



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission  
Public Hearings

Brooks

Thursday, June 12, 2025  
1 p.m.

Transcript No. 19

## **Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

### **Electoral Boundaries Commission**

Justice Dallas K. Miller, Chair

Greg Clark

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Julian Martin

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## **Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Brooks**

### **Public Participants**

Arno Doerksen, Reeve, County of Newell  
Norman Gerestein  
Dan Hein  
Stacey Vanderveen



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[Justice Miller in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our Brooks public hearing for the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

First of all, I'd like to introduce the commission to you. My name is Justice Dallas Miller. I'm the chairman of the commission, and I also serve as a justice of the Court of King's Bench in southern Alberta.

The other commissioners. First of all, to my left is Susan Samson, a long-time resident of Sylvan Lake, Alberta, and an experienced municipal politician who served a full term as mayor of Sylvan Lake and operated a business with her husband in that community. Susan has been recognized by being awarded the citizen of the year award for Sylvan Lake and recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee medal. She's a dedicated volunteer and focuses much of her volunteer efforts on the promotion and strengthening of public health care.

To Susan's left is Mr. John Evans, KC. John is a lawyer with a province-wide firm known as Stringam, and he works out of their Lethbridge office. John conducts trials across the province. His legal ability has been recognized by being awarded the King's Counsel designation, or KC. He also volunteers as a member of the Alberta Judicial Nominating Committee. John's other claim to fame is that he was born and raised in Brooks, Alberta.

To my right is Dr. Julian Martin, a retired history professor from the University of Alberta. Julian's advanced degrees are from Cambridge University. He is a proud capital city resident and has volunteered on many committees while he lived in Edmonton. He now resides in Sherwood Park and serves on a couple of provincial quasi-judicial tribunals.

At the far end of the table is Mr. Greg Clark. Greg is an entrepreneur and consultant focusing on information and knowledge management. Greg has served one term as a member of the Legislature for Calgary-Elbow, and he, too, is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee medal. He currently serves as the chairman of the Balancing Pool of Alberta and consults and advises organizations relative to proper board governance.

This is your Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Alberta. As you may be aware, we are tasked with a few things as a commission. The Legislature has amended the legislation in terms of the number of seats that will be in the Legislature for the next election and expanded it from 87 seats to 89.

In order to give you a sense of where we're going and what we have to do, I thought a timeline would be helpful. This commission was established in late March of this year by the Speaker of the Legislature. We met a couple of times in April as a commission to discuss process and policy and the calendar, and we started our public hearings in late May. We started in Pincher Creek, and we've been to Edmonton, Calgary, Wainwright, and several smaller centres. You can see our schedule on the website.

We conclude our hearings on June 23, and we will then start deliberations, taking into consideration what we've heard across the province. We must provide a report to the Speaker of the Legislature in late October. That report will be an interim report, and the public will have an opportunity to review it, and we are welcoming public feedback to that first report. We will then conduct a second round of hearings probably in late November, December, January, and February, and then we must compile a final report by late March of 2026. Then the Legislature will take our recommendations and pass appropriate legislation to enact the 89 boundaries. As you're no doubt aware, each electoral division or

constituency or riding has one elected MLA, and voters in that constituency do the electing of that MLA.

In order to give some context as to the other challenge that we have, not only do we move the number of seats from 87 to 89, but we deal with a huge population increase. To give you some historic context, the last Electoral Boundaries Commission issued its report in 2017. That report was based on a population of Alberta of slightly in excess of 4 million people. That commission took the number, the population of 4,062,609, and – the mean average is arrived at by dividing the number of electoral divisions. The target population for each electoral division is a range, and it's a range from as low as 35,023 to 58,371. That was the 2017 commission's report and formula and population.

This time around, for our commission, we have a population of 4,888,725 divided by 89 ridings, and the mean average for each constituency, then, is 54,929, just under 55,000. The target for us as a commission is to ensure that a population of no less than the 41,197 and no more than the 68,661 is in each division. The population growth, as you know, has not been spread evenly across the province. We have some challenges and are hearing from municipalities and areas where there has been huge growth on how we deal with that growth.

The ultimate task of this commission – we are not based on an American system of one person, one vote. Rather, in Canada, under section 3 of the Charter that protects voting rights and through judicial commentary in cases, we have a principle of effective representation. That's the principle that operates for the commission.

In order to arrive at a recommended riding map, the legislation that we are governed by gives us several principles that we must take into consideration. Those are, first of all, relative sparsity and density of population throughout the province in determining how large a constituency should be. Common community interests and organizations are taken into account as well. Geographic features are particularly taken into account in terms of boundaries. Communication lines and transportation routes across the province are also considered.

Our goal and our task as a commission is to come up with a report that provides for effective representation, ensures that each of the constituencies fit within the target population, and come up with understandable and clear boundaries for Albertans. There's a catch-all provision in the legislation which allows us to take into account any further information, and much of that further information no doubt will come as a result of the public hearings that we've held across the province.

At this stage we are probably over halfway or just about halfway through our public hearings. We just spent two days in Calgary, and we'll be heading to Medicine Hat for tomorrow morning. We're here in the city of Brooks to hear from you, and we do want to receive your input. We have a schedule of people who have signed up to present. We're flexible enough that if you haven't signed up but if you're here and you want to make some submissions or comments, you're welcome to address the commission.

In terms of the first speaker I'm going to call on Mr. Norman Gerestein to come up and present. Yeah. Just have a seat right there. Typically, sir, we have a time limit, but we've got, I think, a fair amount of time, so we're not going to be too hard on you and restrict you to a specified time. Just please identify yourself, tell us where you live, and begin your presentation.

1:10

**Mr. Gerestein:** Okay. My name is Norman Gerestein. I live in the city of Brooks and have lived here for the past 38 years, so I'm a long-term resident of the area. My first thing is that I'd like to thank

the commission for coming down to Brooks and hearing what we have to say because I think it's critical in the decision-making of boundaries for the electoral changes. Thank you very much for coming down.

I'll start off by saying that I don't believe that any changes are warranted in the Brooks-Medicine Hat riding. Basically, I've written down four reasons, and you have already touched on one of them with the population here. The population of the area has changed over the years, but it hasn't changed as much as the corridor from Lethbridge all the way up to Edmonton, so our increases in population are not quite the same. I believe that our population here within this riding is probably somewhere between 55,000 and 60,000 people. Again, there hasn't been a significant change.

The second point, the representative for the riding would see all perspectives of both urban and rural on issues, ensuring fair electoral representation.

Third, it gives the Medicine Hat portion of our riding two voices in the Legislature to talk about issues pertaining to the area.

One thing that is of critical importance, which is number four, and that goes back to my days when I was on Brooks' city council – I spent 14 years on that – is that we always worked very closely with the county of Newell. I think it's important that when we look at the boundary changes to keep the county of Newell and the city of Brooks in that portion of the riding as well as moving over to Medicine Hat and all the way over to the Saskatchewan border.

That's basically what I have for you today, so if there are any questions.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Gerestein.

We'll start with the hometown boy, Mr. Evans. Do you have any questions of Mr. Gerestein?

**Mr. Evans:** Good afternoon. Thanks for coming. It's good to be home.

I want to know more about the strength that you see in terms of – there are two things – the county of Newell and the city of Brooks being together. Then I'm interested in what you said about the advantage of having two MLA voices in Edmonton by virtue of having Medicine Hat split and why you consider that to be an advantage. That's something that's always being debated back and forth as we go through the various parts of Alberta. If you want to start first with the county of Newell and Brooks and the strength that you see there and then the advantages of the two MLAs.

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, we've worked very closely in the past and presently with the county of Newell and the city. A lot of it has to do with recreation, has to do with housing, has to do with the community support services because, as you know, there is a fairly large meat-packing plant just on the outskirts of town which employs about 2,700 people, and they all live within the city of Brooks. You know, you get down to recreation. We like to kind of split out the recreation so that not all the facilities are within the city of Brooks, so that some of them can be put out into the county of Newell. I think all these things make us that much stronger as a community.

**Mr. Evans:** Is the arena out in the county, just barely, or is that still in Brooks?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, technically it would be in the county, but I think the property was assigned to us over 10 or 15 years ago. There are lots of arenas within the county of Newell that are utilized by the citizens of the city of Brooks as well.

You've got Duchess, Tilley, and a few others, Bassano, that are always used by the people of Brooks if need be.

**Mr. Evans:** And the advantage of two MLAs: can you speak to that?

**Mr. Gerestein:** When you're dealing with a larger centre like Medicine Hat, I always think it's an advantage if you have two MLAs there that can hear from different perspectives. We in this riding have a little bit of a different mix in our population. As you probably are aware, we're very culturally diverse here. I think it's good for whoever the representatives are that they hear different perspectives so they can make better decisions going forward on what needs to happen within both Cypress-Medicine Hat and Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Susan.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you. Thank you for coming out today. It's important that we hear from people who live in the community. I was particularly interested because this is one of a few ridings that has two cities in the same electoral district, those being Medicine Hat and Brooks, and I often wonder how easy that is to represent the residents when the concerns of Brooks – do they align with Medicine Hat, or do you have two separate sets of priorities? But you're fortunate because you have two MLAs. Can you just clarify that or add to that component? That interests me.

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, I have always found that the two big municipalities align very well in what needs to be done. I think that when you talk with the representative from Brooks-Medicine Hat or you talk with the representative from Cypress-Medicine Hat, of course, there are probably differing issues, but we all have schooling issues; we all have health care issues; we all have the mental health issues. I think that if we can talk to two representatives, it has a little bit stronger impact on what is happening up there in Edmonton. I think it's always a bonus. It's always been kind of a point that the southern area has been the forgotten corner, so to speak.

**Mrs. Samson:** Good. I'm glad to hear that because I wasn't sure how that plays out on the ground.

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, I have found it to be excellent.

**Mrs. Samson:** Yeah. Thank you for that information. I appreciate that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Dr. Martin.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you, and thank you. I wanted to ask a little further about the arrangements and alignment with the county to the town and also between the county of Newell and Cypress county. Those two large organizations must spend a great deal of time in broad-based planning issues. Do you find that to be the case?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, I can't speak to the county of Newell and Cypress county, but within Brooks, yes. You've got all your different elements that come into play with the development on the outskirts, et cetera, so that always comes into play. I think the working relationship between the county of Newell and Brooks has been an excellent one.

**Dr. Martin:** I'm glad for all of your sakes that that is true, but I wanted to press you further just to say that the planning arrangements

and conversations between the county of Newell and Cypress county: are they continuing in a mutually useful way?

**Mr. Gerestein:** I would hope they are, but I really can't speak a whole lot to that.

**Dr. Martin:** Right. I was just looking for the parallelism, as it were, between county to county as you describe city to city.

**Mr. Gerestein:** I would surmise that they have a very close working relationship because, like I say, there is an awful lot that goes on within the county of Newell that also goes on within Cypress county.

1:20

**Dr. Martin:** Okay. If I could ask a different question.

**Mr. Gerestein:** Yeah. Go right ahead.

**Dr. Martin:** You described this relationship as a useful and beneficial one. Back in the day you were connected with some other town. Let me see. What was it?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Strathmore at one time.

**Dr. Martin:** You've been around a very long time. You said that you were 38 years a resident here and for a very long time in an elected position as well. Perhaps you remember the days when Brooks was attached to Strathmore. I guess the hard question I'm going to ask, because it's an impressionistic thing, I guess, is: do you feel more comfortable and compatible with the present relationship than was the case with Strathmore back in the day?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, back in the day, and I would have to go back to my experience on the Bow River constituency as a board member, there were a lot of differences in – basically, Strathmore was more of the urban centre and, I guess I would say, the bedroom community to Calgary. The thoughts and ideas that they have in Strathmore are probably a little bit different than going the opposite direction.

**Dr. Martin:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you. You have a very unique situation here in Brooks-Medicine Hat with two cities and the rural areas. Maybe if you could, just help me understand. List one issue that's sort of top of mind in Brooks, one in the county of Newell, and one in Medicine Hat. What would each of those three places have as a top issue in each area?

**Mr. Gerestein:** I would boil it down to – if I had to say anything at the moment, I would say that it's probably mental health issues.

**Mr. Clark:** That spans all three. What's the, like, number one sort of issue that's on the minds of folks here in Brooks?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, it's always the economy, making sure that everything is functioning smoothly and trying to attract businesses into the area. That's always an important issue. Then along with that comes the housing, and along with that comes the development of the infrastructure to support whatever is coming into the community.

**Mr. Clark:** Would you say that Newell has similar issues?

**Mr. Gerestein:** I would think so, yeah.

**Mr. Clark:** And Medicine Hat, the portion that's part of this constituency: are they also struggling with those same types of issues, or is there anything else that's going on there?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Well, from what I can hear, yes, I think they all have those same topics of conversation, you know, that basically revolve around schooling, health care, and infrastructure. Those are really the top three issues that I would say are affecting all three.

**Mr. Clark:** Maybe we could just do a bit of a thought experiment. The previous configuration – it's fair to say that we've received a reasonable amount of written feedback from a lot of folks, in particular in Medicine Hat, who feel like they would prefer to have a configuration a little bit like Grande Prairie is right now, where there's an almost entirely urban constituency and then a hybrid smaller portion of the urban surrounded by county. Just as a kind of a bit of background there, as Justice Miller noted, we're working to a provincial average of 54,929. Is that right?

**The Chair:** Yeah.

**Mr. Clark:** Roughly 55,000. Medicine Hat is not of a size where we could do one constituency for Medicine Hat, nor is it of a size where we could do two even ones. Lethbridge, Red Deer kind of fit that. It's a little like Grande Prairie where you've got this sort of awkward 70,000 or so number. There's a strong push from a number of folks – we've heard different feedback from different places. I guess I'm curious. What is your perspective on that? What would you say to the folks who would advocate, "Let's have an urban Medicine Hat and hybrid Medicine Hat surrounding areas"?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Right now I would say to keep the riding the way that it is because the impact for both I think benefits one another. Right now the representative can hear the issues of the urban; it can also hear the issues of the rural and try to mesh them together so that the best decision could be made for both. If you were to go just to one riding, I don't think you'd get that kind of impact from the representative, whoever that may be, that might be in the best interests of the community.

**Mr. Clark:** That's great. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerestein, I have a couple of questions. One – pardon my ignorance – when did Brooks become a city?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Twenty ten.

**The Chair:** Twenty ten. Okay. And approximately what's the population now?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Estimated or actual?

**The Chair:** You know, I'm happy with estimated.

**Mr. Gerestein:** I would say that the estimate for Brooks would probably be in about the 16,000 range. I think officially the last census had it at about 14,500.

**The Chair:** So you appreciate that, following up with my colleague's question, you can't stand alone – right? – and there's not enough area around. Given the choice this is – I want to say that it's about eight years this electoral division has existed, right?

**Mr. Gerestein:** Since 2017, yeah.

**The Chair:** You prefer it this way as opposed to the Brooks-Strathmore area?

**Mr. Gerestein:** I would prefer it this way as opposed to the other because I think that the population densities of Strathmore and Chestermere are getting to the point now where that might be one riding all by itself.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, thank you very much, sir. I'm going to excuse you. Please return to the gallery. Feel free to stay. We encourage people to stay to hear the rest of the presentations.

**Mr. Gerestein:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Our next presenter scheduled is Mr. Dan Hein. I noticed, sir, you came in a tad late. We generally have seven to 10 minutes for presentation, and then we'll have questions from the commission directed to you and to your comments. Please identify yourself and tell us where you're from.

**Mr. Hein:** My name is Dan Hein. I come from Medicine Hat, but I was raised in Castor. I think you guys – did you have a stop in Castor?

**The Chair:** No. I drove by it.

**Mr. Hein:** Raised in, you know, a rural town, and once I came to Medicine Hat out of high school, I met and married the mayor's daughter there some 40 years ago. We got married and had our first kid in Lethbridge, then we had twins in Red Deer, and then in the late '80s we chased work opportunities to Ontario, where we had our fourth child in Toronto. When we were finished raising them in 2009, we moved back to the west, back to the Hat, and we've been back there since. I've been in the wealth management business for not quite 20 years. I started in Ontario, continuing that work now with BMO Private Wealth in Medicine Hat.

I've been actively engaged in, first, federal and, more recently, provincial politics since my neighbour in Ontario ran as a candidate back in 2004. That's when we kind of first got active as a couple. My wife always had me – politics was always there because she was like a campaign warrior since the age of nine or 10, you know, banging on doors and dropping flyers for her dad in municipal politics. Yeah, so we've always had a kind of an antenna and an interest for all this, and I'm very keen.

I read a transcript from your Lethbridge day, and I also read the first of the Edmonton transcripts just to kind of get a flavour of some of the things that are flying around, and I come to you today with kind of more of a philosophical angle that I wanted to bring to counter what I feel has emerged as a theme.

I just heard you, Mr. Clark, comment on it, this notion. You know, should we concentrate our boundaries so that we have urbans together and rurals together and, effectively, separate? I did a little bit of a counterstudy in the last few days. I just submitted it to Aaron by e-mail attachment on my way up here, and I do have a few copies. Essentially, I wanted to talk about – oh, sorry. That's my proposition, to blend or not to blend.

1:30

I wanted to address, particularly, the academic thought that's kind of out there. I saw in the Lethbridge presentation that these three presenters were proffered to you, and they're all proponents of what I would think of as the antiblend. It's kind of an arbitrary thing to look at, especially, our main towns, Calgary and Edmonton, main cities. It's a difficult thing to distinguish urban from rural when you think about how wide and how narrow at times the suburban belt can become.

I speak with an interesting little background on this. In a former life I was in the telecom business, and we had a little foray from Ontario back to Alberta in the early '90s. We kept our business going in Ontario. We came back and lived in Bentley for three years, and we started a telecom service in the Red Deer perimeter. The idea was that you could call our switch from Lacombe, get a Red Deer dial tone, and dial Bowden, for example, and not pay long distance, right? We called it a one-hop service. This had been coming about in Ontario. The idea was we'd charge people \$19.99 a month for all you can eat. As we developed that business, we also offered it to noncustomers who could use the switch to reach our customers. It was a fascinating little foray.

The way we decided on where to start the business: we did a market study of the Red Deer perimeter compared to the Calgary perimeter, compared to the Edmonton, and we'd also looked at Lethbridge and Fort Mac and Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat. Red Deer at that time in the early '90s had far and away more active phone numbers that were not in the calling core. Way ahead of Calgary, like, miles ahead of Calgary, and slightly ahead of Edmonton. We wound up putting our second switch in Sherwood Park, and that was our second service area, because Sherwood Park had the same calling reach as the Edmonton core. Ed Tel was still in play back then and some fun things.

My point is that the urban to the rural distinction is very much in flux at all times, and the cities of our province, at least 30-odd years ago when we did our market survey: it was dramatic to see how thick the perimeter population density was around Red Deer, like, greater than any other city, greater than Edmonton or Calgary at the time. I found that remarkable. But we got our business going, and unfortunately competition came about. I don't know if any of you remember this, but at one point Sprint Canada came out with an offer of \$19.99 a month for all you can eat in Canada. So we rolled up our carpets and went back to building our business in Ontario at that point.

But that was my little industry-level exposure to what I feel is a very difficult thing to quantify. The urban-rural divide is not as defined as people might think. Even this talk of municipal boundaries being something that should be perhaps sacrosanct and almost enforced in your considerations, I feel like that is also another arbitrary aspect. I would question its worthiness as a prime consideration.

My big thinking as a political observer – you know, I think most of us would agree that political sentiments have for some reason, for some combination of events become more and more acute. Political combat seems to be more escalated and more shrill and, frankly, more blood pressure inducing, I think, now than it was in the past. It seems to me that if we make this decided effort, a determined effort to isolate representatives to be urban or rural – the suburban is your kind of rounding error opportunity, I suppose. But I think if you do that, you're going to have a more incited, a more cranked up Legislature if your representatives don't spend time listening to voices in both of these environments. I would argue that the suburban is in some ways a distinct environment because people kind of – a lot of them have their toes in both. They want to work in the city, but they want to have a horse and some dirt.

That's kind of the gist of what I wanted to bring you. I just wanted to kind of articulate the four academic contributors to the pro-blend notion, that it is not without its proponents and its academic heft.

That's kind of it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Hein.

I don't think this has produced any need for questions, or has it?



**Mrs. Samson:** Just one comment.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clark. Oh, I'll just start with . . .

**Mrs. Samson:** Yeah, go ahead.

**Mr. Clark:** No. Go ahead.

**Mrs. Samson:** I just wanted to know: what part of Medicine Hat are you, the Cypress or the Brooks?

**Mr. Hein:** I'm in the Brooks.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you.

**Mr. Hein:** I live north of the river.

**Mrs. Samson:** Okay. Go ahead. I just wanted to make a note of that.

**Mr. Hein:** I am very much in favour of our riding as it's currently constituted. In some ways I feel like the argument should be made to almost intentionally attach segments of city perimeters to rural districts to compel representatives to hear from all these different voices rather than live in an echo chamber. I think echo chambers are part of our biggest problem politically nowadays. I think, you know, having blended ridings will combat the sorry effects of an echo chamber.

**The Chair:** Greg, any questions?

**Mr. Clark:** No, nothing coming to mind right now. Thank you. I've made a couple of notes.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Dr. Martin.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you. And thank you for the – obviously, we'll have to read it later, this document. To pitch this at a more academical level as well as practical is very useful. Certainly, to my temperament, it's useful to hear you talk about a gradation of forms of life. You have urban, you have suburban. There's a gradation there. It's very difficult because people talk these terms quite loosely.

**Mr. Hein:** I think we binary-ize it.

**Dr. Martin:** Yeah, that's correct. You're suggesting that we have three if not a broad, gentle spectrum of different forms of life, and we shouldn't artificially separate one from the other.

**Mr. Hein:** Yeah.

**Dr. Martin:** Could you tell me again about why you think connecting them or gathering them provides more effective representation?

**Mr. Hein:** Well, I think a conscientious representative would want to make, you know, regular efforts to hear from all sides. I'm sure he'd hear from the rural, the suburban, and then the urban municipalities, the representative governments of each. Hearing all of that would create an opportunity for that representative to ameliorate his own priorities, his own biases, and hear those voices.

I don't know how representative I am, but some of my best friends are very opposite of me. In fact, I would consider my closest friends some of my biggest critics. I feel good about having those relationships and being able to sustain those and build those. I think

it might be in proverbs, the notion that iron sharpens iron. That's what friends should be or could be. Good friendships are that way.

**1:40**

In that sense, I feel like a representative can become a more effective voice at effectively stewing all the competing interests together to come up with, you know, reasonable alternatives, reasonable compromises that benefit and minimize the difficulties imposed on each of the groups. If you can have that in a representative, then I think your Legislature is going to have greater functionality and waste less horsepower on friction.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you. I mean, MLA as steward is a slightly different metaphor, but I think it's helpful. Thank you.

**Mr. Hein:** Skewered or . . .

**Dr. Martin:** A steward.

**Mr. Hein:** Oh, a steward.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Susan.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you. I think that when we look at Brooks-Medicine Hat, the distance between Medicine Hat and Brooks is significant but not that significant when it comes to the trading areas between the city of Brooks and the city of Medicine Hat. People have an opportunity to choose either way to travel; therefore, the people that are travelling to those areas are, in fact, those rural. So I think we have a bit of a unique example here in the province where the people in the middle, which I will call the rural, have a greater affinity and connection to either the city of Medicine Hat or Brooks. Do you agree with me on that?

**Mr. Hein:** Yeah. I think there are some in the middle. I know some ranchers from the Jenner area that bring their cows to the Brooks market, but they get their equipment repaired out of Medicine Hat, so it depends where you're located, I suppose. They have some choices, and they can, you know, divide their loyalties in effect, at least their commercial interests.

**Mrs. Samson:** Exactly. And then, in the same breath, in the trips that we've made in the last two weeks, we have talked to some people who don't have that situation, who have to drive great distances to get to an urban centre, and they do it out of necessity but have no intention of ever living there and have a completely different set of concerns, priorities, and advocacy items. I agree with you that you have a very unique situation going on here, but also it is unique in the province. It is not common. There is a real urban-rural divide out there.

**Mr. Hein:** Divide in the sense of how you would think representation should be?

**Mrs. Samson:** Yes, exactly. Like, the people that have taken the time out to talk to us have clearly indicated that they want representation that talks about what their priorities are, not a mixed bag of what's happening in the city closest to me or the mid-sized city or whatever it may be: I've got something real hard-core I need; I want to build agrifarming; I want investment in the rural; I want better roads. You know, the theme is similar, but . . .

**Mr. Hein:** Sure. The interests, the priority sets are going to compete at times, but I would argue that the municipal levels of government: that is their bailiwick. The provincial representative needs to think about the province and a district that represents the province, and

they can't really do that if they're strictly urban or strictly rural. They're not going to be effectively thinking provincially. The argument, you know, in favour of the blend would say: let the municipal levels of administration and governance do their thing, and let the provincial represent the interests of the province.

I think that there's a lot to be said for pulling people out of their echo chambers and putting them together with people that are thinking and worrying about different things or, you know, wanting different things. It's good for us to spend more time outside our comfort zones, and that's what, I would argue, is going to shape better representation.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Evans, any questions or comments?

**Mr. Evans:** Yeah. I just want to follow up because I think you hit a very important point that has gone unnoticed by probably the majority, almost everyone who's appeared before us, and that is the distinction in terms of the responsibilities of the various levels of government. I want you to just maybe build out on that in the sense that if we look at the Municipal Government Act and we look at what really most urban individuals are concerned about when we're talking about things other than, say, schools, which again is a school board issue as well, but provincial funding comes into that; hospitals, the same sort of thing. But when we talk about zoning, streets, all of those things, those are municipal responsibilities, and I think people have conflated that.

What I'm interested in is that this particular riding is unique and is actually being used to model some other boundary changes because it's perceived to be working. I'm interested to know. You're in Medicine Hat, so you would have the urban perspective, and here we are in what some would consider the rural point of the electoral district. How do you feel your representation and your voice is being heard by your MLA? Just happens to be the Premier.

**Mr. Hein:** Right. I mean, it happens that she's unusually accessible, you know, in terms of town halls and appearances in the riding and things, which seems strange when I consider all the globetrotting and things going on at the same time.

I feel enriched when I see people bringing questions, you know, city people and way out by the border, those types of people that are an hour from any kind of – the people that live straight south of Bow Island or straight south of Medicine Hat, down on the border: I think it's like the best part of an hour to get to a gas pump for some of them. It's amazing how remote some of those stretches are down there.

But hearing these issues all being brought to our MLA and seeing her response and here's what we're working on, or we need to hear more about this: you know, this type of thing, being a sounding board and trying to incorporate all that, I feel enriched personally as a city person. I have a lot of friends and relatives that are still in agriculture. I'm happy when I see those issues being thought about and being put into, in our case, maybe some legislation or at least policy directions. I like that. I like that and feel very good about it.

If I can just steer a little bit into something that I maybe should have put into the report but didn't. It's just my own – I don't have academic backing for it. I do feel like the population growth problems you have in certain pockets – like, I saw how you guys were trying to understand Lethbridge in particular. Is it the west or is it the southeast? Where is the predominant growth? You're trying to get ahead of that. You don't want the boundaries you set today to be so far out of whack eight or 10 years down the road if it can be avoided.

I would argue that one of the great ways you can buffer on the perimeters of especially Calgary and Edmonton is to include more of the rurals that are less likely to explode, you know, at the rate of a thousand a month like some of these corners of the cities are doing. You could buffer that by subdividing those explosive growth areas and attaching them to something that is much less expansive. That would prevent some of the distortion. Do you have one that's like 110,000 right now?

**The Chair:** Close to it in Edmonton, I think.

**Mr. Hein:** Anyhow. I just thought I'd throw that in.

**Mr. Evans:** I have one more question. This doesn't relate to this particular riding, but I'm interested because you come from Castor. Aaron, could you put up Drumheller-Stettler?

**1:50**

**Mr. Hein:** Yeah. My mom is about to get a new Member of Parliament.

**Mr. Evans:** Is she happy about that?

**Mr. Hein:** She's fine with that, but she also got a new MLA when Don Getty became Premier and didn't have a riding. That was, I believe, Brian Downey who stepped down. You have Stettler constituency.

**Mr. Evans:** She's two for two.

**The Chair:** Castor is a magnet for political . . .

**Mr. Hein:** Well, did you guys hear that great quote from Ralph Klein about Castor?

**Mr. Evans:** Oh, yeah.

**Dr. Martin:** *Hansard* is recording all this.

**Mr. Evans:** That's an all-time classic.

**Mr. Clark:** Are you looking for the number?

**The Chair:** While you're doing that, Aaron, Dan, just fill me in. Is all of Redcliff in the Brooks-Medicine Hat riding?

**Mr. Hein:** Yes.

**The Chair:** But only part of Cypress county?

**Mr. Hein:** Correct. So all of Cypress county . . .

**The Chair:** Okay. Yeah.

**Mr. Hein:** Here we go.

**Mr. Evans:** So we've got Drumheller-Stettler. What I'm interested in, your experience . . .

**Mr. Hein:** Oh, look at that. Look at that growth. What's that, 64 people in 12 years?

**Mr. Evans:** Yeah. It's massive.

I want to know sort of where you would flow on your knowledge in terms of Castor. Where would somebody who's residing in Castor go for, say, groceries or whatever? Coronation, Veteran, Consort? Then if you can maybe speak to if you have any knowledge about Oyen and Youngstown and Cereal and those communities. Where do they flow?

**Mr. Hein:** Sure. Well, I can tell you that as a boy in the '60s and '70s in Castor we would make our major shopping trips to Stettler, but we were already going to Red Deer for a dentist. A carload of us would go at a time. I think that persists a lot. There are more physicians in Stettler now, more services, so there's more being done. Like, there are some babies being born in Stettler. Not so much in Castor. I understand my cousin's son has for the last year and a half become the resident medical doctor in Castor, which is very exciting.

**Mr. Evans:** What about Coronation and Consort? Where do they flow?

**Mr. Hein:** I think they tend to flow west, but Consort and Oyen also do things in Saskatoon a little bit. You know, there's some interest going across the border. Some Oyen people will come to Medicine Hat for their major shopping runs and doctoring and things. Medicine Hat has a bit of a magnetic appeal medically for knee and hip replacements and things. This same young man who's now a medical doctor: I ran into his mom and his granddad, who was from Killam. They were in Medicine Hat about 6, 8 years ago because he came to Medicine Hat from Killam to do a knee.

So it depends on the interest, but I would say that for this riding Red Deer is a primary magnet. There's a little bit of interest in the direction of Camrose. Stettler is more and more of a service centre. I've never known anybody who went to Drum. You know, my wife and I did live in Drum for a couple of years between baby number one and the twins.

**Mr. Evans:** And Cereal, Oyen, Acadia Valley, Empress: where do they go?

**Mr. Hein:** To my knowledge, they look south and a little bit – I don't know how many people are between. I can actually tell you that right where you have the wording "electoral district Drumheller" is where our family's homestead was from 1928. They were in that little hamlet called Spondin right in there. But the interest has always been Stettler and west for all the people I know well.

The people I now have come to know in the Oyen belt and the – I don't know many people along highway 9, but a lot of highway 9 does reach into Saskatchewan for certain things.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's where our jurisdiction ends. We can't get into Saskatchewan, so let's stop you there.

Mr. Clark, did you change your mind? You have a question?

**Mr. Clark:** Yeah. Sorry. I'm just listening to this. As you can tell, this is something we think about a lot, but we're hearing lots of feedback on it, and it's an interesting and important topic. I just want to say thank you for coming and for doing the work.

You've put together your report, so you've given some thought to this. I wonder if you can just maybe play a thought experiment with me. Let's imagine that Castor is not fortunate enough to be close to the beautiful Battle River but is two miles outside of the northeast corner of the city of Calgary. The numbers dictate that we need to create a blended constituency that has 50,000 people inside the city of Calgary, and the remainder of that constituency let's call 10,000 for round numbers, including Castor.

**Mr. Hein:** Sure.

**Mr. Clark:** That's one constituency now. How do you feel about that?

**Mr. Hein:** If I was living there or something, I would think that that's good. You know, I already have a lot of interest and I'd probably do a lot of business in that part of Calgary and probably have my lawyer or physician in there. It would make sense to me. You know, I'm a 60-odd-year-old guy. Yeah, I would like that. I would like that.

The dwarfing. I think what you're getting at is if you're, say, 90 per cent urban interests and 10 per cent or less rural interests, I can see how that would dictate how much time and energy and effort maybe that MLA could give us. But I think that rural people have in a lot of cases learned to be better at expressing themselves and approaching politicians, at least in my experience. I watched my mom and dad. You know, they were always involved in Social Credit politics in my childhood. I have a picture, that I'm very fond of, where my brother and I are eating pancakes beside Werner Schmidt, who was aspiring to become the Premier but didn't quite make it.

In any case, I think that even if you have a microscopic piece of rural in a predominantly urban riding, I would not mind being in the rural in that case, personally.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. Good. I guess just a follow-up. Are there any other principles, if we have to blend, is there anything we need to be thinking about if we need to make some of those kinds of choices?

**Mr. Hein:** Well, I think one of the things that I just tried to slip in there at the end is that you can kind of future-proof your boundaries from getting kind of exploded out of all proportion. If you do that, you know, if you understand how much of a rural to attach and that kind of a thing, there's a future-proofing potential that you can try to incorporate. I think that most people that are rural and feel like they may not be heard are probably going to become more outspoken in that case. I think you can count on it, especially in a place like Alberta.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Hein. If you'd have been presenting in Calgary, you would have interrupted the refrain that we heard there. Thank you. You're excused. I have to . . .

**Mr. Hein:** Well, can I just add one little footnote?

**The Chair:** Yeah.

**Mr. Hein:** It seems to me that the antiblend voice is an organized campaign. If you just take the number of people who come with an antiblend message and the number of people who came with a pro-blend message, it's probably a runaway in favour of the antiblend. But I perceive that that is an organized effort, and I think that that is about echo chamber maintenance and protection, and I would strongly caution you to consider that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you very much. We will be in Medicine Hat tomorrow, and we'll be looking forward to what we hear there.

**Mr. Hein:** Yeah. I tried to book there, but you were all full.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, thanks for making the effort to come out.

**Mr. Hein:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Our next presenter is Stacey Vanderveen. Introduce yourself, tell us where you're from, and begin your presentation.

**Ms Vanderveen:** I'm Stacey Vanderveen. I come to you from the rural riding, I'm calling it, but after hearing from our previous presenter I think it is one of those more diverse ridings, of Chestermere-Strathmore.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Life in rural Alberta is quite different from the large urban centres. People who live on farms, acreages, or in rural clusters rely on nearby service hubs for their everyday needs, whether it's going to work, seeing a doctor, sending their kids to school, picking up their groceries. These patterns: rather than thinking about urban versus rural, I'm looking at it as communities of interest that should be taken into account when drawing these electoral boundaries. I think it's important to keep communities with shared economic, social, and service ties within the same constituencies. There are three important examples of these natural communities in my district.

2:00

First, down in the south here, the hamlet of Carseland. I think that should remain in the same riding as Strathmore. These two communities are very closely linked. People from Carseland rely on Strathmore for schools, medical services. They go into Strathmore for groceries. The Strathmore handibus runs a shuttle between the two. Families from both places participate in the same sports leagues and community events. Separating them would disrupt strong community ties.

Second, up in the north just above Chestermere there is the area of Conrich. This, I think, should end up in a Calgary electoral district. It's officially part of Rocky View county, but in practice it functions as a Calgary suburb. It has no local service of its own. It's a bedroom community. Residents all drive into Calgary for work and worship, shop in the city, rely on the city's health care services. It's directly connected to Calgary by major roads. It more closely resembles the city's urban fringe than rural Alberta, so including that area in a Calgary district would result in more accurate and relevant representation.

**The Chair:** Do you know the name of the Calgary electoral division that it is proximate to?

**Ms Vanderveen:** I know it's represented by Mickey Amery only because my brother and sister-in-law live right there.

**Mrs. Samson:** Calgary-Cross.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Calgary-Cross. That sounds right. Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay. So it's near Calgary-Cross.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Right.

The third example I have is my hometown of Langdon. It's somewhat of a hub on its own but is, right in the centre there, deeply connected to both Strathmore and Chestermere not just by geography but through shared school services and regional planning, sitting right in the middle of the two. All three communities are already working together to prepare for the De Havilland field development coming to Wheatland county, also right in the centre of that triangle. This historic project will land right in the triangle formed by the three communities. It's already driving aligned efforts such as aerospace career and trade initiatives and plans for residential growth. Keeping Langdon with Chestermere and Strathmore in the same constituency ensures unified representation.

When boundaries split up these functional communities, separating where people live from where they go about their daily lives, it makes representation less effective, in my opinion. MLAs are better able to advocate for their constituents when their ridings reflect the actual connections and routines of the people who live there. I would urge you to keep these three examples in mind when considering the new boundaries.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you very much. Thank you for your very concise, punchy presentation. I'm sure we're going to have some questions.

Mr. Evans, can I start with you?

**Mr. Evans:** Can you tell me about the De Havilland project? I anticipated, you know . . .

**The Chair:** Yeah. What's the workforce?

**Mr. Evans:** Yeah. And where is it coming from? Is it going to be staffed out of Calgary?

**Ms Vanderveen:** There's already a lot of talk. I'm seeing growth in Strathmore.

**Mr. Evans:** Maybe just tell us what it is and then when it's expected to be sort of operational.

**Ms Vanderveen:** See, it's been coming online for so long, it seems, that I have stopped paying too close attention to the timeline other than that I believe it's breaking ground in the next year.

**Mr. Evans:** It's like a cheque-is-in-the-mail kind of thing.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Yes. But they seem to tell us delivery is very soon.

**Mr. Evans:** What's it supposed to produce?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Aerospace something or other. I'm not super clear on what it's doing, so I can't give you further details on the development itself.

**Mr. Evans:** You can see that there's been a positive population growth of 11 per cent. From your knowledge, where would you say that that's primarily occurring?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Primarily in Chestermere, but Langdon is growing very quickly as well.

**Mr. Evans:** What would you estimate Langdon – is Langdon a hamlet?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Yes. Interestingly, because we have the population. I think we're between 7,000 and 8,000, so we could move to . . .

**Mr. Evans:** Sherwood Park is a hamlet. They never will change. There are some advantages.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Well, that's it. Yeah.

**Mr. Evans:** Which county or municipal district is Langdon in? Do you know?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Yes. Rocky View. We have one councillor that represents us in Rocky View.

**Mr. Evans:** You heard the previous presenter, Mr. Hein, talking about the advantages of – he used blended constituencies. Most people have talked about hybrid in the past, so either blended or hybrid. What's your perception of that debate?

**Ms Vanderveen:** I think we already have that in Chestermere-Strathmore in that we have those two urban hubs of Chestermere and Strathmore, and then we have the rural areas around it as well. Then we have some of those – it's hardly even suburban; it's urban and Conrich. I'm seeing there's benefit to the diversity, but there's also spreading the MLA too thin. Perhaps in a place like Brooks-Medicine Hat then we're just talking about Brooks and then rural area around it whereas I'm concerned about our MLA. She's talking Chestermere, which is more city. We're talking Strathmore, which is an agricultural technically a city but a town, and then we're Langdon, which is a blend of the two. So we're already talking about a lot of diversity, and then throw in the whole deeply rural area south around Carseland and whatnot. There is a point where it's a lot for an MLA to keep up with.

**Mr. Evans:** Are you able to articulate – you may not have thought about this. Are you able to, in your mind, differentiate what roles and responsibilities an MLA would have versus the roles and responsibilities of, say, a town councillor or city councillor in Chestermere and Strathmore or the county as a reeve or a county councillor?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Again, in these more rural-urban mixes in my speaking with constituents – I do some volunteering with the MLA – it becomes a blend because this highway is part of Chestermere, and then this highway right across becomes the MLA's responsibility. So there is a lot of overlap, in my opinion, and it's a little bit hard to differentiate in our communities because of how they're laid out beyond, obviously, schools, health care. That's easily set aside.

**Mr. Evans:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Okay. Susan, any questions?

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you. I wanted to ask – I missed it because I think I was dwelling on the Conrich point. You said that the De Havilland build is a triangle of three communities, one being yours in Langdon. What were the other two?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Chestermere and Strathmore.

**Mrs. Samson:** Okay. Thank you. I didn't pick up on that. Thank you. I'm good.

**The Chair:** If I can encapsulate what I hear you saying, ma'am, it's that you are of the view that you have a hybrid riding already, and communities of interest can be contained within a hybrid riding.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Yeah. I think it is.

**The Chair:** Your big concern is the, my word, stress of the MLA of juggling all the demands?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Somewhat.

**The Chair:** Okay. Good. Well, thank you.  
Dr. Martin.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you very much. As you can tell, we've been dwelling on this topic of hybrid or blended, call them what you will. You describe very usefully a situation in which you have a city, a

ruralish town, smaller villages and small towns, and rural area plus some significant industry that binds, in terms of workforce and the like, some of these pieces altogether. Well, that's very much to your advantage, and congratulations.

One thing we haven't talked about is everything below 22X. Now, how would you characterize that district? It's largely farming, I suspect.

2:10

**Ms Vanderveen:** It is. I guess Indus is just north of 22X, a small community. They come into Langdon, Strathmore, Carseland, and there's the Speargrass Golf Course there with another little suburban hub of itself. Those are the ones that drive into Strathmore. Some of them are hopping onto 22X for work, but you can get into Strathmore just as quickly and with less traffic headache.

**Dr. Martin:** By driving up 24?

**Ms Vanderveen:** Yes, or up 817 as well.

**Dr. Martin:** Yeah. Really, that's my only question. Thank you.

**Ms Vanderveen:** You're welcome.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much for being here. I guess a couple of things. De Havilland project: they're going to build those really cool fire bomber water planes.

**Ms Vanderveen:** I knew it was something that flies, but that's as far as I know.

**Mr. Clark:** If *Hansard* doesn't mind, I'm going to talk about airplanes for the next . . .

**Ms Vanderveen:** Fantastic.

**Mr. Clark:** Yeah. The Twin Otter and the Q400. I'm quite familiar with this project for a number of reasons beyond just being a bit of a nerd. Yeah. Starting construction soonish, and sort of '27-28 is about when that'll happen. It's a fantastic project.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Oh, it's even further out than I thought.

**Mr. Clark:** Yeah. They're building a whole airport. It's about a 10-year project. I mean, it's really fantastic, a huge win for the region, for the province. It's great. It's great for Alberta. I think it's a really exciting project.

With that comes population growth, as you've identified. One of the challenges Strathmore has is that your growth has ticked up, and you're actually quite a bit above average, I think 11 per cent, if I pull my numbers up here quickly. Yeah, about 11 and a half per cent over based on the numbers you see there. So I'm curious. I think you've given us some suggestions around Conrich. Any other thoughts if you did need to – you know, I look at Delacour at the very top there. You've given us some suggestions of what I think you'd like to keep together. Any other ideas on, if we needed to, as my colleague likes to say, nip and tuck a little bit around the constituency, what definitely should be together and what perhaps could move on to a different area?

**Dr. Martin:** Be bold.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Sorry?

**Dr. Martin:** Be bold.

**Ms Vanderveen:** Places like Dalroy have that option with that they either come into Chestermere or they head into Calgary because it's almost equal to get to Airdrie, Calgary. They have options. This probably isn't going to really future-proof against population growth, but tucked in – where is that? I'm trying to remember where the Prince of Peace community is, where it would be on this map. On the western side there. That's a retirement community.

**The Chair:** That's in this riding?

**Ms Vanderveen:** It is. It's called Prince of Peace.

Now, because it's a retirement community and there's a live-in seniors' home in Chestermere – there's also one in Prince of Peace – those two do remain somewhat connected. The seniors having lived there for quite some time tend to come into Chestermere for their services. It's a little quieter than in Calgary, but it is right on the edge there. The growth is so concentrated to Chestermere, Strathmore, Langdon that without lopping off one of those big ones – like I said, those communities living right in the middle, they go back and forth. So as far as future-proofing for population, that would be a tough one.

**Mr. Clark:** That's great. Thank you. That's very helpful. Doesn't make our job a whole lot easier, but I do appreciate the lay of the land. That's very helpful. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Thank you so much. I would have paid a lot more attention driving out of Calgary this morning if I knew you were presenting this.

**Ms Vanderveen:** I'm sorry. I had to go for a drive, too. Worked for my schedule today better than Calgary.

**The Chair:** This is very, very helpful. You're probably the only person that's presented on behalf of this electoral division, so thank you so much. Please feel free to stay. We may have some time for some more general conversation, if you can. Thank you.

Our next presenter, Mr. Arno Doerksen. Good afternoon. Please identify yourself and tell us where you live and begin your presentation.

**Mr. Doerksen:** I'm Arno Doerksen. I live at Gem, Alberta, which is about 35 miles northwest of here in the northwestern part of the county of Newell. I've lived there pretty well all of my life. I think the matter of representation is a pretty serious thing and appreciate the fact that we've been well represented in many respects in this area over a long period of time, and I appreciate your interest and charitability to the subject area today that you're talking about for the last few weeks and into the next few months. It's important.

Personally, I've been a representative of cattle producers way back in the late '90s and early 2000s. I was the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks, that has been talked about as a riding, from 2008 to 2012. I'm currently the reeve of the county of Newell, but I'm representing today as an individual. I don't have a perspective based on discussions with the county of Newell council by any means, but I think the presentations you've heard today from Mr. Gerstein were significant and accurate. I also appreciate the presentation that you've just had with regard to the ...

**The Chair:** You know that territory.

**Mr. Doerksen:** I do know that territory a little better than I would have had I not been the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks.

I think one of the things that I want to point to, really, is one of the slides that you presented earlier, the charge to find clear and understandable boundaries. I don't think there's anything much

more important than that. When people are confused about where they should vote or who their representative is, that's a problem. So from that perspective, the work that you do is important.

I will recall that when I was an MLA, this riding of Strathmore-Brooks, as it was in the day, I think after the first report was chopped up into about four or five different ridings. It ended up staying as it was for the 2012 election. It was still Strathmore-Brooks, which was entirely represented by the boundaries of the county of Newell and the county of Wheatland. Everything within the boundaries of the county of Newell and the county of Wheatland was Strathmore-Brooks, and in the day that worked well for at least two electoral boundary divisions.

With regard to Brooks-Medicine Hat I notice that we're bang on what the target is in terms of population, so maybe your job is done here. I realize it's never quite that simple, but I would add, too, that if you look at the boundaries of the county of Newell, it's significant to keep that together. I realize that not every county can enjoy the fact that they're all within one electoral boundary, but I think, where it's possible, it's a good thing because people understand those boundaries.

The county of Newell encompasses the city of Brooks, the town of Bassano, and the villages of Duchess and Rosemary. We also encompass entirely the eastern irrigation district, which is one of the biggest irrigation districts in the province. We're served by a chamber of commerce that is shared with the city of Medicine Hat called the Southeast Alberta Chamber of Commerce, which is an affinity that is workable and relatively new. It hasn't been in place that long.

**The Chair:** Sorry. What's the name of it again?

2:20

**Mr. Doerksen:** It's the Southeast Alberta Chamber of Commerce, which has recently included the Brooks area and the county of Newell. Also, the Palliser Economic Partnership is well represented by the municipalities in this area.

I think that makes a lot of sense. If that doesn't need to be disrupted, it shouldn't be. Everyone who pays taxes and lives on the perimeter of a county knows which county they belong to because they know where they pay taxes. When you start changing boundaries for specific reasons, if you can use existing boundaries, whether it's rivers or municipalities, we should hang on to that and appreciate if that perspective is maintained. It's easy in this riding. You'll have more difficult challenges outside of the area, I expect.

I think the whole matter of understandable boundaries is significant. I appreciate this from the perspective of both a resident, as a municipal councillor now, but also there was a time when I was the MLA for the area. The fact that there were definable boundaries was significant. That makes it easier. I think, from a municipal perspective, you know, we have one MLA that we can meet with. We don't have to try to get two MLAs in the room to represent our area. That's good for us. Again, I realize that doesn't happen everywhere, but where we can maintain that kind of completeness, we should try to do that.

Other than that – I think that's my primary interest. It would be quite disappointing if this riding were to get chopped up too much because those kinds of changes and the uniqueness of this area – I mean, we're probably as diverse as any riding in the province because of the dynamic of the JBS plant in the county here. The number of people groups and language representation that that represents is probably similar to the city of Toronto except for the population is smaller, but the subgroups of people have melded into this community in a remarkable way.

I also want to speak to the fact, and this isn't really one of your primary considerations, that the municipalities work well here together, and there's a long history of that. When I was the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks, one of the significant things about the Brooks-Newell region was how well the municipal representatives worked together to get things done, the result of which is the fact that all of the smaller communities in this county are connected with paved roads. That's because neighbours worked together to get things done. I think that is evidence of good representation. I think that's what we all look for. We want somebody representing us who can connect with us in some way, and we've been well served in this area. I might be a little bit biased for a four-year period there, but for a long period of time, I would say, we've been well represented.

That's about all I have to say at the outset.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Doerksen. I knew I remembered that name from somewhere.

Susan, I'm going to start with you. Any questions?

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you. A comment and a question. As we started moving around the province outside of Calgary and Edmonton, we talked a lot about clear, identifiable boundaries, and to that end we started using the overlay of the counties. You're absolutely right. The existing riding fits inside the county of Newell, so people would know where they vote. That's important, and that's a good point to make again.

When you talk about munis that work together, are you referring to the cities of Brooks and Medicine Hat and the county of Newell?

**Mr. Doerksen:** Yeah. More specifically the city of Brooks with the county of Newell because the county of Newell encompasses five different municipalities, including our own, but we work well with representatives of the city of Medicine Hat and also collaborate regularly with the MD of Cypress, the county of Wheatland, all of our neighbours. It just works better that way.

There are lots of examples of where if effort isn't put into that kind of a relationship, the taxpayers pay. I think it's in everybody's best interests for people of the surrounding region to work together where they can, notwithstanding the fact that there are differences from time to time, but that's life.

**Mrs. Samson:** There always are. Thank you.

**The Chair:** John, any questions or comments?

**Mr. Evans:** Yeah. I'm really glad you came today because you're wearing two hats that I'm really interested in asking you your experience in dealing with. As an MLA and as a reeve you should have vast experience both in terms of the roles of the MLA and the role of the municipal government or the reeve and the county. I think many people don't understand the differences, and they're set out in the Municipal Government Act. If you have trouble sleeping, that's a great read to fix that, if you wanted to do that. Could you talk about your experience and how you understand, in terms of carrying out both those roles, the differences and how people interact and really get their problems resolved at the various levels?

**Mr. Doerksen:** You're right about the sleep apnea. I've never got past the first chapter.

**Mr. Evans:** Oh, it's a beautiful cure.

**Mr. Doerksen:** That's an interesting concept and certainly one that I learned a lot about. I hadn't studied it ahead of time. I'm a cattle rancher for a living and was a representative with a focus on the

beef industry prior to becoming an MLA. I was drinking out of a firehose for a while after I became an MLA as with when I became a municipal councillor four years ago.

My experience as an MLA certainly informed the importance to me of good local representation for local government. It's often taken for granted. It shouldn't be because good representation at every level is really important. Certainly as an MLA you're looking at the larger issues that the province has some jurisdiction over, but it's the local government, the local municipalities that are boots on the ground and get things done and can act more nimble and more quickly than the provincial government can.

I'm not sure if any of you are familiar with the crop diversification centre south, that used to be called the hort station, in Brooks here, which has been a provincial asset since 1937 or so. The province has recently turned it over to the county of Newell with a 10-year lease to try to get something going in there again. It's been relatively quiet in the community whereas it used to provide jobs for up to 100 people. It'll be a challenge, but I think the local interest can move more quickly than the province can. There will be a chapter in my book on that someday maybe. But the ability of local government to get things done and move quickly is remarkable and important to delivering services to Albertans.

**Mr. Evans:** As an MLA how often did you get questions that you ultimately ended up directing those individuals to the municipal government, you know, to the county or to the city to get it resolved? As a reeve how often are you getting questions that you're having to direct people to the MLA because it's out of your scope or your jurisdiction? Can you speak to that?

**Mr. Doerksen:** Well, that happens quite regularly, but there's also a crossover. I think as a local representative of a municipality you have an opportunity to speak to the higher levels of government and to influence outcomes there. While the decisions may be made in a different circle, there's still opportunity to develop influence. That doesn't happen overnight, but it's important. I think vice versa, too.

I have to say that when I was an MLA I was greatly advantaged by the fact that the local municipalities in the county of Newell, the city of Brooks – well, Brooks became a city while I was an MLA. In this region the fact that people work together was a great advantage and a great help to me as the representative to the province.

I don't know if that answers the question.

**Mr. Evans:** Thank you so much. I appreciate that. Thanks for coming and sharing that.

2:30

**The Chair:** Dr. Martin, any questions?

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you, and thank you. Certainly, a pleasure to meet someone with the depth of experience in government and carrying the burden on your shoulders as often as you have for Albertans. Thank you for that.

I want to ask you further now that you've had a bit of time to reflect back on that experience. One of the earlier presenters here today talked about – how to put it? – that a parochial electoral district is something of an echo chamber. I think his general point was that the diversity or types of communities within an electoral district amounts to healthiness in the voice that the MLA can bring to the legislative Chamber. Would you agree, sympathize with that line of thinking?

**Mr. Doerksen:** I think if that diversity exists within the area being represented, it's accurate, but it doesn't need to be. I think the big

thing is that you actually represent the people that you were appointed and charged with representing. In the case of there being vast diversity, you have to learn to understand that. If there's a great deal of singularity in terms of a perspective, then that's what you want to represent notwithstanding understanding that there will be various varying views.

The big thing is spending the time to understand the perspective of the people you're trying to represent. That's also what really gives strength to the opportunity to represent, when you know you have somebody standing behind you, and I could tell some stories about that. It's important that as a representative you know you're representing something more than your own perspective. The exchange and the relationship that developed for me as an MLA with the people of the county of Newell and the Brooks area was that this was an area where I did business for many years, so that was relatively easy although much more diverse than I thought it was, you know, after I became an MLA but also the rich opportunity to meet and get to know the interests and the perspectives of the people in the Strathmore area.

The value is taking the time to understand what the perspective is whereas, you know, I think that can be accurate, but the big thing is representing the people that you are representing.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clark.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you. Great that you're here. Again, yeah, I recognize the name, and it all twigs now. Yeah. It is really – again, yes, your municipal and provincial experience is really helpful for us, and I wanted to just dig a little deeper into that. I've been thinking a bit about what you said earlier about municipalities working more quickly. Would you agree that that's probably because the sandbox you're playing in at a municipal level is smaller, and the issues are a little more tangible? You can kind of reach out and touch them as a resident.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Yeah. That's true, I think. Yeah. Typically it's roads and water and then other things that come up along the way and some economic development, but you can kick a lot of tires before you get much done on that level sometimes. You really want to stay out of the way of business in the local government area but also in the province, and we hear lots about that in terms of red tape reduction and all that kind of thing, right?

**Mr. Clark:** Certainly, in this part of the world, and back to the De Havilland thing, they did a pretty good job of picking up development if that's where they're landing, so that's good.

In that context, though, would you also agree that in your role as an MLA the issues are just bigger, right? It's a little more complex maybe between different jurisdictions or, you know, grant funding, or you're going to deal with different ministries. Is that a fair characterization of the job of an MLA, to try to navigate some of the big machinery of government?

**Mr. Doerksen:** Yeah. Absolutely. There are always competing interests that go all across the province and a limited budget. You have to, first of all, ensure that you're representing a legitimate position from at home and then grow support for whatever the initiative is. You know, the De Havilland project that you've talked about is significant. I would suggest that by the time that is developed to where it's going to develop, there will be growth in this area as well.

Certainly, the impact of Calgary and the urban areas around – you know, in the county of Wheatland, that we talked about a few minutes ago, the growth has been more rapid and significant and will continue to be that way, but I expect we'll see more growth in this area over a 10-year time period as that develops. I think there's a fair indication that there will be business moving east from that at some point, too, which is good.

**Mr. Clark:** I certainly hope so. Yeah, it's a huge project and all the spinoffs.

It makes me wonder, then: is it beneficial, then, as an MLA to have some focus where you've got communities that are kind of like with like? I come back to your earlier comment of saying, you know, the county of Newell and Wheatland county were both – kind of that was the four walls of your previous constituency. Did that allow you to focus better and better represent your constituency, do you think?

**Mr. Doerksen:** Well, it's the only thing I have to compare to. I don't know if it was better, but it certainly was a good mix. You know, I think there was impact from that. As you move further west, closer to Calgary, it was a more urban-influenced area. From that perspective, probably Brooks and Medicine Hat today have a little bit more in common than maybe Brooks and Strathmore although not really either. I found them both to be communities that were heavily impacted by rural perspective. I've often said that the money is made in the country and spent in the city, right? The dynamic of rural Alberta is pretty significant all across this province, and that's a significant thing.

**Mr. Clark:** One last question if you'll indulge me. Looking back to numbers, at the end of the day, a lot of this, not all of it – it's not purely a numbers game, but unfortunately there are certain parameters we have to respect. We can't do it all. We can't have both Wheatland and county of Newell together and keep this current constituency of Brooks-Medicine Hat. Do you have a preference? If we could put back together – and I did just a little bit of cocktail napkin arithmetic here – all of Wheatland, all of Newell and Brooks and Strathmore and Siksika, if we put that all together, it all adds up to about the right number, give or take, just based on some brief Google searches that I will be ready to stand corrected on if I didn't quite get it right. But that seems like – just hypothetically, that's a viable constituency. Do you have a preference on if we could put that back together versus keeping Brooks-Medicine Hat?

**Mr. Doerksen:** No. I'd leave Brooks-Medicine Hat the way it is. I think, from the numbers, you're going to be making some changes around Calgary in the area that includes the county of Wheatland. This is a riding here that can stay the same. I think the growth pattern here is probably closer to – and that's evidenced by the number, right? I think this riding is within 15, 10, or something of your targeted average. I think it indicates that growth has been relatively steady with what the average has been in the province in this area. So I wouldn't put – I didn't come here thinking it should be put back together. It was good in the day, but growth happens where it happens, and you've got to make the adjustments that you make.

**Mr. Clark:** Perfect. Really helpful. Thank you.

**Mr. Doerksen:** I think the dynamic of – you know, there's been some talk about the difference between urban and rural. There is definitely some, but there are a lot of similarities at the end of the day. My family has had the privilege of direct marketing products



right in the city of Calgary, beef in particular. The dynamic of that relationship when it develops, where a primary producer gets an opportunity to connect with the consumer in the city of Calgary who doesn't know where this region even is, is pretty significant and dynamic. People want to know where their food comes from, and that's only increasing. That's a bit of an aside. I think we can all, like, understand each other's perspectives if we want to. The important thing is not to live in a silo, and that applies to all of us.

Again, I want to thank you for the work that you're doing and appreciate your inquisitiveness after two weeks already. That's awesome.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Doerksen. Your presentation is very much appreciated. My list says that you're the last presenter.

Is there anyone else here? We won't charge you extra for not registering and presenting. Anyone else want to come up and present and say something to the commission about the electoral boundaries process, this riding in particular? Anyone else?

Okay. Well, we'll adjourn our hearings until Medicine Hat tomorrow morning, but we'll hang around. If you want to talk informally, we're happy to do so.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:40 p.m.]





