



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Lethbridge

Tuesday, October 6, 2009
1:59 p.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-16

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

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Peter Dobbie, QC
Brian Evans, QC
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Ross Ford, Deputy Reeve, County of Warner
Bill Malcolm, Lethbridge-West Progressive Conservative Constituency Association

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1:59 p.m.

Tuesday, October 6, 2009

[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to come here this afternoon.

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 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.

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 weeks we will seek community input through a 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 we are to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly regarding the areas, boundaries, and names of 87 electoral divisions. You will recognize that 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 and what the courts have said about the 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 that is available to us.

A brief summary of the electoral boundaries law. First of all, we are making proposals for 87 electoral divisions. Secondly, we have a limited time to accomplish this task. We are required, after consideration of representations made at public hearings, to submit an interim report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by February 2010 that sets out the area, boundaries, and names of the 87 electoral divisions and the 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. This law would then come into force when proclaimed, before holding 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 is, 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. Those numbers will be considered by the commission once they are officially released, and we hope that they will be officially released very soon. I note that we are also required to add the population of 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, as I've said, 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.

2:05

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 for all 87 electoral divisions. There's 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 following five criteria are met:

- (a) the area . . . exceeds 20 000 square kilometres or the . . . surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15 000 square kilometres;
- (b) the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of [any] 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.

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

That's a 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; 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 will make to the Legislative Assembly.

Now that I've explained the law we are to be guided by, I want to receive what is very important, and that is the public's input. 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 your views here, and for those of you who cannot be here or are not planning to speak, the public may make their views known by mail, by fax, or by e-mail.

With that background, I'll now call on our staff to ask the first speaker to come forward. 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 on the commission website. Transcripts of these proceedings will also be available.

Now I would ask for our first speaker.

Ms Friesacher: Our first speaker is Mr. Ross Ford, the deputy reeve of the county of Warner.

The Chair: Mr. Ford.

Mr. Ford: Thank you.

**Ross Ford, Deputy Reeve
County of Warner**

The Chair: Could we get you to give your name for the record and *Hansard*?

Mr. Ford: Sure. My name is Ross Ford, and I'm here representing the county of Warner. I serve as deputy reeve for the county. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to talk to you guys. You have a very interesting job, and you're just getting started.

First of all, I live and farm along the Canada-U.S. border. Believe me, I'm thankful, very thankful for the place I live and the province that I live in. I think we're very blessed, and every time I see a Black Hawk fly over our Canada-U.S. border, I get reminded of this. Our neighbours to the south are pretty good neighbours, but they're quite concerned about protecting themselves from themselves, I guess.

Anyhow, I just have a few comments, and I'm sure I'm not going to go over the 10 minutes.

The Chair: Could I just say that because we don't have other presenters till later, you should feel free to ramble.

Mr. Ford: To ramble? Okay.

The Chair: Not necessarily to ramble but to take your time. We'd like to hear what you've got to say. Don't feel bound by the 10 minutes.

Mr. Ford: All right. Thank you.

I guess my concern or our concern – we do meet with our local MLA often – is that the territory he is responsible for creates quite a challenge, I think, for our rural MLAs. They have great distances to cover to meet with their constituents from our towns and villages and our rural residents as well, and I would hope that this would be considered in your deliberations. It sounds like, you know, it's one of the things that you look at.

Currently, I believe, the criteria is solely based on population, with some other things that you consider. Area is one. I think that right now you have an exception for four districts, where they can be larger. I would ask you to consider maybe moving that up. If you look at the north and the south, there are great areas to cover for these MLAs. That's basically our concern, I guess, the amount of work that these people have to do. It creates quite a challenge for them. I hope it wouldn't discourage them from seeking office, but I know it's always something they consider. As far as representing all Albertans, we all feel we should have that same right to fair representation in the outlying areas.

Basically, that's really all that my concerns or our concerns were. I'm not sure just how or if the criteria can be changed or what process that has to go through, I guess, from recommendations from you people. So that's a question as to how long that process takes or if it's something you would do.

The Chair: Your electoral division has 31,839. That puts you 21.5

per cent below the norm, but you are within the 25 per cent above and below, so you wouldn't go into a special area, so to speak.

Are you available for questions?

Mr. Ford: Oh, absolutely. Sure.

The Chair: Or is there anything more you'd like to say?

Mr. Ford: Well, I guess I'm not just speaking of our division. It's kind of, like, right across Alberta, the number of rural areas. We've seen quite a population increase in Alberta, of course, all in the large centres. I guess we're a little concerned about representation in Edmonton for rural Alberta. A great deal of our wealth for the province comes from rural Alberta. Don't get me wrong; this is not an us-and-them, urban-rural. It's just that I'm not sure that the urbans really understand what goes on in the rural areas, and we just want that representation to remain and not be diminished, you know, as the boundaries are changed. That's basically our main concern.

The Chair: All right.

2:15

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mr. Ford, for your presentation and for your comments. As the chairman said, the current constituency would be one of the smaller ones populationwise within the province. Using the more recent data that we're using now, up to 2009 census data, the population of this constituency would be around 22 per cent below the average size. One of the challenges, of course, that we're trying to balance off is ensuring that constituencies are a reasonable geographic size while at the same time having some relative amount of equality in population.

As I look at this constituency, it strikes me that the challenge is particularly acute because whether you were to extend the boundary either eastward or north or west, there just isn't very much population to pick up. You'd have to go, actually, a fair ways unless you went into the city of Lethbridge. Leaving aside going into Lethbridge, there just isn't very much opportunity for us to add much population to this constituency without a large change in the amount of distance covered. Is that your assessment as well, or are there pockets of population, again leaving Lethbridge alone for a minute, that exist in any direction of the constituency that would make some sense for us to look at?

Mr. Ford: Well, I think the only area where you would pick up a number of extra people would be the reservation around the Cardston area. I know there was some talk of that some time ago. I guess that was part of our concern, that that wouldn't be included in our constituency. You know, this is something that was considered, I think, a number of years ago, but for whatever reason it wasn't put into our area. That would pick up a number of people, I believe, but we would like you not to do that.

Dr. Archer: Again, assuming that one didn't move the Indian reserve into Cardston-Taber-Warner, just looking at the map in front of me, it looks as though Pincher Creek would probably be the closest area which has any substantial population that we could look at. Then that raises a question as to what the implications are for bringing the Crownsnest Pass into the community as well.

Mr. Ford: Yeah. Well, again, you look at the area if you were to do that. You're going from the B.C. border right into farther than the centre part of the province on the south end. It's such a huge area, you know. Already I think it's quite a task for our MLA to cover the

area that he's responsible for right now. You know, it's unfortunate. You spend all day to meet with 50 people, maybe, whereas in a large centre you can probably meet 500 to 1,000 people a day. That's just the way it is, and that's understandable, but I think our primary concern is that rural Alberta is represented fairly in Edmonton right across the province, not just particularly our district. It's the whole province.

Dr. Archer: Right. Just one last question. I'm just trying to get an understanding of the scope of the geographical challenge within this constituency. How long would you think it would take to go from, let's say, Waterton in the southwest up to Taber, which seems to be pretty much the northeast segment of the constituency?

Mr. Ford: You would be looking at a two- to three-hour travel time. Now, if you're going from, say, Lethbridge to the southeast corner of the constituency, you're looking at probably, you know, the same amount of time. I guess you could argue that in Calgary sometimes it takes you an hour to get across the city, too.

Anyhow, I think that's basically all I had to say, and I hope you guys consider that in your deliberations.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks. Those are all the questions I have.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Ford. We'd like to keep you here for a little longer.

Mr. Ford: Okay. No problem.

Mr. Dobbie: According to my quick math there are only about 60 miles in the bottom of the province of Alberta on our U.S. border that are not covered by your current constituency. It's about 120 miles of the border. Just counting the ranges.

My question relates to any feedback you have on any natural problems with the constituency. You've mentioned the reserve, that the numbers might help but it creates other challenges in terms of adding area. Are there any areas in the existing constituency that should logically be moved to adjacent constituencies that won't affect your population?

Mr. Ford: I would say that the way it's set up now works pretty well. I think that if you were to increase the area, whether to the west or the east, then there are some challenges. You know, the different rivers cross in different areas, and some places you have to go way around to get to the other side. You know, those kinds of things. I guess we would hope that the area wouldn't get any larger than what it is now.

Mr. Dobbie: Another question I have is about general principles that we're trying to develop. We haven't made decisions yet as to how we're going to be actually creating the constituencies, and we're listening to people like you to get some direction. One of the things that we've heard in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary is that for the most part they would be satisfied with us treating the city of Calgary within its boundaries as one population base, the city of Edmonton as another population base, and not reaching outside of those cities to create urban and rural, or 'rurban,' ridings. They would very much like to be treated as cities unto themselves and that we take their number and divide it by the average, give them the appropriate number of seats. Then we would leave the rest of Alberta – approximately 1.7 million people, very close to 50 per cent of the population – and allocate the seats there.

If I were to suggest that that would be an approach that we have been strongly recommended by people living in Edmonton and Calgary, that we count their numbers in each city and then treat the rest of the province as another population base to divide up, would you be in support of that, or could you live with that?

Mr. Ford: Well, right off the cuff, I'm not sure. I'd have to probably have a little closer look at that. You're suggesting just not taking any of the rural areas around the city or suburbs, just going by the boundaries of the cities themselves.

Mr. Dobbie: The municipal boundaries of Edmonton and Calgary.

Mr. Ford: Okay. I guess the only thing I would think right off the top of my head is that if those MLAs do represent some rural – meaning, perhaps, a suburb or some country residential, whatever – they may get a small feeling for what, you know, some of the issues are in the rural areas. That may help the rural areas, I guess. Now, if they're just confined right to the cities, they may not get that understanding.

Mr. Dobbie: Well, that's certainly an interesting argument because we've heard it two different ways. Some suggest that it's helpful to represent both urban and rural. Others have suggested that it creates a problem in that the massive population proportion that's in the city overwhelms the people in the rural component. So we're really having a bit of a challenge trying to understand which is a better principle, but thank you for your opinion.

Mr. Ford: Okay. Thank you.

2:25

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you as well, sir, for coming and speaking to us this afternoon. I really just have a question in terms of the population of the riding. Is it fairly stable? Do you see any prospects for growth, or is this an area of the province that is going to remain stable or potentially decline in population?

Mr. Ford: I would say that the population in our riding is fairly stable. It seems like the towns and villages, especially closer to Lethbridge, have had some growth, but the outlying areas seem to have, you know, been getting smaller. Overall, though, I think the population should remain stable for some time. I can't really foresee anything that would happen to change that. If you look at the demographics and the changes, I think the native population has probably grown more than any other group. While that doesn't really affect us because they're not part of our area, I think the growth that you'll see in our area will be just outside of Lethbridge, like Raymond, for example, Cardston. There is some growth there. Now, as far as the rural population goes, it seems to be just getting smaller and smaller.

Ms Jeffs: Do you have a sense of the population and the demographics for the county of Warner?

Mr. Ford: Our population is around 3,800 within the county. Now, our towns and villages are probably roughly around 5,000. Not too much change in that in the last census. It's pretty well stable. We've seen a small increase but very small, you know, half a per cent, 1 per cent, somewhere in there. Again, I don't really see it changing too much.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Ford. Looking at the Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency boundaries, it strikes me that this is the most exotic configuration of a constituency that I've seen on the Alberta map. So two questions, one specific. Down at Waterton and up the Belly River this finger, if you will, that goes out: is that just to encompass any population along that route up towards the Crowsnest Pass and then beyond? Do you have any knowledge of how that came to be? If you don't have that map in front of you, I can certainly show you what I'm talking about.

Mr. Ford: Sure. Yeah, I don't have it. I'm just wondering if it just follows, you know, the river boundary.

Mr. Evans: Yeah. It's the Belly River down here, of course.

Mr. Ford: Oh. Okay. Of course, this would be the Blackfeet reservation, Peigan, I believe. So why it goes around there: it probably just follows . . .

Mr. Evans: Just the river on one side and the Indian reserve on the other.

Mr. Ford: Yeah.

Mr. Evans: Okay.

Mr. Ford: From my knowledge that's all it would be.

Mr. Evans: Then if you just take a look at that configuration, have you heard of any issues, Mr. Ford, about folks from this part of Alberta having a problem identifying which constituency they're in? Are these boundaries quite understandable either geographically, on county lines, or municipally, what have you?

Mr. Ford: Well, down from where I'm from, I haven't heard any of that. Now, I can't really speak for farther east or farther west. You know, I haven't heard any concerns, but like I say, I don't really know. You would have to talk to somebody from that area, I guess.

Mr. Evans: But it's a small community, relatively speaking, so if there were issues, you probably would have heard them.

Mr. Ford: I think that in that little neck that you're talking about there, there could be some confusion, especially with, you know, new people moving into the area. It would take some time to figure that out, but they'd just have to ask, I guess.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Well, those are all of my questions. Thanks very much again.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Mr. Ford, for coming in, and thank you for sharing your views with us. I can assure you that we will be considering them as we look over this map for all of Alberta. Thank you.

Mr. Ford: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

The Chair: Now, I understand that our other presenters aren't here as yet.

Mrs. Sawchuk: That's correct, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: All right. We'll take a short adjournment, then, and await their attendance.

[The hearing adjourned from 2:31 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.]

The Chair: We're going to reconvene the hearing.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Mr. Bill Malcolm, with the Lethbridge-West PC association.

The Chair: Have a chair. Since this is going in *Hansard*, would you be so kind as to give your full name, please?

**Bill Malcolm, Lethbridge-West
Progressive Conservative Constituency Association**

Mr. Malcolm: My full name is William Frank Malcolm.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Malcolm. Would you care to proceed with your presentation?

Mr. Malcolm: Well, first of all, good afternoon.

The Chair: Good afternoon to you.

Mr. Malcolm: Your Honour, Mr. Chairman, commission members, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Bill Malcolm, and I'm appearing on behalf of the Lethbridge-West Progressive Conservative association. I have the privilege of being the president of that association, and I also have had the privilege of being a resident of west Lethbridge and a practising lawyer here for nearly 25 years.

First, I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in what we see as a very important endeavour and taking the time away from your businesses and your professions and your families to conduct what we see as a very important task for Lethbridge-West and for the province. The Alberta Legislature has given you an important mandate in attempting to ensure that our province has effective representation as our Charter guarantees. The basic rights and freedoms that we have should never be taken for granted, and I know that each of you will do your utmost to ensure that the effective representation across Alberta in all 87 electoral divisions is carried out.

Today I'm primarily concerned with some thoughts on this representation and in particular as they pertain to the Lethbridge-West constituency. The people of Lethbridge-West have seen fit to entrust and send a member of our party as their provincial legislative representative in each consecutive election since the early 1970s. Now, I know this is an important historical fact to our party and one which means that each successive MLA from Lethbridge-West has been entrusted with the views of a diverse and a very well-educated urban population.

I'm certain that each of you is well familiar with your governing legislation, but, if you will, I would like to briefly highlight some of the more relevant considerations as required by that statute. The boundaries of Lethbridge-West or any electoral division can be fixed by your taking into consideration any factor that you deem to be appropriate, but I would highlight those that the legislation requires.

Firstly, section 14 requires the Charter guarantee of effective representation. In its simplest form this simply means that the representation we send should produce a decided or decisive or desired effect. This should be produced by someone who is ready

for service or ready for action. Our view is that they have done this and that the future representatives from this electoral division should also be given the same opportunity. In my opinion, the past and current Lethbridge-West representatives have been effective because they are local citizens who have taken it upon themselves to give of themselves to represent their fellows with integrity precisely because they also share with their community neighbours the other considerations that the legislation mandates. These are and they have been urban representatives who share the common community interests of their fellows. It is our view that this is one of the most important and critical of the considerations the commission is mandated to consider.

In considering the comments being offered today, I heard from various members of our association, and the common theme was echoed again and again, and that is common community interests, as you would call them. Lethbridge-West has always been predominantly an urban electoral division, and we believe that it should remain exclusively so.

This is not to say that we have negative or harsh views toward any non-urban area. Quite the opposite, in fact. Instead, we stand firmly behind the view that the rural electoral divisions should be left intact in order to ensure that the Charter guarantee of effectiveness can be enjoyed by our fellows outside of Alberta's many urban centres just as they are enjoyed within those urban boundaries. As the commission will understand, there are fewer broad differences of interest among urban voters as a group and among rural voters as a group than there would be in mixing the two groups in a single electoral division.

Indeed, in looking at southern Alberta as a whole, we believe that only minor boundary adjustments would be necessary to perhaps provide minor adjustments in distributions of voters between and among electoral divisions. Although the rural divisions surrounding Lethbridge and area are under the provincial population average, we submit that this is not so severe as to warrant large-scale boundary changes. The ripple effect of such changes could well affect the more urban but small urban areas such as Lethbridge and Lethbridge-West in particular.

We submit that the southern Alberta divisions and Lethbridge-West in particular should remain largely intact in order to avoid a wholesale population shift which the census numbers, population distributions, demographics, and historical patterns do not necessarily support. Because Lethbridge-West is and always has been an urban division, we submit that it should remain so until the population and census figures dictate otherwise.

For example, looking at the statistical numbers, Lethbridge-West's population, which you'll be familiar with, is 38,012, which puts it at 0.5 per cent beyond the average constituency of 37,820. Lethbridge-East is slightly over 35,600, Little Bow is at 33,700, Livingstone-MacLeod is at 33,400, and Cardston-Taber-Warner is at 31,300. All of those – Lethbridge-East, Little Bow, Livingstone-MacLeod, and Cardston-Taber-Warner – are all slightly under the average constituency, recognizing, of course, that the variance, plus or minus 25 per cent of the provincial average constituency of 37,820, would make them all well within the bounds of that calculation. We believe that all of these southern Alberta divisions are well within the guideline, and we submit that there is no reason to adjust local or area boundaries at this time based upon those figures.

Lethbridge-West, as I say, fits the model almost perfectly except, perhaps, for a small group of people who may or may not have been counted into the census. Leaving that aside, when the population data and the common community interests of Lethbridge-West and its neighbouring divisions that I just mentioned are all considered broadly, there are very sound reasons that are discovered to preserve the existing boundaries largely untouched.

In consideration of the legislative requirements to increase the number of electoral divisions from 83 to 87, the addition of these divisions should almost certainly come from those areas where the same criteria have increased dramatically; for example, where population shifts have become explosive and which also share the same sorts of common community interests as Lethbridge-West does, as I mentioned earlier. Certainly, the large urban population centres come to mind or the larger rural divisions which are adjacent to the large urban areas or possess other unique characteristics. Calgary, of course, and several areas come to mind, Airdrie and Fort McMurray, in the area of 41 per cent and 39 per cent growth patterns respectively that have been experienced in those areas. We submit that these are the areas which cry out for growth-based divisional boundary changes. Lethbridge-West and the southern region more broadly do not.

3:40

If anything, the Lethbridge-West division might serve as an almost ideal model of divisional boundaries as presently constituted. The city of Lethbridge and the divisions of Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East are well served by the current divisions. The current dynamics of the area simply do not warrant any significant alterations to boundaries at all at the current time. The commission should continue to allow Lethbridge-West to grow at a measured pace and to allow it to continue to reflect the common community interests of the area and those of southern Alberta.

The demographics of other areas of the province should also be noted and responded to accordingly. We submit that all 87 divisions should be allowed to reflect their present population and areas of common community interest as that is one of the best means of allowing the Charter guarantees to be reflected 87 times across the province to ensure that each one has effective representation and can continue to allow the democracy in Alberta to flourish.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. We will have some questions here.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Malcolm. First of all, a comment. We do very much appreciate you taking the time to prepare a submission and the fact that you've consulted with others. It would be of assistance if you could provide your submission so that we can post it on the website so that other Albertans can have access to it during the review process, if you're so inclined, in electronic form, or you can leave a copy today. It is, I think, helpful that you've considered more than your own constituency and provided us with your comments in general. So thank you for that.

My question relates to the special ridings that we can consider. As you're aware, we can consider up to four. I'd like your feedback on the extent and number of special ridings that you would have us include in the next proposal that we make.

Mr. Malcolm: Thank you, Mr. Dobbie. That's a good question. I believe that the allowance has been made for special ridings within the province. Certainly, in our view, I don't know that we would necessarily expect or see those to be ones that would need to be implemented in the southern part of the province. As I mentioned earlier, with some of the statistical numbers, Airdrie and Fort McMurray, for example, are I believe mixed ridings or mixed divisions and might be ones which perhaps from a characteristic point of view might be more obvious choices for the commission to make. I think that they are essential given the radical population shifts that have occurred over the past number of years in Alberta, and I can see that areas such as the large urban centres, which have

experienced massive growth, might have to be considered in the characteristics that you're describing.

Mr. Dobbie: Again, the question, though, relates to the four ridings that can have up to 50 per cent lower population. Have you in your analysis looked at some natural suggestions, or do you have any direction to this commission as to the number you would like to see us use: zero, one, or up to four? Have you thought about that?

Mr. Malcolm: I don't think there's any question that from our perspective we'd like to see four at a minimum. That's what's allowed. I don't think that fewer than that would appropriately serve the interests of Albertans. Not at this time.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: Anything further?

Mr. Dobbie: No.

Dr. Archer: Mr. Malcolm, thanks for your comments. Much appreciated. The data that you were citing on where the two Lethbridge ridings sit relative to the provincial average sounded like they were based upon the 2006 census. As you probably know, we've been given authority to use more recent census data, and we have some unofficial census data from the city of Lethbridge. I think the city of Lethbridge officials are in discussion with Municipal Affairs in the process of Municipal Affairs formally accepting the local census information, as they're doing with communities across the province. The net result of using the more recent data is a demonstration that the growth in the city of Lethbridge has evidently been considerably higher than in the province as a whole. The data that we're currently using – and, again, this is still to be confirmed with Municipal Affairs – shows a population in Lethbridge of just over 85,000. The number I have is 85,493. The data that we had, based upon the 2006 census, was 74,653. So the growth has been really substantial, over 10,000. By using the more recent data, we're also using a higher electoral quotient for the 87 constituencies, and the quotient now is 40,583.

In your presentation you had suggested that the two Lethbridge ridings, and I think especially Lethbridge-West, were just slightly below the provincial average. With the data that we currently have, it looks like they're going to be slightly above the provincial average now. In fact, it looks like, by my rough calculation, about 5.3 per cent above the provincial average. What we don't have at the moment is a breakdown according to the communities within Lethbridge as to where that growth of 10,000 has taken place. I think the database is still being updated.

I'm wondering if you have a sense, either by looking at data or just by virtue of the fact that you live here, as to where the most substantial growth has been within Lethbridge over the last three years or so, to give us a sense as to whether it's likely the case that the two ridings if left untouched would each probably be about 5.3 per cent above the average or whether the growth has been higher in one or the other.

Mr. Malcolm: That's a very good question, Dr. Archer. First, I would like to try to rely upon the more official census, as it were. Nothing negative to say in terms of the city numbers. Those numbers are perhaps generated for a variety of purposes, but we would be most content, I think, with relying upon the official census numbers, albeit they are somewhat different than the city numbers

on an annual basis. I don't disagree with the numbers that you've raised, that Lethbridge's population has exploded, as it were, to well in excess of 80,000 over the past two or three years.

I think that anecdotally, in answer to your question, much of the growth has been on the west side, as it's known, and on the south side of Lethbridge. Recognizing that, from a geographical perspective that is an almost even split between Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East from a population base point of view. I think our calculations showed that the 2006 census figures put Lethbridge-West, at least, at .5 per cent above and Lethbridge-East at 3.1 per cent below. So even adding 5 per cent to either of those numbers is still going to put us very, very close to a nice, comfortable number from the provincial average point of view.

I'm not sure if that answers all of your question, but certainly I think that anecdotally, personally, I would be quite surprised if there was more than a fairly even split in terms of that growth of population between the two divisions. Much of the population growth has come in the west side, admittedly, west Lethbridge, but much of it has also happened in south Lethbridge. The division, of course, on 13th Street N. and 13th Street S. has pushed great numbers of those populations into each division. I don't think there's any question about that.

3:50

Frankly, with all due respect, I don't know that I would be overly concerned with a larger number, at least not in terms of the population of Lethbridge. The numbers that I mentioned earlier of Airdrie, Fort McMurray, those divisions where the growth has been 30 to 40 and plus per cent, I think are far more alarming in terms of effective representation. From my perspective both Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West are very well represented because of those numbers. Keeping the provincial average number as close to that as possible, I think, is critically important. That and, as I mentioned earlier, the issue of dividing and becoming a mixed division, with all due respect, I would approach with great caution.

Dr. Archer: Right. As I understand it, there are two principles here. One is the principle of relative voter equality based upon population per constituency, and the other is respecting municipal boundaries and the community of interest that comes with that.

Mr. Malcolm: Yes.

Dr. Archer: Then I'm interpreting your comment as saying that if the recent data – assuming that we're choosing to use the more recent data – shows that we're going to end up with populations about 5 per cent above the provincial average by keeping Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West pretty much untouched, that would not present a big concern to you and to the people in your constituency.

Mr. Malcolm: I think that's a very good summary, Dr. Archer. I truly believe that the addition of that number of individuals on each side of the river, as it were, or on each side of 13th Street, would certainly be beneficial to the ebb and flow of democracy in this community. Certainly, I think it would be well within the boundaries and the guidelines of each elected representative for Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West and what they have to deal with. I don't think that it would be seen to be abnormally difficult by any stretch.

Dr. Archer: Great. Thank you.

I have one more question, Mr. Chair, if I have time.

The Chair: You don't, but we'll allow it.

Dr. Archer: Okay. I'll make it quick, then. One of the areas that you had given us some comment on is some of the other ridings in southern Alberta, so I wanted to ask you a question about the community within the Blood reserve, which is currently in the Livingstone-Macleod constituency. That community abuts three different constituencies: Cardston-Taber-Warner, Little Bow, and Livingstone-Macleod. Do you have a sense as to whether there are particular community affinities between the reserve and any of those constituencies in particular, or would you describe the relationship as not particularly attached to one constituency or another?

Mr. Malcolm: That's a very good question, Dr. Archer. The sense that we would offer there is that there has always been, I think, a fairly traditional connection by many on the Blood reserve with the extreme southern part of the province – that is, I guess, with the Cardston area – so the Cardston-Taber-Warner division might be a more natural location to attach that to, if that's the essence of your question. Having said that, there are other areas from the Blood reserve which I believe have a very strong affinity to the town of Fort Macleod, which, of course, is part of Livingstone-Macleod.

In pragmatic terms it may be very difficult to divide a community between those two electoral divisions. From a personal perspective the sense would likely be that the attraction may well be more toward Cardston-Taber-Warner as the electoral division from a numerical point of view, population base. I'm certainly not that well versed on the population pattern within the Blood reserve itself, but it would seem to me that there is quite a strong attraction to the southern part of the reserve, toward Cardston-Taber-Warner area and the trading centre, which, I guess, would be Cardston and Magrath, that area at least. I don't know if that assists you or not.

Dr. Archer: That's very helpful. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Yes. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Malcolm, for coming here today. I just have a bit of a brief question. You were talking about the urban character of the riding of Lethbridge-West, and I wanted to expand a little bit on that. It sounds like you were talking a little bit about something that we've heard called the 'rurban' riding, that would raise concerns; in other words, having a piece of an urban community joined up in some way with a rural constituency. I understand why that would be on your mind as there are some more sparsely populated constituencies touching on your boundary. Is that sort of mostly based on local knowledge and the concerns about community interest? Have you looked at that elsewhere in terms of how that's worked in the province, or is it really sort of a local sense that that wouldn't be a good fit here?

Mr. Malcolm: You mean the effectiveness of a divided riding, so to speak, as between urban and rural?

Ms Jeffs: Yes.

Mr. Malcolm: Have we looked at the effectiveness? No.

Ms Jeffs: Do you have any anecdotal . . .

Mr. Malcolm: There is a sense of – in Medicine Hat, I believe, one division is entirely urban, and the other one is a mixed riding, a mixed division. Using that as a snapshot example, it works rela-

tively effectively well. Their population is somewhat different, certainly numerically, than Lethbridge. That you're dealing with a smaller population base would be one of the things that I think is important for the commission to consider under those circumstances. But the practical side of dividing, as Dr. Archer pointed out, the population as it currently exists and keeping it within the provincial average constituency size would be, frankly, a challenge with a city the size of Lethbridge, respecting, I suppose, the natural boundaries, municipal boundaries and so on that we already have.

If, hypothetically, a large portion of a rural area of the adjoining area from Little Bow or from Livingstone-Macleod, for example, were to be attached to Lethbridge-West, then I think it would present its own unique difficulties in terms of the number of residents, Alberta voters, who would be in those areas as opposed to strictly staying within the urban boundaries that are currently there. So from a practical point of view, I suppose, with respect, I would offer caution as far as attaching that onto the current circumstances and under the current population models that we have for this area.

Aside from that, as I say, I believe that Medicine Hat seems to work reasonably well from a practical point of view. I know many people from that area, and the ability to represent the constituents seems to work quite well under that model, but again that is call it a unique situation given their population size relative to the average constituency size for Alberta. With respect I would urge, I suppose, the commission to take that into consideration in terms of applying the numbers to each half of Lethbridge.

Ms Jeffs: Well, certainly, I appreciate the note of caution you're sounding. Fair to say that, you know, the creation of one of those so-called 'rurban' ridings is something that should be treated individually within the mix in a particular area. As you say, you feel that it's working well in Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat but would not necessarily be a good fit here. I take it you wouldn't want the rural constituencies nibbling away at the boundaries of Lethbridge.

Mr. Malcolm: No. I believe, as my comments earlier, that we certainly stand with the rural fellows throughout the entire province. Our view would be that the growth numerically throughout the province has been largely urban. As I indicated in my comments, the growth in terms of the four new divisions, as it were, we would submit should be at the urban level rather than at the rural level or rather than at the expense of the rural level in any situation, hypothetically. As I had mentioned in terms of Little Bow and Livingstone-Macleod, in terms of effective representation under the Charter those individuals are receiving effective representation now. Obviously, we'd like to see that continue.

4:00

The growth. When you have numbers as I had mentioned from Airdrie, Fort McMurray, and the high-pressure areas populationwise within the province, those are the ones where we would really urge the commission to consider adding numbers in terms of the electoral divisions. The five divisions that I mentioned earlier in the southwest seem to work quite well now, and minor adjustments may be necessary to deal with minor adjustments of population. But the significant growth, with the greatest of respect, has not been in the south; it has been in the high-pressure population centres. That's what we'd urge the commission to deal with, to deal with that on an urban level rather than trying to make adjustments that could to some extent significantly affect the mix and the blend of the constituencies and the divisions in southwestern Alberta.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you. Just one briefly on the growth. Keith Archer acknowledged the numbers we have that show the growth in Lethbridge. I take it that's an arc, that's a trend that's continuing as far as you understand it in terms of: this is going to continue to be a growing centre.

Mr. Malcolm: If I understand your question correctly, those numbers, that growth is, I would say, well within the acceptable limits and would allow for the next number of years even at current growth rates. Lethbridge's growth, as Dr. Archer might have noted, in terms of the provincial numbers but, certainly, the municipal numbers that are dealt with annually: those numbers have been quite steady. You might call it slow and steady. Yes, they are growth. Growth numbers are good, no question, and we would never attempt to interfere with that, but the suggestion is that the growth that is there is well within the acceptable limits and will certainly serve the next number of years until, perhaps, the next round of commission hearings, the next time, as it were.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Just one question, Mr. Malcolm, and thank you for your presentation. Looking at the boundary between west and east, it's essentially a straight line other than one jog. That's certainly not the norm from what we've seen in municipal boundaries. Is this in any way causing any sensitivities that you're aware of, or is it an understandable enough boundary for the people who live in east and west Lethbridge to be able to determine where on earth they would go to the polling station to exercise their vote?

Mr. Malcolm: That's a very good question, Mr. Evans, and I

suppose by experience over the last number of years I have certainly seen those kinds of things at a very practical level during the various election campaigns that have occurred. There is, I would suggest – it's my opinion, and I think it would be shared by many in our association – an understanding, a recognition within the community that that is an appropriate physical barrier or physical boundary, if you will, just as the river would be. It seems, I think, in short, to work quite well from a practical point of view in terms of the many individuals who are volunteering their time and are involved in the political process throughout the community. They understand the distinction between the two sides of the city, so to speak.

As I indicated, perhaps at one point in time – I'm not sure we're there yet – it may be possible to deal with and perhaps a future commission can deal with the issue of a physical barrier, i.e. the river, for example, so that there truly is a division that divides the city physically. But at the moment from a population base, the 13th Street division is really a very, very good division that way.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Malcolm, for your input here today. We appreciate it. We'll certainly be considering it, and you'll certainly hear what we have in our interim report before February.

Mr. Malcolm: I appreciate your time, Your Honour and members of the commission. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

There being nothing further for presenters, we're going to adjourn and get our plane.

[The hearing adjourned at 4:06 p.m.]

