



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Edmonton

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1 p.m.

Tuesday, June 3, 2025

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this afternoon session of our second day of public hearings in the city of Edmonton.

We, of course, are the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Alberta, which has been recently appointed by the Speaker of the Legislature. I am going to divert my usual introductory remarks and just have you – if you wish to know our background, please go to our website. We want to increase traffic to our website. You'll learn about Mr. Evans, you'll learn about Susan, you'll learn about Julian, you'll learn about Mr. Clark and myself by reading the bios on that website.

There are two things that we have to do as a commission, two highlights or factors that we're tasked with. First of all, the current Legislature is made up of 87 members. The legislation that has been given to us and given us our marching orders is to provide a plan with electoral boundaries marked out for 89 electoral districts, so we're moving from 87 to 89.

In terms of a timeline for our commission, the commission was appointed by the Speaker of the Legislature in late March, and from the time of our appointment we've got a one-year window to do our work. In April we met as a commission on a couple of occasions, and starting late May, last week, we started public hearings in southwestern Alberta. We've now come up to Edmonton and going east this week, and we will be conducting public hearings from now till the week of June 23rd.

We take the information that we receive from the public hearings, and we proceed then to provide a report based on the information we hear from the public hearings, based on the population data that we've received, and based on the existing boundaries. By the way, we've also received many written submissions through our website, leading up to about 10 days ago. We take that information and prepare what's come to be known as an interim report – it's not called that in the legislation – and we file or register that interim report with the Speaker of the Legislature by late October.

That immediately becomes a public document published in *Alberta Gazette*, and we will then hear public feedback based on that initial report. Throughout November to February we will hear public submissions. We don't know the dates yet or the manner in which we will host those public hearings in response to our interim report. And then based on that feedback, we complete a final report and register that report with the Speaker of the Legislature, and the Legislature will then take it from there and pass appropriate legislation.

Of course, you know that we're moving to 89 ridings, and our second big task is to deal with this huge population growth that this province has experienced in the last several years. According to this graph you will see that for the 2017 Electoral Boundaries Commission they relied on a population figure of just over 4 million people in the province. With that population of 4,062,609 the average electoral district perfectly would have 46,697 population. Of course, that's not necessarily the target. The target is plus 25 per cent or minus 25 per cent, and you see that range there. This time around, some eight years later, we are using a population figure of 4,888,723. With that taking into account 89 electoral districts, that brings us to a figure of 54,929, and the range is spelled out for you there in the bottom, 41,000, approximately, to almost 69,000. That's our target. That's the number of ridings, and those are our two big tasks.

In working to reach those two big tasks, we are doing the public hearings, for which we are grateful we have had a full day yesterday

and last evening, a full morning this morning, and this afternoon is busy and this evening is busy, too.

So we welcome and thank you for coming to participate.

Very quickly, our legislative mandate – and if you are here, and if you're keen on the process and have done some background work, you probably looked at the act – we have to determine the criteria that we use to come up with our report based on the points in the legislation in order to achieve the term “effective representation.” We do not have the one person, one vote principle like in the U.S. Our principle is more effective representation. In achieving that goal, we will be considering several factors: the relative sparsity and density of population throughout the province, common community interests and organizations – and I have to say that I as a non-Edmontonian have learned so much about your communities of interest and the community leagues in this city; it's been a real valuable exercise for us – and in the city but more importantly in the outlying areas we rely on geographical features to create boundaries. We'll also consider communication and transportation routes and marks of delineation throughout the province.

Our goal is to create understandable and clear boundaries. That is a big challenge. We've heard a few complaints about: well, they're in this community, they live here, but they vote – some confusion, so we're really going to work hard to make sure we have understandable and clear boundaries. Of course, the legislation gives us the option to consider other important factors that we think are important in constructing the rationale for all the new boundaries. In order to do that and complete our task, we need to hear from you, and that's why we are so grateful that you are here to assist us in this regard.

We do have – you probably received a note from the administrator of the commission. By the way, I should introduce our clerk and assistant, Aaron Roth, who's just put his hand up. Many of you know him. He is keeping the trains on time, for which we are grateful on the EBC railway, so if you have anything in writing you want us to receive, please leave a copy with Aaron.

You probably heard that we are restricting presenters to seven minutes with a three-minute time space for questions and dialogue. I have probably honoured that time limit more in the breach than the observance, so if you want to go on a little bit far longer than seven minutes, don't feel I'm going to cut you off or open a trap door or anything like that for you.

Let's head into the first presenter. In fact, for the first time we're ahead of time. Mr. John Kolkman, if you're here, we're ready to receive you. Thank you.

Mr. Kolkman: Good afternoon, hon. Justice Miller and fellow commissioners. I am a resident of the Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood electoral division. I am appearing before the commission in a personal capacity. This submission looks at boundary changes through a province-wide lens rather than making recommendations for boundary changes in specific electoral divisions.

In drawing an electoral map for its interim report, the commission should follow municipal boundaries wherever possible. In the case of Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Red Deer, this means all seats should be contained within city boundaries. Within these cities, recognized neighbourhood boundaries and major geographic features should also be followed where possible.

Apart from respecting municipal boundaries wherever possible, population parity is the other important principle that should guide the commission in establishing electoral division boundaries. The 2017 commission based its boundary recommendations on 2016 federal census population. The 2025 commission – your commission – made the correct choice to instead use Statistics

Canada 2024 provincial population estimates to establish new electoral divisions. Using more recent population data is allowed under the redistribution rules of the act. The 2021 federal census is too outdated to be useful for establishing boundaries for an election not scheduled to take place until 2027.

1:10

Population growth since 2016 has been very uneven across the province. The populations of the cities of Calgary and Edmonton have been growing at over twice the rate of the rest of the province. As a result, the population variance in city of Calgary electoral divisions has grown from 1.7 per cent in 2016 to 9.8 per cent in 2024. The population variance in city of Edmonton electoral divisions has grown from minus 0.3 per cent in 2016 to 8.5 per cent in 2024. The metro area around the city of Calgary, especially the cities of Airdrie and Chestermere, the town of Cochrane, and Rocky View county are also experiencing above-average population growth. The metro area outside of Edmonton and the larger regional urban centres other than those cited above have experienced population growth at about the provincial average. The rest of the province has been experiencing much slower population growth if any at all.

To achieve population parity while still allowing for effective representation of rural and remote areas, electoral divisions in an 89-seat Legislature should be distributed as follows. Twenty-eight seats for the city of Calgary, an increase of two. Each Calgary seat would on average have a population 2 per cent above the provincial average. Twenty-one seats for the city of Edmonton, an increase of one. Each Edmonton seat would on average have a population 3.3 per cent above the provincial average. One additional seat for the metro area outside the city of Calgary, centred around the rapidly growing city of Airdrie.

This would remain the same: two seats each, as is currently the case, for the cities of Lethbridge and Red Deer. Only minor adjustments to existing boundaries are needed to equalize population between electoral divisions in these cities. One seat each within the boundaries of the cities of Grande Prairie, St. Albert, Airdrie, Medicine Hat, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and the hamlet of Sherwood Park, with an adjoining seat in the immediate vicinity of these urban centres. These urban centres have populations too large for a single seat but too small for two seats.

Then a reduction of two seats in the rest of the province. While regrettable, a reduction of rural seats outside the major population centres is necessary to ensure that all Albertans have roughly equal representation in the Legislature.

To summarize, an 89-seat Legislature should add two seats to the city of Calgary, one additional seat to the city of Edmonton, one additional seat to the metro area north of Calgary, and a reduction of two seats in the rest of Alberta.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation. I welcome any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir. Can I get you to just repeat the one-seat city? You rattled through a list. St. Albert . . .

Mr. Kolkman: Grande Prairie, St. Albert, Airdrie, Medicine Hat, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and the hamlet of Sherwood Park.

The Chair: Good, thank you. We have lots of time.

Mr. Evans, any questions?

Mr. Evans: I thought you were suggesting two seats for Airdrie.

Mr. Kolkman: Pardon me?

Mr. Evans: Two seats for Airdrie. Isn't that what . . .

Mr. Kolkman: Well, currently – if you look at the current configuration for Airdrie, the city is kind of divided in half with the western half of Airdrie being combined with rural parts of Rocky View county and the town of Cochrane. Then the eastern side of Airdrie is, you know, parts of Rocky View county going down to the town of Chestermere.

What I'm suggesting is that Airdrie could have a seat all by itself. With the current population of about 85,000, it's still going to be about 30,000 above the threshold, so a chunk of Airdrie would then have to still be combined either on the east or west. Whatever works best from a community of interest point of view or just a numbers point of view. I'm actually suggesting that there will have to be a net addition of one seat in that entire metro area that encompasses the cities of Airdrie and Chestermere as well as the town of Cochrane and the rural parts, which aren't so rural anymore, of the Rocky View county.

In fact, one of the things that's interesting about Rocky View county is that it's developing several fairly dense urban centres. Langdon has certainly grown. Now there's one on the west side called Harmony. Its population has been growing considerably above the provincial average.

Does that clarify?

Mr. Evans: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Susan?

Mrs. Samson: My question, if you want to just expand on it a bit more, is your take on – you would like to see the commission follow the municipal boundaries and then, drilling down further, respecting the communities, but in your list of seats we will have some urban-rural mix. Do you consider – like, when we talk about the cities, we talk about Calgary, Edmonton. Cities like Medicine Hat, Airdrie, St. Albert are the smaller cities, and there would be a hybrid model there. Did you want to speak to that?

Mr. Kolkman: Yes. That is inevitable. I mean, you can only stay within municipal boundaries in four cities: Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, and Red Deer. No other city is really large enough to have two seats. Several of them, the ones that I cited, are too large for one seat. So it is a bit inevitable. I think that, obviously, the goal should be to try to minimize the number of additional municipalities. That's actually probably fairly easy with the hamlet of Sherwood Park because currently most of the rural portion of Strathcona county is in a separate Strathcona-Sherwood Park riding. A number of the other cities – like, St. Albert actually has an urban seat, but then it does have about maybe a third of its population or a quarter in with the adjoining municipal district of Sturgeon, where I think there is a community of interest.

Instead of just trying to, you know, recommend specific boundaries, I mean, you obviously have demographers available that can try to ensure that those rural seats, if that's what you call them, which are inevitable in the cities that I cited, have as much community of interest as possible in terms of where they extend into the adjoining municipality.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Julian. No questions?

Greg.

Mr. Clark: Just really thorough. I do appreciate that. Yeah. You've suggested one more for Edmonton, yet if we did that, we'd still have a 3.3 per cent population.

Mr. Kolkman: Correct.

Mr. Clark: And we have growth – significant growth – certainly in south Edmonton but, you know, a lot of new inflows. One of the struggles is that if we're already – you mentioned that in 2017 the average for Edmonton was a little bit below average, .4 per cent or something.

Mr. Kolkman: Yeah. Well, my number is .8 per cent.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Whereas if we start at 3 and a half over, by the time seven or 10 years goes by to the next commission, potentially we're in a similar situation. If we were to add yet another seat to Edmonton, do you have a thought as to where that would come from?

Mr. Kolkman: Well, it would have to come from more rural and remote parts of Alberta. I guess the reason I'm suggesting – I can kind of give you a bit of a number. I kind of ran the numbers. You know, if Edmonton were to receive two additional seats, up to 22 seats, the average population would be 1.4 per cent below the provincial average.

It's kind of interesting. In some ways Calgary got a little bit shortchanged last time. They had, you know, several per cent above average in terms of their population. It's also just reflective of the fact that Calgary has added more people than Edmonton. I mean, the percentage growth has been similar since 2016, but because they started as a larger city and because they were not at parity – they were above average in population, the average riding – that sort of tipped the balance toward two more seats for the city of Calgary and one more seat for the city of Edmonton.

1:20

I mean, it's pretty clear in Edmonton where the additional seat has to be. It has to be on the south side. You know, there are three or four ridings there that are all more than 25 per cent above average in population. Calgary is a little bit more complicated because there's been growth in more places north and south and even some growth in, like, that Beltline area. It's surprising how much the population of Calgary-Buffalo, which is in that Beltline area south of downtown, has actually increased.

I mean, two additional seats give a significant amount of flexibility in terms of where, but it goes without saying, you know, that you create one additional seat or two additional seats, and you then have to change boundaries in surrounding seats as well. That's kind of inevitable.

Mr. Clark: We have observed that, yes.

I just want to say thank you very much. You've obviously done a lot of work and research and a very thoughtful and thorough analysis, so thank you.

Mr. Kolkman: You're welcome.

The Chair: You've caused more questions. Sorry.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Thank you for your presentation. I want to put a hard case. Given the principles that you asserted, reasonable in and of themselves – namely, respecting municipal boundaries and also, wherever possible, the internal boundaries within a city like Edmonton – well, what are we going to do, then, with some of the so-called mature neighbourhoods that are not growing at the rate at the periphery, which is pretty much what we would expect? In your initial propositions would you tolerate us moving boundaries around in some of the internal existing electoral districts?

Mr. Kolkman: Yeah. I mean, this is the work that your demographers are going to really have to get busy with.

Dr. Martin: No. It's actually us, unfortunately.

The Chair: We're all demographers now.

Mr. Kolkman: Oh, you're all. Okay.

There's no question there are some of the ridings that are in more established parts of the city that are probably going to have to grow a little bit, and if they do have to grow, as much as possible, I think, you know, do it with an adjoining neighbourhood that has somewhat similar socioeconomic characteristics if possible. That is sort of something that's likely going to have to happen.

Some of these ridings have already grown. I'll give you a good example. I live in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. When I first became politically active back in the '80s, they were two separate ridings. Now they're one riding, and even then, you know, I think today they're a little bit below average in population, not a lot but a little bit. I mean, Calgary-Buffalo is a bit of an exception to that in Calgary because of the incredible growth that's taking place, well, downtown but particularly in that Beltline area. It's actually, I believe, about 10 per cent above average, but that's not the difficulty. There's a little bit of evidence of that, not quite as much, in the Edmonton-City Centre riding as well according to the 2024 population.

But it goes without saying, yeah, that some of these established neighbourhoods are – you know, there's going to have to be a little bit of expansion. I think the most critical thing is to follow neighbourhood boundaries in Edmonton because we strongly identify with neighbourhoods, and the city is clearly identified. Each of these neighbourhoods are, oh, anywhere from maybe 3,000 – some on the edge of the city are bigger, but in the mature neighbourhoods they tend to be 3,000 to 6,000 people. You can sort of work with the variances often and instead of cutting a neighbourhood in half, try to, you know, if you have to add a neighbourhood, have the whole neighbourhood rather than, let's say, cutting it in half down a residential street or whatever.

I guess that's the only advice I can give.

Dr. Martin: No. That's good advice. I mean, I was teasing a colleague perhaps from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood this morning who described extremely well the neighbourhood character and the cohesiveness. I was teasing them: what are you going to do with 50th Street? Is that really a divide of a community? How did that happen? It is not immediately germane to our task, but here you have what looks to be very, very similar if not identical residential patterns on either side of 50th Street in your riding.

Mr. Kolkman: Right. Yeah.

Dr. Martin: It was artificially done at some point.

Mr. Kolkman: Yeah. Well, it's inevitable. Like, every riding does have – it'd be very few ridings that don't have some sort of a major roadway bisecting them. Again, I think the most important principle is – I do believe the 2017 redistribution did follow neighbourhood boundaries even though there were a couple of ridings that had to cross the river, but even in doing so, they were able to not divide neighbourhoods. I believe that they were successful in following neighbourhood boundaries even if some of the ridings looked a little odd because maybe they have to cross the river or something. I guess that's going to be your job and the job of the commission. I haven't really looked in detail at this point in terms of, you know, what neighbourhoods could be added where. I think for Edmonton

it's pretty much a given that there will have to be a seat added to the south side, but even there you can do that in different ways, right? Yeah.

The Chair: Mr. Kolkman, thank you for your comprehensive presentation. When I say comprehensive, I mean you not just focused on your own riding but a good overview of the province. I have one question, though, relating to your percentages. I just want to make sure I understand how you came up – in your proposal part of your presentation you said 28 seats to Calgary. That means plus two, and they would be about 2 per cent above the average. By average do you mean that figure up on the screen?

Mr. Kolkman: Yes. That's the figure I mean in terms of that. Yes. It would be 2 per cent above that average.

The Chair: Okay. And in Edmonton it's 3.3 per cent.

Mr. Kolkman: Correct.

The Chair: Okay. How did you calculate to get those percentages? Did you take, for example, Calgary and add up the 28 seats?

Mr. Kolkman: Yes.

The Chair: Yeah. Just walk me through that range. Those are helpful communication tools for us. I think we want to crib those in our report. How did you arrive at them?

Mr. Kolkman: Here's the spreadsheet. What I did is that I took the 2024 populations from your website, but instead of just – and that was a really helpful map. Whoever designed that did a great job. Kudos to that person. What I did is I took all the ridings, you know, based on their current population, the 2024 populations, the existing ridings. I totalled them all up, and that was a total of 1,568,519, and then I divided that by the 28 seats, an increase of two seats, for Calgary.

The Chair: Okay. So that's the way you did it.

Mr. Kolkman: That's the way I did it. Yeah. I just kind of, you know, ran your numbers into a spreadsheet, and that way I was able to divide out the Calgary seats, the Edmonton seats, and so on.

The Chair: Okay. Can you leave that spreadsheet with Aaron?

Mr. Kolkman: Sure. Yeah. I have it. It's kind of, you know, a working sheet, but I'm happy to give it. Should I give it to Aaron, then?

The Chair: Yeah, please.

You know, seriously, the comprehensive nature in which you've approached this is helpful. Sometimes we just get so focused on the boundaries, and you've taken the broader view, which is very helpful, and you've also balanced it. We hear a lot about: don't touch the municipal boundaries; no hybrids. You recognize that hybrids are effective, like, in Alberta somewhere.

Mr. Kolkman: Well, I mean, particularly once you get into rural Alberta, you have multiple municipalities. Even there you should try to follow – like, if you add in 10 municipalities or something rather than carving the municipalities up, you know, instead of trying to have the MD of Opportunity all in one riding rather than split between two ridings, for example.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. We may call on you when we go to the rural parts and tell them we're taking away two ridings.

1:30

Mr. Kolkman: I guess you'll give them my e-mail address.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks.

Our next presenter, Kathy Telfer, is not here. Hopefully, she'll be coming.

Brooks Arcand-Paul, please come forward. Good afternoon.

Member Arcand-Paul: Good afternoon, Commissioner. Thank you so much for having me. [Remarks in Cree] Just introducing myself in my language. I just said: hello, my name is Brooks; I come from the Alexander First Nation. I am the MLA for Edmonton-West Henday, and I'm presenting today on two topics of interest, Edmonton-West Henday and Indigenous rural identity.

As an Indigenous person and very likely one of the only Indigenous voices at these hearings I bring a different perspective than you may have heard about with respect to those rural ridings. I've also had a chance to visit every corner of this province since being elected and thereby have a good flavour of the unique circumstances facing the different communities around Alberta, particularly for Indigenous nations.

Before I get into that, I'd like to discuss Edmonton-West Henday at length as I have direct, first-hand knowledge of its riding given my connection to it. As a resident in one of the communities of West Henday for three years and counting and particularly on the west portion of West Henday, I see the immense growth that has occurred since the last boundary redraw in 2017. In particular, the house that I live in now was an empty lot in 2017, but so were many of my neighbours' homes not only in my neighbourhood but the nearby communities within West Henday and also south of our riding in Edmonton-South West.

Since 2017 and even since the last census data was released in 2021, there's been considerable growth in the communities of Hawks Ridge, Kinglet Gardens, Rosenthal, Secord, Starling, Trumpeter, and Hawks Ridge. As of the last census we have added 11,000 new residents in these communities alone. I would add, though, anecdotally from living in the area, that number sorely underrepresents the number of folks that actually now call these communities home in present day. I would guess that that number might be a few thousand more today. When we get to the new census data, I would not be shocked if we were well above the target population of 68,000 today.

This poses a unique challenge for Edmonton-West Henday as a riding, because we try to balance between representing the northeast portion of the riding, which has had static growth in that time – those neighbourhoods, Athlone, Calder, and Wellington, grew between 2017 and 2021 around 200 people. The more established neighbourhoods such as the greens, which I refer to as Lewis Estates, Belmead, La Perle, and Terra Rosa in the west end of the city have only collectively grown by 400 people.

Anecdotally, this is consistent with the development and growth that I've seen in the communities at Lewis Estates with the exception of Stewart Greens, which continues to experience growth and expansion and which I will anticipate will add a few thousand or so new West Henday residents in the next five years should growth remain as steady as it is. So going over the numbers, it is very clear that with the strictly west-end neighbourhoods, those truly west of the Henday, we've added the equivalent of the three northeast communities of Calder, Athlone, and Wellington to West Henday and then some.

Commissioners, Alberta was indeed calling, and many people responded, and our city must be reflected in that growth by adding another seat or two, I would argue, in this fine city to reflect the fact that Edmonton has grown by over 200,000 since the last redraw. Keeping that in mind, I think at least one of the two seats that you must allocate should be in Edmonton-South.

All this to say I do think that Edmonton-West Henday needs to be largely the same given the growth. As an MLA I'm often asked to mediate on city issues, as you can appreciate, which is a difficult task to balance without stepping on the toes of the incredibly capable public servant councillors that we have. Adding in county councillors and different jurisdictions that have different needs, desires, and realities will create an unevenness that Albertans do not want.

I grew up on my First Nation, which meant that I spent a considerable amount of time in Morinville. People move to these small towns to escape this city. The needs of those residents are different than even nearby St. Albert and are even further departed from those in Edmonton. To ignore this reality would be a great disservice to the people we are all charged to represent. For example, crime and policing are very different than in the rural portions of what abuts West Henday, and each side of the current border deserves an MLA who understands their very unique needs.

Finally, I do not think adding any further rural communities – that's to say, anything outside of the city of Edmonton limits – would be smart. The urban connection is something that is full even in the communities in the north by Big Lake, and you can see the difference with the estates that may be considered more rural right next door along 231st Street. The commercial development, access roads, and city services make these communities – Kinglet Gardens, Starling, Trumpeter, and Hawks Ridge – way more urban than even the few estates that are a few kilometres away.

I want to stress the need for ridings to be kept intact with municipal boundaries and would add further that to split cities or add a rural counterpart is doing a great disservice to the residents in communities like the ones I represent as they're much more homogeneous in interest than their rural counterparts even just across the road.

I'd like to now turn to another issue I'd like for the commission to consider throughout this province, which is fair representation for Indigenous communities. If we look at how we've split up similar communities in southern Alberta – namely, I think of Cardston-Siksika and Livingstone-Macleod, which separate three First Nations that are all Blackfoot. These First Nations share much more than just the language. They share the same constituent concerns and deserve one MLA that represents them and their unique needs. While that is just one example, I do think there is some use for the commission to consider First Nations or Métis communities when it comes to redrawing the boundaries in these areas because oftentimes a local representative can have better success being able to represent each of them equitably as oftentimes they have overlapping political needs. For example, we already have this in Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin, which includes the four nations that share much social and political reality.

Then on the other extreme we have one lone First Nation, Horse Lake, in the riding of Grande Prairie-Wapiti who are minorities in that riding, just as Enoch Cree Nation is in Drayton Valley-Devon. The commission should not allow for this to happen because it drowns out First Nation voices when they are just one First Nation in a riding that includes many non-Indigenous voices. For example,

Horse Lake should be added to Central Peace-Notley, and Drayton Valley-Devon should include O'Chiese and Suncild First Nations to adequately represent these First Nations' collective interests into Drayton Valley-Devon. Good examples of this are already happening, like I just mentioned, including Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, Lesser Slave Lake, and, to an extent, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Finally, I do see some separating of First Nations in Livingstone-Macleod. The Eden Valley reserve and the Big Horn reserve in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, which are both part of the Stoney Nakoda Sioux Nation, and where they are presently divided up by electoral boundaries which disconnect them from their First Nations in Banff-Kananaskis: I would recommend reuniting those areas.

Thank you, commissioners, for listening to me today. Those are my submissions. I appreciate the time that you have taken today to hold this public meeting and the work that you've undertaken. It is a great public service to the great province of Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to exercise my chairmanship here and ask the first question. I want to just highlight what our numbers say for West Henday. The 2017 report relied on 43,046. You've built a house since then, as did many others, and we're now relying on 63,212. So you're content with those figures.

Member Arcand-Paul: I wouldn't say that I'm content with the figures. I would say that, anecdotally, you can see there are numerous high-rise structures, multilevel units that are being built within West Henday, both in Rosenthal and Secord and Starling. We are seeing that growth.

The Chair: Okay. Yeah. Maybe I should have been more clear. Our figures that we're relying on were as of July 2024. My next question was future growth. Future growth has already happened, obviously, based on what you've answered. Is it too hard of a question for you to crystal ball and say: well, what do you think? If your boundaries are untouched eight years from now, do you have any idea what this 63,212 figure would be?

Member Arcand-Paul: I would guess that it would be at least in the 70s if not 80s, particularly because there's a housing crisis. We need people in homes. And right now ...

The Chair: And you've got the land.

Member Arcand-Paul: We have the land. You know, the city councillors have been very clear that there's no other place to develop within central boundaries in Edmonton. They're moving to the outskirts, and ridings like mine are going to be absorbing that growth. Right now I'm fine representing these amazing numbers, but I worry that we will be well above that figure that we proposed, which is 60,000-plus. We will be well above that before the next rebound.

The Chair: So you'd be content with us taking some of your district away?

1:40

Member Arcand-Paul: If it comes to that, I would recognize that there would be some need for that, but I would not want to lose it to another rural riding. It needs to stay within an urban centre. Arguably, if that is the case, then we have to crystal ball and prepare for the future of Edmonton.

The Chair: Okay.

Your second point, which was very well made – it's close to my neck of the woods – is that you commented on Livingstone-Macleod and Cardston-Siksika and a third riding.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah. Livingstone-Macleod, Cardston-Siksika, and Banff-Kananaskis.

The Chair: Okay. How do we square that circle?

Member Arcand-Paul: It would be quite simple. Piikani is right next door. If you're looking at the electoral maps, there are little Indian reserves that are contemplated within Livingstone-Macleod, and that is a timber line that is held by the Piikani Nation. There are very few residents on that timber line, but it would be an inclusion of Piikani because it abuts the boundary of Cardston-Siksika as well, so an inclusion of them into Cardston-Siksika would make the most logical sense because they have that interest with the Blood and Siksika nations.

The Chair: Is there any way we can bring that riding up?

Mrs. Samson: Is it the Alberta map we want to look at?

The Chair: Yeah. Bring up the Alberta map.

If you could come up to the map and show us, then, that would give us some reference. You'll need a microphone.

Member Arcand-Paul: Oh, right. You know, I'm an MLA, a politician. I should know I should always have a mic on me. Thank you to the great staff making sure this is all working today.

Mr. Clark: While we're waiting, because I don't want to diminish from this, first off, I appreciate you very much sharing that perspective. It's something we've been talking a bit about as a panel, seeking out and finding more Indigenous perspective on boundaries, and this is incredibly helpful for us. I just want to thank you very much for that because it's something we've been thinking about, and we want to make sure we do our best to get that right.

While we're just getting that up, if I can ask an unrelated question, somewhat unrelated, I suppose.

Member Arcand-Paul: Sure.

Mr. Clark: Your Legislature colleague MLA Turton suggested a hybrid – I'm just trying to find my notes here, and my fellow commissioners can correct me if I'm wrong on the exact notes I wrote down – proposing that Spruce Grove-Stony Plain be carved out, Stony Plain heading into a combination of Drayton Valley and similar and Spruce Grove taking a piece of Edmonton-West Henday. His belief is that there's a lot of similarity across that Edmonton boundary, sort of people shop back and forth, good to have MLAs hearing different perspectives while acknowledging that different communities have different identities. That's the note I took yesterday when MLA Turton made his presentation. I just note you seem to have a different perspective.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah.

Mr. Clark: Same data set, same facts, different perspectives, so maybe you can just speak a little bit more to that.

Member Arcand-Paul: Well, first I live in that part of the riding, and I don't access Spruce Grove whatsoever. The highway there at

rush hour is the worst highway in the province, I would argue. It is very difficult to navigate that especially during high-traffic rush hour.

They are very unique in flavour. The municipality of Spruce Grove is of a different flavour than anything within the urban riding, so that split that would exist – there are different needs. Like I mentioned, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, particularly, they're the same type of flavour. They do not have the same needs and desires of the municipality.

I would argue that we need MLAs in those particular ridings to be able to represent their specific unique needs. I talked about policing and crime. Crime and policing in Spruce Grove is different than the city of Edmonton, and to split that up would cause disarray between the urban centre, which is Edmonton-West Henday and Spruce Grove. To add them to one riding, to say Edmonton-West Henday-Spruce Grove, would be a great disservice to the residents of Edmonton. Like I said, I mediate for city matters, and it is oftentimes a very difficult thing to even talk just solely about Edmonton police. Adding in another complement, which would be the RCMP, would create further disarray and further difficulties to provide adequate representation for the people of Edmonton, particularly the ones that need adequate representation for these issues.

A good example of this, Commissioner, is when there's crime happening on the edge of the city where I live, just off of 231st Street. That's the edge of Edmonton. I live right there. The RCMP do not respond. They do not have jurisdiction to respond. When we have any calls, it's oftentimes the fire, the Edmonton fire, that responds to anything of emergent nature, even with the pileups that happen on that highway. I'm just waiting. We've had one highway traffic incident there, and Spruce Grove does not respond. They do not send their county response team to us. We have to rely on the city. So to add that further complication would just be unnecessary, and it would create unevenness in representation for the MLA of that area.

Okay. Here's the map now. Do you mind if I show it, Commissioner?

The Chair: Yes. Please. Absolutely.

Member Arcand-Paul: Okay. I'm sorry. I have to walk right in front of this.

So right here we see Piikani, which is this little pink square right here. These are the two nations that I mentioned before. This the Blood Tribe and Siksika. As you can see, these are together in Cardston-Siksika. There's that little kind of cut-off, which abuts the actual reserve boundaries of Blood Tribe. If we cut Piikani to just include that little portion, that little corner, to include that representation, that would provide evenness this in that voice to provide adequate representation for the MLA. Right now you have two MLAs that are representing the same distinct, unique needs of the Blackfoot communities in southern Alberta.

Being able to just include them in that one insert – because right here, I mentioned, this is a timber line. This is an addition to reserve. For those not familiar with additions to reserve, they're not oftentimes habitable. They're oftentimes things that were added to them because they were supposed to be added to them under treaty. You see them dotted across. You'll also, when you're considering this, you will see that my nation has a little portion within – up north.

Sorry. Aaron, you can scroll up. In West Yellowhead. Sorry. Too far. Too far. Too far.

In West Yellowhead, you'll see, up north, there's a little pink portion there. Then just over – I think that's Central Peace-Notley.

This is Alexander First Nation. You have two carve-outs; they're not actual habitable nation. We have all of our oil and gas leases here, and you'll think that is a reserve that needs to be included. No. Those are not what I'm arguing to be included. I'm including where there are actual electors that need to be included in that.

I'm happy to come back and talk about those specific insets because this was the work that I did prior to getting elected. I'm an Indigenous law lawyer, and I have a great deal of interest in this, and I can come and explain.

Those aren't what I'm talking about. What I am talking about are things like this, where O'Chiese is one voice in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and then we have Enoch as well in Drayton Valley-Devon. Just north I mentioned Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, which does represent three different First Nations, including my First Nation, Alexander, Alexis, and Paul First Nation, whereas these two are alone in themselves, and same with up north here. Just north of Grande Prairie, Horse Lake is all by itself in Grande Prairie-Wapiti. Those are minorities in those ridings. I am just arguing to add them to our items that already have additional Indigenous First Nations communities or Métis settlements.

The Chair: What I hear you saying is that if we just expanded the boundaries for Cardston-Siksika to go west and encompass Piikani, that would bring Siksika, Piikani, and Blood all in Cardston-Siksika.

Member Arcand-Paul: That's right.

The Chair: That's very helpful.

Member Arcand-Paul: I forgot to mention, too, that Eden Valley, the one I also spoke about, is right here, and this is part of Stoney Nakota Nation right here in Banff-Kananaskis. So the inclusion of these two into Banff-Kananaskis would bring them back in line with their counterparts in Banff-Kananaskis.

The Chair: In Eden Valley there are residents.

1:50

Member Arcand-Paul: Yes, there are residents, about 200 or 300 people, but they still deserve adequate presentation.

The Chair: So it would be a minor adjustment.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah, precisely.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Member Arcand-Paul: Any other questions, Commissioner?

The Chair: Yeah.

Sorry. I jumped in there.

Mr. Clark: No, I'm taking my time. That's great. Thank you.

Dr. Martin: That explained exactly where I was going.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you, sir. That information was very valuable. We weren't sure when we were looking at Livingstone-MacLeod – no. It was Cardston-Siksika that was long and skinny, if it's the figure-eight one.

The Chair: Figure eight, yeah.

Mrs. Samson: We weren't sure because we have no input on: do those First Nation reserves even want to be together?

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah. You can see it with their Blackfoot Confederacy. They're represented politically through the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Mrs. Samson: Okay. Good to know. Thank you.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you for the question.

Dr. Martin: I did have a question.

The Chair: Yeah. I did, too, and I forgot it.

Member Arcand-Paul: We'll come back to you, Commissioner.

Dr. Martin: What are we going to do with Calder?

Member Arcand-Paul: With Calder?

Dr. Martin: You know, we have this really sort of very odd, almost desperate set of boundaries for your riding, which now that I am a commissioner I can appreciate the difficulties they had 10 years ago with such matters. In the middle is the railway yards, the warehouses, the strip malls, the metal bashing. It's not really likely to generate a lot of residential development because it's a purposefully a commercial and industrial zone. The growth that you see is typically to the west of the Henday, but you know, none of that really affects the parts of your riding that are to the east of St. Albert Trail. Is that a fair characterization?

Member Arcand-Paul: I think that's a fair characterization. I would add though that the growth is very static in those areas, so we're not adding more development. If anything, this new type of development that I'm seeing in the community is infill. We're adding maybe one extra family on a lot that may have only had one, so we will only see a difference of a few hundred. If we are keeping them, I would imagine that pending a bust in the oil cycle, we won't see further growth in homes in the riding, which is totally possible with the way that oil is currently being projected.

I would argue that perhaps that growth may slow in the western part of the riding, in those ones that I argued that we already have well over 11,000, perhaps even 20,000, I would maybe say, right now today, presently. With that riding, I would really be sad to lose them, particularly because they have been part of Edmonton-West Henday since Edmonton-West Henday was created after the last boundary, that creation, and one of the things is that they know the people that they are voting for, and they just underwent a change from federal redistricting where they were under Edmonton Griesbach and are now under Edmonton Centre. So that lack of even representation will be felt if we lose those communities.

Dr. Martin: I bring it up because it is a hard case given that you and many presenters are talking about the cohesion of communities, whether it's through community league activity or any other theme along that line, and here we have an instance of quite the opposite. You have – I don't even know what the right word is – almost a distant satellite and in between is a nonstarter. There's no community there after 5 o'clock. I mean, it puts you in a bit of an odd space. Relative to an aspirational philosophy of a coherent community, you don't have one.

Member Arcand-Paul: Well, I would argue against that because there is a cohesion with respect to industry. The Walker yard is connected to Calder, Athlone, and Wellington. There are a lot of workers that go and work in the Walker yard for CN, and then we have the intermodal over closer to Starling, Trumpeter, and the Big Lake area.

The industry workers: I know first-hand of engineers that live and work in Starling that access intermodal, and Walker yard is also accessed by Calder and Athlone, so there is that connection with that industrial park. A lot of them also work in the industrial park nearby, so I wouldn't say that there is not a connection with the industrial yard whatsoever. A lot of the workers that work in those industrial parks, because there are multiple, as you identified, do also live within.

Another added complication is that there are conversations with the municipality to create supportive housing in the industrial parks, so that may mean that we have other residents that will be moving into the industrial park areas. That is something to be considered by the commission, keeping in mind the municipal moves that will be happening with respect to residents in those industrial areas. So, yes, there are no people that are currently living there, but there are plans by the municipality, by the city of Edmonton, to create supportive housing in those areas.

I wouldn't want to lose them because they do have that flavour and you don't see that anywhere along the line here in Edmonton, maybe except for the centre, where you have the main hub right in Edmonton-City Centre. But, again, if we are stranding intermodal, the workers around that CN Rail yard, we will then lose the flavour of CN Walker, which is a lot smaller than even across the road with Edmonton-City Centre.

Dr. Martin: That's a lovely answer, and I want to have a follow-up.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah.

Dr. Martin: Because you have now identified that residential growth potential in your last remarks, would you say that that is imminent and tangible or aspirational?

Member Arcand-Paul: Well, I think it is real. I think it is a real possibility. On both sides of the spectrum of this conversation about where supportive housing needs to go, they're both leaning towards putting them in industrial spaces. We saw that here in the riding of Edmonton-Glenora, where there was some push-back by residents in the area because it was too close to their community, so we're going to likely see them being moved further. The industrial parks in my riding: there's a large part of undeveloped area where they could put these supportive housing units.

On both sides of the spectrum of people arguing for, for lack of a better term, shelters for homeless folks, on one side they say to put them in the industrial parks, and on the other side they say: let's support them by putting wraparound services in industrial parks. So they're both landing on the same space. And where are these industrial parks? Well, they're on the edge of the city, including in Edmonton-West Henday. It is very likely that these will move forward because all candidates right now are arguing for that moving forward.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Arcand-Paul. One last question, names.

Member Arcand-Paul: Sorry?

The Chair: Names of the constituency. Are you satisfied with Edmonton-West Henday?

Member Arcand-Paul: I don't think it reflects the community. I think because we have Calder, Athlone, and Wellington, it does kind of create that confusion.

The Chair: What's your recommendation?

Member Arcand-Paul: My recommendation would be, because we are purely Edmonton west, I would say Edmonton-West, but I know that name is already taken, I believe.

The Chair: Well, Edmonton-South West and Edmonton-North West.

Member Arcand-Paul: Edmonton-South West, yeah. Edmonton-West because the Henday is not the delineation mark. It doesn't touch Calder. I personally as an Indigenous person and reflecting, Henday is pretty interesting because they brought the Haudenosaunee; they brought the Iroquois over here, which are my friends and family, so I would like to keep that name very secular, if you will, to be reflective of the fact that we represent Edmonton west.

The Chair: Edmonton-West. I like it because of its simplicity.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yes, exactly. I think the Speaker will also agree with you.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, commissioners. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Moving on to our next presenter. Is Kathy Telfer here now? No. Peggy Wright. Okay. Good afternoon.

Ms Wright: Oh, I feel very short. I'm going to sit down in the chair.

Dr. Martin: I understand that feeling, feeling very short.

Ms Wright: It's a thing.

Thank you very much, commissioners, for having me here. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to a few of the issues that collectively you are dealing with over the next number of months. I certainly very much do appreciate your work.

2:00

As you've heard, my name is Peggy Wright. I am proud to serve as the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, which is up in the northeast end of Edmonton. I'm here today because I do indeed have the distinct honour to speak on behalf of the folks I represent. I also bring a somewhat unique perspective to things as well because I've not only represented the community since 2023, but I also had the privilege of teaching in the northeast of Edmonton for a period of about 24 years. I taught in the Beacon Heights area, which is in Beverly; taught in the Sifton area, which is in Clareview; taught at John Barnett, which is in the Kilkenny area; and also taught at Northmount, which is in the Northmount area. I really concentrated my teaching career in the north and northeast end of the city.

As a result, there certainly were some things that really shaped me as not only just a teacher but also as a person, that idea of north side pride. That indeed has also very much shaped the folks who call the north side and northeast part of Edmonton home. Whether folks have lived there for generations or whether they arrived a little bit more recently, people in the northeast of Edmonton really do share a fierce pride in community, a fierce pride in where they live, where they work, and where they raise their family.

Before I delve into some of the issues, I'd appreciate you considering as you go forth – I just wanted to take a brief moment to explain about the history of Beverly and Clareview, about some of those things which, although there are two names in there, they

actually really very much do share in common. Again, though it bears two names, Beverly and Clareview, and they are indeed divided by the Yellowhead, the riding is one that is absolutely unified by community. Its roots go back to the towns of Beverly and Belvedere in the early 1900s. Both were annexed to Edmonton in the 1960s, and their identities, both of them, were shaped by hard-working immigrant and working-class families, many of whom had a hand in building Alberta's energy, health, and education sectors.

This is a working-class riding. It always has been and I suspect always will be. It's a place where folks put in very long hours on job sites in warehouses, in care homes, and in classrooms. It's a riding full of folks who work hard and who often juggle multiple responsibilities and sometimes juggle multiple jobs. Many of the folks in the entirety of that area are not just working one job; they're working two, sometimes three, jobs. There is indeed, though, an ethic of hard work and as well an ethic of mutual support and an attention to community.

Folks may know about Beverly's coal mining roots. At one point I think Beverly supplied about 60 per cent of the coal that was required for electricity here in the city. But also that area of Belvedere, which was called north Edmonton at one point, was very early on anchored by the Fort Road Business Association. In both communities you will find very active small and medium-sized businesses, and that, too, has very much shaped the communities there.

Clareview came along in the 1970s to accommodate some new growth on that northeastern part. What you will often find – and this is something I found very, very true in my work as a teacher – is that you will have folks who maybe grew up in Beverly, grew up in that Belvedere area. They go off, they go to university, they go get a job, but oftentimes they will indeed return home, sometimes, particularly in both Belvedere and Beverly, to do things like buying their grandparents' or their parents' home. So there is indeed that sense of community, a multigenerational sense of continuity. Certainly, it's that idea of collective history that really does join the two together.

One of the things that I would urge you, as a result, to consider, then, is that idea of respecting municipal and community boundaries and, as I've spoken to a wee bit, talking about and considering those shared histories that some of these ridings do indeed represent and how those lived realities of the folks who live in those communities then make sure, because of the way in which the ridings are created, that that effective representation is indeed followed through and something that people can really depend upon. Representation isn't just about numbers; it's about identity, and it's of course about connection, and it's about ensuring that all voices are heard in our Legislature.

Further to that issue of considering that like communities must be kept together, I certainly know, given that we have Sherwood Park and a few communities to the north of us as well, that there might indeed be some discussion as to whether or not that eastern side of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview might join with Sherwood Park. I'm here, first of all, to say that there are quite distinct differences between the folks who live in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and the folks who live in some of those outlying communities.

For instance, there are distinct differences in the type of housing that the folks live in in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It's about 40-ish per cent who live in single detached homes; 23 per cent live in row houses; 30 per cent live in apartments. When you contrast that with Sherwood Park, for example, 71 per cent of folks in Sherwood Park live in detached homes; in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview it's 39 per cent. In Edmonton-Gold Bar, which is a riding to the south

of us, it's again higher, where 58 per cent of folks live in detached homes, and in Beaumont we're back up again to 79 per cent.

Median employment income I think is also a factor. Again, I spoke about Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview being a thoroughly working-class community. In Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview the median income is somewhere around \$60,000. Now, granted, that's a 2021 stat, so it could have risen a little bit from there. In Sherwood Park it's around \$83,000, and in Beaumont about \$86,000. Those are distinctly different communities even if you look at just those two things.

When you look at the diversity of the population involved, in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview there are about 10.8 per cent of folks who are Muslim versus in Sherwood Park, 1.2 per cent, or Beaumont, about 1.6 per cent.

Visible minority populations. Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is I think one of the most diverse communities in all of Edmonton. Certainly, Edmonton itself is diverse, but in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview the visible minority population is somewhere around 34.9 per cent – I guess not somewhere; that's pretty exact – compared to Sherwood Park, where it's about 10 per cent, and Beaumont, where it's around 16 per cent, which really speaks to the diversity.

That really brings me to my final point, which is all about making sure that you also consider the diversity of the communities that you are looking at in your deliberations. Again, more than one-third of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's residents – and I know we're not the only constituency out there – identify as visible minorities, and more than 10 per cent of folks as well in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview are Indigenous. That diversity becomes very much a strength and becomes very much central to that community's identity.

We've got one community in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview – I'm thinking of the community as a whole in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview – where there are halal grocers, culturally diverse schools, many, many prayer spaces, but another neighbouring community simply does not have those resources. These are two completely distinct, disparate communities. Again speaking to that issue of representation for racialized and diverse communities, representation in order to be effective needs to be as equitable as possible, so the diversity of ridings as well needs to be not only considered but I think needs to be one of the most important factors in your deliberations.

Now, I'm thinking I'm very close to my time at this point, or am I okay to continue? Okay. I will stop.

Dr. Martin: We want to ask questions. We're on the clock here.

Ms Wright: As Aaron will know, I can go on.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Evans, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No.

Ms Wright: Oh, thank you.

The Chair: Susan?

Mrs. Samson: Ms Wright, excellent presentation. Our figures show that the population in 2024 was 54,557. With the amount of work we have to do, it's nice to have some that are just nicely dropping into the parameters that we've been given.

Ms Wright: That's kind of neatly in the middle of the populations that you're looking at, right?

The Chair: Right in the sweet spot.

Ms Wright: Well, and we can indeed see that growth particularly in the Clareview area, but also I know that even in Beverly you find many, many more developments in terms of municipal housing happening, so it's right there in front of you. Folks can certainly feel it and I know are also experiencing it.

The Chair: You're a hard person to keep notes with.

Ms Wright: Because I talk really quickly. I know. I try and get through everything.

The Chair: I just wanted to confirm something. Did you say that one-third of your riding identifies as a visible minority?

Ms Wright: Yeah, about that. Well, yeah, 34.9 per cent.

The Chair: Okay. And 10 per cent Indigenous?

Ms Wright: Ten per cent Indigenous, yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Julian?

Dr. Martin: Thanks. I know it is a fact that there is a community on either side of the Yellowhead, but it's passing strange that it survives with that massive divider in between and only two bridging roadways. And then, on top of it, Belvedere is divided by railway tracks and all sorts of things. You're suggesting that these three components cohere.

2:10

Ms Wright: Yes. Certainly, when you look at Beverly, much of the population of Beverly, for instance, will shop at the Tuesday farmers' market, but people from Clareview as well will go to what folks still term the Abbottsfield mall, Riverview Crossing mall. They might take the bus there, but many, many folks from both the Clareview side as well as the Beverly side go to that farmers' market. Likewise, many folks from the Beverly side know all about Jerry's Sobeys up in Clareview. Jerry is a fabulous human being, which is why people know about his Sobeys.

People do shop that corridor, and there are many folks, too, who work in the community and who use the public transit. As you've alluded to, we certainly do have the LRT. We've got buses that will take folks to Belvedere, will take folks to Clareview, or will take folks downtown or wherever it is they need to go.

Dr. Martin: Thanks.

Ms Wright: You're welcome.

Mr. Clark: I am learning so much about Edmonton – it's great – just the different neighbourhoods, communities.

I'll just say thank you for being here. The statistics you provided in quantifying communities of interest in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as distinct from Sherwood Park are very helpful. Thank you.

Ms Wright: Thank you.

The Chair: Can we mark you down as saying yes to keeping the name Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview?

Ms Wright: Absolutely. Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Good. That's what I thought.

Ms Wright: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.
Ruth Yanor.

Ms Yanor: Hello. I'm wearing a face mask because I had oral surgery recently and don't want to get any immune challenges. I'm clear enough on the mic?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Yanor: Okay. Thank you.

Well, good afternoon, Chair and members of the commission. I'm Ruth Yanor. I appreciate the hard work that you and your commission are putting in today and will be putting in in the months to come, and I thank you for your efforts. I must say that I'm not a fan of the conditions that you're forced to operate within. I was under the understanding that the current work is to receive statements of principles and concerns, and that's my focus. I have four for your deliberations.

First, the principle of equity. Presently there's a wide range in electoral boundaries and the voter populations they contain. This falls under point (a) in your list of directed considerations. For example, in 2024 Lesser Slave Lake had 15,704 listed voters; Edmonton-South West had 41,428. Each riding had one representative. There's no equity in giving 15,000 voters the voice and power of 41,000 voters. That put an Edmonton-South West vote around a third the value of a Lesser Slave Lake vote. The next rural riding sits at just over 19,000. The lowest urban riding is at 23,000.

Recent news states that Alberta has reached a population of 5 million. When Alberta had 2 million residents, we had 79 representatives, 25,000 constituents per representative in an ideal province. Eighty-nine representatives to manage more than a doubled population is vastly inadequate and does not match democratic aspirations. We'd be asking each representative to speak for over 56,000 Albertans if the ridings were equal. Merely adding two ridings is not adequate.

Canada committed long ago to representation by population. Rural overrepresentation needs to be corrected in a way that allows an adequate but not a deafening voice. The boundaries should be set so that every single rural vote is worth one vote or at worst 1.25 according to that 1991 Supreme Court decision. But definitely do not give rural votes the voice and power of three to four times an urban vote. That's simply not democratic.

Second, population growth, still point (a) of your consideration. From what I found, many Alberta counties have lost population while Calgary, Edmonton, and the bedroom community of Airdrie-Cochrane have gained. Calgary-North East had 66 per cent growth; 40 per cent growth in Calgary-South East. There's been a 50 per cent increase in Edmonton-South; 43 per cent in Edmonton-South West; 40 per cent in Edmonton-Ellerslie. Some of these urban ridings have 50 per cent more than the provincial average. That could make a vote in some of the rural ridings worth far more than four times a vote in one of those ridings. Not ethical. Also, a consideration in promoting voter apathy. Why vote if my vote is worth one-quarter of a rural vote? It's lost before we start. Any new ridings, it follows, should be in Calgary and Edmonton, and I do suggest a few rural ridings might need to be absorbed into their adjoining ridings to achieve a more even population distribution.

Third, the principle of fairness. This touches on points (a) and (e) of your directed considerations. Urban voters pay more in both income and property taxes than do rural voters. Urban voters receive more services, and their property taxes reflect this. Urban centres: their services, including care centres, are utilized by rural voters whose taxes don't much support these services. Urban taxes

subsidize rural services such as health care, infrastructure, emergency services, schools, and education. It's good that we support all Albertans in having a decent standard of living. However, blending rural and urban into a single riding makes for divided needs and might likely serve one of the pair or both poorly.

I raised my three children in rural Alberta. I lived rurally for 23 years. I understand something of rural concerns. There are certainly issues commonly shared across ridings – crime, safety, cost of living, jobs, access to care and services – but municipal boundaries should be respected. Urban voters have a number of urgent and expensive concerns not shared by rural voters: homelessness and encampments, parks, emergency services, affordable housing, aging surface infrastructure for a booming population, public transportation. Most AISH recipients live in urban dwellings.

Juggling between competing values is not good for any representative's mental health. Crazy, bicycle-spoked boundaries that simply follow the bedroom-community commuters would not honour point (e) of your directed considerations. Nearly 90 per cent of Alberta's population lives in urban municipalities. Nearly 90 per cent. This should be heavily weighted in your deliberations. There should be a respectful recognition of the share of the provincial needs that are carried by urban voters and their paid taxes. Electoral boundaries can go some way to recognizing that urban and rural voters require distinct ridings and dedicated representatives.

My final point, point (d) of your considerations. The province-wide broadband program to improve Internet access has made possible remote care, remote education and access, and remote working. This has reduced some of the urgency for improved transportation. It's created options: being a health care provider online, working remotely, and creating online searches in a timely rather than time-out fashion. Improved Internet access may have resolved communication issues and reduced some of the pressure on the transportation. Constituents can access their representative online and vice versa.

2:20

The pandemic advanced our ability to participate in Zoom meetings, and we discovered that online meetings are a cost-effective way of connecting. Online communication has been an equalizer. Accessibility has been improved and continues to improve. Communication access is less a concern for rural residents due to this. It should be a reduced concern for this commission.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms Yanor. Did you say what riding you were in?

Ms Yanor: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The Chair: Edmonton-Gold-Bar. Okay.
Any questions, starting with Greg?

Mr. Clark: No. Thank you very much. I appreciate your presentation.

The Chair: Julian?

Dr. Martin: No. I like the clarity of how you lay out the values, the principles, as you call them, that should underlie our work. We on this commission have been debating these ever since we were appointed, so we're not unaware of the difficulties in this regard. You will appreciate that by the act we have been given two new ridings. So point taken, but we have to struggle with a set of practical problems even though we are fully alive to the principles

that you announced. We're not forgetting these principles, but we are trying to accommodate them in the straitjacket we live in.

Ms Yanor: I appreciate the straitjacket you're in, and it needs to be pointed out that it's an unrealistic one.

The Chair: Susan?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you again for your presentation, Ms Yanor. It was quite good. Thank you.

Mr. Evans: Nothing from me. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you again, Ms Yanor. You did encapsulate for me the historic challenge when you said: 2 million people, 79 ridings. We now have eight more – no, sorry; 10 more ridings for 3 million more people. What's complicated about that?

Ms Yanor: Yup. Exactly.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you for your comprehensive presentation.

That leaves us one more presenter before the break. Mr. Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Justice Miller and members of the boundary commission. I appreciate this opportunity to have some brief comments and a discussion about Edmonton-North West specifically and around provincial boundaries and constituencies generally.

I think I might be in a unique position as MLA for Edmonton-North West. This is the third boundary commission that I have seen since my tenure as an MLA, and I can see the challenges that each of the boundary commissions that I've seen respectively in the past and now are facing. Some of them are unique, but although the volume of population increase here in the province of Alberta is unprecedented with your commission to deal with, certainly the trends in regard to urbanization, growth of suburbs, and some specific growth in other areas have been a trend for the last three boundary commissions. You know, perhaps some of these problems are exacerbated this time because of volume, but the general situation is the same.

I think I have Edmonton-North West up on the screen now. Some of the specific issues that I will discuss in regard to Edmonton-North West, I guess, provide a case in point or an example of other places and more general circumstances around the province. If I can just maybe direct your attention to the north – maybe can I just get it up there, and I'll just point, please?

The northern edge – this is the Henday, and you can see that my constituency jumps the Henday just over by that cloverleaf interchange there. That's actually where the Remand Centre is, right there, as well. On the west side now there is a new development going in which is going to be called Goodridge Corners. We saw that this is a trend on the south side of the Henday, where you get new developments on the south side because it opens up the land, meaning opportunities and so forth for people and more affordable places to live, too, for young families and so forth.

But, you know, again, seeing another development just on the edge of not just the constituency but the city I think provides a case in point for us about the importance of retaining the integrity of municipal boundaries so that we can serve these communities that are popping up still within the Edmonton city boundaries but on new land, basically. All of the services that you need to start a new suburb – for example, all of the infrastructure around sewer and water and electricity, roads, schools, policing, social services – all of those things are dealt with through a single MLA as well as the

municipal, in this case the city of Edmonton, helping to provide those services.

Now, it just creates a stark sort of view of the problem with jumping over a provincial constituency and into a rural area on the other side of that boundary. Goodridge Corners is going to require all of those services: the city police, Edmonton city social services, the Edmonton transit system, the city of Edmonton sewer and water and roads, manufacturing, and so forth. You know, to split that and then the interests of a rural area that's immediately north of there, the county and so forth, just doesn't make sense.

I note that I'll acknowledge and certainly Mr. Kolkman's presentation acknowledged the reality of requiring some urban areas to be split. Let's say the city of Medicine Hat: it can't just be by itself, right? Or St. Albert or, I should say, Grande Prairie, for example, and – there are many other places – Airdrie. But with the big cities, you know, you're just creating an artificial sort of concoction that defies the reality of what's happening in cities like Edmonton and Calgary.

On the edges of the city of Calgary a similar thing is happening. I can think of Calgary-North West, for example, where they're way over the median, for sure, already, and there's lots of growth that is happening within those very generous boundaries of the city of Calgary, which extend far into the prairie sometimes. You know, to think that you could, then, create a hybrid from that when you already have a full house on the city side and all of those services that I just described that are required by the citizens that live in a new area like Edmonton-North West or Calgary-North West, then I think that it invites more problems than it does, in fact, opportunities.

We know that we need to increase, and you have a mandate to increase by two MLAs in the House. Certainly, there's room for that in the Chamber, I can tell you, but you are also – you know, and I appreciate your problem where you need to move some of these boundaries around to make sure that we provide some degree of equity in what the value of any given Albertan's vote is. The previous presenter, I think, described it quite well. You know, if you hit a ratio between how many people are represented in a place like Edmonton-North West compared to a place like Lesser Slave Lake or some place like that, where it becomes 3 to 1 or 4 to 1 in terms of voters to that constituency, then that does undermine democracy, so I would be very careful not to just keep those same boundaries in some of those really low-population areas.

I know that you need to represent those areas, and they need accommodation, too, because of the added costs associated with living in a very large constituency. I mean, some of those northern Alberta ones are the size of a small or medium-sized European country, right? So we do need to accommodate for that, too. Anyway, I just thought I could use Edmonton-North West as an example of the challenge and, I would say, you know, resisting the temptation to jump the municipal boundaries of the cities, the big cities like Calgary and Edmonton, when there's lots of work to be done just right there.

2:30

In fact, Edmonton-North West in the last boundary redraw: you can see it's got a bit of a funny shape, right? This is because – I mean, I can work with it, for sure; it's not insurmountable – it's to accommodate for future growth, and they nailed it on the head quite well, I think, in regard to places like Edmonton Griesbach, which used to be federal military land. You have a similar district area in Calgary, right? You see tremendous growth, lots of wonderful urban design and different living accommodations and so forth and lots and lots of population growth. We see it as well up in the northern boundary on the other side of the Henday with the

community of Albany, for example. There are lots of houses in there that, you know, are just a few months old. I really don't mind the sort of section that has neighbourhoods down by the tracks there where my office is. You know, there are houses in there that are 120 years old, and in Albany there are houses up there that are probably 120 weeks old at most. I mean, that is not a problem.

Another issue, and I think I heard the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talk about it, is the culture of the north side. Edmonton-North West, I think, reflects that really well. You have a very large population of Muslim people moving in there because you have the largest mosque in Alberta and the largest Islamic Academy, the Muslim school, the biggest one in Canada, for sure, I think. You know, you see this delightful thing where people are moving in to create community with like cultural compatibilities, right? And not just Muslims, because of course Islam represents – you know, there are 30 or 40 different countries represented at the mosque, right? Also, the African population is increasing, the South Asian population is increasing. People are trying to cluster and live in an area, especially if it's a new one, where they can buy houses in proximity to each other, and then they're creating their community and supporting each other in that way as well. So although it's a bit of a funny shape, there's a certain coherence in Edmonton-North West, you know, around churches and mosques and cultural organizations, around shopping, around schools and the like.

I mean, I know – and I can appreciate changes to the boundary. I've seen it a couple of times before. But there is a certain core and a certain essence there that I think really does represent the population really well and services that are provided by the province of Alberta, the provincial government, and what people hope and aspire to for themselves and for their families.

Happy to take any questions there.

The Chair: Thank you. I just have a clarification question first. I may have misunderstood you. Is it Goodridge Downs or Goodridge Corners?

Mr. Eggen: I think it's called Goodridge Corners, the new development. Yeah.

The Chair: Oh. Is that in your riding, or is it just outside your riding?

Mr. Eggen: No. It's in. It's on the other side. It's just, you see . . .

The Chair: When you say the other side, the other side . . .

Mr. Eggen: On the other side of the Henday. Yeah. And then, you know, just by that traffic intersection there, and then it's going be to the west of there, right? You know, we can see that in Edmonton and Calgary where you put these ring roads in, lots of development, which is great. It provides affordable, single-family dwellings and mixed-family for the people.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I'm sure we've got some questions. Mr. Evans, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No questions.

The Chair: Susan?

Mrs. Samson: Are you happy with the name Edmonton-North West for the riding?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Yeah, I mean, you know, it has a certain generic element to it, and that's fine.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Julian?

Dr. Martin: Thank you. Thank you very much. I asked your colleague a question earlier about Calder in that district, that's in his riding. I'm looking at a large-scale map now rather more closely, and I could see his point about the historical character of Calder and so on in the very way the streets are laid out. That's indicative of a much older set of communities and the like.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, for sure. It was a separate town, right?

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Would you see a uniformity or something approximating that in the housing types and housing stock and the configuration of neighbourhoods throughout your district?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. For sure. I mean, obviously, like I said, there are houses that are a hundred years old and then there are ones that have been put up in the last couple of weeks, right? But there's a certain value, you know, like a monetary value, which is similar for property from top to bottom. Still, the majority are single-family, stand-alone houses, right?

Like, in some of those older neighbourhoods like in Rosslyn and Lauderdale and so forth, where they maybe are 60 or 70 years old, you're getting a whole new generation of young families moving in and buying those because they're a little bit more affordable and people buying to be close to the mosque, quite frankly, that's right there. A great spot because it's a beautiful, unique development that is very desirable, high property values, and lots of new condos and apartments going in, too, like, put up very quickly, driving up that population very fast. As I said, Edmonton-North West is kind of designed to accommodate for growth, but, I mean, the numbers from 2017 show 52,000. That's quite a few years ago. Of course, we've experienced an historic increase since then.

The Chair: Thank you.
Greg?

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you. Just quickly, your population of Edmonton-North West seems to have tracked quite nicely the general average growth. It's been quite steady, tracking again, roughly, with the population of the province. Do you anticipate – you've noted that there are some areas for future growth. The ring road tends to attract that. Is it fair to say, then, that you expect the growth here to be ticking up a bit over the next little while, ticking down, staying steady? Is the past a good prediction of the future? Or do you feel like we're going to see more growth in Edmonton-North West, perhaps, relative to other places?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Maybe not the explosive growth that we saw right now, but it'll continue to fill up. It'll be a steady growth over the next five to 10 years.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: I know you're not in charge of schools as the boundary commission, but we need . . .

Mr. Clark: Do you want one?

Mr. Eggen: . . . all of that infrastructure there. We need the schools and hospitals and roads that come with that population.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks a lot.

The Chair: It's always helpful to hear presentations from members that walk the sidewalks and drive the streets as the representative, so thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: It's 2:40. We're going to break for 10 minutes. We'll be back at 2:50.

[The hearing adjourned from 2:38 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. After the afternoon break, Aaron Paquette.

Mr. Paquette: Well, good afternoon, members of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide input on the redrawing of Alberta's provincial electoral map. Kind of exciting. This work matters deeply, as you well know. It shapes the quality of our democracy and the ability of Albertans to see themselves reflected in their government.

I'm speaking today not only as a city councillor for the city of Edmonton but as someone who's been through a similar process. In Edmonton we undertook our own Ward Boundary Commission ahead of the 2021 election. We explored a variety of models, including some that might have looked efficient on paper, like splitting the city into pizza slices, which, thankfully, did not happen, but also blending multiple regions together, but in practice we recognized that cutting across too many communities undermined the very representation we were trying to improve. Ultimately, we made the decision to prioritize keeping communities, especially community leagues, together. When you divide up neighbourhoods that have shared interests, identities, and challenges, you start eroding the very foundation of effective representation. We found out first-hand. It's not just about drawing lines; it's about preserving places.

Now, this is also about respecting the role of municipalities in the democratic system. Cities and towns across Alberta are not just administrative units, as some would like to believe. They are governments. Municipal governments are the front line in delivering services, building communities, and responding to local realities. The boundaries drawn by this commission directly impact how effectively we can work with the province to deliver for our residents. When provincial boundaries ignore how municipalities are structured, cutting through established communities and merging areas with conflicting needs, collaboration begins to suffer. It makes joint planning more difficult, it creates confusion in representation, and it weakens trust between orders of government. At a time when municipalities are increasingly being asked to do more with less without always being treated as equal partners, fair, coherent boundaries that respect local governance matter more than ever. Effective provincial municipal relations depend on clarity, respect, and alignment, certainly not fragmentation.

Now, Edmonton is the fastest growing city in Canada and the most affordable major centre in Canada. These are not by mistake. These are intentional results from the past few city councils. In fast-growing areas like south Edmonton the risk of splitting natural communities of interest is especially high. These aren't just clusters of houses. They're families who share schools, transit routes, parks, and public services. If we slice them up and merge them with radically different areas, urban with rural or inner city with outer fringe, we don't get more representative ridings; we get confused

ones. Constituents end up underrepresented, and MLAs struggle to reconcile competing priorities within one boundary.

We've also seen through recent federal redistributions how certain redrawings can produce unintentional political homogenization. It can flatten diversity, not expand it. It might feel like you're creating a broader perspective, but the result is often a single dominant political voice that drowns out nuance and marginalizes differences. That's not democracy working better; that's democracy getting blurred. We can and must do better.

Let's also not ignore the sheer scale of Alberta's urban growth. The population increases in cities like Edmonton and Calgary are well documented and ongoing. If we want our electoral map to reflect where people actually live and how they're living, then new seat allocations should probably follow that reality. That means adding representation in places like south Edmonton or north Calgary, where the pressure on services and that diversity of need are the highest. Anything less would fail to represent the Alberta of today and the upcoming future.

We've already heard today about population versus representation disparity that already exists in the province. While we can see the various rationales for this, it is also very difficult to see it as anything but political the way we favour specific sets of viewpoints. Albertans, the majority of whom live in our municipalities, understand the difficult situation of equitable representation.

To segue a bit, we have a history in North America where some people's voices mattered more than others when it came to the vote, where some demographics, based on either the colour of their skin, their culture, or their gender, either had partial or no votes whatsoever. I look at this table right now and I think: well, what if Representative Samson, her vote, equalled the same as the rest of the people on the panel for their vote? Maybe great for Representative Samson; maybe not so great for everyone else.

That is the situation we sort of find ourselves in today that has a somewhat dark historical precedent. My kokum, my grandmother, couldn't even vote. That was not a right that she had, and then giving her a quarter vote, one that mattered one-quarter compared to someone else, maybe is not a healthy outcome. Ironically, in order to find better balances of representation, we have given many people outsized voices where their vote matters more than others, and there is a serious moral, ethical, and, ultimately, legal question about that approach.

I will close by saying this. Keep communities together. Respect municipal structures because that is where the service delivery actually happens. If the co-ordination is not there, we start to run into some serious issues. Just as an aside, we have obviously been bringing in evacuees for many years. Even in my own ward we had two instances of serious evacuations where I was able to co-ordinate with the MLAs because we knew our community. Ultimately, representation only works if people feel seen, and that starts with boundaries that respect who and where they are.

Thank you for your time and your service to Albertans. I know it's not an easy job, and you're going to have an interesting time presenting these results.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir. Tell us what ward you represent.

Mr. Paquette: Yes. I represent ward Dene in northeast Edmonton. I'm in the boundaries of Edmonton-Manning.

And I heard the question about Edmonton-North West, and if you want to name it Edmonton-Paquette, that's fine. I'm just kidding.

The Chair: Okay. Let me put you on the spot. You're an elected politician; you're used to being put on the spot. How many new constituencies? How many electoral districts should Edmonton get?

Mr. Paquette: How many – sorry.

The Chair: How many new ridings should Edmonton get?

Mr. Paquette: Oh, how many new ridings? We got zero new ridings. We just changed the borders in order to ensure that we had an equitable distribution.

The Chair: No, no, no. Sorry. Not city-wide; provincially. Now you have 20 ridings. How many new ones should you get?

Mr. Paquette: Well, considering our population has grown by 125,000 people in the last three years – that's bigger than the entire city of Red Deer – and looking at the general size that we'd like to keep for population representation, probably two.

The Chair: Thank you.

Greg, starting on your end.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I have two sort of questions that are similar and related. I'd like you to dig a little deeper into – you'd alluded to a federal redistribution where inadvertently we end up with a single group that has quite an outsized voice in a community. Maybe can you just expand a bit on that? I'm just curious a little bit on how that happened, what the specific implications are, and just what we should watch out for.

3:00

Mr. Paquette: Yeah. Again, going back to the numbers of how we do representation, that blend of rural, municipal: I understand the rationale for that, because you can balance your numbers quite easily, but what happens is that if that balance is more ideological rather than practical, you start getting ideological results, which is probably antithetical to wise governance. What we would really like to see on the federal level, but that's likely not going to change, is more akin to the municipal approach, where I represent urban and rural. But that's because we had a massive expropriation about 20 years ago or so.

Generally speaking, Edmonton tries to keep boundaries intact when it comes to the communities because otherwise you get a very interesting split where some voices are going to feel like their vote just literally does not matter because of where they live. If we could rightsize that, that would be great. In fact, back to the original point, I mean, your mandate is smaller than this, but the larger conversation probably should be – when it comes to the economic impact of municipalities, you know, just Calgary and Edmonton alone account for over 72 per cent of the economic activity in Alberta. Just on that basis alone and the population basis I think it's safe to say that we are still operating with the mindset that Alberta is primarily a rural province. Landwise that's true; populationwise, absolutely not true. Therefore, what you find is a lot of voices go unheard, ignored, and underrepresented in the Legislature.

Mr. Clark: If you don't mind, just a different question. I'm always interested in your opinion on names for constituencies in and around the Edmonton area. Just looking to represent both the specific communities, there have been some suggestions of their Indigenous names that we could use to represent and honour that history. If you have any specific examples now, we're interested, but even as we perhaps put some names together or even put some new boundaries together, it would be interesting to hear your perspective.

Mr. Paquette: If there's a will from the commission to do that, one thing I would recommend is maybe find words that can be pronounced easily. And the next is the way we did that. We actually had someone from community, Terri Cardinal, who worked at Grant MacEwan and still does. She's a vice-chair there, I believe. She has deep connection with community. She came with an elder and said, "We can do this for you," because it was a recommendation from the commission. "We can do this for you. Give us free reign in order to do it correctly." And they got a bunch of women elders and went around the entire city of Edmonton to different points of historical significance throughout the history of our province and our city and the history precolonization. They were able to gift us names that had meaning, that were prayerfully considered by this entire committee of Indigenous elders.

Doing it right, asking the people who understand the city or understand the province and the languages of the province and the history, I think, would be very, very important if that was to be a recommendation. It's a little bit different because we tend to honour people with names who have been political leaders in our history, but as we know, that can also be fraught with controversy as perspectives change over decades or centuries.

That would be my advice if that's something that you're looking to do, and if you want any further information, don't hesitate to reach out to the city of Edmonton. We've had a lot of feedback on that, and the biggest one is that the communication about it could have been even more robust so that people would understand the why and the result of a boundary commission and overlapping numbers and the confusion that could cause.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: How many aldermen are in this city?

Mr. Paquette: We have 12 councillors and one mayor, so 13.

The Chair: All right.
Julian?

Dr. Martin: Thank you. I'm very glad you mentioned the fact that in its particular tract – well, your ward has a large tract of rural land. You know, some people often forget that you and the MLA for Edmonton-Manning, say, do have rural representation responsibilities even though the number of people may be sparse, that you are in fact alive and carry the burden for understanding some of the dynamics of that. So thank you for that, because some people think it's all of one or all of the other and blending would be bad, but we already experience a bit of that from time to time.

Mr. Paquette: Well, I will point out that if you look at the map and you see the Anthony Henday there, north and east of that is a massive amount of residential development occurring. On the west side of the Manning freeway, that is all designated industrial, and the parts that aren't yet developed now have maybe about 30 residents. It becomes pretty sparse. The issues they deal with, though, are very unlike the issues of the folks living in the city proper. I will say that I work very hard to be an extremely conscientious representative, and I go out and I talk with people, and one of the challenges is that for those 30 people, while their concerns are extremely important and valid, they take up definitely an outsized amount of time for the work that I have to accomplish for the rest of the 86 some-thousand people.

Dr. Martin: It's the 90-10 rule, perhaps.

Mr. Paquette: What's that?

Dr. Martin: The 90-10 rule. Ten per cent of it takes 90 per cent of your time.

Mr. Paquette: I don't even have 10 per cent. I've got maybe 2 per cent or one per cent or not even. It's beyond that. But luckily, I don't have another sort of township in those borders. Otherwise that would probably throw things way out of proportion as far as, you know, equal representation for everyone that is in my ward.

The Chair: Susan, any questions?

Mrs. Samson: Just one. Thank you for the most interesting presentation on the reflection between municipal governance and the work we're doing for the province and how that will play out. I like that link. Did you by any chance recognize the name Audrey Johnson-McGillis, who presented to us earlier today?

Mr. Paquette: I did not get a chance to hear the previous presentations.

Mrs. Samson: Oh. She was the one that was suggesting Indigenous names for some of the EDs. Did she do work for you in Edmonton? When you mentioned elders doing...

Mr. Paquette: What was her name?

Mrs. Samson: Audrey Johnson-McGillis.

Mr. Paquette: I really couldn't say. We tried to preserve the anonymity of the elders in order to protect them from any unfortunate, expectable problems.

Mrs. Samson: Not a problem. She offered to help us out, and I wondered if there was an overlap, but thank you. Excellent presentation.

Mr. Paquette: Well, thank you. I'm not sure, but maybe your vote, is it greater than the rest of the commission?

Mrs. Samson: No.

Mr. Paquette: Oh, okay.

Mr. Evans: Yeah, she's rural.

The Chair: Okay.
John, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No, I don't have any. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir. It's really helpful to have someone from another level of government presenting. I think you're the first. Yeah, you're the first presenter that has come on behalf of a municipal government, so thank you.

Mr. Paquette: Well, I appreciate the opportunity, and I deeply appreciate the work you're doing. I know how difficult it is and what a dedication it is to the people of Alberta, so thank you.

The Chair: As we're moving towards the end of the list, as a non-Edmontonian I have learned a lot yesterday and today about Edmonton. It's very much a positive, so thank you very much.

Mr. Paquette: I'm assuming you're a big fan of bike lanes now.

The Chair: Well, I haven't seen any bike lanes in Edmonton. I don't know it that well.

Mr. Paquette: Don't worry. I won't catch you on record on that.

Dr. Martin: He drives. He drives from place to place, so he wouldn't see a bike lane.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Paquette: Thank you.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

The Chair: That takes us to Nathan Poon.

Mr. Poon: Okay. Good afternoon.

The Chair: Good afternoon.

3:10

Mr. Poon: Before I begin, I just really wanted to thank the commission here today for listening to the diverse perspectives of many Albertans over the past few days and in the continuing days. Thank you so much.

My name is Nathan Poon, and I'm the president of the Students' Association of MacEwan University, located in downtown Edmonton. I was elected to my position, myself and a team of four vice-presidents, to represent the interests of over 19,000 MacEwan University students, advocating on their behalf on academic, nonacademic, and government issues. It is important also to highlight that SAMU is a nonpartisan organization. We do not align ourselves with any political parties, provincial or otherwise. Our members, who are students, live across and around the city of Edmonton. Student civic engagement is a key priority for SAMU, so we speak with you today through that lens.

Representation of postsecondary students in Alberta's electoral process is integral to ensure students' specific concerns, like housing and affordability, are effectively represented. As the electoral boundaries of Alberta are being redrawn, I encourage the commission to consider the distribution of students in cities like Edmonton and the communities they constitute.

Population growth in Alberta has been on a steady incline for a number of years, and it's encouraging to see a plan for additional representation for Albertans and keeping up with the increased number of voters. In the previous federal election we saw the addition of Edmonton Gateway, hoping to account for the boom in population in the south side of Edmonton in particular. Given that MacEwan University previously had a campus in Mill Woods, so in southeast Edmonton, which is sort of closer to, you know, the south Edmonton area, and given that transit data suggests a strong student population on the south end of the city, we would hope to see a similar approach for the provincial election, ensuring the people of south Edmonton are fairly and effectively represented.

Additionally, the allocation of an additional seat to the Edmonton area would greatly contribute to the voices of students in Alberta. As MacEwan, the University of Alberta, and several other institutions are situated across Edmonton, the city is home to a huge population of students. As the students study, research, and contribute to the culture and economy of the province, we also hope that there will be enough voices in the Legislature to advocate for their well-being. However, in acknowledging that students are spread out in the city, we also want to encourage the commission to be thoughtful when deciding which communities will be bundled together under a new riding.

Students are a perfect case study of neighbourhood composition. As a population who is far more likely to rent than own and one who does not have reliable access to private transportation options, students choose where they live with an eye to the communities they want to engage with while assessing proximity to key locations

like work or school. As a result, the communities we live in not only reflect the location of our homes but also priorities and expectations relative to our neighbourhood. For example, as local rezoning conversations have demonstrated, the expectations and experiences of a neighbourhood made up primarily of detached single-family homes will differ from a neighbourhood made up of high-rises. With this in mind, we are hoping the commission will focus on grouping similar communities together and avoid breaking up established connections and work within these communities, especially from a civic engagement lens.

To close, I want to reiterate the value we see as students in additional representations for Edmontonians and south Edmontonians in particular, with the hope that the decision made for the new boundaries will aim to minimize disruption to established networks within these communities.

As my colleague pointed out, the previous speaker, Mr. Paquette, Edmonton has seen a rise over the past three years – I believe it's 125,000 – and a large portion of that is students coming in from around Alberta. At MacEwan University we are projecting a substantial rapid growth of students by 2030 from 17,000 to 30,000, especially, for example, in our residences, so in our student housing. We, our student body, have been hearing that it has been incredibly difficult to find housing in the sort of downtown area, so most of them have sort of been situating themselves in areas such as south Edmonton.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Poon. How long have you been in this position?

Mr. Poon: About one month.

The Chair: Okay. And is it for the next year, the next two years?

Mr. Poon: Absolutely. For the next year, maybe two years if the students love me.

The Chair: Okay. What are you taking?

Mr. Poon: I'm in computer science.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Evans, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No. Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Did you do a written submission? I couldn't find my notes on that, but I thought I read something along the same lines.

Mr. Poon: No, I have not submitted a written submission.

Mrs. Samson: Okay.

The Chair: Julian?

Dr. Martin: Thank you. Thanks for coming. I have a personal request of you. The next week when you go to the board of governors meeting, send my regrets.

Mr. Poon: Okay.

Dr. Martin: Because I'll be with this crowd.

I echo your remarks about the significance of the activity of students in Edmonton and about the reliance on adequate transit areas and where the students find accommodation. You know, MacEwan has about 25 per cent of the daily commuter traffic in and out of the central part of Edmonton, so it's a very significant feature

of the central part of the city. So I certainly take your remarks to heart. And then, of course, the U of A: a similar story there as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. No further questions or comments from me aside from the note of: thanks for being here. Really appreciate it.

The Chair: There is one more question.

Mrs. Samson: I found what I was referring to. We had a written submission from an individual with the last name of Salazar, and he was the student union rep from Mount Royal. He mentioned the same types of concerns that you did. So know there are voices out there focusing on a similar problem.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you again very much, Mr. Poon.

Mr. Poon: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Our next presenter is Dave Hardman.

Mr. Hardman: Good afternoon.

The Chair: Good afternoon.

Mr. Hardman: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I think this is critical, especially given some of the things happening in the province, that we get this right. You know my name is Dave Hardman. I want to speak to you about the sense of community, and it's been alluded to multiple times in the four presentations, I think, I've seen this afternoon, that community is critical, not only in the sense of getting people the representation, but I think it in part can allude to people becoming disengaged when they do not feel represented. This is where I see it as critical.

A bit of background on myself. I taught in this province for 39 years, mainly social studies, not surprisingly, and the vast majority of that was in smaller communities in the northern half of the province, all the way up to just about the Northwest Territories border, including time on three different First Nations reserves. To assume that you can lump people together without that sense of community is impossible. I know we'll never get it right, and you guys have been tasked with the job of getting it right, but I'll give you an out.

The Chair: We'll never get it perfect.

Mr. Hardman: I'll go with that as well.

I hear people talk in Alberta about this concept of the unique culture of Alberta. I take great umbrage with that because I've been all over this country multiple times and every area has got its own unique culture. I'll say that right down to the difference between two small towns I taught in up north that were 17 miles apart, and they were different. So when we start considering putting these groups together, that's a massive part of it.

3:20

We have an obvious split between rural and urban, and this is becoming more and more so as time goes on, even from the time I was a kid, which I know was a long time ago. Urban and rural were not split as much because half the people who lived in cities had lived on farms as younger people. We don't get that anymore. Most people don't know where their own food comes from, so to build community we have to somehow make sure that when you have a representative, you have one that can represent that constituency, and to represent a constituency, we have to have someone – and I'm

looking at it not from the representative's view but from the physical plant of that constituency – you have to have a group of people that can be represented.

If you look at the major problems that we constantly hear of around the province: medical care. Well, the town I lived in for 15 years, their emergency room is closing, and they're the nearest hospital for about an hour either way. So when we talk about not being able to get a doctor, well, we can get into a hospital but we have to wait, in the urban area. They're talking about: they have no doctors, no emergency either. It's special to me. I spent 13 years in a fire department doing fire rescue up north. You know all these people.

When you look at education, they're seeing their schools close. You close a school in a small community, you've killed the community. We can't get enough schools open in the cities. The problem is kind of the same about schools or about health care, but not really. You get a constituency that's – and I'll just throw out some numbers and don't quote them – 90 per cent urban, and 10 per cent even rural or definitely rural. At 10 per cent, he's looking at the representative going: well, he's going to have to represent mainly that 90 per cent. This is where the disengagement, I believe, comes in in that sort of a scenario. People are going: "Well, what's the point in getting involved? We're outvoted automatically."

When I talk culturally, I think I'm referring to three different areas of culture. You can start off with the economic: people who do different things have different views. You work in the oil patch, you're a farmer, you work in a big city, or you work in an industrial job; you get a different mindset, and I think it's a critically different mindset.

You look at it from a cultural point of view. Previous speakers, and Mr. Paquette was one of them, mentioned some of the cultural groups that are coming in. They need to be represented, and maybe the whole system is different.

And then you have the geography, and they're very generic terms. I think we have to be very, very careful. We have to understand that when the rural people complain about policing or lack of, it's serious. Like, you get in trouble and need the police, in many rural areas that I've worked in, especially up in the Peace River country, you might be an hour, an hour and a half from an emergency response from police. None of this: eight minutes and the ambulance is at the door, and the police are probably there beforehand, and the fire department is probably there before that.

We've got to put this together, and we've got to organize the system better so that you can have representatives that are dealing with those issues in that context.

As a social studies teacher, I know, I'm tending to be long-winded, so I'll wrap it up with that. Thank you for your patience, and I wish you all the best in this incredibly important job you're doing. I'll take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hardman, and for a social studies teacher your math is perfect: seven minutes.

Mr. Hardman: Oh, I had a timer on, but it faded on me. My technological skills are not there.

The Chair: Greg?

Mr. Clark: Thank you so much. I appreciate that, sir. Can you tell me what constituency are you from? Where do you live currently?

Mr. Hardman: Where? Well, we moved around a bit; a lot of time in the Peace River country, Fairview particularly. Time up south of

Fort Vermilion on the Tallcree reserve. I was principal at a reserve outside of Lac La Biche at Heart Lake. I taught in the St. Paul area. Then in the last about 20 years I was out in both Seba Beach and in Spruce Grove.

The Chair: And do you live here now, in Edmonton?

Mr. Hardman: Oh, I didn't say. My own constituency is St. Albert. Sorry. I know you're constantly asking that.

The Chair: Okay. But you've lived rural, so your perspective is that you lived in both places and . . .

Mr. Hardman: Very much so. And my whole life has been that way. We grew up in Edmonton but spent all our time in the woods. I hunted, trapped, fished. So it's always been this kind of dichotomy.

The Chair: Okay. Julian?

Dr. Martin: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I've been taking notes on your remarks. Am I right to extrapolate from what you're describing as saying that the rural areas, precisely because of the scarcity of services and infrastructure, need strong advocates?

Mr. Hardman: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I'm not talking a radical political – I have my own politics. But they have to be represented, where people will actually pay attention to that, and it's not: oh, well, it's a rural area but, okay, the representative is more talking an oil company, or it's a rural area and it's right wing or left wing. No. I'm talking advocacy.

Dr. Martin: We've been hearing a lot from people who are addressing urban issues, rightly so, and they need a strong advocate, but more than that, what impresses me is the granularity of the examples that they provide. That adds persuasiveness you wouldn't have solely on an argument upon principles and values alone. That's a little abstract, but the granularity of understanding the issues is persuasive. And I think what you are pointing to is exactly the same sort of thing, so I very much thank you for that.

The Chair: Okay. Susan, do you have comments or questions?

Mrs. Samson: This may be more of a comment, Mr. Hardman. Thank you so much for coming out. I think one of the things that really hits home when I listen to you is that we've been focusing on urban issues mostly today. I live in a rural town of Sylvan Lake, but my experience and my lifestyle in Sylvan Lake is even more urbanish than the stuff you've described. I often have heard that regular people don't understand what it's like to live in a rural setting. The examples you gave, as my colleague alluded to, like an ER closing in a rural community is a lot different than me living in Sylvan Lake and my urgent care closing, because I can go to Red Deer in 20 kilometres. You know, I have options even though I'm rural, so there are different levels of rural. But the important thing is that I think we don't fully understand it unless we live it. It's those day-to-day examples that really hit home.

Mr. Hardman: If I can digress just very quickly on that point exactly. When I was on the fire department – now, that ended about 20 years ago when we left that area – we ran the only set of jaws, jaws of life, from the B.C. border – we're at Fort St. John – to the Peace River at Dunvegan to halfway to Peace River. We were the only crews. Now, this was a small fire department, totally volunteer at that time. Nobody made a cent off it. So you had a bunch of

people who would drop everything at a moment's notice; didn't matter whether it's a kid's birthday party or whatever. The frustrating part was that it's an hour and a half drive to the B.C. border, and there's a big, bloody hill there, and it was a dangerous spot. You're nodding your head like you've seen it.

3:30

Mr. Evans: I've been there.

Mr. Hardman: Yeah. We had our first share of accidents there.

Mr. Evans: Where did you live?

Mr. Hardman: Lived right in Fairview for most of it. Lived in Hines Creek for that first year.

Mr. Evans: That's a long drive.

Mr. Hardman: Yeah. That's a long ways up. Fire trucks: yeah, they got flashing lights and make a lot of noise, but they don't go very fast. Looks like it in the city, but they barely hold highway speeds. They're full of water or gear. So, your point is exactly right on. You knew everybody, you know. We'd run from our houses in cars with flashing lights. We didn't have overhead lights but flashing lights. Everybody knew there's something going on because there goes Hardman. There goes Bobby, you know.

That's the point I'm trying to get to. We see a proclivity of trying to attach rural areas to urban constituents. I think inherently it's wrong. Now, I know it's going to happen to some degree, but I think we need to keep this on as a broader philosophy to not do that.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. I really enjoyed – I almost want to say a talk, but I know it was a presentation. I really . . .

Mr. Hardman: Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: I appreciate your time.

Mr. Hardman: I've been out of the classroom awhile. I'm getting rusty.

Mr. Evans: One question. You started off with the importance of community.

Mr. Hardman: Yes.

Mr. Evans: In the legislation it talks about communities of interest. I would like to hear your perspective on how you would flesh out what communities of interest means. Just to give you some context, the way that it's put in the legislation – it's section 14 – communities of interest including municipalities, regional and rural communities, Indian reserves, and Métis settlements.

I think community and that aspect that you're talking about is incredibly important, but we have the responsibilities of trying to figure out what communities of interest mean. If you could help us out, that would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Hardman: Oh. I'll take a stab at doing it from this direction. It's where you can connect – this almost sounds hypocritical before I say it – communities with different interests but similar or like interests, common goals. If you're going to hang a farming community on the edge of the city, hang it in – and I know some of you are not from Edmonton – the western section, northwest of Edmonton because that's rural. That's all acreage.

Mr. Evans: It's all – sorry?

Mr. Hardman: That's all acreage country.

Mr. Evans: Okay.

Mr. Hardman: By definition, that's what rural is; it's basically your acreages. So they're at least kind of up there. Don't hang them – I mean, I can't think of an example right now – with St. Albert. St. Albert has got nothing to do with agriculture. It's got little to do with industrial. It's basically a professional-based city. That sort of thing. If you're going to build a community of interest, highlight and go for those like interests. Just don't look at geography – like, we can carve a chunk of X-thousand people out of this rural area and attach it to this urban area – and go with it from that perspective. Again, if you look at – an obvious one would be, you know, Grande Prairie, Peace River. You could add a chunk of the oil patch area to it because half the guys who live there are working in the oil patch. That's kind of the thing I'm getting at, if I'm making sense.

Mr. Evans: Yeah. We're just looking for feedback and to help us flesh that out. So, thank you. Appreciate your presentation.

Mr. Hardman: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Hardman, you are probably exemplary of the type of presentation we've enjoyed the most, because it turned into a bit of a conversation. We've had over 40 presenters, I think, in the last two days, or close to that. We're happy to keep going, but we have some time limits. Thank you so much.

Mr. Hardman: Thank you very much for the opportunity, and best of luck.

The Chair: Thank you for your genuinely irenic approach. We appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Hardman: As a teacher I used to do my song and dance. I apparently still do it. Have a good day.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: That then, I believe, takes us to our last presenter, Bobbi-Sue Menard. Good afternoon.

Mrs. Menard: Hello, everyone. My name is Bobbi Menard. I am here apparently for partisan reasons, but I'm going to try and make the case that that is not so. For my apparent sins in childhood, I sit on the provincial board of the United Conservative Party as an Edmonton regional director. As much as I would like to in seven minutes shove in every single argument 20 CA presidents have asked of me to defend their neighbourhoods at all costs, I'm not here to do that at all.

I'm actually here to make a case that I think is in service of Alberta and democracy as somebody who as a private citizen is gleefully and joyfully involved in the partisan process because I think that can take care of itself on the simple point that this legislation is written very famously for where the puck is going, not where it has been and that the case for this legislation and its interpretation is one of firm optimism on behalf of all Albertans.

In pursuit of that goal, I should like to say that the Edmonton region is an incredibly unique if not exemplary intersection and example of the legislation itself in sections (a) and (b) of 14, with sparsity, density, and a rate of growth of population and communities of interest, including municipalities, regional and rural communities, and Indian reserves. All we are missing are the Métis settlements, although we enjoy a tremendous and robust

population of folks with that background within our community as a whole.

Because Edmonton's primary available land for development and the endless preoccupation of our city council is how, when, and where we will grow, I would like to make the suggestion that optimism is the surest principle for ensuring a reasonable and robust representation of every single Edmontonian now and into the future.

I am well aware that we have constituencies with 40,000 people, and I live in a constituency, Edmonton-South West, that was in 2021 68,000 and growing, and I would imagine it's closer to 72,000 to 75,000 based on what I can see in my own neighbourhood.

The Chair: Sorry. What constituency?

Mrs. Menard: Edmonton-South West.

I would say that one of the most optimistic reasons to interpret the future state of this legislation is what one economist has called the forgotten person. In the last election the 68,000 people of Edmonton-South West experienced very close to the same ratio of disrepresentation as Albertans receive federally compared to the folks of P.E.I. when you look at the difference between Edmonton-South West and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

On that principle alone I am genuinely advocating the idea that within the city of Edmonton and the rural-urban interface the population be reasonably as close to parity as possible regardless of community because it is within that parity of vote expression at the individual level that community is enabled downstream of the culture of the people and choices within that economy and community as they choose to build it.

I will say that I am very deeply aware that electoral fairness is not just about numbers, that community is a genuine expression and that even legislation such as this is downstream of the culture and expression of the people who create it and the economy which enables that. However, the major disparities in voter expression were predictable and wrongly decided in the last round. We should not have 30 per cent, 40 per cent differentials in population within a single electoral boundary cycle. I understand that we had massive if not exponential growth as a vote of confidence from people around the world immigrating to Alberta and that there are currently 1.6 million visibly racialized Albertans and another half million or so who are nonvisibly racialized but are nonetheless immigrants, compared to 650,000 rural Albertans.

3:40

I am advocating sincerely for the optimistic case that those who choose us as a life's passion and choice and leave behind that which they have known have equal right as Canadian citizens of choice to a full expression of their vote with parity regardless if they choose urban or if they choose rural Alberta.

I am also advocating for the idea that we have a rural-urban interface that has radically changed how people access services and how people enable the creation of capital, of wealth, of how they educate their children, how they access government provision, and how their tax dollars are exercised at all three levels of government on their behalf and that recognizing that is more enabling of community rather than a rural-urban dichotomy that is currently costing this province substantive reputational and cultural risks in terms of stability.

I often tell this. In my personal life I've worked in rural economic development for a long time. I work now with my family business, which is rural and high-tech agriculture just outside of Sylvan Lake. Rural Alberta, if you look at population as a heuristic, has stayed flat. Maybe up 1, maybe down 2, maybe down 3 per cent over the

last decade, where urban has gone up eight, nine, 10 points depending on which perfect plot of urban Alberta you pull on.

If you look at that as a heuristic of economic growth, we have a term for that delta or that difference between 10 per cent growth and staying flat. A 10 per cent drop in economic activity is called a great depression, and I grieve for my fellow rural Albertans, where I make a living. Their children are not coming home. Their land is not selling. Their corporate land is at a 40-cent-on-the-dollar discount, and nobody is buying it, and capital has flown to the cities. I don't doubt that these are major, major issues, yet the optimistic case for Alberta is one where there is the ability of every single Albertan to come together within community, within the rural-urban interfaces, the ability to drive your pickup truck or drive your Smart car down the geographic lines that we say are somehow creating a sense of place.

I believe quite firmly that the interpretation of this act is one of optimism, which enables people to cross over those lines and have those conversations that will yield the division we are currently experiencing more so than the expression of discrete community. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Probably some interest in starting a conversation by way of some questions. Great. Do you have any questions?

Mr. Clark: Yeah, I've got a few. I hope you have a little bit of time, because we've got a bit of time here, so I have a feeling this one may turn into a – we have some opportunity here, I think. It's interesting to explore some of this, and I have a few things.

First off, we'll just start. You quoted a few numbers on 1.6 million visually racialized Albertans, 500,000 or so sort of immigrants of other kinds. Then there was a number you quoted for rural Alberta. I didn't quite catch that. I was trying to write it all down.

Mrs. Menard: Six hundred and fifty thousand.

Mr. Clark: Okay. I did get it right.

Mrs. Menard: Yes.

Mr. Clark: I should have told you that. I got that right.

Mrs. Menard: That's okay. So that is a mix of my hot spot, and I'm not on Wi-Fi. I can't look up the name right now because I don't have the tab open on my phone, but it is from a government of Alberta report using 2021 numbers. I realize and I've been told that you'll be using 2024, but I can, if it's required, submit that. Those are taken from government sources.

Mr. Clark: It would be great. Yeah. If you wouldn't mind getting that to Aaron, we'd would love to see that. Just hand it into ...

Dr. Martin: Here's some wireless, by the way.

The Chair: Just give this to the ...

Mrs. Menard: Okay. Let's see if I can look it up in my favourites. Like, I have so many tabs I looked up.

Mr. Clark: It would be great. Yeah. Well, if it came from Alberta Treasury Board, and that's a lot of the data we're using as well, but if you could get that to us, I'd be very interested in those numbers.

Mrs. Menard: Yeah. Absolutely.

The Chair: So we'll just give you a minute to log in there.

Mrs. Menard: Okay. Let's see if I can do this.

Mr. Evans: No pressure.

Mrs. Menard: No pressure. Yeah. I'm going to, like, mistype this instantaneously, and then I'm going to struggle to find it, of course, right?

Dr. Martin: They insist that you use caps.

Mrs. Menard: Oh, it keeps trying to attach me to my phone. If you ask me a question while I grab my phone, I'll listen.

Mr. Clark: No problem. Yeah. We can get the actual data, but we'll take that as read.

Mrs. Menard: Okay. Absolutely. Go ahead.

Mr. Clark: That's great. I'd love to see the source, and we can update that as well.

Mrs. Menard: One hundred per cent.

Mr. Clark: That's more of an interesting data point.

I want to go down the road of this communities-of-interest idea and the rural-urban interface. Your perspective here is really valuable because it's a little different from what we've heard from others so far. One of the definitions that stuck with me of the community of interest is who goes to school together is sort of a real magnet, and I'm curious: do you find that people who go to school cross that boundary? It may seem in some ways like an invisible boundary, but, like, on the west edge of Edmonton do people who go to school inside Edmonton live in Edmonton, go to school in the rural area live in the rural area, Stony Plain with Stony Plain; how do you ...

Mrs. Menard: So I have ...

Mr. Clark: How does that actually hang together?

Mrs. Menard: I'm going to use a personal anecdote. I have five kids between the ages of 18 and 26. I am well aware. Some of my kids played high-performance sports, and some of them went to Harry Ainlay with children from Spruce Grove, who magically had an older sibling with an address at the University of Alberta. Strange but true.

As to the school issue, I think the case for optimism is the fact that, as a matter of policy, there's \$8 billion in new schools coming to Alberta, and that's radically going to change the experience of parents across the province. As a forward-looking statement of growth, when you look at school development and where people choose to live and home relative to school development, a couple of things happen when you're choosing schools for children. Edmonton is a city of school choice whereas rural is not.

When you look at these ideas of how people choose those things, typically if you own land in rural Alberta, your socioeconomic status relative to the capital required to take that land creates a level of homogeneity and community that is unknown within urban Alberta. I am not persuaded that we look at that level of integration and we look at that level of separation, that that school separation is in service and materially better for the electoral process, not because culture and school are not important but because we're not having that discussion meaningfully right now. It is not to our benefit on the whole, is my personal belief. You are not seeing children from rural schools integrate into higher education at the same rate. It's just a simple demographic fact. Kids in rural schools

don't get higher education at the same rate that kids in urban Alberta do.

I find that, if we are going to look at that, they do not have the same number of language options, they do not have the same number of training options, and there are many schools in rural Alberta that lack core technical support. The more that we are able to live as a society with the world that is coming towards us than the one we wish to preserve, which we cannot in a meaningful sense, the better off we will be. I wish that were not true, for the record. For the record, it is more and more difficult to raise children. I say this as the parent of a teacher.

The Chair: Julian?

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much. Our job is difficult . . .

Mrs. Menard: It is.

Dr. Martin: . . . but your remarks about the optimistic case for Alberta layer another level of civic burden on our shoulders. So thank you for that, because your. . .

Mrs. Menard: And yet I was attempting to set you free.

Dr. Martin: . . . view of this is fantastically different than we have heard before, and I very much appreciate it.

I want to press you a little further on what you called the rural-urban interface, a lovely phrase. You're saying we should focus on the interface rather than on dichotomies, and that's very interesting. So you're posing as a social fact that there is an interface because much of the discussion is it presumes the opposite. I think it's very important for us to hear examples of that because it is a very different way of approaching the matter at a kind of meta level.

Mrs. Menard: Sure.

Dr. Martin: That is, in fact, as you rightly point out, the expectation of the act.

3:50

Mrs. Menard: Absolutely. I guess the first, most practical example I would point to in our consumer culture is that I wish we could put up a map of the Costco locations in Edmonton in the metropolitan region. The Costco map is a reasonable expectation of how people travel and make life choices, as the expectation of consumer culture. Now, you can have all sorts of interesting side discussions of how consumer culture interacts with political expectation and prosperity and a matter of policy, but within Alberta the Costco map is a really excellent representation of how we have changed.

You can run against that the map of where my gas card is, working for a rural business – that's my UFA card – and how we access the stuff of life and how we function, which starts in Alberta both literally and metaphorically with petroleum and then our groceries and our agriculture. It demonstrates, I believe, a really clear example of how urban, exurban, and rural are interacting together, and that many of those ideas of community and culture are downstream from the reality of how we live our day-to-day lives, and that the optimistic case, which I'm trying to make, is that how we behave in setting up the core functions of our lives enables us to make better decisions in and around our communities and more robust decisions.

Dr. Martin: I think it's very instructive that very large retail corporations – Costco is an excellent example – plan these things very carefully, where they're going to invest capital and staff and

that they would choose to locate or maintain existing Costco warehouses is a good indicator of catchment areas, to be sure.

Mrs. Menard: I think that the second example I would point to is the changing demographics in the bedroom communities of Edmonton for immigration. There is a real shift in how immigrants are viewing the bedroom communities, or suburban communities of Edmonton, based on, one, can they get a mortgage; two, where can their kids go to school? Where can they also access work? And what we're seeing is in some ways absolutely exemplary Canadian Albertanness, as we watch our immigrant communities be able to access the level of capital required to move out into rural Alberta, and you're seeing them spread out on a consistent basis. I for one am absolutely delighted by that fact. I think that the Alberta promise is being made real in front of us, whatever side of the political spectrum that you are on. That understanding of community, that through osmosis moves out further and further, more of them take up agriculture, that trend and that forward-looking perspective is really, really important because that is as it is, not as we imagine it used to be.

Dr. Martin: If I may just conclude, at least now, osmosis is exactly the right image, and in fact you took the words almost right out of my mouth. But I would be very grateful if you could provide your notes to our clerk, Aaron, who's hiding somewhere.

Mrs. Menard: Absolutely.

Dr. Martin: He's always on the phone somewhere. But we'd love to have this because it's such good food for thought.

Mrs. Menard: Thank you.

Dr. Martin: And it would be particularly helpful if you could include all the examples you hadn't really got to.

Mrs. Menard: Yeah, I absolutely will. I'll have to, like, add a few things in because they're sort of sticky-noted across my screen. But I will get his e-mail, and I'll provide them within the next 24 hours, absolutely.

Dr. Martin: That's super.

The Chair: Susan, any questions, comments, dialogue?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. Yes. Thank you for your presentation.

Mrs. Menard: Oh, you're welcome.

Mrs. Samson: It's very detailed and high level, so I'm going to ask you a question, to give me an example. We've often talked about the challenges of mixing rural and urban. My particular thought was: if you have one MLA and the region is split between rural and urban, how would that enhance the rural from your perspective? Why is that such a good thing? Like, you have said why you want it, but I've been told numerous times why it's a difficult thing. Why is it a good thing from your point of view?

Mrs. Menard: When you have a 50 per cent – let's not pick 50/50. Let's pick a 25 per cent rural, which is tacked on to a larger 75 per cent urban population. It actually serves as a moderating force on the 75 because it enables and requires that particular representative, regardless of their political stripe, to balance off needs. It serves as a moderating force.

The simple fact of the matter is that the population of rural Alberta is insufficient relative to urban Alberta with the growth in

population to maintain the level of influence that it has unless it acts as an integrated moderating force. Enabling rural to participate with urban within a body of MLAs changes the breadth of perspective of said MLAs because you will have pure urban, pure rural, as well as mixed. That level of diversity of perspectives is valuable inside the Legislature, from my point of view, regardless of political stripe, and it also enables the reasonable representation of people's life work as capital and investments, inside farmland, inside urban, to have a downstream effect on the culture and policy that we have as an economy.

Mrs. Samson: We get a lot of push-back from MLAs who have said that the workload on a straight rural constituency is immense. We've taken that into consideration in our deliberation. Then, in the same breath, different people have said the mix of priorities makes it difficult to have a clear voice when trying to advocate.

Mrs. Menard: Clarity of voice is not an alloyed good because it automatically means that you have FOMO, fear of missing out. While singularity is important, if we have a series of MLAs across 89 people who all have a level of singularity, they have no inherent impetus for compromise, nor does it increase the empathy required for good decision-making and consensus-based policy development.

Rural and urban, whether we like it or not from an economic point of view, are currently separating. Increasing the representation of rural, rather, over top of urban on a population basis diminishes the overall importance and efficacy of the vote as a matter of accessibility. People deserve to have an reasonable parity of the impact of their vote, and they also deserve to have a wide spread of perspectives and responsibilities within their MLAs.

Really briefly, for the rural MLAs I do believe that there are definitely regions within this province where that eight-hour drive is just an absolute job killer. I'm not saying that those folks should be in that 65,000 population at all. I think those exceptions are real and valid, and they should be there.

I do think, and I'm going to say this as respectfully as possible as somebody on the volunteer side who works with a lot of MLAs, that they have many, many options in the ways in which they can discharge their duties. As much as I have a huge degree of sympathy and empathy for the driving and the demands of the job as I perceive them to be, there is a level of cultural affinity within urban that very rarely sees an MLA in the same way that rural does. That cultural affinity is insufficient to the cause of voter agency throughout the province, whether they live in rural or whether they live in urban. It's not paramount to that.

I believe that the forgotten person in this equation is the person in urban, as urban experiences substantive growth, whose voter access is diminished over time if we do not set this up so that we can accommodate future growth. There's been no substantive evidence to say, while our current growth rates are bonkers – thank you to the federal government – that growth will dissipate or that rural has a clear pathway to catching up to the growth rates of urban.

4:00

Mrs. Samson: I agree. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: What are your thoughts on the idea of – let me structure it this way. Right now it seems like we tried to have our boundaries along the lines of the existing municipal boundaries. Is there an advantage in the way that you're thinking to having the inclusion or a situation where we would have two MLAs representing one

municipality, for example a rural municipality? Would that be an advantageous representation or disadvantageous?

Mrs. Menard: You mean like split a community of 10,000 or 20,000?

Mr. Evans: Not worrying about, you know, following – we would follow community interests, we would follow geographic boundaries. We would be less concerned about municipal boundaries. In those circumstances you could have a situation where you would have two representatives who are representing different parts of the same municipality, so you have, theoretically, two representing one.

Mrs. Menard: Fair. Completely fair. I'm just going to use a personal example or personal experience. I was the campaign manager for the UCP for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain in the last election. The two communities have – believe it or not, Stony Plain is massively more conservative than Spruce Grove, especially along what I would call the eastern wall, which is becoming a commuter and bedroom community of Edmonton. It is much more, like, as a partisan matter or a political persuasion matter, liberal than the rest of those communities. What was genuinely fascinating to me relative to your question inside this conversation is that there was an expectation that it was truly rural, yet neither case was that correct.

When we're seeking to balance these ideas and these expressions of community and how population changes our own personal issues and experience day to day – I say this to my colleague who lives in Lamont. I work in rural economic development as a consultant with her from time to time. We live 90 minutes apart and in two different economic worlds, just absolutely, phenomenally different experiences of economy. When we talk about smaller communities and how they experience economy and participation and the validation that comes in our consumer culture of the last 20 to 25 years of how prosperity is expressed and a representation of how we enjoy our community, which has become, to my way of thinking, a dominant mode of culture – and we can discuss whether that's healthy or not at another time. When we speak to this idea of, "Could you have two representatives of a smaller community?" I do believe that is true because we have set up the design of our communities in such a way that it is reasonable where you express economy and culture and prosperity to draw those lines.

For example, would it include industrial and, say, the heart of the community on one side of a line, on one side of the track, say, in Spruce Grove, and you could have the north side of the track completely be a different universe just in how there are folks who are in a trailer park and there are folks who own \$2 million mansions on, like, 40 acres of hobby farm, cheek by jowl, side by side? It's not always the size of the community. It is how we interpret community, and usually in our current culture that is downstream from our experience of economy, measured by personal prosperity.

I am making the case for optimism, not that that isn't important – and it is reality – but that when we distribute votes in the most equitable manner possible, we enable better discussions, better decisions, better compromises at all layers of government in and around those ideas of how we will be able to express ourselves more fully as human beings.

Mr. Evans: As an additional comment, what's interesting – you know, our perspective as commissioners, having travelled about as much as we have so far, and about to do more, the individual definition that everybody holds in terms of what they consider

rural and urban: there's a vast difference in understanding. It's probably most illustrative, for example, in Pincher Creek, which is a very small community. They have a definition of what they consider rural and urban, and those in Pincher Creek consider themselves urban, and those outside of Pincher Creek are designated as rural. Now, what they don't know is that in Edmonton and Calgary everybody is rural, so it's very unique to have these discussions about urban and rural, because it's all a matter of perspective.

Mrs. Menard: Oh, absolutely. Our family business – hopefully this is not recorded – is Smoky Trout Farm, so we are halfway between . . .

The Chair: Actually, it is recorded.

Mrs. Menard: Okay. Well, it is what it is. There you go. There are personal details. My spouse: his dad was at Halliburton for 50 years and moved back to Beaverlodge, so we still own in La Glace farmland, and my spouse will tell you that he grew up in a town. I am unable to find it on a map. Well, I can, obviously, and we go there. But I absolutely agree that there is a sense of perspective, and sometimes I try to make the argument to folks that the rate of change is less important than the frequency in which we experience that rate, which goes to the definition I think you're putting forward. The more often we experience a high speed of economic growth or a high speed of economic decline, the more often we change our definitions of how we understand our sense of place in the world.

The Chair: Mrs. Menard, you are obviously a big thinker. You blue-sky, and you've thought about a lot of things, and you've rattled our presentation just for today, but let me ask you. I want to set up what I understand you're saying and then quiz you a little bit. Okay?

Mrs. Menard: Okay. Here we go.

The Chair: So tell me this. How long have you lived in the southwest?

Mrs. Menard: I lived in Edmonton-Meadowlark for a long time, and it switched around halfway through, and now I live fully in Edmonton-South West. I've been where I live currently for four years, at the very tippy-top corner of Edmonton-South West, just outside of Costco and River Cree.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Menard: There you go.

The Chair: Tell me this. Let's imagine you were born and raised and lived your entire life in Edmonton-Mill Woods, and you worked in Edmonton-Mill Woods, your kids all went to school in Edmonton-Mill Woods. Would you be thinking the same way now? I know it's a hypothetical.

Mrs. Menard: Absolutely.

I used to live, like, in Meadowlark, which has very little change, is much more senior and stuff like that. Would I feel the same way? I actually think I would feel – when you look at Mill Woods and how the population has developed there and the rate of change, Mill Woods I think is at about 37 to 42 per cent immigrant population in the last 30 years.

The Chair: Oh, yeah. At least that.

Mrs. Menard: When you look at those – so we have those 2021, where they put together for every single riding the population distribution for age, income, and all of those things. They hand them out for election years. One of the things that is really interesting if I lived in Edmonton-Mill Woods is that my experience and perception of the rate of change would be a different idea of my built environment than if it is in Edmonton-South West.

Your built environment. I used to be – oh, that's really nerdy. I used to be the managing editor or the editor-in-chief of *Okanagan Home* magazine, so I have very strong opinions about this. Your built environment experience inside of Edmonton-South West, so what you go out and you see as a human being within your brain every single day, is in a constant state of flux where I currently live for where people have put their money and time. In Edmonton-Mill Woods it's a different experience because it has changed based on the visual signals of socialization, which is visibly racialized Edmontonians. Would I feel the same? I think that Edmonton-Mill Woods should have a different shape, form, and be potentially smaller-esque. I can't remember where they sit. They're not as large inside population as . . .

4:10

The Chair: It's 58,700.

Mrs. Menard: Oh, 58,000, right? So they're 10,000 less than Edmonton-South West, and they're 7,000 less than Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Chair: No. There are 20,000 less than Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. Menard: Yeah.

I think that despite the fact that their housing has not changed in a substantive way since the '80s, when it just boomed – right? Mill Woods boomed in the '80s. That sort of idea of how change happens: yes, it should be physically larger. Yes, it probably should go outside the Henday, or it can go up into Gold Bar. I'm not necessarily fussed in the directions which it goes. I am more interested in the idea that Edmonton-Mill Woods is reasonably comparable in voter access to representation as the regions around it because it is experiencing the same, or slightly greater amount but reasonably the same, as Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-South in change and the experience of it as a community.

The Chair: Okay. I was more interested in how you thought your thought process would develop.

Mrs. Menard: I would be sad in almost any circumstance to see my numbers go up if I was in a smaller number of people. I think that that is inevitable because you think: I have an advantage here. If I live in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and I've got 41,000 people for my rep, of course I'm going to be sad. I could call up my MLA and have 27,000 less people to compete with to get an appointment. That may make me personally sad, but as a body politic, that's corrosive. It just is flatly corrosive. My sadness is not greater than the needs of every other Edmontonian to have a reasonably equitable access to an MLA, such as the quality that that MLA may be. With 89 of them coming up, I'm sure it's going to be ever more diverse in terms of quality. But my sadness, as an expression of my personal beliefs, is insufficient to overcome the imperative that everyone has equality on this.

The Chair: Okay. We bleed into the country and the electoral districts in the perimeter of the city of Edmonton and create a bunch of blended or hybrid ridings.

Mrs. Menard: I do believe that there is tremendous value in doing more like Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-South, and even into Edmonton-South West because it creates a third perspective within the Legislature. I believe that also in Calgary, because . . .

The Chair: Okay. Well, let's just stick with Edmonton.

Mrs. Menard: Okay. But I do believe it.

The Chair: The three bottom ridings of the city easily could be blended or hybrid.

Mrs. Menard: Yup. So could Edmonton-West Henday. Perhaps the limitations would be Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Meadows because of Sherwood Park and Edmonton-North West because of St. Albert.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay.

Mrs. Menard: But otherwise, no. I do believe there is tremendous value because Edmonton is deeply diverse in its economic expression. The heartland is real. There's tremendous manufacturing in various places, and most folks who live within a 45-minute drive from downtown or even a 30-minute drive from Costco – the rural expression is of preference, not of reality.

The Chair: Okay. I want to limit . . .

Mrs. Menard: Sorry.

The Chair: I could keep dialing and clicking you.
Julian, you've got one more question.

Dr. Martin: Short and snappy. I could go on forever building a complete theory of representation on the basis of your assertions, and I would enjoy that.

To recap, if I might, you're asserting that an ecosystem, so to speak, of electoral district types is healthy for Alberta at the macro level and should be at minimum sustained as part of the array of electoral district types we offer.

Mrs. Menard: Yeah.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Menard, for coming and sharing with us your perspective and, obviously, the results of a lot of thinking on your part, and for that, we are grateful.

Mrs. Menard: Thank you for having me.

The Chair: It doesn't mean you make our job any easier. Let me tell you that.

Mrs. Menard: I am sincerely – if I had a goal, and I wrote a goal down for this, it was to give you a reasonable set of rationales where you could find a way forward to be optimistic and confident to express on behalf of all Albertans equal access to the vote.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much.

We will adjourn until after dinner tonight at 6:30.

[The hearing adjourned at 4:15 p.m.]

