



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Brian Evans, QC
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12:02 p.m.

Wednesday, October 7, 2009

[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to come out and share your views with us today. When I say that we're looking forward to hearing from you, I know that I'm speaking for the whole commission.

My name is Ernie Walter, and I am the chairman of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce the other members of the commission here 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.

Our task is that we have been directed by legislation to make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions based on the latest census 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. Over the next few weeks we will seek community input through province-wide consultation before developing our recommendations. Through public hearings such as the 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. We are 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 that have studied the boundaries in Alberta, and the population information which is available to us.

A brief summary of the electoral boundaries law. As I've mentioned, it is 87 electoral divisions that we're mandated to propose. We have a limited time to accomplish this task. We are required, after consideration of representations at these public hearings, to submit an interim report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by February of 2010 that sets out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 proposed electoral divisions and the reasons for those proposed boundaries. Following 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 this 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 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. The 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 the 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, which is the 2006 census, but if the commission 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 are currently reviewing the 2009 census data which we have, and we will be considering that together with the 2006 census once

the data has been officially released. We are also required to add the population of the First Nation reserves that were not included in the census, as provided by the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

The commission is required to divide Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions by taking 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 in the act states that a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 per cent above or below the average population of all 87 electoral divisions. There is one exception to this. 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 five following criteria are met:

- (a) the area . . . exceeds 20 000 square kilometres or the total 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 an Indian 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.

This is 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.

12:10

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

We 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. Our staff at the back of the room have our e-mail and other details.

With that background, I'll call the first speaker. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then five minutes for 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 have 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 in mind, we will call the first speaker.

Ms Friesacher: Our first presenter is Nona Elliott from the Lesser Slave Lake constituency.

Nona Elliott

Ms Elliott: I'm Nona Elliott from Lesser Slave Lake, No. 63. I'm coming at this from the point of a returning officer. So that's where I'm going. I gave in the paper a brief history of the boundary changes of our constituency. If you have my presentation, you can see that it has changed a lot over the years from 1905. I believe the last boundary change was in 2004.

The Chair: Excuse me; 1905?

Ms Elliott: Yeah, 1905. So you can see that we have evolved, I guess is the term, over the years.

In putting together this report, we did take into consideration the sparsity and density of the population of our constituency, our Indian reserves, Métis settlements, and existing municipal boundaries, existing road systems, and other demographic features of the constituency. I also listed our present electoral borders, that encompass the following municipal districts and their populations. You can see that we have a lot of municipal districts that border on our constituency.

I presented map 1, that shows you the size of Lesser Slave Lake, No. 63, compared to the rest of the province. The proposed changes would consolidate our constituency and make it more voter friendly. One of the things that I found as a returning officer was that some of our boundaries are not voter friendly. I think that is really, really important.

I give you some of the official stats. The estimated population of the town of High Prairie is 3,000; the town of Slave Lake is 6,000. The unofficial number of reserves in our area, I would say, is 20, and the unofficial number of Métis settlements is three. The reasons these statistics are included in the presentation is to give you a perspective of the size of our present electoral district.

The maps provided will give a snapshot view of how the electoral boundaries of Lesser Slave Lake, No. 63, would look with each suggested change. These changes, if implemented, would give us a net gain of 782 voters. We are presently at minus 28.8 per cent of the 37,820 population average.

In option 1 we are proposing the following changes to electoral boundaries: that polling districts 1 and 2, Tallcree north and south, be moved to Peace River 70. The reason is the percentage of voters that have mailing addresses in Fort Vermilion, which would indicate a normal travel route in that direction. I've found that the people who normally do business in the communities should belong to that electoral district.

Option 2 is that Cadotte Lake and Little Buffalo and Seetha, local mailing addresses in Peace River, be moved to Peace River 70. The reason is the percentage of voters with mailing addresses in Peace River would indicate a normal travel route for services in that direction. A number of the voters registered in the area did not maintain permanent residences in Lesser Slave Lake 63. That presented a problem because we these people wanted to vote in Peace River, but they were registered in Little Buffalo or Cadotte Lake, so it was causing some problems. I felt that a lot of these people did not vote and were disenfranchised.

Now, option 3 is rather unique. I said that this presented a rather unique experience for me as a returning officer as a large percentage of these voters indicated their support of our MLA Pearl Calahasen but were in a different electoral district so were unable to vote for her. On the basis of this information I'm asking that these polling districts be included in Lesser Slave Lake 63. That was, again, that when we were out in the area, these people wanted to vote for our MLA, but unfortunately they were not in our constituency, so they did not vote. They had to vote other places.

To me our present electoral boundaries are not voter-friendly. If we want our voters to get out and vote, I think that we should really take this into consideration.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you very much, Ms Elliott. It is very useful to have your perspective as a returning officer. We've heard from other returning officers in other areas, but it is important to us in our considerations to get that information. Clearly, you were mindful of the timelines, and you went through your presentation quite quickly. Do we have an electronic version of your original presentation? Does it show colours? What I'm grappling with is that I'm not familiar with the polling districts. They don't have those numbers on our maps, so I can't quickly see from our map where the changes are.

Ms Elliott: No, I don't.

Mr. Dobbie: We don't have you up there, but if I could give you a map, and if you could sort of . . .

Ms Elliott: Well, if you look here, I've given a map right here. Okay? It shows options 1 and 2, which would be including Tallcree north and south and Cadotte Lake and Little Buffalo in Peace River 70. Do you see that?

Mr. Dobbie: I do. It's just that our copy is a little harder to follow.

Ms Elliott: Okay. I don't have – they said they didn't need one. I was going to do a PowerPoint, but they said we didn't have time.

Mr. Dobbie: Right. My first question is: can we get an original with some colour on it? Did you submit that?

Ms Elliott: No, I didn't submit.

Mr. Dobbie: If we could just at some point get that from you, it would be very helpful.

Ms Elliott: I can certainly get you one. I would have done it, only they said I couldn't present it.

Mr. Dobbie: We don't have a PowerPoint facility here.

My other question relates to, I guess, the riding in particular. With the new population data that we have for the cities and many of the other municipalities in Alberta it appears that the total population figure that we can consider is significantly higher, so the quotient or the average is higher. The average – and you may want to make a note of that – that we are looking at now is 40,583. Given that information there is certainly a strong case to be made that the existing Lesser Slave Lake constituency merits consideration as a special constituency; it meets a number of the factors. So my question to you is: if part of your work was trying to add population

to protect the riding, would it change if we were to consider that constituency as a special area that can be up to 50 per cent below the average? Would your opinion change as to your proposals, or do you still think it's important to make the corrections to effect better voting patterns?

12:20

Ms Elliott: No, I wouldn't change my opinion because to me I guess this is what this is all about: people getting out to vote. Okay? In my opinion we have to make sure that they have access, that we don't disenfranchise them. You must remember, the people in those areas are entrenched in their way of going, so if they go to a certain area, they want to vote there. This is where they live; this is where they do business.

Mr. Dobbie: I understand that. My final question is: did you have a chance to talk to your fellow adjacent returning officers about your suggestions?

Ms Elliott: No. But at the time we were doing the election, we certainly had lots of discussions.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you very much for your input. I'm sure everyone else has questions for you as well.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Ms Elliott, for your presentation and, really, for the detailed information that you're bringing forward today. It's really useful for us to get the perspective of someone who's living in these areas. I'm just trying to orient myself to the map that I have in front of me. It looks like the first two suggestions you're making seem to be sort of on the western part of the Lesser Slave Lake district and seem to be in about the middle of that constituency. The suggestion is to move the boundary a little bit westward because the community of interest – no. Sorry. Is it moving it westward or eastward? You're suggesting to move the boundary eastward and provide some of that population in the Peace River district. Then the second change is on sort of the southwest corner of your constituency, to move that one westward. The net effect is to increase a little bit the size of the population within your constituency.

Ms Elliott: I think it would be a net of about 970 voters.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. In response to Peter Dobbie's question you had said that you hadn't conducted formal consultation with people within those districts. What's your sense as to how that change would be received in those communities? Is that something that we need to be proactive on in getting the opinion of people in that community, or is it your sense that people would see those changes as pretty natural?

Ms Elliott: Well, I think what you would have to do is take – and I could've given you the statistics. You look at voter turnout. Okay? I think what that reflects is that if people want to vote in one constituency, for one MLA, quite often they don't vote. I guess that this is the thing, that it's very tenuous. Do you know what I mean? It's easy to turn voters off, really easy. If the weather is bad, the roads are bad, or something just isn't right, they get turned off. To me as a returning officer I didn't want to turn off my voters. I wanted those people to get out and vote. I didn't care where they voted as long as they got out and voted. But when they're saying to me, "I don't want to vote in this constituency; I want to vote in another constituency," whether they voted or not, I don't know. Again, it's very delicate because voters, like I said, get turned off, and we don't want to turn them off.

Look at our percentage of people that came out to vote. I think that what this should be about is getting more voters out, getting people to want to vote, making it easy for them to vote. They're like elephants. I mean, if they go one way, keep them going that way.

Dr. Archer: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for coming out today and for providing this information to us, Ms Elliott. If I understand correctly, you'd like to see the options as a package?

Ms Elliott: Yes.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. You're adding a bit to Peace River, and you're taking a little bit away from the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock riding. I think I'm pretty clear on the additions to Peace River, where you're looking. I'm just trying to orient myself on those electoral districts as to what's coming into Barrhead. Are those sort of in the corner, or are they all along that border?

Ms Elliott: They're just along the corridor.

Ms Jeffs: If I'm holding up my map, is it this area that's coming in?

Ms Elliott: Yeah. Here they are right here, just right along the edge.

Ms Jeffs: So it's this area?

Ms Elliott: Yeah. Just along in here. There are about four or five of them, and they seem to all be close-knit communities in there. There's the Smith-Hondo area, and those communities have a lot of interaction with each other. Of course, again, our MLA did a lot of campaigning in that area and convinced a lot of people that possibly she was the right candidate.

Ms Jeffs: So your sense is that those are communities of interest that could be added?

Ms Elliott: Yes.

Ms Jeffs: And we would have a net gain of about 900, so it wouldn't actually impact whether the constituency falls into that special category or not for us?

Ms Elliott: Yes.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Do you have a sense as to how the good people in those two constituencies would feel about that? You know, for example, in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock would they acknowledge those as sort of communities of interest as well? Do you know?

Ms Elliott: Well, the people that I spoke to at the time I was returning officer seemed to feel that, you know, but I've no idea how the rest of that constituency would feel. I really don't know. Like I said, I'm just going on my experiences going through the association as the returning officer and setting up polling stations and talking to people and all the questions that I was getting from people as to: "Where do I vote? Why do I have to vote here? Why do I have to vote there?"

Ms Jeffs: Okay. I notice that we'd be adding a little bit to Peace River, which is already a fair size. Do you have any sense as to how that might go over in terms of – because that's one of the issues that we look at quite closely is the growing of some of these large constituencies.

Ms Elliott: Well, all this at one point in time belonged to Peace River. I have no idea why those changes were made. I really don't know. I wasn't privy to that information.

Ms Jeffs: Your sense of history is more extensive than mine. Do you know when those communities previously belonged to Peace River? Do you know when that changed?

Ms Elliott: Yes, I do. In 1971 Dunvegan was abolished and split between Peace River and Spirit River, Lesser Slave Lake created, to the southeast Lac La Biche. Then in 1986 there were no changes. In 1993 Dunvegan expanded east, and Lesser Slave Lake expanded to the Northwest Territories border. In 2004 they expanded north and east to take over the north portion of Lesser Slave Lake. So from 1971 to 2004 they've been gradually including things in our area as far as I can tell.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. Those particular communities that you were looking at: do you know in which boundary change commission . . .

Ms Elliott: In 2004.

Ms Jeffs: In 2004 they were shifted into this constituency from there, so it's fairly recent, then.

Ms Elliott: Yes. I don't know for sure, but I think the reason they were shifted at that point in time was that our MLA was then minister of northern affairs or Indian affairs and something. I don't know. I think that was why those areas were shifted because they're mainly Indian reserves and Métis settlements. I think they were shifted into Lesser Slave Lake because their MLA was the minister of aboriginal affairs. I think it was a political move. I really personally believe it was more of a political move than it was consideration for the voters.

Ms Jeffs: Or for what made sense in the constituency.

Ms Elliott: Yeah.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Well, thank you very much for that.

The Chair: Just so you know, those bells ringing are the fact that we're now over time.

Brian.

12:30

Mr. Evans: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Ms Elliott. Just one question, and it relates to ease of access by ground in these proposed areas that you're talking about. I take it that it does make sense to you because the transportation routes are conducive to either the expansion south or the contraction on the west side; in other words, the ability of the residents in these areas to get to the closest area, the closest population base is consistent with what you have recommended to us. Is that correct?

Ms Elliott: Yeah. Tallcree north and Tallcree south deal in Fort Vermilion. That's their normal trading route to Fort Vermilion. They don't come the other way.

Mr. Evans: All right. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, ma'am.

Ms Elliott: Thank you.

The Chair: Our next presenter.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Alderman Elroy Deimert for the city of Grande Prairie.

**Elroy Deimert, Alderman
Greg Scerbak, Manager
City of Grande Prairie**

Mr. Deimert: May I introduce our city manager, Greg Scerbak.

The Chair: For the record your full name, sir.

Mr. Deimert: Elroy Deimert. We have a letter from our mayor on behalf of the council and also some rationale for the suggestions, how it would impact neighbouring ridings, et cetera. Should I, then, just go ahead and present?

The Chair: By all means.

Mr. Deimert: All right. Looking at that letter, I'll just review it briefly.

The City of Grande Prairie has reviewed the existing boundaries of both the Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grand Prairie-Smoky divisions. And, by the way, our other neighbouring ridings.

The statistics provided identify that both divisions are well within the average population of 37,820.

In fact, I believe they're over 5 per cent, on the high side, which gives us some room to manoeuvre.

The City desires that the current level of representation for Northern Alberta be maintained without change and that there be no reduction to the number of constituencies and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the residents of Northern Alberta. Additionally, the City requests the division boundaries be adjusted to create an urban constituency wholly within the geographic boundaries of the City. The second division boundaries would then combine the remaining urban portion of [northern] Grande Prairie with adjacent rural municipalities as required to meet the average population criteria. This would create two divisions similar to what has been established for Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South electoral divisions.

We thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Some of the rationale for this, if you look at that second page, is that, you know, it's in all of Alberta's interests to maintain four constituency ridings in the Peace Country, or northwestern Alberta, if the overall population and the vastness of the service areas continue to warrant them, and this, of course, continues to be the case. However, the principle of natural communities needs to be honoured in the division of Grande Prairie. We know that Dunvegan-Central Peace continues to be under the 25 per cent variance.

We have a long-term solution, we believe, for these problems that we address, in effect, in how we affect the distribution of our neighbouring ridings to Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky. By redistributing Grande Prairie-Wapiti to be wholly within the city of Grande Prairie, as a Grande Prairie riding or constituency, one would then redistribute Grande Prairie-Smoky to include a portion of, perhaps, northern Grande Prairie, with its agricultural service centres and shopping centres in their neighbourhoods, with the rural remnants of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky minus the east region of Grande Prairie-Smoky, east of the

Smoky River. Now, this boundary is not so important east of Smoky as it is to take some of the population that remains there into the Dunvegan-Central Peace riding.

Each of these redistributed ridings should be reduced in population; that is, the Grande Prairie urban riding and the Grande Prairie plus rural riding. Each of these, we believe, could be reduced in population at least 10 per cent, which would leave them at, perhaps, less than minus 5 per cent off the mean – I know the mean is changing – since Grande Prairie and Grande Prairie north are growing at rates that will take these ridings well above that mean within the next eight years, by all predictions. The extra population east of the Smoky could be added to a newly configured Dunvegan-Central Peace riding, bringing them up to a more comfortable, say, minus 5 per cent below the mean. Thus, we have, we think, a long-term solution that honours the constituency principles.

Further to that, these ridings – for example, Valleyview and Falher – were once in one riding. You know, back in '83, in Marvin Moore's day, that was all one riding then, and I think the '82 election was the change. Of course, the north-south highways, highway 43 and highway 49, going up towards Peace River, cut right through that Dunvegan-Central Peace riding.

When we talk about urban issues that should be represented by urban representatives – those are, for example, affordable housing; crime, especially organized crime; all of the things that FCSS now does; and, of course, urban planning, sustainable urban planning – all of these are issues that we feel perhaps could be represented better by the natural community of an urban riding in Grande Prairie.

I'll stop for questions.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much for your presentation. I must admit I'm a little confused. In terms of the north how far from the existing Dunvegan-Central Peace electoral boundary would you suggest that we move that boundary south towards Grande Prairie?

Mr. Deimert: Well, no. We wouldn't be talking about the Dunvegan-Central Peace riding being changed in the north. It'd still probably go along Saddle Hills, but what we're thinking is to perhaps go to the Smoky, then, as the boundary. What we would take in is Valleyview and DeBolt and put them back into the Dunvegan-Central Peace riding. There are other ways of doing that because, actually, the amount of population between the Smoky and, say, Valleyview is so small. If we are talking about the Smoky going north here, this area up to the Smoky – and that would be some of the towns right up to the river – would stay in this area of, say, a northern Grande Prairie-Wapiti-Smoky riding whereas the population, especially in Valleyview and Fox Creek, that is now in Smoky could go into Dunvegan-Central Peace. That main corridor is – I mean, people from Falher, et cetera, shop in Valleyview, et cetera.

All we're trying to do is basically say that we have more than enough population within Grande Prairie, of course, to have maybe three-quarters of the city or two-thirds of the city in an urban riding. Then the northern part, which absolutely services the agricultural area around it, could then become part of a mixed urban and rural riding, which would be not so large as some of the other ridings. Then, of course, Dunvegan-Central Peace, which is a problem riding anyway, could then look at contiguous communities. There's a highway, a major route, from Valleyview up through Falher, et cetera, going towards Peace River. As I said, before '83 this was a riding. This was, you know, Marvin Moore's old Smoky riding.

12:40

That is how we think it would affect our neighbours and actually help our neighbours because, as you know, Grande Prairie is growing. It's going to be unusually large within eight years if we stay the way we're going for these two ridings, anyway. We're going to be looking at two ridings that have well over 10 per cent above the mean while you've got another riding next to it that's 25 per cent under. Again, you know, what made us start to think about this was really the urban issues that we feel could be addressed.

Of course, we still want to maintain the relationship with the areas around us. We do a lot of things together. We have certain utilities that are done together. We feel that we would still, in effect, really have two MLAs representing the city, but one might be specializing in relations between city and neighbouring municipalities.

Mr. Evans: That's a very good clarification. In terms of discussing this proposal with your constituents here in Grande Prairie and any of your neighbours in Dunvegan and any of, you know, the municipalities of Valleyview and Fox Creek, as you've already alluded to, have you had any of those kinds of conversations at this point?

Mr. Deimert: Well, there has been ongoing talk of this for some time, all the way back to, you know, '82 and ever since. I think that it's been an issue at these hearings before. The general feeling is, I think, that in the city, at least, there are city issues. Some of the aldermen have spoken quite eloquently to those issues. Of course, this is something that's been done regularly for other mid-size cities, and we're always classified as a mid-size city in all of the organizations, not as a rural municipality. Certainly, we know that Dunvegan-Central Peace is worried. I mean, they have a special status, but we sense that this is going to be a problem down the way. We have this excess within Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti, so we thought that this is not a bad time to address it. You do, of course, need room to eventually make other special ridings in the north, we think. There's good reason for such need. If Dunvegan-Central Peace is taken care of, I think that gives the commission room to make other adjustments.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you for that. My only other comment would be, you know, that if you go all the way down in Dunvegan, all the way down to Fox Creek, that really does expand the size of Dunvegan-Central Peace, which is already a pretty substantial constituency. That does add a lot of mileage to the MLA.

Mr. Deimert: Yes. Yes, it does. Although, you know, a major town there is Valleyview, so that would be a natural place to have an office. And in Fox Creek you've just got very small communities along that way: Little Smoky and Fox Creek, and that's it. It's really just the highway, and that highway is a natural community-maker, really. People shop up and down that highway both ways, coming into Valleyview to shop, so that is the principle community-maker in that area; it's true. But we do have to look at that: it's no bigger than Smoky used to be, kind of thing, from Sexsmith way.

I think that there is that huge section between the highway and the Smoky River that is absolutely not populated by anything but moose. So we're talking: we don't really care what could be done; you folks can figure that out. There is a huge section in there that would come all the way almost to Grande Cache, where there is no population, so it's really only that highway that's counting in that area.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: I'm just going to ask a couple of questions. You realize that under the updated numbers your Grande Prairie-Smoky is 1.7 per cent over and your Wapiti is 2.6 per cent over. That doesn't give you a whole lot of room.

Mr. Deimert: That's true, Your Honour. But, you know, if we're looking at growth rates, the city doubled in size in eight years or something like that. How many years? Thirteen years. In the last eight years it went up something like 30 per cent or something like that. So, you know, we're looking at room there. This is why we feel it wouldn't be a mistake – I mean, we are in rural northern Alberta – to go minus 5 per cent in these regions.

Grande Prairie has a population of probably over 52,000 now – right? – just within the boundaries of the city. Just north of the city we have communities that are growing very fast – they're virtually part of the city, but they are in the municipality – so Clairmont, a huge development in there as the highway comes through, et cetera. We think you have room there. Now, how much room is not for us to decide. You get to look at that. But we think there's room, say, to safely go below the mean and then use that extra population. In Valleyview you might have a thousand or so voters, and in Fox Creek, you know, a few more, the actual population being a little bigger than that, and then DeBolt. So we think the numbers are working in favour of a redistribution solving several problems.

Yeah, we are aware that the mean is going up. We're going up faster, by the way.

The Chair: So how many people on your map would be going to Dunvegan-Central Peace?

Mr. Diemert: I can't say exactly, but we're thinking that it would be well over 3,000. The actual voters is another – we're talking raw population figures. Yeah. Can anybody help me out with Valleyview's population? In Fox Creek I think we're maybe closer to 5,000 or 6,000. I'm more familiar with the number on the voting list than I am with the actual raw population figures.

If you think of it in percentages, you know, one could work a percentage, that you're taking a percentage from Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky and transferring that percentage of population to Dunvegan-Central Peace, and that works. Those are the only ridings at issue, so one could look at that issue and adjust the boundary in sync with that kind of reasoning, I would think.

The Chair: I'm looking at the mileage and the distance.

Mr. Diemert: Yes.

The Chair: That's a toughie.

Dr. Archer: Mr. Deimert, thanks very much for the presentation. I'm looking at a map that has the two present ridings focused on the city of Grande Prairie and wondering: if you were to choose the demarcation point between the constituency that you would be proposing – that would be the urban Grande Prairie riding – and then the rest of the riding that's going to continue to be within Smoky, where would you put that line?

Mr. Diemert: You know, I don't think we're really qualified; this would be wild guessing on our part. If we look at from the bypass north or 116th Avenue in the city, that includes a lot of the rural service centres in the north. A lot of the agribusiness is in the north. We're talking about maybe a quarter of the city's population, something like that, so one would have to look at that. There is huge semi-urban growth in the areas around that. Then, of course, we're

talking about the municipal city boundary on the south. So places that are in the county would stay with the reconfigured Grande Prairie-Smoky riding. But one of them would be totally controlled by the city boundary and part of the northern population taken into a mixed urban and rural constituency. I'm guessing that it would be somewhere around 116th Avenue, just knowing how much population is to the north.

Fortunately, the city is building both ways. New growth is going on in the north, and it's going on in the southwest as well within the city boundaries, so no doubt we'll have growth in the actual urban boundary, within the boundaries of the city. No doubt about that from the plans already developed for development.

12:50

Dr. Archer: My last question. The data that we have in front of us is updated for the city of Grande Prairie to 2007. That has your population at just over 50,000. You were mentioning a figure of 52,000. Has there been a more recent census than 2007, and is that in front of Municipal Affairs at the moment?

Mr. Deimert: No. Probably not.

Dr. Archer: So 2007 is the data that we'll be working with then. Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you very much. Just carrying on a little bit in terms of the growth – and you may have said it, and I may have missed it – do you have a projection for sort of the next five years? Is the growth going to continue sort of at that pace?

Mr. Deimert: We have some projections that we've done.

Mr. Scerbak: We do have some growth rates. Grande Prairie has been growing at a rate of 6 to 7 per cent. However, we're forecasting for the next few years the growth rate to slow down to probably 2 or 3 per cent.

Ms Jeffs: But still 2 to 3 per cent projected.

Mr. Scerbak: It's still growth but much slower than it was.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. It sounds like a motivation behind the proposal is to try and – is it fair to say that you're trying to resolve a tug-of-war between the disparate interests between an urban area and the surrounding rural area? We've heard talks about these 'rurban' ridings, and this is one of them that comes up.

Mr. Deimert: Absolutely. Those are the issues, although we certainly appreciate the common interests that we have as we serve a larger riding. You don't have to be in Grande Prairie long to know that we've got all the urban problems that Edmonton might have, certainly with housing issues and policing issues and planning issues. In fact, our neighbours around us, you know, because we're in the process of discussing consensual annexation, et cetera, are always saying: well, why don't you grow up instead of out? So, of course, we're looking at all of those normal urban problems. Representation on these would desperately help us.

Ms Jeffs: We would still be splitting the city if we adopted some formation of yours. This has obviously been discussed around the council table. We wouldn't be perceived as orphaning that northern part?

Mr. Deimert: Well, that's just a suggestion of how it might be done. The main motion was a wholly urban riding, the leftover going into an urban-rural riding. These are only suggestions and not something that council has – as with Red Deer there would be a portion that would be, you know, looking at being in a rural riding. Everybody understands that those interests are meshed as well but that, hopefully, this wholly urban riding then would be meeting their needs as well. I don't think that they would hesitate to go to their neighbouring MLA to present urban issues, and I think that's healthy.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. But your sense is that that proposal that you have here with that northern piece is probably a fairly good place to make that dividing line? You said there are some service relationships between that part . . .

Mr. Deimert: Certainly the agribusiness centre of Grande Prairie is north, going into the Clairmont area. That's huge. Also, the mall that would be in there is a place where all of these rural people come to shop. So in terms of their connection with the city, that's certainly the area that is servicing many people in that area.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you very much. Those are my questions, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dobbie: I know that we tend to stretch out these five minutes. Alderman Deimert and Manager Scerbak, thank you very much for the work you've done. It is quite helpful. I have my Google alerts set up on my BlackBerry, so I knew that council passed a resolution, and I got a chance to think about it. Grande Prairie, it seems to me, the region, is a bit of a model for intermunicipal co-operation. You're marketing the Grande Prairie region, the regional association. I take it that that's been thrown into the mix and that you don't see it hurting those alliances.

Mr. Deimert: Absolutely. It was something that was brought up, and we feel that because we're largely . . .

Mr. Dobbie: Again I'll have to cut you off because I have a few more questions.

We clearly hear your suggestion, and we understand the models in Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge. The challenge that we are looking at is trying to balance effective representation, and one of the tools we've been given this time is the ability to create up to four special constituencies. We are still at the stage of developing our principles as a commission as to: what is it that we are going to use as criteria within the list of 30 things we can think about, and how do we weight them?

In many ways what we have heard from the Alberta population in general is that there is an apparent sense that rural votes outweigh urban votes, and one of the possible solutions to that is to say that there are three or four special ridings that must be treated as special because they meet three to five of these criteria. If we take them out of the mix, the balance of the constituencies comes much closer to the average. The challenge that we have in this area compared to a more centralized area is that we can't reach very easily to move people in and out. So it would be helpful if we could get some further information from you, your proposals. Give us some drawings. Get the stuff on the website.

I am certainly becoming more and more convinced that the use of only one special constituency has created some of the problems here. I think that we may need to call these areas what they are, and Dunvegan would be included. Let's take them out of the calculations so that on average everyone is much closer. So that is going to

be our challenge with you. If you are taking these steps in part to protect Dunvegan, there may be another way to get there, but we may not be able to accommodate everything.

Mr. Deimert: Could I just clarify that? You know, the main object was to meet the needs of our folks in Grande Prairie, and we thought that some of those things might help. You ask us to say how these changes would impact our neighbours, and it was just a thought that if you happen to need those special cases elsewhere, there is a possibility here.

Mr. Dobbie: Again, it is very helpful, but the drawings help us more than the words because we seem to be visual.

Mr. Deimert: Okay.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Tony Yelenik, reeve, MD of Greenview.

The Chair: For the record, sir, your name.

Mr. Yelenik: My name is Tony Yelenik. I'm the reeve of the MD of Greenview.

The Chair: The spelling of your last name?

Mr. Yelenik: Y-e-l-e-n-i-k.

The Chair: Yes.

**Tony Yelenik, Reeve
Municipal District of Greenview**

Mr. Yelenik: I don't have a written presentation today but will be more than pleased to present a written presentation to you later on in the mail. What I have today is a verbal thing. The presenter just prior to me has raised several issues that we take exception to, and I would like to deal with them in the answer period, so I will cut my verbal comments fairly short.

Thank you very much for allowing us the opportunity to present today. We feel that proper electoral representation is a critical component of our democratic system at any level of government. Although representation proportionate to population levels is often identified as desirable, it's equally important that representation be reflective of geographic conditions and economic drivers.

The presenter prior to me hived off everything east of the Smoky River. I live outside the community of Valleyview, and it was really concerning to have the presenter have us hived off and moved to some other jurisdiction. Most of our residents in that area do business in the city of Grande Prairie, and we feel that the two boundaries of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti are adequately serving our residents right now. We feel that with the two constituency offices both located in the city of Grande Prairie, the city of Grande Prairie is equally represented by those two individual representatives. With the population the way it is now, with the new numbers that were just given here today, we think that Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky ideally suit the numbers that are prescribed in the legislation.

1:00

We're concerned about the reduction of seats in northern Alberta, and we think that the five constituencies now adequately address and

serve the people of this area. We would hate to see a reduction in the number of representatives from this area. We feel that it's adequately served now. Dunvegan is under the provincial average, but there are exceptions, and we feel that Dunvegan should remain an exception. We feel that the two ridings of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti should remain constant.

Basically, that's what I have verbally to present, but I'd be willing to answer some questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Reeve Yelenik. A quick question. One of the things we've heard relates to naming of constituencies, and there have been some suggestions that we might want to consider, to the extent possible, having municipalities in the constituency names. So one suggestion for this constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky was to consider Grande Prairie-Valleyview. Have you thought about that? Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Yelenik: Not really. We feel that the name adequately represents us. You can tinker with the name all you want. I guess representation is what's important to the people there, and we feel that we're getting adequately represented now.

Mr. Dobbie: The other question I had is that we've looked at this constituency, and it appears generally to be congruent with the municipal boundaries for the counties. Are there any specific areas that you believe need minor adjustment, that should be in or out? I know you're generally satisfied, but are there any areas where you say, "I don't know why that's in our particular constituency"?

Mr. Yelenik: No. Fox Creek belongs to the same school division as Valleyview, and we feel that we have a good working relationship with the town of Fox Creek, the town of Valleyview, and the municipality. As well, the town of Grande Cache is also included in our constituency, and they are in Yellowhead. It's a little bit out of the way, the Grande Cache portion of our municipality, but the way the boundaries are set up now, Fox Creek deals well with the representative in place.

Mr. Dobbie: Again, I've heard you, and I take it that the suggestion of trying to create a hole in the doughnut for the municipality: you just don't see that working.

Mr. Yelenik: No, I can't see that working at all. The city of Grande Prairie is more than willing to accept our support for construction of a new hospital now. I find it really surprising that they would like to be a separate entity unto their own. We think that the two MLAs in the area represent the city as well as the rural areas, and we think that it's a good mix. We've had a very good working relationship in the past with the city and with the county of Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. You can see the challenges we face. We seem to hear A and B on a regular basis. Thank you very much.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mr. Yelenik, for the presentation. There seems to be a couple of issues emerged from the last presentation that may or may not be confusing the issue. The one recommendation I heard was for the creation of an urban constituency within Grande Prairie. Assuming we're working with the 2007 census, that would likely mean about 40,000 people in that constituency and about 10,000 people from Grande Prairie who are going to be in a mixed constituency with urban and rural. Those people presumably would be tied both to the people who are currently in Grande Prairie-

Wapiti and currently in Grande Prairie-Smoky. A second suggestion had to do with reconfiguring the boundary of Dunvegan.

My sense from the presenter from the city of Grande Prairie is that the first was their highest priority, and the second was a commentary but not much of a priority. I'm hearing pretty strongly from you that the suggestion of connecting your area, particularly around Valleyview, to Dunvegan doesn't make a lot of sense.

Mr. Yelenik: No, it doesn't. The city is the hub of the area, is the major urban area, and I think most of the business moves to Grande Prairie. It doesn't move to Falher. I don't know where the previous presenter got his information that people in Falher shop in Valleyview and Valleyview people shop in Falher, but that is quite a bit of a ways from the truth.

If you take 12,000 people out of the city of Grande Prairie, if their population is 52,000 – I think it's around 50,000. If you take 10,000 people and add it to the county of Grande Prairie, that leaves you with 29,000 people in this rural riding that was envisioned, and that's even under Dunvegan's population. Then you have two constituencies that are under in the area, actually three when you include Lesser Slave Lake, so it doesn't really make any sense to me, and I don't think that it's workable.

Dr. Archer: What would be your response to the other proposal, then, which I think would be to have an urban riding, about 40,000, and then to have a second riding that includes much of what's currently in Grande Prairie-Smoky, 10,000 people from Grande Prairie, and much of what's currently in Grande Prairie-Wapiti?

Mr. Yelenik: You have a constituency stretching from south of Fox Creek to the B.C. border then, and it really doesn't make for good representation to have one MLA responsible for that large an area, I don't think. Population is sparser than the city of Grande Prairie, but east of Smoky River there's a thousand people around the DeBolt area, we have an Indian reserve with about 1,200 people to the east of that, and then you have 2,500 people in the town of Fox Creek, 1,800 in the town of Valleyview. The constituency stretches east of Valleyview, I think, 40-some kilometres. So you have a very vast area that I don't think could be serviced very well by one MLA.

Dr. Archer: Okay. Then the last point is just more an observation than a question because I know we're getting close to our time. One response to that challenge would be to look at moving Fox Creek possibly to an area, one of the constituencies east of it, to ensure that the constituency doesn't extend so far geographically.

Mr. Yelenik: I don't think that would be favourable to the residents of Fox Creek. They're currently serviced well by the representative of that area, and I don't think, based on the discussions that we've had with Fox Creek, that they would be willing to be either included in Lac Ste. Anne or in another riding to the east of that.

Dr. Archer: That's it for me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.
Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you. Thank you very much, Reeve Yelenik. It's interesting. As you say, we're hearing rather divergent views. It's your suggestion that the urban-rural mix doesn't need to be tampered with in the two ridings.

Mr. Yelenik: I don't think it creates a conflict. I think the representatives can represent urban as well as rural at the same time. I don't

think that's too difficult to represent. I don't think we're that much different than urban for the representative not to be able to take forward the issues through the Legislature.

Ms Jeffs: Just a couple questions on the MD of Greenview. Is that currently completely within Grande Prairie-Smoky, or does it cross boundaries?

Mr. Yelenik: Well, no. A portion of Grande Prairie-Wapiti as well as Yellowhead.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. So the previous presenter's proposal to hive off that part of the east would take the MD of Greenview into yet another . . .

Mr. Yelenik: Into another constituency as well.

Ms Jeffs: Okay. There would be a piece of Greenview going that way, too, so you'd be feeling a bit drawn and quartered there, would you? All right. Thank you very much for that. Those are my only questions.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much, Reeve. Would I be putting words in your mouth if I were to suggest that by having two MLAs in the Grande Prairie area who have both urban and rural responsibilities, the representation for both urban and rural in the Grande Prairie area and, in fact, in the two constituencies is stronger?

1:10

Mr. Yelenik: I couldn't have said it better myself.

Mr. Evans: I picked that up from your comments. Thank you very much. I have no further questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Reeve. That was very good.

Mr. Dobbie: The only suggestion, sir, is that if you have a written submission, it would be very helpful if we got it before October 13. Mail might not get it there; e-mail definitely would.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Kevin McLean, president of the Grande Prairie-Smoky Liberal association.

The Chair: Good afternoon. For the record would you give us your full name, please.

**Kevin McLean, Grande Prairie-Smoky
Liberal Constituency Association**

Mr. McLean: My name is Kevin McLean. I'm from Grande Prairie. I've been a resident since 1991.

The Chair: All right. Go ahead.

Mr. McLean: Okay. About a month ago we realized Electoral Boundaries was going to be coming to Grande Prairie, and there was more talk about it. I think the last one was in the early '90s. If you ask most average people on the street of Grande Prairie where the boundary is, on 100th and Resources, they have no idea where they're at. But with representation you're looking at numbers, 40,000 or whatever.

I commented about a month ago in the paper about the urban and rural divide, more specifically Edmonton and Calgary. Grande Prairie is growing. They're right. We're at 50,000, not 100,000 or 120,000. One thing I wanted to come in is that people that represent the ridings – I don't know about the PCs, but I know for myself that I haven't been notified of boundary changes or anything. I'm about to look for donations for the next election. If changes are going to happen, it's going to affect me, so I'd like to be notified by the city or whoever, the electoral debate. Nothing has been decided yet.

I had another couple of comments to make, too, on the diversity between rural and urban. I've lived here since 1991, and we have a lot of people from around the world that have moved here. I think the way the ridings are set up now, urban and rural, for Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti gives a good diversity for the population from country to city. I have a nanny – I'm going off course – from the Philippines. I have a fellow that helped me through math; he's from Africa. I have friends from India. I think their input in our democracy is very important to bring to the country, and it's not just urban. I think Grande Prairie is going to get its urban eventually. It's growing, and it's going to get bigger.

We don't want to lose ridings in the north. We're an economic engine for Alberta, and we're low population. You look at our map, and you look at how big our ridings are. We can't afford to lose any. We need to keep what we've got. We power over 50 per cent of the revenue, and it's going to grow. We need to sustain and eventually add to the city of Grande Prairie. Maybe I'll be older and grey when this happens, but to divide it now, I think, is a little premature.

Calgary and Edmonton, yeah, we see. I spoke on this, and David Swann was up a month ago, looking at money for the changes. Anyways, a lot of us do want changes for Edmonton and Calgary. You've got a lot of people in a small area, square kilometres, so change is needed.

I wanted to bring up diversity. It's not just percentage. You had a fellow from the MD talking about the county. There's a diversity here that maybe helps the county, and maybe eventually we won't all be rural Conservative. It might change. It might be Liberal or NDP. There might be change. It's an opportunity that could happen that way as well. Your job might be easier if Grande Prairie went that way.

Anyways, as far as I'm concerned, I wasn't notified. I read it in the paper. I know that nothing has been concluded. I'm talking about the changes as if, you know, our alderman Elroy Deimert, that was up here – I know you've got a lot of decisions to make, and I know there are four or five ridings in Edmonton or Calgary. But a lot of us do think it's significant. Right now the way it is is good. I'm just throwing that at you. I didn't come prepared with notes. I came as an average citizen and someone that wants to raise money to put up a battle next election. I can say that. Anyways, that's why I wanted to come towards you.

A lot of people are working. We're having a hard time right now in the oil field up here; a lot of people are out of work. But when it comes around, we're going to be an engine again, and we're helping build overpasses in Edmonton and Calgary. A lot of the money is going there. A lot of our roads are falling apart here.

One other thing. The rural and urban divide: a lot of that's caused in the land-use framework, where they're not giving the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie enough annexation to say that we can grow properly in the county, or MDs are not going to put industrial bases right on our borders that are affecting us on a tax basis, 60-40 for residential base, for corporate, whatever. There are other issues. But as I'm talking specifically towards this change now, I don't see the need as of right now, so I'm going against the council that put forward the motion.

If you have any questions, fine. I didn't come prepared. I just wanted to speak as a citizen and someone wanting to raise money for the party.

The Chair: Just to let you know, the hearings were advertised in all the newspapers, and each householder was mailed an outline of the process and what's involved and that.

We certainly welcome your input here. Am I summing it up correctly when I say you feel that for now leave it as it is?

Mr. McLean: In northern Alberta don't take away. We don't want our MLAs taken away.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. McLean: We don't want to lose one.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. McLean. Can I just get the spelling of your last name?

Mr. McLean: M-c-L-e-a-n.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. I wasn't sure if there was an A in there at the front or not.

While you may have a political affiliation, it is very helpful for us to hear from individuals who are not necessarily members of council or representing a group because we need to hear from as many people as possible and get the best information. So I would encourage you to have other people – we're going to have, hopefully, future hearings after the first draft of the report is made public. There should be an opportunity for other people to participate, so if in your work you can go out and suggest that people give us their input, even by e-mail or otherwise, over the next few weeks, that would be helpful as well.

Do you know what the voter participation rate was in Grande Prairie in the last election?

Mr. McLean: To say off the cuff, I think it was 60 per cent, but they had it in the fall, which might have been lower. I think it might have been 40-some per cent. Someone in the city might know. I know for the municipality because I ran. It was 19 per cent in 2004, and it was 27 per cent in 2007, so it's very low. There's a lot of work to be done in getting people out to vote. I don't think squeaking a border here or there in the big ridings is going to really change a lot of them getting out to the voting stations. Maybe in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary where you've got a million people around.

Mr. Dobbie: From a general principles perspective again, we are being requested by people in Calgary and the mayor of Edmonton and the representatives from those cities to consider the population of Edmonton as a group, the population of Calgary as a group, and the rest of Alberta as a group. The way the numbers work out on that basis is that it's very close to 50-50. If you take Edmonton's current population and Calgary's current population, either 49 or 51 with the rest of the province. As a general principle if we were looking at dividing the province along those lines – Edmonton, Calgary, the rest of Alberta – is that something that you would support?

Mr. McLean: Well, one thing that I know is that democracy is about the vote. I came in ninth, 35 votes short of Elroy Deimert, who came in eighth. I believe in population. You know, I do know

everyone – I'm speaking on the north. But I think you've got 2 million in Edmonton and Calgary, say, the surrounding area of Edmonton, and 1.5 in the rest of Alberta.

Mr. Dobbie: One point eight to 1.7 is basically it.

Mr. McLean: Okay; 1.8 to 1.7. What's the seat ratio? I think there's a big difference. Isn't there a little bit of a difference there? What is the ratio of Edmonton and Calgary and the rest?

Mr. Dobbie: It's close.

Mr. McLean: It's very close? Okay. Well, then, maybe there's not a – some of us think there's more, that Edmonton and Calgary should be more of a representation by population. I am for population, so I hope it doesn't affect northern Alberta. I know I'm speaking because we are less in population. You can tell by the boundaries.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: If you had to give up a seat, how would you feel?

Mr. McLean: Representation is very important, I believe, for everybody. We'd be losing a seat, and we're an economic power. I don't think that's the nicest thing. No, I wouldn't like it. I wouldn't want to lose a seat even though it's not on my side.

1:20

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks for the presentation, Mr. McLean. As I understand it, your main concern is that the number of constituencies in northern Alberta or the representational ratio that exists should not change very much and that, certainly, there shouldn't be a decrease in seats in this part of the province. I take that to be your main argument.

Mr. McLean: One hundred per cent. Yes.

Dr. Archer: The second issue has to do with what's taken place within these two constituencies. I think today's hearing has been one of the ones in which we actually have heard the sharpest differences between people in a community. You know, it doesn't escape us to see that we have people representing both the city of Grande Prairie and various reeves from the surrounding area making presentations. It's pretty clear that there's quite a clear divergence of views here. I suspect that no matter where we end up on this, we're probably going to hear about it in the second round of hearings because the views are so different.

I just wonder if you could give us some context for whether this is an issue that there's been a fair bit of debate about publicly in Grande Prairie. Do you know if the position that the city took today is something that you would have anticipated? Have there been discussions that have been reflected in the newspaper, for example, indicating that Grande Prairie was going to come forward with the views that it did? What kind of discussion has been taking place within the community?

Mr. McLean: Well, I think that because the electoral debate is open now with the commission, I do believe it was pretty quick forward. I think that for the average resident of Grande Prairie it's: "This will be good for you. We passed this proposal in council, and here we go." I don't think it's been talked about a lot. As a representative of one of the ridings, Grande Prairie-Smoky – I am of the Liberal association – nothing was brought forward to me. It will change issues for me. I think it's stuff that brews over time, but there's even

more. The provincial government is a creature of municipalities, so there are other issues there maybe, too, with annexation and stuff.

I do think that right now for representation for the people it is a good fit. Now, I don't think I'm the only one that's speaking like this. There could be more at the next meeting if you get more people here. It's something that was brought on about these changes in the last week. It was brought in the paper.

I don't think Valleyview or Fox Creek or – I'm talking Grande Prairie-Smoky now. Do I know the range roads exactly, the boundaries? No way. But do I know the towns that are within the boundary of Grande Prairie-Smoky? That's my business to know. I need to raise capital to fight the next election. But Sexsmith, Clairmont, Valleyview, Fox Creek: they're all important to this constituency. They're all people that live there and contribute. They go to the oil field to work; they farm. I think big changes like that have to be important.

Grande Prairie eventually is going to have it. We're not going to stop growing. You heard a representation of 2 per cent, 6 per cent growth. I think that changes will come, but the question is: are they needed right now? I don't think that enough people have been notified. No, I do not.

I hope I was able to answer that, Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. McLean. You spoke about diversity. I wonder if I could just get your opinion on whether new Canadians are opposed to Canadians who have been here for generations are more in need of the services of their MLAs, have greater need and, therefore, take more of the MLAs' time than those who have been here for many generations. Any comment on that?

Mr. McLean: I think there's need on both parts. As for immigration, when people come to our county, it makes us stronger. It makes our city stronger. Like I said, I have an individual helping me get my high school diploma, Augustine Ebinu. He's from Africa. I have friends – an alderman, Yad Minhas, who's from India, been here for years – that make our community stronger, businesspeople. I have a Philippine nanny helping me now. If it wasn't for her, my wife or I would be at home because they couldn't take twins that are two years old in daycare. It's hard to get a spot.

Then on the other hand, we have people that are out of work that have been here for generations. I go back to the 1600s, 17th-century Cape Breton, Newfoundland; my wife's family, the 1600s. So there are needs on both parts, not just immigration or Canadians that are here. It does make Grande Prairie diversified. Since '91 we have changed. I think they talked in our paper last year about Muslims. There might have been 60-some individuals in the late '90s; now we've got 600. We are changing.

That's why I'm representing the rural and urban change, too. It can help rural with the way we are now as well – right? – because we get out and vote and people talk. But I think there are needs on both parts. To say: which one has needs? I don't think so. There are needs on social issues or economics for people that are here for centuries or generations, centuries on my behalf, or people that are here a year.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks very much for that opinion.

Mr. McLean: You're welcome.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you. Just one question, really, with respect to these communities that a previous presenter talked about hiving off. This is on the eastern side of Grande Prairie-Smoky: Valleyview and Fox Creek and so on. Is it your sense that Grande Prairie-Smoky makes the most sense for the placement of those communities, that they should ideally remain here and not drift into one or the other of the constituencies? I think it might have been Keith – I may be wrong about this – that mentioned about Fox Creek maybe going into one of the other constituencies, as well. But what's your sort of sense as to where they naturally belong?

Mr. McLean: As far as the boundaries I know that within the city there's 100th and Resources Road for Grande Prairie. I know the towns. But the range roads, you know, you can take a town out or whatever. Percentage-wise you're talking 40,000 or whatever, and Smoky and Wapiti are right there.

Ms Jeffs: No, no. Sorry. Maybe I'm not making this clear. Just those communities on the eastern boundary that we're talking about being hived off: Valleyview, Fox Creek. Do you have a sense of them and where they most naturally fit and where they're trading?

Mr. McLean: Are you talking about what Elroy, our alderman, was saying about making a new constituency?

Ms Jeffs: Yes, about that piece.

Mr. McLean: We don't want to lose any MLAs in northern Alberta. I haven't heard of too many problems from residents.

Ms Jeffs: So they're happy where they are?

Mr. McLean: We've had, you know, a couple of hundred people that we're talking to. I've had no issues raised about electoral boundaries personally to me. Recently in the paper the city had a motion. Motions are nice because, I mean, whatever; eventually Grande Prairie is going to be big enough to do things. There is an urban-rural divide, but it's more than an electoral divide; it's provincial-municipal, different things. But as for changing it, no. There are a lot of people who believe it's good. A lot of people don't even know which street it changes on either, so you're lucky to get them out to vote as well. More emphasis should be on getting people to vote, getting out there.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Thank you very much.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. McLean. That was most interesting. I would hope that if you do have a written submission or you want to make one, we have it by e-mail or mail or fax. We'd be very interested, just as we would from the previous speakers.

Mr. McLean: Well, thank you for giving me time to speak.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Councillor Pat Jacobs with the county of Grande Prairie.

Pat Jacobs, Councillor
John Simpson, Director of Planning
County of Grande Prairie

Mrs. Jacobs: Good afternoon, panel.

The Chair: Before you do that, we'll just wait till we get the speakers down. Thank you. All right. Now, for the record could we have both of your names.

Mrs. Jacobs: My name is Pat Jacobs. I'm a county councillor with the county of Grande Prairie. This is John Simpson. He's our director of planning.

I'm here representing the county of Grande Prairie and bringing apologies from our reeve, who is in Australia right now. Our deputy reeve is in Edmonton right now, and I'm the only one left in town. I'm not a very good politician. I don't like speaking into microphones, so I don't know how I got here. John has courteously agreed to take over the presentation on my behalf and on the behalf of council, if that's all right with the panel.

1:30

The Chair: It's just fine. We thank you for coming.

Mrs. Jacobs: I just want to say that we were all a bit surprised to read the paper last night because in some conversations at a meeting that we had with the city two weeks ago, they weren't opposed to the current boundaries. So it was really surprising, and I hope we manage to catch that in our address.

The Chair: I'm sure we will. Thank you.
 Please proceed.

Mr. Simpson: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, on behalf of the county I'd like to thank the commission for being here and listening to issues affecting the electoral boundary review. A lot of what we're going to say, I think, was probably covered by Tony Yelenik, the reeve for the MD of Greenview; nevertheless, I think it bears repeating.

We understand that from time to time we need to go through the process of looking at boundaries and boundary review to make sure that we have adequate representation. Of course, the county supports that principle. We did look at and did review the mandate of the commission, your implementing legislation. We understand, you know, that you do have criteria which you must follow and that the changes that are contemplated must be done in an open and transparent manner. We understand, in that context and given the growing population of Alberta, that you've been allowed to add four seats to the Alberta Legislature, which is important, I think, in terms of maintaining proper distribution and representation.

We noted that there are 10 electoral districts, based around a 37,000-plus population, you know, the information we were using at the time, that are above the variance allowed and two that lie below the allowed and so on. Seven of those 10 that are above the variance are in the Calgary area, two in Edmonton, and of course you've got Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Central to our point here is that the two that are under the variance that are allowed, Dunvegan-Central Peace and Lesser Slave Lake in northern Alberta, fall into that category. We do note, as mentioned before, that both Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky are districts that fall within the variances that are allowed.

We understand the process and procedure for determining the boundaries, but we are concerned, of course, about the growing concentration of future ridings in southern Alberta, particularly in

Calgary. With the large number of seats that will inevitably end up there, it follows that future decision-making will, in our opinion, carry a large southern bias, which makes us nervous. I guess it's in this context that, certainly, our council and other councils in the area would oppose any loss of ridings in northern Alberta. I think, you know, as we go through and look at the numbers, it would be very easy to start to add more seats in southern Alberta and perhaps consolidate ridings in northern Alberta. That could be an option.

We are suggesting special consideration for the four ridings to be created and that you do look at that with all seriousness for the ridings that are affected in the north so that we don't lose ridings. We feel that losing ridings, obviously, would be detrimental to our population. Electoral boundaries are more than just population, of course. They have to consider the geography, the quality and adequacy of transportation networks, our weather conditions, which you're going to experience today as you travel further north, the accessibility to our MLAs in a timely manner, communication linkages, and so on. We've always made the case that we feel we're at a disadvantage in northern Alberta because those things work against us in a major manner.

We feel that the issues MLAs must address at a provincial level, including medical care, postsecondary care, economic issues, mountain pine beetle, provincial parks, and so on and so forth, are all important issues. The more MLAs working on our behalf – it's important to do it. We see through past decision-making the centralization of services in Edmonton and Calgary. I guess the classic example right now is the elimination of regional health authorities and so on. The decision-making is going to move into those centres, and we need to work at ways of trying to minimize it as far as the representation of northern Alberta is concerned.

Specifically with respect to the two Grande Prairie ridings, the county would like to make the point that the current boundaries do work well for the county. It's always good to have two MLAs working on our behalf. It allows us to deal with all the regional issues that I mentioned earlier. When the boundaries were created – I think it was in the early 1990s – I certainly made representations to the commission at that time suggesting that the city of Grande Prairie be split on a north-south basis or an east-west basis creating a north side and a south side of the riding, and I think that has worked well. We certainly have had excellent MLAs and continue to have excellent MLAs.

To that end, I think it works two ways. Number one, it works towards providing an equitable distribution of population between Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti not only currently but also in the future, and I'll talk to that in a minute. Also, the clarity I think it provides in terms of the north side and the south side is also very, very good. So, in general, we support it. We think, however, as the map that I've provided to you demonstrates, we can always use a bit of clarity. We can always use a bit of tweaking in terms of the boundaries.

The map that was provided to you suggests some minor adjustments to the boundaries of Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti. On the west side of the city we're looking at possibly moving the boundary along 100th Avenue out to what we call township road 70 and then straight north to the Grande Prairie boundary, so there's a little bit of tweaking there because the current boundary follows rivers and creeks and stuff. This would provide a little more clarity. Similarly, on the east side around the city of Grande Prairie possibly extending it eastwards along 100th Avenue to, I've shown here, range road 53, as an example, and then south to the Wapiti River.

Just some ideas. I can suggest to you from my time as an SDRO – my wife was a returning officer – that there is a lot of confusion by voters, you know, trying to understand where they're voting and

being sent to other areas and so on and so forth. The more clarity we can provide to the boundaries, the better off we are.

In summary, we've got three basic elements to our presentation. The first is that in the provincial context we urge you not to eliminate any northern ridings, and the temptation could be there given the sparsity of the population and the fact that Lesser Slave Lake and Dunvegan-Central Peace are underneath the variances. Secondly, we want to make it clear that we support the current boundaries of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky. Insofar as it affects the county of Grande Prairie, a major change, particularly as you've heard from the city, would not be supported. Thirdly, there may be some opportunities to tweak some of the current boundaries of the ridings near the city to provide clarity to voters without unduly impacting the population base of each constituency.

To give you some idea of population, a rough calculation, the north or the west side of Grande Prairie-Smoky might gain a hundred people. In the southeast area where we're proposing some boundary adjustments, Grande Prairie-Smoky might lose 400 people. There might be some adjustments in the city that might also come into play that would see some other people, but the population shifts are not significant so as to put the variance out of whack between the two ridings. It would still be pretty close to equal.

The last comment I guess I would make with respect to the boundaries is just in terms of growth. We've heard about growth and how it would work. We've heard about north Grande Prairie and the Clairmont area, which is in the county. The current population is about 2,500 people. If we look at a growth rate of 2 per cent, that's 50 people per year. If we, you know, are really good, 4 per cent, that's a hundred people a year. So while we are going to see growth, it's not going to be huge.

Conversely, in the city, the way the city works, they've got good growth in each of the quadrants – southeast, southwest, northeast, northwest – just the way the development industry works. So a boundary which follows 100th Avenue not only reflects and allows both constituencies to grow, it allows them to grow in almost an equal fashion, which I think is important as we move forward.

The last issue I'll touch on, which we think is important in terms of the proposed boundaries, is that it also takes into consideration future annexation of areas that are now under discussion between the two, the city and the county, and it doesn't distort it. If you look at city boundaries only and that becomes a boundary line, shall we say, between the two constituencies, I can assure you that those boundaries within the next two to five years will shift again because of annexation. Again, trying to add voter clarity to things, we think that the current boundaries work.

With that, Mr. Chairman, again, we thank you for coming, and we'll answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you both for coming. Again, it's very helpful to have the written submission and the drawing. A quick question. You were surprised at the resolution of Grande Prairie city council. Would they be surprised to see your drawing with the proposed boundaries, or did you discuss that on a planning basis with your equivalent in the city?

1:40

Mrs. Jacobs: Well, we didn't discuss anything because the only discussion we had was that we were both really not objecting to the status quo. We really hadn't – unless, John, in your discussions with him . . .

Mr. Dobbie: But in terms of the tweaking, was that a bilateral discussion?

Mr. Simpson: No. That was something that we put forward to council, you know, as part of three points that we thought would be important for the commission to consider. The big global context or the big regional context, the overall context of Grande Prairie-Wapiti – are they working or not working? – and then just knowing how the two constituencies work, and some of the issues around where voters vote and all that kind of stuff was ours.

Mr. Dobbie: Could I ask you to check with your equivalent in the city of Grande Prairie and just give us a follow-up note? Again, assuming that their best-case scenario can't happen, would they support this? We might get sooner feedback rather than later from them. Thank you.

Mr. Simpson: Sure. We're meeting tomorrow, so that's not a problem.

Mr. Dobbie: Other than that, you know, I understand your presentation, and I don't have any questions. It's very clear. Have you provided a copy for posting to the website?

Mr. Simpson: No. You're the first to see this.

Mr. Dobbie: All right. Because it would be very helpful. Do we automatically update these?

The Chair: We have been, yes.

Mr. Dobbie: Once they're updated. Okay. Great. Thank you. Those are my questions.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you. Very clear presentation. I don't have too much. I'm actually looking at your proposed boundary and the other one, and I don't see an awful lot of change. You're using the same horizontal line for the north and the south split, highway 43. So it's really just on the western and on the eastern edges that you're adjusting a little bit.

Mr. Simpson: Correct. The main axis splitting the city between Smoky and Wapiti is 100th Avenue. Then, of course, 100th Avenue extends into highway 43 as you move west. So that's right.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Well, you know, appreciating what Mr. Dobbie has said about perhaps getting us some feedback on that, that was my only question. Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Well, Councillor Jacobs and Mr. Simpson, thanks so much for the presentation. Much appreciated. I wonder if you could comment on the alignment that exists between the boundary of the county of Grande Prairie and the two constituencies of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky. Do you take in most of both of those constituencies?

Mr. Simpson: The county is serviced by both MLAs, Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky. Wapiti goes from the B.C. border into the city and into the Saddle Hills to the north, where Dunvegan starts, and the Wapiti River to the south. Then on the east

side, of course, we go to the Smoky River and then Birch Hills in the north. So we have Smoky on one side in half the county, and Wapiti is in the other half of the county.

Dr. Archer: Okay. So the boundary of the county actually corresponds with the boundary of the two constituencies?

Mr. Simpson: No. Sorry. My mistake. Wapiti actually extends farther south, through Grovedale. You can see it on the map on the wall there, I think, how far south it actually goes, a lot of green area.

Dr. Archer: Oh, I see. Right. Yeah. Okay.

Now, one of the issues that we're looking at, of course, is this issue of relative equality of constituency populations. When you take the population of these two constituencies together, they sum to about 85,000 people. The average constituency in Alberta, according to the data that we currently have, is going to be just over 40,000. I think the number is 40,583.

Let's leave aside the issue of where the line is drawn within Grande Prairie. If you didn't change the boundary at the outskirts, then we'll have two constituencies that are above the provincial average probably by 5 to 10 per cent. One strategy for us would be to accept that and to simply say: well, some city ridings will be larger than average; some rural ridings will be larger than average. Another is to say: well, let's just try to bring them both down to around 40,500. I wonder if you could comment on your advice to us on that matter and then, in addition, what your recommendation would be if we end up with a population of about 5,000 over the average. Are there any parts of the constituency that it makes sense to move to an adjacent constituency?

Mr. Simpson: Good question. The short answer is no. We understand why you can start tweaking boundaries – and I'll pick Dunvegan-Central Peace as an example – by perhaps moving that south into the county of Grande Prairie. It just doesn't make sense. We start to lose cohesiveness within our county in terms of who we're dealing with and so on. It makes it bigger for Dunvegan-Central Peace to try and service that area.

I mean, I've looked at the boundaries, and I've looked at how you would massage them, and I can't come up with a nice, neat, little package that says: "Yeah. Boy, if you did this, it'd be a lot better; it would really help here and help out over there." It doesn't work. I mean, we applied the same principle to how you'd split the city I think in the past. It has worked, and it continues to work. It allows for both growth now to meet the existing variance but also allows both sides to grow in the future and continue to meet, I think probably, future boundary reviews.

Dr. Archer: The trade-off from your perspective is that it's better to keep the constituency the same at its outskirts even if that means a slightly higher than average population.

Mr. Simpson: Correct.

Dr. Archer: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mrs. Jacobs and Mr. Simpson. Just a follow-up on Keith's question. You're very aware of the boundaries of the adjacent rural constituencies. Do they make sense from the point of view of community of interest? Are there any examples you've noted where there may be an attraction to an

area outside of an existing constituency boundary? I think you were both here, at least you were, Mr. Simpson, when we heard from the Lesser Slave Lake representative, who is a returning officer and was suggesting – granted, further north than you might be that familiar with – that we tweak the boundaries a little bit because people did feel a community of interest outside of the boundaries of Lesser Slave Lake and outside of Athabasca. Any examples that you're aware of?

Mr. Simpson: Well, I guess the only one I can think of – first of all, looking at other boundaries, say Dunvegan-Central Peace again, there's nobody that lives in that area, really, that I'm aware of that would have a Grande Prairie address or a Clairmont address or a Clairmont postal box or whatever. The hills do form what I would consider to be a bit of a barrier, and they are working or living and doing their community things on that side of the hills. Certainly, they do come over here for shopping, which we appreciate.

Within the constituency there are certain little anomalies that do occur. For example, people in the La Glace area do have Sexsmith phone numbers, and Sexsmith is within the Grande Prairie-Smoky riding. There are people that might use Sexsmith, for example, as their main travel route, I think, or place of business or whatever else.

Generally speaking, you've got to draw a line somewhere, and I think we've used township road 70 pretty much as the current boundary. Certainly, once you get close to Bear Lake, if you look at the boundary descriptions where the Grande Prairie Creek crosses or meets Bear Creek, from that point on you go straight north of the Grande Prairie line. I think that as time goes on, people are aware of where the boundary is and are comfortable with it. It does cause some little issues, but generally speaking, it's okay.

Mr. Evans: Nothing dramatic.

Mr. Simpson: Nothing dramatic.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks very much.

That's my only question, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Jacobs: I'd just like to add one thing.

The Chair: Certainly.

Mrs. Jacobs: I think John has covered it all very well, but I think you have to look at more than just population numbers. It's got to be taken into consideration the ability of the MLA to adequately be able to get around his constituency, be seen, not be accused of hiding in an office someplace because it's just physically impossible for him to get out and about. When you look at some of the northern ridings, there's a lot of terrain to cover in order to see those few people or even to hold public information meetings, to gather the people all in one spot. They've got to drive a couple of hours to get there. So I think you have to take into consideration that ability to serve their people.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, both of you. That was very good, and we appreciate it. If you have any further written material or anything else, please feel free to e-mail it, fax it, or get it to us however you can. Again, thank you both very much.

Mr. Simpson: Thank you.

[The hearing adjourned at 1:50 p.m.]

