

In this time of fiscal deficit we should not be increasing the number of MLAs. Instead, we should be making the boundaries more consistent with "rep by pop" by increasing the size of rural constituencies and decreasing the size of urban ones. Alberta already has fewer constituents per MLA than most other provinces.

To ensure that people in rural areas have rapid access to their MLAs, increase the expense budget of rural MLAs and make better use of technology.

People in rural areas should have access to a free phone line for their MLAs with the office staffed by qualified people who can answer their questions, discuss issues and pass on concerns to their MLA when he/she is out of the office and not able to speak directly to constituents. Staffing should be available on some evenings and Saturdays to facilitate access to the MLA's office. Staff could also respond to emails and ensure the MLA is aware of the concerns or questions of their constituents. Videoconferencing, using facilities in local schools or community halls, could allow rural MLAs to have Town Hall meetings in their constituency without having to travel to every community. However, an increased expense budget would also enable rural MLAs to travel more frequently in their constituency, using private airplanes as required. To offset this additional cost, the expense budgets of urban MLAs could be reduced since it is much easier for their constituents to visit their MLA office, attend meetings at various venues in the constituency and also make use of phone, email, Twitter, and other communication devices to stay in touch with their MLA.

This is the time for the Government to demonstrate fiscal prudence and responsible use of taxpayers' resources.

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