the rural areas. It's really a leg up for us. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Reeve Molly Douglass with the county of Newell.

The Chair: Would you for *Hansard* give your name and who you are presenting on behalf of?

Ms Douglass: Absolutely. My name is Molly Douglass, and I am here representing the county of Newell. We are running ahead; otherwise, I think most of our councillors would have been here as well, so I want you to know I do have some friends.

I'm just going to run back for a minute and get something.

The Chair: Just before you do start, let me assure you that from what we've heard, the county of Newell does have a lot of friends.

Molly Douglass, Reeve County of Newell

Ms Douglass: That's great. Thank you.

I really do want to read out and into the record the cover letter that comes with our presentation. It's very sincere.

The County of Newell appreciates your presence today in our community. The fact that your Commission is holding this Public Hearing for so many of our local authorities and residents to present and/or be present heartens us.

The mission of your five-member group to listen, consider, and eventually "puzzle the pieces" to fit as best as possible is a formidable task.

As a representative and on behalf of the citizens, staff and Council of our County, thank you for your important work and thank you for hearing us today.

I've been sitting here for a couple of hours, and I'm not sure how many more times you want to hear a lot of the same information, so

I'm going to probably skim through some of this, but some of it takes a little bit of a twist or might be different than what you've heard.

3:35

Within the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act and also on the website of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, mention is made four times of "relevant considerations" for determining the area to be included in and in fixing the boundaries of proposed electoral divisions.

Listed in Section 14 under the heading of "relevant considerations" are eight items. The Act states that the Commission "may" consider any factors it considers appropriate, but uses the words "shall take into consideration" when describing this list of eight (a-h).

The County of Newell Council feel that if these eight guiding features are considered there is no need of any changes within our current Strathmore-Brooks constituency, and in fact, the changes proposed would disregard the first relevant consideration – item (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Then I was just going to look at the seven others, but I'm going to skim through some of them. Sparsity and density I don't think were a lot different than lots of constituencies.

Common community interest and community organizations. You've heard lots about that today, and within the county of Newell one thing I would really like to point out is that I do believe that within our county – and I obviously direct my comments about the county of Newell because that is our county. Ben was here representing Wheatland. We do like each other. We do work together well. The county of Wheatland and the county of Newell meet regularly, and that is the only other county that we meet regularly with. It isn't because we haven't tried to cultivate other counties around us; it's just something that we do, and it hasn't happened with the other counties. So we have lots of community interests within the county of Newell, but I also believe that extends into the county of Wheatland.

One thing that we have done within our county which I think is important to keep us all together sort of under one region is that in 2008 the county of Newell decided that all of our communities within our boundaries were critical. We focus a lot on hamlets because hamlets are a county-municipal – I was going to say problem because the people that come from the hamlets aren't here behind me to yell at me. They occupy a lot of time around the table, and some of us sort of started to wonder: why aren't we concerned about our villages and our town of Bassano and our city of Brooks? Those are critical to the people within our areas. So we set aside some new money out of our county coffers, in the amount of \$4.4 million, for regional enhancement based on a per capita count for our hamlets and for our villages, town, and city. I just point that out as something that I believe makes us a very close and concerned about one another county and community.

Item (d) refers to Calgary and Edmonton.

Item (e). I did enclose a couple of maps that – I don't know – might help you understand the county of Wheatland borders a little bit better. The first map is our current Strathmore-Brooks in the yellow, and our boundaries are there with Wheatland, so that might help you understand what you were asking Ben a little bit earlier.

Then, of course, the second map shows us pulled apart into three constituencies, and that was what I talked about under item (e) the maps. I really feel that

This "splintering" [that has happened] has been done with little regard to the mandated considerations.

I'm reading on page 2 under (e).

Brooks and a large rural area have been pulled north across the Red

Deer River, Bassano and a small rural area have been pulled south across the Bow River, and what's left of our current riding is realigned with Chestermere and area, leaving our communities of Gem and Rosemary as our only ones in our original electoral division, Strathmore-Brooks. We would be on the fringe, outer part of three constituencies as "add-ons" and central to none.

That, certainly, is something that you've heard lots about.

Item (f) talks about the number of municipalities and other local authorities.

Wheatland County is our rural local partner in the current Strathmore-Brooks area. Both of our counties have irrigation authorities, the Eastern Irrigation and Western Irrigation Districts, whose boundaries are similar to ours. Newell and Wheatland County share common economic interests of agriculture, irrigation and the energy industry. Strathmore and Brooks are the business and service centres. Hamlets, villages, and towns exist in both Counties. Many of our "border" communities are linked through school attendance, trade and recreation patterns. Our Trans-Canada/#1 connection is obvious. Our combined population of 41,757 along with all the other considerations leave us believing we are a near perfect constituency.

We also understand that we might not be able to stay near perfect, but looking at all of the things that, you know, you had to consider, it seemed as though we were sort of perfect.

The geographical features.

The Trans-Canada Highway/#1 is a common east-west link for all of our communities, whether they are located north or south of it. It is the road we travel to access our City (Brooks) and Town (Bassano) for the retail services we need. In addition, [secondary highway] 36 provides the north-south link to #1 for many of our populated areas. For us, these main routes are connectors, not dividers.

Our two rivers, the Red Deer and the Bow, form natural boundaries in the North and in the South for our County and its internal municipalities. Rivers are natural and true dividers, especially when bridge crossings are not available meaning many miles and much time to "go around."

They truly are dividers. I live north, close to the Red Deer, and we have ferry service when it's operating; otherwise, we drive many miles to find a bridge. So to push people across rivers isn't always a good idea.

I think, though, item (h) is the most critical, especially in our world today: the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

Decision makers at all levels of government, whether municipal, provincial, or federal, need to focus on engaging citizens in our democratic systems. At a time when voter turnout is at record lows, all of us need to be looking for ways to arouse positive public interest, rather than confusion. Three electoral districts rather than one within our County does not translate into understandable and clear boundaries. In fact, it instead would result in mix-ups and disillusionment within our public. Recognizing your MLA and/or actually knowing him/her should not be made more difficult.

Population requirements of section 15 put us pretty good. I mean, we're 10 per cent above the average, so we have room to grow, so I don't think population is a critical factor with us. I understand what's happening around us perhaps.

The words "effective representation" appear within the Act and also on the website to sum up why the need arises to review our electoral divisions. Our belief is that we currently have effective representation and do meet the requirements of the relevant considerations.

The EBC website mentions to the reader that "the commission will be particularly interested in your advice on any places where you think the existing boundaries:

- slice up natural communities of interest
- don't respect natural boundaries, like rivers
- include areas which have little in common

and your suggestions on how these or other concerns . . . might be corrected."

Our current boundaries have no problems. The ones proposed have all of the above concerns. Let's talk about how we can keep what we have in place . . . more or less.
Thank you.

The Chair: Just before we go to the questions, I'd just point out that the average when we took into account the 2009 municipal censuses, that we didn't get until late 2009, brings it to 40,880, not 37,820.

Ms Douglass: Okay. So the new average is 40,880. Okay. I wonder how I – it must have been in the book I took that out of.

The Chair: In addition to that, I think you'll find – and we'll be confirming the numbers – that your suggested riding that you're now currently in would be towards 45,000.

Ms Douglass: Okay. I took these out of the tabled book.

The Chair: That was set out before we had access to the 2009 municipal censuses, which came out last September or October, after we had published the panel. Those first figures were based on the last federal census.

3:45

Ms Douglass: Okay.

The Chair: We now have updated municipal censuses for Alberta to the end of 2009. Populationwise you're looking pretty good both ways.

Ms Douglass: Okay. I do have this book, and I did look at the wrong page of something. Sorry about that. I don't like it when facts aren't facts.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Reeve Douglass. Your presentation is very clear. We've been through a discussion of most of these issues over the course of today's hearings. We've heard very clearly that there's a strong desire to ensure that the county of Newell is within one constituency. A number of our presenters, when pressed on the issue, have indicated that that's their first priority. A second priority is to stay associated with the county of Wheatland, but the first priority of keeping the county of Newell as an integrated whole within one constituency would be the higher priority.

The other thing I'm hearing in your presentation and I've heard from others today as well is that if there is a trade-off that the commission is going to make over the next couple of months in looking at keeping these counties together and if there's a price of having a population base somewhat above the average, in general people seem to be pretty comfortable with a higher population to ensure that there is consistency of communities within the constituency. Again, I'm taking that kind of by inference from your presentation, and others have said so more directly today.

Ms Douglass: Absolutely, Keith. I think it's important to distinguish between – obviously, I represent the county of Newell, so my first job is to keep it together, but that doesn't make it of less interest to our people to include the county of Wheatland as well in that whole thought pattern. But, yes, we don't want to have three MLAs within our boundaries for obvious reasons. Taking that to the next step, we really want to stay the way we are, which is what I've said.

Dr. Archer: Right. We have had some presentations, I guess I should say to you, that have indicated that it wouldn't be unreasonable, at least for some people, to look at a constituency that included Drumheller with the county of Newell.

Ms Douglass: Who said that, and where do they live?

Dr. Archer: You'll be able to find it in *Hansard*.

Ms Douglass: I haven't been here all day, unfortunately. I should have gotten here faster.

Dr. Archer: Well, I think the argument was that there is an association in the badlands. I think it's a badlands tourism concept that would probably tie the provincial park with the area around Drumheller. I think it's a tourism kind of argument.

Ms Douglass: The Canadian badlands initiative. It involves 63 municipalities, the whole south basically. Yeah, it's huge.

Dr. Archer: Right. Anyway, that was one of the ideas that was discussed during our presentations today as well.

Ms Douglass: Some people say strange things under pressure.

Dr. Archer: I thought that was a pressure-free part of the sessions today.

Ms Douglass: Just kidding.

Dr. Archer: Anyway, thanks very much for your comments.

Ms Douglass: You're very welcome.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Mr. Chairman and Reeve, thank you very much. I think that what has happened today is that we have perhaps asked some loaded questions to some of those other people. The questions have been along the line of: if you can't have the existing boundaries, how do you feel about this alternative? Or what alternative? From your reaction I think the real question is that if we give you five choices and choices 1, 2, 3, and 4 are to stay with the existing, and it's only number 5 that you would – it's not 1 and 1(a). It is these four, and then if there's a pen to the pad that forces you to do it, another alternative could be to move. It's not a mild preference to stay. It's a very, very strong preference for the two to stay.

Ms Douglass: Yes.

Mr. Dobbie: That's an inference that I'm drawing from what I'm hearing from you. Again, it's helpful when we are here to hear from so many people. The other thing I wanted to add is that, generally speaking, I appreciate the fact that this came as a surprise because many in the area thought it was a naturally perfect constituency, the same with Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Generally speaking, I also personally appreciate the fact that most of the presentations have been on a let's-make-the-case argument as opposed to taking it personally. Again, I just appreciate the principled basis of your presentation that has come to us.

Thank you.

Ms Douglass: I thought all you lawyers would enjoy the principled case.

The Chair: We won't go there.
Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much. I do actually believe that the suggestion about joining up with Drumheller came spontaneously from someone. I don't think we, you know, had them down and had them arm-wrestled in any way. It was very much an option that was discussed that was clearly not the favourite option. So we have heard that message loud and clear.

Thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon, Reeve Douglass.

Ms Douglass: You're welcome, Allyson.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Reeve Douglass, for your perfect presentation about the perfect union of the county of Newell and the county of Wheatland. It does strike me that there are probably two reasons for the great commonality of the two counties. I'd just like you to make some comments on that.

The first, obviously, is the common interests of the two areas. I would say that the second is that, as I understand it, since 1996 we've had Strathmore-Brooks. Having the two counties within one electoral division for that length of time, notwithstanding that there have been at least three MLAs during that period of time, well, maybe two, I guess, now that I think of it . . .

Ms Douglass: Two. Lyle and Arno.

Mr. Evans: And Tom Musgrove just before that.

. . . that must have had some influence as well on how well the communities have gotten together, just because you've been within one provincial jurisdiction. Is that a reasonable assumption on my part?

Ms Douglass: I think so, yeah.

Mr. Evans: But the main reason would be the commonality of interests between the two counties?

Ms Douglass: Yeah. I mean, we're just so similar. I think Ben spoke to it well, and so did Ken. Part of it is that I think our irrigation districts make us really similar as well, especially when we are sort of the northernmost of the irrigation districts. We border special areas, you know, to the north and east, and it's a different world. So Strathmore-Brooks, the counties of Wheatland and Newell: yeah, it's worked.

Mr. Evans: Well, I think we'd have to be Luddites to have missed the message. Thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms Douglass: You're welcome.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Reeve Douglass. A clear message, clear directions, and we are blacking out the names of anyone who might have suggested otherwise.

Ms Douglass: I'm sure they're safe.

Thank you so much for being here today. Like I said, it was heartening when we heard you were coming to our area. We really do appreciate that and the work you're doing.

The Chair: It's been a pleasure being here, and we'll be here tonight.

Do we have a further presenter before 6?

Ms Friesacher: There are no scheduled presenters until 6 p.m.

The Chair: All right. We'll adjourn until 6, and we'll return then.

[The hearing adjourned at 3:54 p.m.]

