



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Edmonton

Tuesday, September 22, 2009
3:03 p.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-5

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

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

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

Acting Chief Electoral Officer

Lori McKee-Jeske

Participants

Judith Axelson, Edmonton-Mill Woods Liberal Constituency Association
Laurie Blakeman, MLA, Edmonton-Centre
Stephen Mandel, Mayor, City of Edmonton
Dr. Cassandra Van Nostrand

Support Staff

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil
Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC
	Shannon Dean
Administrator	Erin Norton
Communications Consultant	Melanie Friesacher
Consultant	Tom Forgrave
Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

3:03 p.m.

Tuesday, September 22, 2009

[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for taking the time to come out and, hopefully, share your views with us today. I know I speak for all members of the commission when I say that we're looking forward to hearing from the people of Edmonton and area.

My name is Ernie Walter. I'm the chairman of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce to you the other members of the commission here with me today: on my far right Dr. Keith Archer of Banff, next to him Peter Dobbie of Vegreville, on my immediate left Allyson Jeffs of Edmonton, and next to her Brian Evans of Calgary.

Now that I've introduced us, I'll explain to you what our task here is. We've been directed by the legislation to make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions, which is four more than we presently have, based on the latest census and population information. In other words, our job is to determine where to divide Alberta into 87 areas so each Albertan receives effective representation by a Member of the Legislative Assembly. How do we plan to do this? Over the next months we will seek community input through a province-wide consultation before developing our recommendations. Through public hearings such as this one here today we want to hear what you have to say about the representation you are receiving in your community.

In carrying out this work, we have to follow the provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It says that we are to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly regarding the areas, boundaries, and names of 87 electoral divisions. You will recognize that this means we are mandated to propose four additional electoral divisions in Alberta, which will come into effect at the next provincial general election. This will be the first time in 23 years that we have new electoral divisions in Alberta. We're also reviewing the law, what the courts have said about electoral boundaries in the province of Alberta and in Canada, the work of previous commissions and committees which have studied boundaries in Alberta, and the population information which is available to us.

A brief summary of the electoral boundaries law. As I've said, our function is to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly for 87 electoral divisions. We have limited time to accomplish this task. We are required, after consideration of representations made at these public hearings, to submit an interim report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in February of 2010 that sets out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 proposed electoral divisions and the reasons for the proposed boundaries. Following the publication of the interim report a second round of public hearings will be held to receive input on the proposed 87 boundaries. After consideration of that input the commission must submit a final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by July of 2010. Then it is up to the Legislative Assembly by a resolution to approve or to approve with alterations the proposals of the commission and to introduce a bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the resolution. This law would then come into force when proclaimed, before the holding of the next general election.

One way to ensure effective representation is by developing electoral divisions with similar populations, especially where population density is similar. The law directs us to use the populations set out in the most recent census of Alberta as provided by Statistics Canada – and this is the 2006 census – but if the commis-

sion believes that there is population information that is more recent than the federal census compiled by Statistics Canada, then the commission may use this data in conjunction with the census information. We have that data for the city of Edmonton and for the city of Calgary and other areas. I note that we are also required to add the population of Indian reserves that were not included in the census, as provided by the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

3:10

In dividing Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions, the commission will take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate, but it must and shall take into consideration the following:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Metis settlements,
- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (e) . . . the existing municipal boundaries,
- (f) the number of municipalities and other local authorities,
- (g) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (h) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

The population rule states that a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 per cent above or below the average population for all 87 electoral divisions, and this is with one exception: up to four proposed electoral divisions may have a population that is as much as 50 per cent below the average population of the electoral divisions in Alberta if three of the following five criteria are met:

- (a) the area . . . exceeds 20 000 square kilometres or the . . . surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15 000 square kilometres;
- (b) the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of the proposed electoral division by the most direct highway route is more than 150 kilometres;
- (c) there is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 8000 people;
- (d) the area of the proposed electoral division contains [a First Nation] reserve or a Metis settlement;
- (e) the proposed electoral division has a portion of its boundary coterminous with a boundary of the Province of Alberta.

It says that for these purposes the municipality of Crowsnest Pass is not a town.

That's a very general overview of the legislation, but the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada have also provided guidance. In rulings they have agreed that under the Charter the rights of Albertans include the right to vote; the right to have the political strength or value or force of the vote an elector casts not unduly diluted; the right to effective representation; the right to have the parity of the votes of others diluted, but not unduly, in order to gain effective representation or as a matter of practical necessity. These rulings as well as the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act must guide our decisions and, ultimately, the proposals that we make to the Legislative Assembly.

Now that I've explained the law that we are guided by, we want to receive some very important input, and that's your views. We believe that what we hear from you, the people who will be affected by these boundary changes, is critical to recommending a new electoral map that will ensure fair and effective representation to all Albertans.

Again, on behalf of the commission let me welcome you here today. For those of you who will not be speaking, you can still make your views known in writing, by mail, fax, or e-mail, as many are.

With that background information, I'll now call on our staff to call forth the first speaker. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then five minutes of questions and answers with the commission. The commission's public meetings are being recorded by *Alberta Hansard*, and the audio recordings will be posted to the commission website. Transcripts of these proceedings will also be available. If you are registered as a presenter or choose to participate in this afternoon's meeting, we ask that you identify yourself for the record prior to starting your presentation.

With that, we'll call the first speaker.

Ms Friesacher: Our first speaker is Mayor Mandel with the city of Edmonton.

The Chair: Welcome, Mayor Mandel.

**Stephen Mandel, Mayor
City of Edmonton**

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Judge Walter. I am Stephen Mandel. I'm the mayor of the city of Edmonton. Judge Walter and members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, thank you for the opportunity to present the position of the city of Edmonton to you.

The city of Edmonton is requesting that the Electoral Boundaries Commission redesign the province's electoral division boundaries so as to provide 20 electoral divisions within the boundaries of the city. This would be an increase of two electoral divisions from the current 18 electoral divisions in the city.

Section 12 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act was amended this year to add subsection (3), enabling the commission to consider more recent population information if it is available. The city of Edmonton conducted a census in the spring of 2009. As of April 2009 the city's official population is 782,439 people. That's an increase of over 60,000 people since the 2006 federal census. We do a census because both the federal and provincial governments mandate grants based on the most recent population data, and we want to ensure that the most up-to-date data is available. In this case it's even more significant because of the time frame under which you'll make a decision today which will probably have an impact for a number of years later.

Given this population increase and the commission's current direction, which says that the average electoral division population should be 37,820, the city's eligibility for electoral divisions can be calculated by dividing the current population, 782,439, by the recommended average electoral division population of 37,820. Edmonton would be eligible for 21 electoral divisions. Recognizing as well what the growth trends in our city communicate, that population trends in Alberta are overwhelmingly urban based, it is more reasonable to assume that redistribution should not only acknowledge the strong growth which occurred in Edmonton but the trending over the past 10-plus years, which shows the depth and consistent strength of these trends.

The city of Edmonton argues that the numbers tell a clear story of why the city is eligible for two additional seats in the provincial Legislature on at least these following grounds. Statistical analysis of the current population numbers justifies the request of two seats. The city of Edmonton census of 2008 and 2009 showed that the city population grew by over 30,000 people in one year. That is a large, 4 per cent population increase in one year. That increase would warrant almost one additional seat on its own. The rate of growth in the city of Edmonton is expected to continue. An additional two MLAs is the minimum number that Edmonton citizens should be electing in the next provincial election to ensure an appropriate democratic representation.

Given that expected growth, I would argue that electoral divisions in Edmonton should have a population equal to or slightly below the average electoral division to ensure that equivalent democratic representation persists even as the population grows. The redesign of boundaries must address the oversize of some of our divisions. For example, Edmonton-Whitemud is 50 per cent higher than the average division, and Edmonton-Castle Downs has 23 per cent more people than the average. They will have an even larger variance than stated in your public materials, considering the growth reflected in our updated 2009 census. This dilutes the value and weakens the voice of the individual voters in these constituencies. At least two additional electoral divisions can easily be carved into Edmonton by redesigning the boundaries of these two divisions and redistributing the population accordingly.

Numbers tell a clear story, and when you consider that the next commission may not be reviewing this again until as late as the year 2020, it is essential that the decisions you make here not only serve today's population but will stand the test of time. I know that you have a difficult and often contentious task to accomplish. Edmontonians remember well that the last time this task was undertaken, we actually lost a seat, a result that resonated strongly and negatively in our growing city. For this reason Edmontonians will be watching this process even more carefully.

We are a growing city, a city with an increasing intensity of urban issues caused by growth and concentration of people, whether the need for effective transit or the challenge of the homeless, urban needs and challenges which our citizens believe must receive proper focus from within the legislative Chamber, a focus that becomes most possible when a fairly balanced level of representation is applied. We're a capital city with a pride of place and with citizens who fully value the role played by the Legislature and who will be looking for transparency and logic and fairness in the process.

I look forward to the commission's consideration of the request of the design of 20 electoral divisions within the boundaries of the city of Edmonton. I'd be more than happy to answer questions.

3:20

The Chair: Thank you, Mayor Mandel.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. Those were really helpful comments, so much appreciated. I guess I would like to make an observation more than asking a question, and I'd ask that you respond to that. The legislation enables us to use more current data than the 2006 census, and of course we're using more current data for Edmonton, but the electoral quotient of 37,820 that you cited, which was part of our publication that we sent to all Albertans, was based upon the 2006 census. So to a certain extent, I think, your figures use updated census data for Edmonton as part of the numerator, and then the denominator was the 2006 census data. The consequence is that it would appear that Edmonton would be entitled to a larger number of additional seats.

If you use the updated census data from across the province, then the electoral quotient increases from our published figure of 37,820 to a figure of 40,583. That's the figure that we're currently using as a denominator, as the average size of all constituencies. If one took the census population that you referred to for Edmonton, 782,439, and then divided it by 40,583, the result is a recommended number of constituencies of 19 rather than 20.

I wonder if you could simply comment on that issue, which attempts to bring in the population growth across the province rather than just for the city of Edmonton.

The Chair: Just before you do that, Mayor Mandel, we are just getting the updated numbers from Edmonton and Calgary.

Mr. Mandel: Sure. We appreciate that. I guess that when we did the numbers, we rounded it down to 20. The numbers of 37,820 would have justified 21, and we rounded it down to 20 because we didn't know what all the numbers were across the province. So we did an adjustment to it.

I can't speak to the entire population of the province. I mean, if you're saying it's 40,000, then it's 40,000, but the fact is that you need to look also at the growth potential. You know, the challenge you face is that the province is becoming ever more urban, and the challenges in the urban areas are becoming greater and greater. Not that they should have an unfair representation, that's not proper, but they should have a fair representation, whatever that number is. If we have that, then I don't think we can complain. That's really my position. We shouldn't have greater representation, but we shouldn't have a decrease in representation.

The challenge you face is that you're predicting 12 and 14 years out because you're predicting to 2020 or '21 or '22. Our city as well as other major metropolitan areas in the province are growing substantially. I think that's one of the challenges you face. You're on that side; I'm on this side. I would hope that you'd look at population as an important issue and that you would find a balance in making sure representation is done in an effective way.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you. Thank you, Mayor Mandel, for your presentation. You have indicated that two of the ridings have received very, very significant growth. Is it your presentation that there should be an additional riding in the north and in the south of Edmonton to accommodate that and to accommodate what you see as an ongoing trend in that area in terms of the population swelling?

Mr. Mandel: You know, I think it's an interesting point. We had a tremendous amount of growth in the south end of our city in Whitemud as well as in Castle Downs. We're also seeing a tremendous growth in the central part of our city, a tremendous influx of people from eastern Canada moving to Edmonton. I don't know whether or not – I mean, the adjustments in all these have to be done and, you know, you would set a standard for numbers, but obviously Whitemud is way, way out of line, and Castle Downs is reflective, I think, of a change in dynamics, too. A lot of people moved to the north end of the city from outside of the city. If all the numbers were looked at, my belief is that you'll find there are an awful lot more people coming into the central part of the city and into the northeastern part of Edmonton because that's where an influx of a great number of our new Canadians are coming from and coming to.

So that's something you'll need to look at in how you analyze the distribution of population within a metropolitan area. I don't know whether our census has that distribution. If we have that information, we'd be glad to supply it to you.

Ms Jeffs: Certainly, that would be appreciated. If you do have that information with the growth in the central part of the city, that would be very helpful. I think we are getting some data on that coming from the city.

Mr. Mandel: Whatever we have, you should have. It's open to the public; we have nothing to hide. Whatever it is, it is. I get the sense when I go places and see the new immigrants coming to the city that there are a fair number who are moving into the central part of the city and the north-central part of the city. How that has impacted on the numbers and population distribution, I'll allow the professionals to do that.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman. Thank you very much, Your Honour, or Your Worship, I should say.

Mr. Mandel: It doesn't matter. It's easy. Call me whatever you want.

Mr. Evans: I'd just like to get clarification, Mayor Mandel, for myself about your focus on the averaging. I take it from your presentation that you are recommending that we as a commission continue to get updated census figures, population figures, as we go through this process, and that our goal should be to be as close to the quotient, the average per 87 constituencies, as possible regardless of whether that would result in two seats for Edmonton, one seat for Edmonton, or whatever. Are there other factors that the city of Edmonton would weight equally or close to that in terms of the recommendation that you'd make to this commission as to how we should deliberate on the various factors?

Mr. Mandel: A couple of things, I think, are important. You've mentioned, Judge Walter, that there's a challenge with distances for rural areas. That's not our issue, but that's an issue. In the cities you've got the ongoing urbanization of the province of Alberta and the influx of people moving to the cities, whether it's Edmonton or other cities in the province. I think that's a big issue, and that's not going to slow down. The people are moving in a dramatic number. That would be one.

Number two. I think that we're having a tremendous influx of aboriginals into our community, and that kind of representation – you mentioned the aboriginal reservations. There's a huge aboriginal population ongoing moving into the urban areas, Edmonton in particular. We have the second-largest aboriginal community in Canada but the fastest growing, and that's because of the challenges faced on the reservations. That's a different social issue, which we're not here to discuss, but that's moving a lot of people into the urban areas, and an awful lot of them are coming to Edmonton. So that's having an impact on our city, and that's causing a rise in our population. The urbanization of that and the problems it creates, the social issues – you know, we need to have that kind of representation of those kinds of issues in the Legislature because they're substantial and they're ever growing. As an example, the homeless problem in the city of Edmonton is substantial and the same in Calgary. We face big issues. We need that kind of representation to present those issues to the provincial government.

I think those are some of the issues that I would think are important. Social issues and the problems we face in municipalities in the large urban centres are substantially greater today than they were, whether it's police or drugs or other challenges we face, that I'm sure other cities face, but we have it magnified. As an example, one statistic shows that around the city of Edmonton police costs are about half of what they are in the city of Edmonton. It's obvious because we have the central part of the city, where those challenges come.

We need to have that representation in the provincial government to be able to put forward the case and the challenge that we face in the city of Edmonton. An equitable base of representation is fair. I don't think we should have more, but we shouldn't have less.

3:30

Mr. Evans: Thanks very much.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. A couple of questions. First, it seems implicit in your presentation that you're suggesting that the commission consider the boundaries of the city of Edmonton as something to honour and that we divide the city into constituencies within the boundaries.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. I'd like to comment on that. I really think that's imperative. You know, we have a new regional group getting together. We're working very closely together. I respect their privacy and their ability to make decisions about what's going to happen in their area. We need to work with our neighbours to make sure that the Edmonton capital region works well together. But the challenges we face in the city of Edmonton are different than they might face out there, and we need that representation.

I'll use a federal example which infuriated me, and I'll state it now. The federal government, when they made a reapportionment of boundaries – there's an Edmonton-St. Albert, there's an Edmonton-Sherwood Park, and there's an Edmonton-Leduc. They don't have issues the city of Edmonton faces, and I think it's unfair for either of those places to have representation that could be dominated by Edmonton or dominated by the other city. We are an entity to ourselves and have our own challenges, and I think our borders and the population we have within those borders are absolutely sacrosanct. Those are the representatives we need to have to speak for our city. I think you confuse people unless you want to eliminate all of the boundaries, and that's another story. That's a different issue. I think that for the city of Edmonton it's absolutely sacrosanct that our boundaries need to be where our representatives are.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. Again, I thought that was implied, but I wanted to make sure I was understanding it.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you very much for that question. It's very important. Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: And you hadn't set me up by asking me to ask you that?

Mr. Mandel: No, I didn't. But it's a very important question because it has created, I think, a fair number of challenges for us in the city of Edmonton with the federal representation. Not that I'm critical of the federal representation. They do what they do. But there are issues within the city that we have that are substantially different.

Mr. Dobbie: I lived in the city of Edmonton for over a dozen years. There are six wards currently. There has been discussion about going to 12. I understand that the wards vary in population and that they're not changed regularly. Is that correct?

Mr. Mandel: We're now going to 12. There's a small variation, not a lot. You know, before, when we had the six wards, they'd be in the 125,000 range plus or minus. There'll be some variance but not a lot.

Mr. Dobbie: One thing that might be helpful. You've given us the macro perspective in terms of making sure there's equity in terms of the total number of MLAs within the city of Edmonton. We are going to need to balance within Edmonton the size of constituencies. We to some extent want to try to predict where the growth will be, but we have a number of factors to look at: existing neighbourhoods, major road boundaries. If the city of Edmonton has any specific

suggestions or if you've become aware of specific issues within the city with its existing boundaries where you would recommend some improvements, if you have any specific suggestions, we do have some time with the commission that we think we would like to consider those, and those would be helpful. So again, if there are some glaring examples where the previous boundaries didn't make sense to the city of Edmonton and you have some suggestions, we'd welcome it. You don't need to give those today.

Mr. Mandel: Okay. Great. Thank you. I'll have to go back and consult with our administration to see what that might be.

I will comment on one thing, though. The city of Edmonton is looking, like almost all urban areas in the province of Alberta and the direction of the province, for greater intensification, trying to move more people into a smaller area, and controlling our boundaries for growth. That's part of a provincial-wide initiative to try to stop the proliferation of growth and the challenge we face with greenhouse gases. That's an issue we face in Edmonton – and we take it very seriously – but there might be other issues that we will definitely bring to your attention if we see them.

Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Mayor, in looking at the existing electoral divisions, we see a lot of growth in Edmonton-Whitemud in particular, in Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Castle Downs, Edmonton-Decore, and Edmonton-Manning. We see that growth in those areas is increasing much more quickly than in the balance of the city. Is this what you would expect to continue in the near to medium future of five to 10 years?

Mr. Mandel: I would think that, you know, that's where we have a great deal of our land. If you look to the north around the St. Albert area, we're pretty much out of land, so there's not going to be a lot of growth from the city of Edmonton up there. Historically we'd move south because that's towards where the airport is and the industrial areas are, where our major road systems are, the Anthony Henday and the Whitemud, so we would expect a continuation of growth in that area. We would, though, anticipate that some of it would move a little further east, Summerlea and south of Summerlea. That area would see a bit more growth as it starts to fill up in the south end of the city. Right now in the Heritage Valley we're moving towards the boundary of the city. Windermere is the next area to be developed. So we think we'll have some shift to the east.

We are looking at the MDP, which will evaluate and do some development up in the northeast, which has been somewhat – I won't say less developed. It has developed a lot more recently but not to the degree it's going south. The areas to the northeast will be under the new municipal development plan, and that's been directed to have a lot of growth because of the potential growth in the Industrial Heartland and the supply of goods and services and products for that area. Now, as of yet we haven't got many upgraders built, but we're assuming that will cause some growth. Whenever the Henday is built, it makes a big difference. The Henday will be built and opened up to the northeast in the next four or five years, and that will cause more growth to happen up in that end of the city.

We see movement in all directions, but a lot is going to be south, primarily because that's where the airport is. So a lot of people will be moving towards there, and also our industrial growth is that way as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other questions for the mayor?

Dr. Archer: Maybe just one additional question, and it's more a matter of principle than anything. One of the areas where we have some discretion is in the creation of special electoral districts. Across the province variation in constituency size, of course, has to be plus or minus 25 per cent of the average population, but we can create up to four districts that can vary by as much as 50 per cent below the average. That's intended for the sparsely populated parts of the province, particularly in the north, I suspect, although the legislation doesn't give a geographical indicator. Do you have a view on the use of special electoral districts within Alberta just in general? Is that something that you'd like to comment on?

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. I'll voice an opinion. My concern is that you don't dilute the electoral power of other groups in essence because people live in a more secluded or isolated area. I understand that there's a challenge of reaching those people because an MLA has further to go and further distances, but at the same time that shouldn't preclude people from getting fair representation. So I think you have to judge very wisely how you use those. I think that's a decision – that's why you're over there and I'm over here.

From our point of view, it would be disheartening to see that some of the major urban areas would be reduced in size of representation when an area that's very sparsely populated and large distances apart would have a greater representation just because they're further apart. That, in my mind, shouldn't necessarily be a governing factor because my vote should count the same as everybody else's vote. Representation by population is really something that I think is very important.

I do understand there have to be some variances and adjustments, but from my point of view, I think it's important that districts are not treated special because there's no one living there. You know, that's an issue where people decide to live in those locations. We bless them and hope they do well, but they shouldn't be entitled to greater representation than people who live in urban areas, whether it's Lethbridge or Calgary or Red Deer or Grande Prairie or Edmonton.

Dr. Archer: Thanks. Nothing further.

The Chair: In other words, use it wisely.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. I realize it's not easy. I know most of the MLAs, and they're great people, and they work very hard. I know that to travel from one end of their riding to the other has a great deal of challenge, but that's, unfortunately, the evolution of Canada, where we're becoming an urbanized society. Unless there's a way to change how you're going to represent people and how they're going to vote, I don't know how you're going to change that. I think it's everywhere in the country where there's a movement to the cities.

As a result of that, it's going to create an ongoing and ever-increasing challenge of the distances that some members are going to have to travel in more isolated areas. Maybe there need to be better communication systems. Maybe there needs to be better equipment devoted to travel. You know, the province has planes. Maybe these people need to have better access to aircraft so that they can visit these outposts – that's fine with me – but the vote is what counts. How you meet those people as an MLA is your choice, but the vote should be based upon as close a proximity to representation by population.

3:40

The Chair: All right.
Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you. I just have one follow-up to Brian Evans' question. You were talking about the influx of the aboriginal population into the centre of the city and other ethnic diversity there. Did the city census capture that? Will that be in the data that's coming?

Mr. Mandel: No. We did not ask. I don't know if we would. It's a bit bold to ask. That's a federal question. We don't want to get into who you are. But just from my experience, for example, I had a meeting the other day with the Somalian community. There are 10,000 Somalians living in Edmonton, and no one would realize that. You've heard of Eritrea? There are 5,000 Eritreans living in Edmonton. I mean, there's a large influx of population. A lot of these people have come from Montreal and Toronto because they don't see a future there. They come here, and they're warmly welcomed and can see a future. The Sudanese and, you know, the large influx of African population is wonderful. It's going to be a great future for our city.

I believe most of those people are coming to the cities. Also, in the population analysis we've done in the capital region group Canada will grow and our region is going to grow as a result of immigration, net immigration with the rest of the country but primarily an awful lot from outside of the country as our economy grows. Those people come to the city. They come to the central city. Maybe they get wealthy, and they move to other parts of the region. But in the initial stage of their arrival into Canada they come to the central city because that's where there's connection with people. So we see that central core growing. I think that if you ever get a chance to go to some of the schools and go to grade 5 or 6 and see the multicultural character, it's quite wonderful. That wasn't there five years ago.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Do you have any questions of the commission?

I'm sorry, Brian.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Chairman, just a couple of follow-ups for Mayor Mandel. First of all, on the movement of ethnic immigrants to the central core, we've heard – and I think it's unanimously felt by this commission – that one of the reasons for that is the availability of social service agencies and other assistance that municipal, provincial, and federal governments make available to new immigrants and to others who are in need. Is that a factor that in any way, shape, or form we should be taking into account to offset the added demands of the folks who are the most recent immigrants, access to services in addition to their MLA, access to the various social services?

Mr. Mandel: You raise a very important point. That's why the necessity for a balance in representation, because of advocacy and having adequate representation for parts of the city which have a newly immigrant population who are for the most part probably using services a bit more than other people. They need access to those. They do come to those areas because of that, but also, like in any city where new immigrants come to places, they gradually gravitate out to other places. That doesn't mean they're all in the centre of the city. There are, you know, a lot who have gone to the south side. But predominantly we've seen a lot of the African population move to the centre and the northeast, and I think it's service oriented. It's also, you know, the very nature of opportunities for housing and also where their friends are. But as people change socioeconomic position, they move out to the suburbs and move to different parts of the city, and we expect that to happen with this immigrant group as with all groups.

I think you raise a really interesting point about access to services, but it's also access to the advocacy. That's really the important part of what MLAs do. They advocate for their constituents. So having adequate representation for this group of people is almost paramount to the same kind of advocacy group for those who live in the more outlying areas who don't have as many people there but the distance creates a challenge for them. Well, these people need to have advocacy because they're for the most part afraid of government. They haven't seen the kind of honourable and honest government we have in Canada and in the province of Alberta, so they need to have confidence and comfort with their politicians. I think, you know, that's an important variable that happens in a city like Edmonton or Calgary for that matter or, I'm assuming, Red Deer. That's a variable that is sometimes maybe not discounted but not thought of: how important it can be for the newly emerging immigrants to our society, which is going to be our future growth.

Mr. Evans: The second follow-up is just on the issue of acceptable variance from averaging. It's probably an unfair question to ask you, but if the city of Edmonton has not considered this yet, it might be something that you might want to consider, Mayor Mandel; that is, what you would recommend to the commission as an acceptable variance from the quotient, whatever that quotient ends up being with the most current information that we have, whether that's 2 per cent, 5 per cent. Or is it even a fair criteria for us to look at?

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. We'll definitely do that. I won't do it now. Even though I believe I can, I won't do it now. I'll check with the knowledgeable people behind me to make sure that I don't make a big dummy mistake. We will definitely follow up with a position on that. I do have an idea, but I will shut up. I won't say anything today.

Mr. Evans: I certainly respect the input that you get from Mr. Hlus in particular.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. We're very lucky. We've got a great team. You know, Steve Thompson has done all the census work, and Brian has been a great addition to the city. He's really been, I can tell you, a great help to us.

The process. You mentioned in your opening remarks, Judge Walter, that . . .

The Chair: The process will simply be that we'll get the public input over the next month. We'll then consider everything. We'll do an interim report, which will have 87 electoral divisions in it, and propose names for those electoral divisions. We will then present that to the Speaker of the Legislature. The public will have access to look at that, and then we'll convene a second round of public hearings . . .

Mr. Mandel: Okay. That was my question.

The Chair: . . . so that people can have their input on what we've proposed. Then we'll do a final report, which will have to be in the hands of the Legislature by July of 2010.

Mr. Mandel: Okay. So we will have another kick at the cat, depending on what you say, anyway.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mandel: I wish you good luck. It's not an easy job to satisfy

3-odd million people. Good luck with your deliberations. I hope that my presentation was of some help.

The Chair: It was.

Mr. Mandel: Again, thank you very much for your dedication in doing this. It's much appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Ms Laurie Blakeman.

The Chair: Ms Blakeman, welcome.

**Laurie Blakeman, MLA
Edmonton-Centre**

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Ready?

The Chair: We are.

Ms Blakeman: Rock and roll.

Thank you very much for allowing me to appear before the commission today and bring some observations from my position as the MLA for Edmonton-Centre and a member of the Official Opposition caucus. Some of what you'll be hearing from me today will probably be familiar. I haven't been too shy about getting my ideas out there about what I would like to see happen, so think of it as reinforcement rather than repetition, if you will.

I'm going to approach this in three ways. I'm going to talk about issues in Alberta, issues in Edmonton, and issues in Edmonton-Centre if you'll allow me. I have to say that overall in Alberta what I am finding from the population when you talk about elections or politics is despair and disbelief. I'm just going to run through the outline of what I'm going to talk about. We've got the population reacting with despair and disbelief. I'd like to talk a little bit about the matrix, about the variance percentage, about using recent numbers and considering future growth.

3:50

For the issues in Edmonton themselves, again, using recent numbers and future growth, I think there should be two seats at a minimum that are added to Edmonton. I'll come back and talk about that, the issues in Edmonton-Centre, urban considerations such as that disparity of vote but also things like language groups and the number of business revitalization zones and community leagues that urban MLAs deal with, housing stock, density, et cetera.

I talked about issues in Alberta and seeing the despair and disbelief in the population. I think that's coming from a cynicism that there is nothing that they can do that will affect the system and a cynicism that the government doesn't really want them to participate, which is why we get so many people, I think, that are disengaging. Electoral reform is badly needed. I recognize the parameters that you're dealing with, but most people don't understand how narrow your parameters are. No doubt you will hear people talk to you about the need for electoral reform around fixed election dates and voting systems and all the rest of it, but it does lump together in the public's mind.

I think the key piece that you can deal with is the disparity between the rural voter and the urban voter. I would argue that the matrix that currently appears and is considered should be discarded. I don't think that it reflects today's society, and I do think that it gives too much emphasis to rural geography. It does recognize rural members dealing with town councils, for example, who could be

representing a few hundred or a few dozen people, but it doesn't recognize urban MLAs dealing with business revitalization zones or community leagues, which could be representing several thousands or tens of thousands of people.

I think that there's a great deal of emphasis put on the distance that the constituency is from the Legislative Building itself. I would argue that that does not represent a difficulty in representing the riding. What it represents is how the time is used by the member, but at the same time that one member is travelling to their constituency, another member who resides in Edmonton will be using that time to do other jobs. I think the distance across a riding is a factor.

I'd like to see the commission dealing with the 'rurban' ridings, and I would propose to the commission to consider – the position we have now is that two groups with conflicting priorities are in a position of having the same representative. One way or another that representative is going to choose one priority over the other, and the second group's priorities will be subsumed. I would urge the commission to think of approaching this in a different way, more like the doughnut and the hole rather than pieces of the pie in which the rural, suburban, and even urban are all joined together and one person is supposed to represent it. If what we have is an urban centre surrounded by a suburban or a rural riding, cut it like a doughnut and the hole rather than a piece of pie.

I think the percentage variation that you will be basing on becomes very important, and I would urge the commission to consider as low a percentage as possible.

I'm going to move on to issues in Edmonton. I didn't hear all of the mayor's presentation, but I'm hoping that we're going to agree on things. I think it's important that the most recent numbers are used for Edmonton and that the commission does consider future growth, which is within your mandate, I understand. I'll point out that in 2008 Edmonton grew by 30,000 people, which currently would constitute an additional riding. Again, based on the variation used, Edmonton could get no seats added. Even though we have grown consistently, we could end up with the same number of MLAs.

Let me give you an example. In 1993 we had 19 MLAs. That dropped to 18 MLAs, and this could be in place until the next boundaries commission. The recommendations from this one take place immediately and would carry us through the 2012 and 2016 elections. We could end up with the same number of MLAs serving Edmonton between 1993 and 2020, a period of 30 years. So I would really urge the commission to consider adding two more seat allocations to Edmonton.

I want to address an apparent contradiction. Members of my caucus have been saying that we shouldn't have any more MLAs. "There should be a hiring freeze on MLAs" I think was the phrase that was used. Indeed, I agree. I think each MLA could be representing more people. We could have a higher average if we are resourced appropriately in our constituency offices. But I would still argue that the growth numbers in Edmonton and the future growth projected in Edmonton merit those two additional seats, which, I would argue, should be reallocated from elsewhere. I would argue that there is no contradiction there. I think Edmonton has earned those seats. This really comes into play in my life. I see the number of votes that are at the table considering Edmonton's priorities and needs in a government caucus. This also affects the number of votes that are considering Edmonton's needs and priorities in an Official Opposition caucus. The number of seats we have in Edmonton does matter to us. I feel we've been underresourced, and I'd like to see that addressed.

The issues in Edmonton-Centre. My voters are struggling with that despair and cynicism that I referenced earlier. They're very

aware that they're from a downtown urban riding, yet their vote is worth less than a vote in any number of rural ridings that you would like to give as an example. I have a number of younger constituents who are living in my constituency but attending NAIT or Alberta College or the University of Alberta, NorQuest, Grant MacEwan. A number of them actually are not allowed to vote in the riding because the current rules say they have to vote where their parents live. But even at that, they don't see the point because they don't see how their vote is going to make any kind of a difference. They're reluctant to get involved and support a process that they see as flawed and that does not take into consideration and value their vote. They don't see their vote making a difference. I think if we're looking to the future – and you are set to do that, obviously – we need to understand that cynicism and that despair amongst the voting public.

Specific to Edmonton-Centre we have five downtown communities, and we have some fairly hard and fast boundaries around the community: we have the river to the south, we have 124th Street and then later 121st Street on the west side, 111th Avenue on the north, and 97th Street on the east. They're fairly hard boundaries, and when you divide my population of almost 40,000 into those five communities, they do break down roughly into about 9,000 apiece. To start to move my numbers around, you are going to cut communities in half or cut pieces of them off.

I do not envy you the task. I'm sure you've heard that many times today and will hear it many times as you move about the province. But I am greatly concerned at having a riding that shares a number of very strong commonalities like: we're a downtown community, we are used to dealing with density, we're used to dealing with high-rise living, we're used to dealing with older housing stock, we're used to dealing with an influx of daytime workers who then leave the community at night, we're used to dealing with infill housing and revitalization with highly diverse populations with very few children but a high percentage of seniors. There are a number of issues that are, I would argue, quite distinct to being the centre of the city. I hope we don't end up in a situation where we have to break up neighbourhoods in order to conform to whatever is going to be your average numbers. That's particularly difficult with Edmonton-Centre.

Finally – I've reached my time – my last suggestion is that when you look for names, if you are going to have to name four new ones, could I recommend that you consider filling out the other four of the Famous Five, who are women who were nation builders and leaders in our province who are recognized throughout Canada and the rest of the world. We're slowly recognizing them in the city of Edmonton with the parks system, that has now named five parks after them, but we have one provincial riding that is named after the Famous Five, and I'd like to see the other four names added to the roster.

Thank you for the opportunity to present.

The Chair: Thank you.

4:00

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you for that presentation. The information is helpful. My question relates to your riding in specific. Edmonton-Centre, according to the last numbers we had, had approximately 41,300 constituents. We know the total number for Edmonton; we don't have the riding breakdowns. Do you by any chance have more recent information from the city of Edmonton? Do you know what number you're looking at?

Ms Blakeman: No. The 41,500 sounds about right. I've had a lot of growth in my riding, which is unusual because generally the

insides of cities are hollowing out. But the city of Edmonton made some strategic moves to revitalize the downtown area, and in fact I've had a lot of infill housing, which is one of the things I talked about.

Mr. Dobbie: We expect to have that information within the next few weeks. If you could have someone from your office contact Elections Alberta, they can get that directly to you, but we don't have it yet.

My question is on the average. You've made a compelling case to keep the five neighbourhoods together. At some point we have to trade things off. In your particular constituency you've argued that there are a number of high-need constituents that engage the resources of you and your office quite regularly that may be different than suburban MLAs encounter. Would you rather have 3,000 or 4,000 more people in your constituency and keep the neighbourhood together, or would you like us to try to honour the average quotient? That's the trade-off that we're going to be looking at. If the neighbourhoods are approximately 9,000 and if they go to 10,000, we either have to split one or have you average up, and I think it, again, flies a bit in the face of some of the other arguments you've made. At some point – and I don't need the answer today, as I mentioned to the mayor – it would be helpful, you know, to hear from you as an MLA which you would prefer.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I certainly will do that. I can tell you now that my communities have fought hard to establish a sense of identity, and they still fight hard to establish that sense of identity. They would prefer to stay together, but they would like to see my office better resourced. So that's the answer. Can I handle more people? Yes. Do I need additional resources in the budget to do it? Yes.

Mr. Dobbie: That's not our file.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I understand that.

I will take up your offer and will check with the city and see what the numbers are, and I will attempt to get you some kind of an answer back. From where I'm sitting now and just knowing the people that I'm involved with, I think they'd prefer to stay together than to have a piece split off any one of them, but I will respond to you in writing.

Mr. Dobbie: You'll take the hit, then, to your young voters who feel devalued? That's the problem, right? We are all trying to cope with that equity.

Ms Blakeman: Well, those voters I get for free, actually, because they don't get to vote in my riding. I just get to service them. I'm not going to lose them. They're still going to live there, and they're going to vote in their home communities because that's what the rules are right now.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: You're welcome.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your presentation. I wanted to touch on an issue that you brought up regarding the disparity between the rural and the urban voters, and that's been talked about a lot. You mentioned about the recommen-

ation for Edmonton, but as you know, we have four seats to allocate in this boundary distribution. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on how you would best address that rural-urban split by the allocation of those four seats and any reallocation that you might see of what's happening with existing seats in general.

Ms Blakeman: I'm going to admit that my expertise is fairly narrow here in that I'm an Edmonton MLA. I can tell the effect that's happened to my city because we have fewer seats at the table to argue for things, frankly, and in looking at the population, I think it's fair to say that we should have two additional seats. I am reluctant at this point, without looking at the rest of the numbers and considering the rest of what you no doubt have in your briefing documents, to hazard a statement about anywhere else they should be allocated in the province. I'll buck for Edmonton; I can't speak for the others.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Maybe just a follow-up. The statute allows us to provide up to four special areas which would have a variance of up to 50 per cent, and that's looking at factors such as distance and so on. Do you have any thoughts on those? Obviously, that affects the urban-rural disparity in vote.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think the frustration that I hear repeated to me many times at the doors is that this is an urban province, and they don't understand why we would allow a disparity of up to 50 per cent for 4 out of the 83 and now, possibly, 4 out of the 87 ridings. People just cannot understand why that's allowed to happen, why their vote would be watered down, worth less, and a number of other phrases I'm sure you've heard used, because another area is sparsely populated.

I mean, what are we here to do as government? Why do you have those seats in place? It's to allocate the resources of the province and to ensure that you're protecting the population and delivering services. So why are people in urban areas allocated less of those services in order to serve a very sparsely populated area?

I can't speak to what it's like to represent a very sparse and very large area, but I would think that we should be able to make better use of the technology that we have today. I heard the mayor say something about, "Well, maybe those far-flung members could gain by some help in transportation," and that may well be the answer. What I see is people that say: "Well, people live in the urban areas. Why aren't we getting the representation that reflects that?" That's the response I get from the constituents when I talk to them.

So those four I think should be used as sparingly as possible.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman. Thanks very much for your presentation. Just a couple of questions. First, you've used the terminology "allocation of resources" and the unfairness of having more disparity in the quotient in some of the rural areas. Last week we had a couple of presentations in the rural areas, and we heard the flip side of that, which is that the rural areas contribute hugely to the overall resources of the province, which translates into money that is available in departments to provide services to both urban and rural Albertans. So that's the other side of the coin that I personally have to take into account. We heard that loud and clear last week, and I suspect we're going to hear it quite a bit as we go around the province. I don't expect you to make a comment on that, but I'd welcome any comment that you have.

The question that I have is that you've suggested we should be

viewing the likelihood of an expansion in population in various areas, and urban areas certainly in the past and surrounding the urban areas is where the most rapid population increases have been. Actually, some of the figures we have, it's in the areas surrounding the municipal boundaries of the major centres in Alberta where the fastest growth is. Is there any way that you can see or suggest to us that we would quantify that factor? It's one of many factors that we are going to take into account, and I'm personally, again, having difficulty.

Even recognizing that Edmonton has been growing very quickly, Calgary has been growing very quickly, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Fort McMurray, and Grande Prairie, how do you take out your crystal ball to guess where that's going to continue? There are a couple of areas where it's pretty obvious it's going to continue, Fort McMurray being one. How do you take out that crystal ball, and if you do, how do you quantify what the importance is of that likelihood occurring and, as you said, being a reality over a very extended period of time, before perhaps the next Electoral Boundaries Commission has a go at these 87 divisions or however many there will be the next time?

4:10

Ms Blakeman: So the question you're asking me to consider is about the future growth?

Mr. Evans: Yeah.

Ms Blakeman: Well, from everything that I have access to as a member, they talk about the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, and certainly I think everyone would expect to see growth in the two major metropolitan areas, that Edmonton and Calgary will continue to grow. We're told that that Edmonton-Calgary corridor will be a growth area, particularly as we move more goods and services across them. Those kinds of discussions I've seen in forecasting, Toronto-Dominion newsletters and things like that that are put out by economists and thinkers that do that kind of thing. I know that the south has remained stable – in other words, south of Calgary – and that we've tended to see a decline in the rural areas and in the north with the exception of the Wood Buffalo area, but I don't think that's any surprise to any of you.

I'm not sure I'm addressing your question.

Mr. Evans: I guess I wasn't clear enough, or I was too verbose to get to the point, and I apologize for that.

How do you quantify that, though? The Edmonton-Calgary corridor is likely going to grow, so do you suggest to us that we set up electoral divisions that have less than the quotient in those areas where we assume there will be growth so that they'll get closer to the quotient over time? Again, it's a wonderful thing to talk about it as a factor, but how you use that information in an intelligent, reasonable, and consistent manner is a heck of a task. So I'm just asking if you have any recommendation on it.

Ms Blakeman: No. I agree, but I think it's the obvious. I think it's Edmonton and Calgary. So if we're considering seriously future growth and where, you know, we've been able to plot – Edmonton and Calgary continue to grow; the difference is how fast. Even in this year of decline the city of Edmonton is growing. We're increasing in population and a number of other factors that you want to judge that kind of thing by. So I think the future growth consideration should be centred on Edmonton and Calgary because those are the ones where we've got a long history of data to pull from.

Mr. Evans: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: I just want to go back to something else you mentioned. You talked about the rural areas being the breadbasket, where the resources come from. I guess I would argue: true enough. But I think this is based on voters, not on resources particularly and not on the companies that extract them. The voting system is based on the voter, not on the business community that's around it or the resources that are being extracted from any particular area. So I guess that's my argument back. It's the voter.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Ms Blakeman, for your presentation. You know, as you look at the population distribution in the constituencies in Edmonton, the pattern is just so clear. In all the constituencies around the inner core the populations are pretty close to the provincial average. In fact, the one constituency that stands out a little bit is yours because based on the 2006 data I think you are nine percentage points above the average population. All the others are within about two or three percentage points. Then as you go to the outskirts of the city, the pattern is clear as well, but many of the constituencies are much larger than the average population, particularly in the south.

The two that stand out to me are Edmonton-Whitemud, which is 49 per cent above the average using the 2006 data, and Edmonton-McClung, which is almost 20 per cent above using the 2006 data. Again, we're in the process of updating the data that we're using to ensure that we can take the Edmonton census data and put it into the constituency parameters. Right now we just have it for the city as a whole. When we're making projections, all we can do is add the average growth in the city to every constituency, and we know that that's not happened. So we're still refining the data. It seems that there's a compelling case that at least one new constituency should be created in the city, and that should be created in the far south, in particular using some combination of Whitemud and McClung.

I have two questions. One is for your own riding. Given the fact that your riding is larger on average than the urban core ridings, do you have any advice as to, if we did split some of that off to bring it closer to equality within the constituencies, whether it makes the most sense to move some of your community to Glenora, for example, which is just slightly below the average? It was minus 5 per cent, based upon the data that we're looking at. You're over by 9 per cent; they're under by 5 per cent. Again, those are the two constituencies with the largest variation in the inner core. Any advice you could provide on that would be useful. Again, it doesn't have to be today. This could be subsequent advice.

Then with respect to the Whitemud and McClung constituencies, because those two are both substantially above the average, are there some natural communities of interest in that part of the city that we should be aware of and mindful of as we're thinking of the most appropriate divisions within the south part of Edmonton?

Ms Blakeman: I will get some information to the commission subsequent to this meeting around any recommendations I could make about which piece of the constituency would best be joined onto which other constituency. It's going to be east or west. I think the divisions don't break anywhere near as easily north or south. I will get that information to you.

I can't speak to the ones in Whitemud and McClung. I just don't have enough information about the demographics of who is there, but I'm sure this is appearing in *Hansard* and is being recorded. I'm sure that there are people out there that will be listening and will come through with information for you to answer your question.

Dr. Archer: Great. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: You're welcome.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate your appearance here and your thoughts, and I'm sure we'll hear further from you.

Ms Blakeman: You will. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I join with everyone else in thanking you for your efforts. I know this is volunteer time, and it's a big investment of your time, and Albertans do appreciate what you're trying to do on our behalf. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Dr. Cassandra Van Nostrand.

Dr. Cassandra Van Nostrand

Dr. Van Nostrand: Thank you. I have some copies of the skeleton and body of my comments. First of all, I am the president of a nonprofit in Canada that is very much interested in the electoral process. I'm also the current temporary member for the liaison for parliamentary and electoral affairs. Plus, I function in a number of other duties although due to the fact that I recently had cancer, I've had to slow down quite a bit. My background is that of science, genetics, medicine, and law. I actually started out as the child of a farmer and worked in genetics in the southern part of the province, worked on developing resistant wheat chromosomes under Dr. Ruby Larson, who was the head of the Canada district agriculture station and well known to the Russian hierarchy at the time. So I've got quite an overview of both urban and rural and was somewhat surprised and kind of taken aback in my seat to hear Ms Blakeman say that a vote is a vote. If you look back over all the statistics for Canada as well as Alberta, it's nice to believe that, but if it isn't coming into effect, it's kind of a mere muttering of words put together in phrases that don't reflect any kind of verisimilitude.

4:20

In any event, the fact is that if you look back even to Chrétien or Prime Minister Harper, the Hon. Stephen Harper, there were at least 7 or 8 to 1 of those that were not voting for him, the actual numbered representatives versus one. This was well dealt with in a very good article that was done in the *Edmonton Journal* on an opinion page in the editorial section just not too recently. I can't remember the man's name, but I believe it was Jackson. I have a copy in my files if anyone wishes to see it. It was very well done, and it overviewed quite a bit of the process.

The process for you is very difficult because we're entrenched, and there's quite a bit of time that's gone on over Alberta politics as well as all over the country, and I believe that what we do here is going to be very reflective in the nation as well as show to the world what we're about. I truly think that if we can go to the moon, it's time that we think of developing a process of voting that truly reflects the people that are there and either in the boundaries or in the entirety of the process will reflect the will of the people instead of the blatant disregard we've had in some of what I feel is almost class consciousness. We don't give what I feel is a vote.

A significant section of my organization has dealt with homelessness, and I've been able to most years count twice the number that the city counts in terms of actual homelessness. I don't know what percentage of these people vote, but they need to vote regardless of whether we believe they're terminally ill or just temporarily homeless or whatever. I think every person in society deserves a right because I believe in the Charter.

I've been involved in trying to consider the importance of people's values and rights, their legal rights, and I've had quite a bit of exposure and involvement. I've written laws in the U.S., I've been involved in a considerable amount of legislation, but I've been overwhelmingly disenchanted, of course, in seeing the fact that our young people are not voting and, furthermore, that they're not only disenchanted but are completely almost writing off the entire democratic process. Now, as you know, that's the one thing that makes us a society of structural importance, just like it's important for our farmers. I mean, we can't demolish the need for the voting importance of the farmers. Just like the importance of the person, the farmer is the strategy and the structure behind the urban population unless we all want to pay \$500 for a loaf of bread, unless you want to be like New York and pay \$5,000 for an apartment. I think we've got to recognize that it starts in the whole democratic process.

Now, whether we allocate some of those four special persons that you were talking about in the allocation of the committee, maybe we should think about – I'm not saying I know all the answers, because I'm probably not as wise as you are. My jurisdiction has been the law and various concepts of law, legislation and so on, but not necessarily writing the electoral process. Nevertheless, I've become very interested because I see this complete lack of interest of so many of the young people, even the very old people, and I say to everyone: well, you know, if you feel that you have no vote, it's time for you to go to a nursing home. This is a really sad phenomenon.

Then I also realize that we have to do something about it. What is it that we have to do? We can't spank people; we can't tax them for it. We have to make it a positive thing. Now, maybe one of those votes should be, you know, a special person that reflects only young people's votes. Maybe there ought to be one person somewhere up there, both maybe in the Legislature and I also recognize myself to say in the federal dominion, that maybe recognizes the young people's votes because the young people feel that they're not there. They don't feel that they're, you know, represented, being heard, being cared about, or anything. They feel that there's flagrant disregard, flagrant misadministration of the entire democratic process, and that the current methodology of voting is circumventing the entire democratic process by its convoluted and poorly organized, poorly understood, and somewhat blatantly one-sided defiance of the democratic process, the way I see it and the way many people see it, whether it is entirely or not.

The voting process in Canada might now, as far as the young people are concerned, just as well be slot machines that are rigged like the Vegas casinos or have all of the voting on a computerized system because it would not be long till the government would come in and regulate how the outcome would be anyway and who will win and what is virtually what and who's doing whatever. There's such a lack of belief in the process by the young people of this country right now that we need to do something about it, and I'm here in part to recognize that need.

I don't have all the answers, I don't have all the suggestions, and I don't know all the process, but I have a large overview. I mean, I'm almost 65 years of age. I'm retired. I've had cancer. I've been mugged. I've been almost killed. I've been through three professional degrees. I've been across the nation, and with my involvement in this nonprofit I have a tremendous ear to hear what the people are saying out there. I've written extensively in newspapers throughout the world and in books in other organizations. I listen and hear what people are saying, and it just appalls me more than just even the urban-rural criticism and discrepancy and whatever Ms Blakeman refers to also. It appalls me to just realize that our young people just aren't being – we should do everything we can.

If we can take the vote into a nursing home and let people vote in a nursing home, tell me: why can't we take the vote to NAIT? You know, if I were representing those students and they were mine, I'd be suing all the way to the Supreme Court for discrimination because I believe that right now the way that much of the voting system is, it's a harbinger of discrimination. I feel that the way a lot of it acts out, its administration is rather somewhat incongruously discriminatory in its overall features and structure.

I feel that we need to have the provinces also give an equal weight. It starts with the province. It starts in Alberta by what we do in giving equal weight across our province, but I believe that that will ultimately – you know, I realize that this elections group here is not going to overtake the entire country, but I believe that what we do here will have an effect upon our dominion and that it will make the voting process more real and democratic. Once we get that going here, it's going to take on a certain value of its own across the entire dominion. There should be an equal weight in all the provinces, just like there should be some equal weight between urban and rural.

We have to have large amounts of land, and we have to have fewer people out in the rural areas, but we have to have them, or we're going to be – you know, we already get everything there is from China in Wal-Mart. Pretty soon our bread – I mean, the other day I went to McDonald's, and I saw their crouton package: made in the U.S.A. I thought: can't we make croutons here? We have many people out of work. What is wrong with our country? Why can't we make croutons? I'm not totally French, but I do speak some.

4:30

Anyway, I believe that we've got to take serious and real interest in this and not be, you know, sort of harbouring the voting process interests that are structured so long in the system, that's gotten a little bit untimely and difficult even for me, a scholar, to understand and to work to perceive. I mean, I've worked on the democratic trail. I've worked in the elections campaigns. I've seen older people vote twice in the same election. I've seen people who shouldn't be voting, voting. Yes, I've seen all the irregularities. I realize, you know, that it takes a lot of structure to get a perfect thing, and maybe we'll never get a perfect system. But, like I said, right now my objective today is to highlight, in effect, the fact that we've got to do something. It'll take more than me because there's quite a lot of politics and, you know, strategic political structuring that goes on in this whole process that even if it's not beyond me, it's been structured for so long as to be impregnable, interminably difficult to understand compared to the old days, when just a vote was a vote and if you didn't get 50 per cent, you didn't get in. Now there are lots of structural factors which make it so difficult that we're making it very unsavoury for our young people.

Number one, I feel that we've got to do something to make the electoral process palatable to young people and to all of the working people that are the structural basis of our economy and our nation. Okay? Now, that just doesn't mean a vote for a vote, or just because you have more people in the urban area and they're all on welfare, let's give them all a vote. Yea, hey, hey. What's wrong with giving a farmer and all of his farming relatives out there making our bread a vote? Excuse me, but I think Ms Blakeman is putting her emphasis on the wrong syllable. I think we've got to realize that this is a very complicated procedure. Now, if I wasn't so old and having multiple involvements over a lot of things, I wouldn't be here today to speak, because it is a difficult process.

Like I said, I'm not saying I know it all, but I want to make the statement that we must bring our young people into the forefront

here somehow, someday. I've written about legal methodologies of getting more of our young people positively structured, and I studied strategic, long-standing studies of many systems for allocating resources and for preventing crime. I've written about this in the Alberta newspapers from time to time, but it's not picked up a lot by legislators because we're on such a path of: build more prisons, get more people working. It doesn't work. Even in Thailand, where they kill people for crimes, especially drug crimes, it doesn't work, or in Iraq, where they cut people's hands off, it doesn't work. Crime is growing everywhere.

The politics has to build a positive system just like crime. I've advocated, you know, a card that builds upon people's positive credits, that gives them more rights to gain welfare and other things if they've done more good things over time. It's interesting. I'd share it with anyone. But I think we have to build an electoral process that builds on positive features not only of our economy but of our people and especially of our young people. I myself believe that this will also work towards eradicating some of the latent discrimination that's built into the electoral system as I personally suffered when working in an electoral campaign. I feel that all these factors will – if we go forward and look at things realistically with a view towards the benefits of our people and not the self-servicing of any particular politicians or any particular area but the true democracy at the basic, you know, centre of our whole process, I think we're going to get to the heart of all of this.

As I say, the only thing different that I bring up today is to recognize that maybe we could take one of those positions. I don't know if it's even feasible or possible, but it's a thought, and I'm presenting it. We need to think about the young people in a different way than what we've thought about because they are wholly not voting, and that's very scary.

Okay. I don't think I should go on too much more, but if you have some questions.

The Chair: Allyson?

Ms Jeffs: I don't have any questions.

Mr. Evans: Thank you for your presentation.

The Chair: Peter?

Mr. Dobbie: No questions from me. Thank you.

Dr. Van Nostrand: You bet. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your time. We appreciated your views. We'll certainly take them into account.

Dr. Van Nostrand: Thank you, Your Honour.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Judith Axelson.

**Judith Axelson, Edmonton-Mill Woods
Liberal Constituency Association**

Ms Axelson: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to make a presentation to you today. I'm a member of the Edmonton-Mill Woods Liberal Constituency Association, a past president and currently serving on the board, and we thought we would take this opportunity to make a presentation, not that we're greatly in fear of anything that might be done to our constituency, but we would like to reinforce very much what we

have in our community that is so good and that is represented by our constituency.

First of all, our constituency, in the southeast part of Edmonton, is one that has 11.6 per cent more electorate than the recommended average, so we do have some room for growth. Frankly, we're not opposed to this. When I get to the end of my presentation, you'll find that we have a position that, actually, we should be looking at fewer MLAs rather than more.

The entity known as Mill Woods in Edmonton is a planned community that has existed for close to 40 years. It's a planned community of neighbourhoods that have a strong community organization, cultural diversity, and sense of community. Mill Woods constituency consists of five of these neighbourhoods. Until the 2002 boundaries commission it was four neighbourhoods, and we gained a fifth one, that we requested. Unfortunately, as a result of gaining this fifth neighbourhood, we lost part of one, so one of our five communities is now split. Probably close to half of it was given to Ellerslie constituency, which is immediately to the south of 23rd Avenue.

4:40

I have a map. The first map is page 4, which shows you the location of our constituency in relation to Edmonton-Ellerslie. What we would like of this commission is to get back that part of Lakewood that we lost in the 2002 boundary relocation. It's a difficult thing when a community league is split by a major east-west thoroughfare like 23rd Avenue. To maintain the integrity of the constituency as well as regain that lost portion of Ellerslie, we would like to lose the portion that was tacked on as a result of the 2008 election, the portion that is to the east of 34th Street. It's south of the Mill Creek Ravine. You can see the sort of northeast boundary of Edmonton-Mill Woods on page 4, that is an irregular boundary. That is basically the Mill Creek Ravine, and we inherited, according to this, about the last centimetre; it would be east of 34th Street.

There's been a lot of growth in this area east of 34th Street even since the last census was done, and it's not reflected here. We would like, if you'll turn to page 8, to have the constituency look as I've depicted it here. The yellow part being shaded in: that's what we lost to Ellerslie. The left-hand portion just to the south of 34th Avenue is basically industrial/commercial. South of where you see the polls for Mill Woods, like 23, 25, et cetera: that area is residential. That's the part of Lakewood that we lost.

The next page, page 9, shows you what part of Ellerslie that is. You can see that Ellerslie is really, really far south on this particular map. These polls, particularly 62, 55, 58, and the area to the east of that, which has nothing there yet, has just mushroomed with houses. Again, these maps here were taken out of the 2008 election booklet that was sent out by the government. There's no reflection of the growth there, and a lot of that growth, I'm afraid, would not even be reflected in the 2006 census. All of the growth in Edmonton has been mainly on the south end and southeast and northeast. So Ellerslie is going to be growing out of necessity, and I think they can afford to give up that little piece that they took from us in the first place.

Thirdly, I would like to mention that the area to the east of 34th Street consists of communities which have been developed probably 25 years or more since the communities to the west of that street. They really have nothing in common with the older part, and they go by different names. They don't even consider themselves Mill Woods. They go by names like the Meadows.

Anyway, if we're still looking at having to find more people to put in Mill Woods constituency, we do have sort of a worst-scene scenario that I think might work, and that's on page 10. The area

south of Whitemud Drive bounded on the southwest by the Mill Creek Ravine and by 34th Street on the east, 50th Street on the west is currently part of Edmonton-Mill Creek. The area there is Jackson Heights. It's an older area than everything on the other side of 34th Street.

In my written presentation I mention the fact that Edmonton-Mill Creek is badly chopped up – half of it is in the area north of the Whitemud, quite a bit north of the Whitemud, an area formerly known as Avonmore – because there is a large industrial area that separates that residential area from the other parts of Mill Creek, which are south of the Whitemud, at one time Edmonton-Mill Woods. Prior to 1993 Edmonton-Mill Woods was split in a like manner. In fact, part of our constituency was part of Edmonton-Avonmore.

So that is what we would like to see with our constituency. We recognize that as sort of a landlocked area, or whatever you want to call it, we have very little potential for population growth without boundary readjustment. About the only thing that's happened in the last 10 years within our constituency is that a new seniors' condo has gone up, a 12-storey building which isn't occupied yet but will be probably within the next few months.

We also would like the commission to consider major geographical and man-made boundaries when recognizing where the boundaries of constituencies are located. In our case the Canadian Pacific rail line by Gateway Boulevard on the west side and Whitemud Drive to the north are boundaries that are very important, probably more important than the Mill Creek Ravine. Considering Ellerslie, for example, it's interesting to note that the new parts that have been given to the Ellerslie constituency are south of the major power transmission corridor and greenbelt, and this is where Anthony Henday Drive runs. You know, there's going to be major splitting of that particular constituency as well, so I really would like to see these things considered. As mentioned, the 2006 census does not fully reflect the growth that we've seen in the southeast part of Edmonton.

On a different note, the last part of my written presentation, which is on pages 6 and 7, addresses three concerns that I didn't think really fell within the jurisdiction of this commission, but I kind of hope that you have some influence when it comes to talking to the people in the government who will be considering your recommendations. Some of these I heard by the previous speaker. First and foremost is fair representation in the province when it comes to representation by population. Each Albertan's vote should be equal, and that is not the case under the current way in which the province is divided up into constituencies. The fact that less than 20 per cent of the population lives in rural areas is not reflected in the Legislature at all, and the vote of the rural voter far exceeds the weight of that of an urban voter. Is that fair? I don't think so. I refer to this as a deficit in democracy in Alberta.

I also mentioned earlier that we take the position of decreasing the number of elected representatives in the future rather than continuing to increase them. As the population grows, the benefits of technology have also grown immensely, and there's really no reason for people living in far-flung areas to feel that they are not connected to a particular MLA or constituency. In the future you'll be seeing more and more of this. It's going to be less necessary, I think, for people to do their campaigning running around from door to door all the time. They'll be using other forms of media, as already has been indicated. For example, in our last municipal election in Edmonton a number of the new councillors used some of these new things like Facebook and whatnot to connect with the electorate.

4:50

Thirdly, a way to re-engage the Alberta voter. When less than 40 per cent of the electorate vote, you do not create a situation that

could be called a democracy, and I personally believe that the way to re-engage people is to develop some form of proportional representation. This is something that's been kicked around the block and kicked around the block that has been effective in many countries of the world: Sweden, Israel, The Netherlands. I think that we have to try different things. It's not just the youth that are becoming disenfranchised or disaffected by what's going on; it's also older people. It's everybody. What's the point of voting? What's the point of voting if you think you know who's going to win and your vote is not going to count? First past the post is fair, I suppose, but it doesn't reflect the desires of the voters.

Anyway, that is my presentation. If you have some questions for me, I'd be very pleased to answer them.

The Chair: Thank you.
Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yes. Ms Axelson, thanks so much for the presentation. Much appreciated, especially the detailed maps that you provided and the indication of communities of interest that exist in the different areas. One of the things I was trying to get an understanding of is kind of the net effect of the changes in terms of the preferred option that you're recommending to us: some constituents being returned from a previous redistribution, some being recommended to go to another constituency. Do you have a sense as to what that net effect would be? I know that at one point in your presentation you indicated that it's conceivable even to have some of these changes result in the constituency being very large, like maybe even 25 per cent above the average, but I don't think that was your final recommendation.

Ms Axelson: No.

Dr. Archer: Where does it come out in the end?

Ms Axelson: In the end I don't think it would affect the Ellerslie constituency adversely because of the growth there that's not reflected in the census, at least for that small part that we want back from them. I really don't know. Then, of course, you guys say: "Well, what's going to happen to the area south of that transmission line? Do you put a new constituency that straddles highway 2?" I don't know. I heard you mention that McClung and Whitemud were constituencies that have grown so greatly. Yeah, that became evident. That was evident even back in 2002 when the commission was looking at boundaries, but it was not reflected in the census figures that they were working with. So now it's evident. What is not showing up is all that stuff south of those transmission lines south of Ellerslie and the stuff to the east of 35th and, particularly, south of Whitemud. Before the next time a commission meets, there are going to be houses all the way out to what used to be called highway 14 – I think it's the Anthony Henday east or north or whatever, highway 16. I can't remember the numbers; they keep changing the numbers of the highway. We're always a step behind in these developing areas.

When it comes to Mill Creek, it's an anomaly, I think, because of the fact that it has two such diverse pieces of real estate, or whatever you want to call them, involved. Maybe a new constituency has to be set, the new Mill Creek, east of 34th Street because the ravine is there, and maybe the part that's in Avonmore has to be reabsorbed by some of the older constituencies in that area like Gold Bar or Strathcona. I know that last time Gold Bar ended up straddling the river, with the changes that were made. You know, it probably sounds very partisan of me to say this, but there were definite

changes made that reflected Conservative interests. What can you do? I mean, they're the ones that form the government, and they get what they want in the end. It doesn't help that one of their minor cabinet ministers represents Edmonton-Mill Creek, I suppose. I mean, he has a lot of weight to say: don't change my constituency. I can guarantee you that most of his support comes from that part of the constituency that's north of the Whitemud. He doesn't live in the south part. He lives in the north part, and that's where all his connections were.

Anyway, again, when you look at constituencies like Strathcona and Gold Bar, these are more what I call landlocked constituencies, which don't have any room for growth unless somebody decides to build some skyscrapers and populate them because there are just, you know, stagnant areas, basically, in terms of building of housing and whatnot.

Did that answer your question?

Dr. Archer: Well, partly, and I think that partly what we'll probably want to do is as we're getting the new data from the city of Edmonton and including that within a community profile, we'll be able to generate alternatives which provide us with a good indication of the net effects of one kind of change or another.

Ms Axelson: Yeah. I agree. It would cause some repercussion but not as serious as some changes would make.

Dr. Archer: Right. Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Again, I appreciate the detail. A quick question. Our detailed maps have fallen down, so am I to understand that the existing Mill Creek constituency runs east of 34th Street?

Ms Axelson: Uh-huh.

Mr. Dobbie: How far east does it go?

Ms Axelson: It goes all the way to the end of the world. No, at least to 17th Street, at least, but there is even building out beyond 17th Street now. And it includes everything south of the Whitemud to the Mill Creek Ravine.

Mr. Dobbie: I just wasn't sure. Again, your suggestion, though, is to start at 34th Street and move west.

Ms Axelson: Yeah, like, if you had to.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. I just didn't know how far you went.

Ms Axelson: I kind of think putting that Jackson Heights area that I mentioned in with Mill Woods would put us over the 25 per cent, but even if that part stayed with the part to the east of 34th Street, it would still work. You know, a Mill Creek constituency all south of Mill Woods Road and taking all sides of the ravine – both sides. There are only two sides to a ravine.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you again. Just so I could draw that 34th Street on my map. Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: I think that's asked and answered, Mr. Chairman. I think I'm good. Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Well, just for clarification, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much for your presentation. You've commented and you've heard some comments from commission members as well about not fragmenting communities of interest. I'm just curious whether you've had an opportunity to discuss some of your suggested changes to Edmonton-Mill Creek and Edmonton-Ellerslie with the community associations or others in those two areas there.

Ms Axelson: No, I didn't.

Mr. Evans: Do you have any gut reaction as to what their . . .

Ms Axelson: Yeah. Ellerslie I don't think would mind. As I indicated in my written presentation, mostly the area that's north of 23rd Avenue that the Ellerslie constituency gained is sort of forgotten about by campaigners except for the houses that line 23rd Avenue so their fences can be used for campaign signs. The people living there don't identify themselves with Ellerslie. It's a small area. I don't think that would bother Ellerslie, personally. I really don't. I know the president down there and some of the constituency association people.

I think it would upset Mill Creek. I think it would upset Mr. Zwodzdesky. I don't think it would be as upsetting to the people in the Liberal Constituency Association or the community leagues, personally. You know, those people that live in Jackson Heights don't have anything in common with the Avonmore people. You find a highly mixed ethnic community in the Jackson Heights area, a lot of East Indians and Pakistanis and Filipinos and a few white people. In the Avonmore area it's a much more Anglo – I hate to use the word Anglo-Saxon — more a European group of people that live there. In a lot of ways they have nothing in common.

5:00

Mr. Evans: Well, I guess, ultimately they have just as much opportunity to come and present before the commission as you do, and that's probably the best answer.

Ms Axelson: They do. I don't know if any of them planned to be here. I know that the Mill Creek Liberals weren't making a presentation, but I have no idea about the Conservatives. Again, I only know what the Liberal constituency associations planned to do. I don't know. Is there a posting somewhere of who was making presentations that is public or, like, is there something here?

The Chair: No.

Ms Axelson: It seemed to me that last time there was a listing. When you came in, you got to see who was making presentations for the day, and you could decide if you wanted to be here to listen to them, which I found interesting.

One of the reasons why I did not contact anybody is that there was a very short time frame, really, from when we found out that the commission was meeting here to the time I put something together. So that's why I didn't do it.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Just one more.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you again for your presentation. Just on one point

of clarification, I was just picking up on something in your written submission that we have here. You mention that some of these changes that you're suggesting could be accommodated within that 25 per cent variance that's permitted by the statute. You know, recognizing that we are going to be looking at trade-offs between communities of interest and a desire to at least not go to the outside edge of that, is there a preferred sort of variance or is there a trade-off whereby you would like to see the community boundaries adjusted to ensure that you don't go above a certain percentage? We've heard a lot of presentations of people trying to stay close to that average, and that's something we're considering as well. I think this maybe builds a little bit on what Keith Archer was suggesting about the net effect of these changes.

Ms Axelson: Under the present system if we went, you know, above that 25 per cent above average, it would create a hardship for whoever was going to be running for election in that campaign because they would be having that many more houses to visit, that many more brochures to get printed off, or whatever they're going to do. Obviously, we would be most happy if we just got back what we lost to Ellerslie and, secondly, lost that stretch of land to the east of 34th Street, in that order. I kind of think that if you got figures from the city, you would find that that area that we had tacked on for the last election east of 34th Street would put us well over the 25 per cent, but if you take that off – I'm not sure of the exact population in that little section of Mill Creek that I suggested could be tacked on. I think it's not unfair to be 25 per cent above, but if we get greater than that – of course, it's nice to stay closer to the average, but I realize it's very difficult.

It's not an easy task that you have before you. It's difficult for you to imagine the various boundaries of the constituencies. Those of us who come and make presentations – you know, how many times have I walked my constituency for one election or another. I know it's little nooks and crannies. I just know where everything is there, and I see things first-hand. It's difficult for you to see it.

Then you get the political interests. I promise you that, basically, the suggestions that I've made or recommendations are not politically given in terms of: oh, I want to get back at Mr. Zwodzdesky. I mean, I'm on a first-name basis with him. I've known him for years. I just think that there's got to be a logic to the way things are done. You know, I don't think it would make any difference. I think he could still win the constituency, whatever one he's in, as a PC. I don't think that would be taking anything away from him.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Again, thank you for your presentation. We'll certainly take it into consideration and look at the detail which you've given us.

Ms Axelson: Thank you again for allowing me to be here today.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. We're going to take an adjournment at this point. I don't believe we have another speaker scheduled now, so we'll take an adjournment and reconvene at the appropriate time.

[The hearing adjourned at 5:06 p.m.]

