



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Lethbridge

Tuesday, October 6, 2009
10:03 a.m.

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. I see we have someone here this morning, and we're looking forward to hearing you and having you share your views with us. We have presenters for this afternoon, but it doesn't appear that we have at this point presenters for this morning.

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

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 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. Over the next few months we will seek community input through province-wide consulting before developing our recommendations. We want to hear what people have to say about the representation they are receiving in their communities.

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'll recognize that means we are mandated to propose four additional electoral divisions in Alberta, which will come into effect at the next provincial general election. 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. We are to make proposals for 87 electoral divisions. We must accomplish this task within a limited time. We are required, after consideration of representations made at the public hearings, to submit an interim report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in February 2010 that sets out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 proposed electoral divisions and reasons for the 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 the input the commission must submit a final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by July 2010. Then it's 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 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, that being the 2006 census, but if the commission believes 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. Elections Alberta is currently reviewing the 2009 census data, and those numbers will be considered by the commission once they are officially released. I note also that we are required to add popula-

tions of First Nation reserves that were not included in the census, as provided by the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and as I've said, we are entitled to look at more recent census information provided that it has been accepted.

The commission is required to divide Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions and must take into account the following factors:

- (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, 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 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 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.

10:10

That's a general overview of the legislation, but the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada have also provided guidance. 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; and 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, we are in a position to hear from people and to hear their submissions. We have a rule that each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then five minutes for questions. We're now open and ready, and if anyone would like to come forward and start their presentation, we'd be more than happy. Otherwise, we will wait until the registered presenters arrive.

Mr. Annable: So I can come up and just speak a little?

The Chair: You sure can.

Mr. Annable: I may as well since I'm the only one here.

The Chair: Now, for the record for *Hansard* we need your name.

**Derrick Annable, Reeve
Vulcan County**

Mr. Annable: Yeah. I'm Derrick Annable. I'm the reeve for Vulcan county.

The Chair: All right, Derrick. Which riding are you in?

Mr. Annable: The riding of Little Bow.

The Chair: And what would you like to tell us? We're anxious to hear it.

Mr. Annable: Okay. Thanks. I guess I've got a captive audience today. I would just like to make a couple of short comments on representation, just making comparisons to our area as to the rural, where our MLAs are covering great areas. In talking to them, like, they'll have six or seven different councils that they're working with, a couple of towns in their riding, villages, hamlets. They find it very difficult to cover all the ground and, you know, get to all the people out there, whereas in the cities they've got a couple square miles. They're a very dense population. They're working with one city council, possibly a community group. It's a lot easier for them to get to the main part of their constituents that way.

We're just seeing a lot more control, I think, going to the city. We feel that we're losing our voice rurally. We just kind of want to see that that representation still stays there. I realize that our rural population is dropping every year, it seems like, but there's been a lot more control put on our issues – we're seeing a lot more control going to urban centres, and I think that's showing up with the land-use framework that we're seeing come into effect in the province right now, too. There's a lot less input from our rural areas going into that. We'd like to see a lot more input, but we're having a hard time getting it in there.

The Chair: Would you be open to a few questions?

Mr. Annable: Yeah, I would. Sure.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Annable, for coming today. I know you hadn't planned to present, but it is very helpful to hear from you, and it's great to hear from someone who's involved as a reeve in a county. I live in the county of Minburn, so I'm somewhat familiar with the challenges. The area in northeastern Alberta hasn't been growing at the same rate as the cities have, so we recognize those challenges.

I'd like to ask you a couple of questions. I heard your comments on the size of your constituency. Within Little Bow itself are there any obvious problems with the riding? Does the current riding have some components of it that clearly shouldn't be in there, that aren't natural parts of it, or areas that with a little tweaking we should be adding in? Do you have any comments on your particular riding?

Mr. Annable: That's a good question, one that I never really actually thought about. I know that we sure wouldn't want to see it any larger than what it is, but I guess that's one I've never really put a lot of thought into before as far as changing the size of our riding or anything like that.

Mr. Dobbie: If you have some time and you think about it before the initial report is even drafted, we can take written and e-mail submissions up to October 13. If you have any thoughts at all and you wanted to add them, please do so.

Mr. Annable: Yeah. I'd sure take that into consideration. I appreciate that.

Mr. Dobbie: The information shows the website.

My second question relates to the balancing we're required to do between effective representation and the quality of votes. It's clear that we're allowed under the legislation in general to be plus or minus 25 per cent for a constituency. According to my notes Little Bow currently is 37,733. With the new provincial average, with the new numbers we have, the average riding size will be 40,583. It takes you, as Mr. Chairman mentioned, to about 16 per cent below the average. In your particular constituency would you be comfortable with it remaining the same size and being 16 per cent below the provincial average?

Mr. Annable: Offhand just to say, yeah, I think I would be with it staying the same size. I don't see a problem with our being a little bit smaller in population than, I guess, bringing in the average that the urban ridings would be. I think the big thing for us is just for our MLAs to be able to cover the ground and see the people that are out there. I guess that would be our biggest concern.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you. We have heard that, just so you know, from people in other rural constituencies. They've really brought to our attention the challenges of an MLA getting across the riding. Just so you know, you're not the only voice raising that with us, but thank you very much.

Mr. Annable: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Annable, for coming and making your presentation this morning. I'm looking at a map of the constituencies for the city of Lethbridge. There is a small area just on the eastern edge of the city that is part of Little Bow. The word that I can read here is Fairview. I don't know if that's a community within Lethbridge – I assume it is – but it seems to be just one small part on the far eastern edge just south of highway 1, so far as I can tell. Are you familiar with that part of the city?

Mr. Annable: On the eastern edge of the city. Well, I'm familiar with the eastern part there but probably not the exact piece that you're speaking of.

Dr. Archer: Okay. Maybe I'll just come over to your map and point it out.

Mr. Annable: Yeah. Sure.

10:20

Dr. Archer: There's a small community on the eastern part of the city that seems to have been attached to Little Bow. I can only assume that that was done by the last Electoral Boundaries Commission to try to ensure some equity in population between the two Lethbridge constituencies and then the surrounding constituencies.

The context for my question is that we've heard a lot in both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary about the perceived need to ensure that all of the ridings within those urban areas stay within the cities and that there are not any ridings that bridge across a rural constituency and either the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary. It seems as though that principle wasn't applied to Lethbridge, based upon my reading of this map.

Given the population growth in Lethbridge between 2006 and 2009, the most recent data that we're working with has a population

in Lethbridge, according to my calculation, of just over 85,000 people, about 86,000 people. If we're working with an average constituency size of about 40,000, that would lead us to the conclusion that the Lethbridge ridings are going to be larger than average, or we're going to be in a situation in which we're going to be taking that same principle used last time, which was to take a small part of the Lethbridge community and add it to Little Bow.

I'm being told here that it may well be that that part of the constituency that we are referring to, that is just east of the Lethbridge-East riding, might in fact be outside the city boundary. The map shows that the population distribution here is pretty tight and looks pretty consistent with the distribution of the population in the city.

I guess the general question, then, is: if there was a need for us to take part of the population in the city of Lethbridge and to attach it to the Little Bow constituency, maybe two parts, is it reasonable for us to be thinking along those lines? Secondly, if it is reasonable to think along those lines, are there any natural dividing points that we should be mindful of either in the current constituency of Lethbridge-West or in Lethbridge-East?

Mr. Annable: Yeah. Okay. The parcel you're talking about there, quite a bit of small acreage properties have been going up in the last 10 years in there. There are a lot of two-acre parcels with a horse on them out there, I think, looking at this and thinking back to being down a couple of those roads there. But I think, you know, that if a person had to bring the population back into line, there's a lot of similarity in what's going on in that edge of Lethbridge there to what's going on in Coaldale, just five or so miles farther to the east, which is in the Little Bow riding anyway. So I guess that if that's a deciding factor in bringing some of the things more in line populationwise, I don't think there would be a great deal of problems that way from the rest of us in Little Bow. Whether or not the people in the city of Lethbridge would feel that way I'm not too sure. I don't think there would be a big outcry from the people in our area.

Dr. Archer: Right. Just so I can be sure what area that we're talking about, I'm looking at the area just immediately south of highway 1.

Mr. Annable: That would be highway 3 there, right?

Dr. Archer: Sorry. Highway 3.

Mr. Annable: Yeah. Straight south there.

Dr. Archer: And then there seems to be another roadway. It looks to be coming southeast. There's a parcel in that area that would simply be an extension of the current area that has a more dense population that's attached to Little Bow.

Mr. Annable: Yeah. There's just a little half-rectangle spot there north of the highway that you're talking about.

Dr. Archer: This area in here.

Mr. Annable: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Dr. Archer: So you're saying that the development in that part of Lethbridge tends to be more acreage development.

Mr. Annable: Yeah. It seems to be. There are a lot more people

looking just for that larger lot size out there. It seems to be like that all around the edge of the city.

Dr. Archer: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Annable: You're welcome.

The Chair: Allyson, any questions?

Ms Jeffs: Yes, just a few. Thank you very much for coming this morning. I'm going to continue a little bit along the same line of questioning as Keith Archer and Peter Dobbie here. You know, we've talked about that edge of Lethbridge, but are there any other areas, if the riding did need to grow, to find some population? It's very close to 17 per cent below the average. Are there other communities or areas that it might make sense to add? Bearing in mind that I understand you don't want to grow the geographical size of the riding unduly, are there other communities that come to mind which might be a good fit?

Mr. Annable: Well, offhand there's not really a lot populationwise to pick up in there.

Ms Jeffs: It's a little sparse out there, isn't it?

Mr. Annable: It really is. There are quite a few miles between neighbours. I don't know. That's a tough one, to say where you'd pick up anything there, really, unless they did the census in the summer, when we have all the holidayers in. It would be a big difference.

Ms Jeffs: I'm working off the map, and my math skills are perhaps not what they could be. What's the drive time, you know, to get around the riding, like sort of north-south or east-west? Do you have a sense as to how much . . .

Mr. Annable: Yeah. Well, it'd be over an hour from one end to the other north-south. You're pretty much looking at an hour east-west, north-south. It's a pretty roundabout way there, I guess. You know, when you look at it, it's almost kind of a square, if you wanted to say so. It's a pretty good chunk of area to get across. It's at least an hour from end to end.

Ms Jeffs: Lethbridge is sort of within the boundaries, if I can say it that way, of Little Bow, but what are the main communities? A couple of hours distant from Calgary: am I reading that right?

Mr. Annable: Yeah. Well, Vulcan is sort of the larger centre, I guess, and it's a good hour from Calgary. Down towards the other end it'd be another 40 minutes from Vulcan to the south end, so you're looking at a good hour and a half to two hours from Calgary to the far end of the riding there.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Well, thank you very much for that. Again, we do appreciate – you know, we have heard from other presenters in some of the rural constituencies about their concern. I'm sure you're aware that we're also hearing from some in the urban, so we have a bit of task that I'm not sure King Solomon would envy.

Mr. Annable: Yeah. You've definitely got your work cut out for you to make this the way people want to see it.

I think the big thing for us is that we're seeing that for our MLA to come down, by the time he flies out of Edmonton and gets into

Calgary, drives down, hits a couple of meetings, and can get a flight back, he's using up a good three days of his week, just to come down and meet with a few people, whereas it's a lot easier to catch an hourly flight out of Calgary to Edmonton, more or less. You know, they're looking at an eight-hour turnaround to get down here and hit a couple of meetings. For these guys their schedule is a lot tougher to get back up to Edmonton.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

10:30

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Mr. Annable. Just a couple of questions. First of all, one of the themes and one of the criteria we've been looking at is commonality of interest, and from what I recall hearing from Mr. McFarland during the time that I was in the Legislature with Barry, there is a fair degree of commonality of interest in Little Bow. Are there any divergent populations, divergent issues, conflicting issues that you've identified or that you could identify, watching it from your position as a reeve or otherwise in the constituency?

Mr. Annable: As far as between the urban and the rural ridings?

Mr. Evans: Or whatever, you know.

Mr. Annable: Just whatever is going on in the area? Divergent issues?

Mr. Evans: I'll give you an example. In Brooks, for example, you know, there's an immigrant population, and of course there are other issues that they face compared to the traditional farming-ranching families that might have been in the area for many generations.

Mr. Annable: Right. Okay. Well, maybe on that aspect, I guess, we've got a lot of immigrant workers coming into farms and different things like that, where a lot of Mexican Mennonites have come up. They are kind of the main workforce on a lot of the farms in the area right now, and we are running into a lot of language and literacy issues. You know, I think that's something that's showing up more in the smaller rural areas than in the urban centres because that's where they're populating themselves, in the small villages and hamlets and some of the sparser populated areas.

Mr. Evans: So from your experience does that immigrant population have a greater need for access to the services that the provincial government would be able to offer and, therefore, the MLA would be able to offer?

Mr. Annable: Yeah. That's something that in our county we've been putting a lot of money into, the Rainbow Literacy Society, to get some home help to the people there, to get the kids help and to help the adults pick up the language and get some reading skills. It helps with their jobs, and it helps the kids. You know, if the parents are learning, the kids will start learning, too, is the way we kind of look at it, so it helps out that way.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks for that.

The other question is just more of a general question about potential increases in population. You know, I look at your centres here on our map: Vulcan, as you've spoken about; Vauxhall; Coaldale, with the increased population; Coalhurst; Picture Butte. Any particular area in Little Bow that is likely to have a greater population increase than the rest of the constituency in the foreseeable future?

Mr. Annable: Well, I imagine if anything is going to happen, it's probably going to be the Coaldale area that's going to grow more than anywhere else. It's closer to Lethbridge, closer to the services that are offered, hospitals. That seems to be where the retired people are going. They're leaving our community and coming to Lethbridge or this area down here.

Mr. Evans: So it's not industry that's driving that population; it's more retirement opportunities.

Mr. Annable: That's where we're seeing a lot of our population going: the older people moving out. We're definitely working, trying to get some industry into our area, but that's always quite a chore.

Mr. Evans: All right. Thanks very much.

Mr. Annable: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Annable. That's been very informative. Thank you for appearing here, and good luck to your county. Hopefully, we'll have a decision that will make everyone happy.

Mr. Annable: Okay. Well, I appreciate it. I never expected to come and make a presentation today, but I'm glad I did. It's quite an enjoyable experience, I guess.

The Chair: It's one of the benefits of being the reeve.

Mr. Annable: Yes, that's right. I wish you guys the best of luck with where you're going with this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Annable: Thanks.

The Chair: All right. We don't have any more presentations until this afternoon, but I see there is another lady here. Would you like to come forward and say anything?

Ms Virostek: No. No need. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, all. We'll take an adjournment at this point. We'll reconvene at 2, then.

[The hearing adjourned at 10:36 a.m.]

