

September 17, 2009

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Province of Alberta
Suite 100, 11510 Kingsway Ave
Edmonton, AB
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Thank-you for the opportunity to provide my comments and suggestions on the new electoral divisions for Alberta. There are two issues in drafting new electoral boundaries that I would like to address. The first is the whether or not to deviate from proportional representation, and the second is the basis for deviation.

Alberta ridings traditionally have different numbers of voters. This recognizes that absolute parity may detract from the primary goal of effective representation. Factors such as geography, community history, community interests, and minority representation need to be taken into account to ensure that the Legislative Assembly provides effective representation for all Albertans.

Ridings with populations below the average are traditionally rural or remote to reflect the greater difficulties of providing effective representation. Traditional explanations include poor roads, extreme winter weather conditions, and the necessity of travelling by boat or airplane to reach some communities. Rural MLAs often represent communities with few other government offices.

In my view, these explanations no longer support the establishment of rural ridings with fewer voters than urban ridings. The difficulty of providing effective representation for rural ridings has decreased due to improved roads, telephone service, wireless communication, and email and internet access. The difficulty of providing effective representation within cities has increased due to social problems such as homelessness, drug activity, and lack of language skills among some immigrant groups.

In my view, ridings should be constructed to have as close to equal numbers of voters as possible. Ridings with fewer voters should be constructed only if there are very persuasive economic, geographic or social considerations.

The onus should be on the Electoral Boundaries Commission to ensure every proposed deviation from equal numbers of voters contributes to better government of the province as a whole. If the Commission does conclude that some Alberta ridings should have fewer voters than others, I urge you to consider that the traditional practice of fewer voters in rural ridings may no longer be appropriate.

I do not support the continuation or creation of any *special consideration electoral divisions*, with populations up to 50% below the provincial average.

Thank-you for your attention

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Howard", is written over a horizontal line.

Robert Howard

[Redacted]

Leduc, Alberta

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