



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Grande Prairie

Tuesday, June 17, 2025
6:30 p.m.

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Grande Prairie

Public Participant

Bob Marshall, Reeve, County of Grande Prairie No. 1

6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 17, 2025

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to Grande Prairie's public hearing of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. First of all, thank you for coming this evening when we know there are conflicting demands on all of us. By way of introduction, my name is Justice Dallas Miller. I'm the chairman of the commission, and I also serve as a justice of the Court of King's Bench in southern Alberta, way down south in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat.

The other commissioners. To my left is Susan Samson, a long-time resident of Sylvan Lake and an experienced municipal politician who has served terms as councillor and mayor of Sylvan Lake and operated a private business with her husband for years. She's also the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee medal for her volunteer activity and has been named a citizen of the year in Sylvan Lake.

To her left is John Evans, KC, a lawyer with a province-wide firm known as Stringam. He works primarily out of the Lethbridge office and conducts trials across the province. His legal ability has been recognized by being awarded the King's Counsel designation, or KC. John also does some trials, I believe, up in this territory as well. John also volunteers as a member of the Alberta Judicial Nominating Committee.

To my right is Dr. Julian Martin, who is a retired history professor from the University of Alberta with advanced degrees from Cambridge University. Julian has volunteered on many committees in Sherwood Park and Edmonton area throughout his career and has also served on provincial quasi-judicial tribunals such as the Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board.

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

We are your Electoral Boundaries Commission for Alberta. I would like to just go through a bit more of an introduction in terms of our task ahead. The legislation that governs our operation as a commission has been amended to provide for 89 electoral divisions rather than 87, so that is one big factor we must take into account in our work.

To give individuals some perspective as to what is before us, the timeline is helpful. As a commission we were established by the Speaker of the Legislature in late March of this year. We met a couple of times in April to discuss process, the program, and the schedule, and we commenced public hearings in late May. We've been going full strength in terms of touring the province since late May, and we will work this week and continue on Monday, next week, with our final day of virtual hearings. We have been to many communities, criss-crossing across the province, and this week we are dedicating to northern Alberta. We were in Peace River this morning, and we will be in Slave Lake tomorrow and Hinton and then to Red Deer.

Once we complete our public hearings, which will be next Monday, we begin deliberations as a commission. We will be meeting for three days next week to discuss proposals for the new boundaries, and we will be meeting no doubt throughout the summer, and eventually we will come up with an interim report. I shouldn't say "eventually." We will come up with an interim report, and that will be registered and filed with the Speaker of the

Legislature no later than late October of this year. That interim report is then subject to more public hearings and public feedback. We will receive that throughout November and December, and we will have a final round of public hearings then in January. That will then lead us up to a final report, which will be filed with the Speaker of the Legislature in late March.

As everyone in the audience knows, each constituency or electoral division or riding – all those terms are used interchangeably – elects one member of the Legislative Assembly. Voters in that division, or riding, do the voting for that member.

To give some perspective on what our task is, it's helpful to look back at the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission, which provided their final report in 2017. It's only eight years ago, but the world has changed a lot. Alberta has changed a lot over that time, and the contrast is helpful to illustrate the task that we have. In 2017 the Electoral Boundaries Commission, at that time, had an Alberta population of 4,062,609 people. That, averaged out over 87 ridings, came up with a mean average of 46,697. That's not the target number for each electoral division. The target number is a range of anywhere from minus 25 of that number to plus 25. Those figures are before you at 35,023 and 58,371.

Our situation this time around is a vastly increased population. The population that we will be relying on: the number is 4,888,723 Albertans, plus we have the 89 electoral divisions to deal with. The mean average then results in 54,929. Again, the target population is that range of minus 25, of 41,197, and up to 68,661.

The biggest factor, in addition to the change of electoral divisions, is the huge population increase. That growth has not been spread evenly across the province, so our task is to fashion and construct electoral boundaries after we hear from Albertans such that we can come up with effective representation across the province. That's the principle that we'll be relying on, not one person, one vote. We are not part of the American system. That is an American feature, not part of Canadian electoral law.

When we come up with our report, we will be working through several principles that are included in the legislation as guides for us. We will be dealing with the relative sparsity and density of population across the province. We will be dealing with issues such as community interests in each electoral division. Boundaries will be looked at or determined to some extent by geographic features. That's prominently in the rural areas. When I say "rural," that's outside of Calgary and Edmonton. That's a very rough definition of rural. Also, communication lines and transportation routes will serve as potential boundaries. Our task, ultimately, is to come up with understandable and clear boundaries for Alberta and for Albertans.

Finally, we will take into account other appropriate and important factors that we as a commission deem relevant. That's a catch-all phrase that will encompass any interesting or informative or helpful information we receive through the public hearing process. That, by way of background, is the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, our mandate, and our schedule.

In view of that, we are here for Grande Prairie. Our first presenter will be Mr. Bob Marshall. Please come forward. Have a seat. We've got, obviously, lots of time, and we want to hear from you. Please identify yourself, where you live, and proceed with your presentation. Once you've completed your presentation, we will no doubt have questions and carry on a dialogue based on what you've told us.

6:40

Mr. Marshall: Well, thank you for allowing me to speak. I have actually met Greg Clark before. When he was leader of the Alberta

Party, he came up here to speak to municipalities. I am the reeve for the county of Grande Prairie. I live just outside of Grande Prairie, to the west, Wembley, on an acreage. With your presentation I do have some concerns around some of the guidelines, the criteria, and mainly how it's around population. We saw that the last time, and it seemed like it was primarily driven around population. When you look out historically – I'll probably get called on this from our history professor here – 100 years ago the population was primarily 80 per cent rural and 20 per cent urban because we were an agrarian society. Things have changed a lot in those 100 years. Now it's flipped, and it's 80 per cent or even more on the urban side. It seems like, with the immigration that we're experiencing, it's heavily populating into those larger centres.

The other one I'd like to highlight is effective representation. I would challenge the thought that an MLA in Calgary, their constituents, even though there is a higher density of population, can be 15 minutes away and walk to their MLA's office where, if I look in the north, if you look at the NADC area, which is Northern Alberta Development Council, we're 60 per cent of the province's land mass; we're only about 10 per cent of the population. But the resources that come out of the north, that feed the provincial revenue base from oil and gas to agriculture – in the northwest here there's more agricultural land than there is in all of Manitoba. From an agrarian base, oil and gas, forestry, and even tourism – how many of you have heard of Big Sam? Have any of you heard of Big Sam, the 1,000-pound pachyrhinosaurus skull, 72 million years old, that we excavated last fall?

Mrs. Samson: I did hear about it.

Mr. Marshall: We streamed it live. There are 1 in 25 households in Canada that saw it on one of the news feeds and 1 in 50 in Britain. Again, from a tourism aspect we have huge potential up here as well.

When you look at, again, some of our MLAs: it takes five hours to drive to their constituency office to see them versus being able to walk 15 minutes to see your MLA. Effective representation is more than just population. It's also: how can you engage with your community, and how do you represent the resources that your region is bringing to the province from a resource revenue?

Some of the other concerns are that an MLA in Edmonton or Calgary has one city council to deal with; the MLA that represents our region has the town of Wembley city council, the town of Beaverlodge, part of the city of Grande Prairie because that's split, the county of Grande Prairie, the MD of Greenview. There are five just for our MLA plus ag societies and different community groups. Again, in large centres you have one community group probably within your organization, where we have multiple ag societies, multiple community groups that your MLA in our region or in the north or in any rural area has to represent. The challenge is much greater for a rural MLA to have effective representation than it is in the larger centres.

Population is an important aspect of it. My concern is those numbers on the wall, when it's so heavily skewed: are we going to actually have proper representation in the rural areas and especially in the north? I look at Minister Loewen's riding right now. Basically, he's going from Fox Creek all the way up into Clear Hills county. It's a really challenging district that he has to look after and a lot of travel with that.

Again, 41,000. When you're looking at the north here, we have maybe 500,000 to 600,000 people total, and that's mainly concentrated around the city. The county of Grande Prairie has over 100,000 with the city and everything in it, and the other population base will be Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. There is another

probably 100,000 based around there. Then the rest of the population is distributed across the north, and that makes it even more challenging.

I really implore you to look at more than just those numbers. They're important. I don't disagree with that, but we really need to have proper representation for those rural areas, especially the resources that come out, so that we have the representation there so we can get the investment back into the region so that the money that is coming out from royalty revenue and everything else can feed the provincial coffers and we have the ability to manage them properly for the people that are in the area that are working in those regions versus someone in an ivory tower sitting in a downtown office building that doesn't know what is going on out in the more rural and remote areas.

I would really implore you to look at more than just what is on the board there with those numbers. I think it's important to all of the citizens within the province to look at that. I challenge this; I had the same concerns the last time, and it seems like at the last boundary review there was a number and it was primarily focused on the population. They weren't even willing to listen to anything else that came out. Their focus was, from my perception, from what I recall eight years ago – it was a long time, and my memory is not what it once was. What they were mandated to do by the government at the time was to look primarily at those numbers and come up with a balance of: how do you come up with those boundaries?

Again, I know that you look at community and there are other factors, but to me it seems like it's a subset of what you have to do with this. How do you look at this and then how do you balance everything else within it? I would challenge you to look at effective representation and have this as a piece of it but also those other factors. I believe they're key if you want effective representation for all Albertans within the Legislature.

Thank you for hearing me.

The Chair: I'm going to take the prerogative of the chair and quiz you, okay? Normally I let my fellow commissioners go. Just by way of explanation, effective representation can include several factors. The primary one is population, but it's not the only one. When we look at the two Grande Prairie ridings, the city, you're at a population of 50,852 now, and Grande Prairie-Wapiti is at 53,900, almost 54,000, so you're in the sweet spot there. That's not a problem.

We've been all over. Let me say a couple of things to you. Land doesn't vote. You talk about distances. How would you like to have seven different languages represented, none of them English, in your riding? What do you say to that?

Mr. Marshall: Well, I say that we have the same challenges in the north here because some of those immigrants are coming to our region as well. It's: how do we manage the influx and set those immigrants up for success within our region? We are short of skilled labour for a lot of the jobs that we require, so when we are bringing in these immigrants, whether they're – I'll give you an example. I have rental property in Wembley. Two years ago I had a young couple from Ontario. She's a nurse. He's a red seal welder. I forget where they were out of again, but he was working for the Coast Guard. He looked for: where's the best place to be a welder in Canada? Grande Prairie, Alberta. So they moved here. No jobs set up, two young kids, and they were here. Within three days he had a job lined up as a welder. She had already had a job as a nurse because we are short of those skilled labourers. That's just within Canada.

6:50

The next year, when they moved out, I had another couple from Quebec phone me looking for a place to stay because the vacancy rate is less than 1 per cent in our region. I've had immigrants for the work program that we have around the province to bring in immigrants, allowing that to come in. You have to pick and choose. I mean, the number of people that were applying for a place to rent was incredible. Great to be a landlord but challenging when you don't have a place to stay. Again, we have those same challenges, maybe not to the same extent, same volume as what the cities are seeing, but we're still seeing those immigrants come to our region as well.

To the numbers: yes, we're sitting pretty good, but like I said, the two population centres are us and Wood Buffalo in the north. The rest are going to have a hard time meeting those numbers. How are you going to have proper representation, especially as it's being driven up by population? The people are coming into Calgary, primarily, but people are starting to move from Calgary to Red Deer and then up to Edmonton as well as Calgary getting flooded.

We're trying to get people up here, but, again, how do we make sure that they're successful? How can we set them up for success so that they can integrate and they can help the economy and be successful in the community versus – I mean, the one documentary I saw on CBC a couple of years ago, the amount of immigration we've had over the last two years: more people are leaving because they're not seeing the success. They're sold a dream but they're not able to realize that dream, so they're turning around and they're leaving just about as fast as they're coming in. We've had record immigration, but people aren't able to see that success that they're being sold. That's a challenge that we have, and we have an abundance up here.

I mean, you're up in Peace River. In my opinion, it's one of the best places to live. It's colder than hell in the winter, but – yeah; okay – we can golf just about 24/7. We're getting close to that day if you want to go out. So there are lots of different things that draw people here.

Again, I put it back. Yes, we have that same issue here, maybe not to the same extent around languages and stuff. We're all seeing it across the province.

The Chair: You've given us some nice, handy statistics, 60 per cent of the land mass, 10 per cent of the population. What latitude are you using north for the land mass, roughly?

Mr. Marshall: I believe it's around Westlock. If you pull up the map, you can look at the NADC map for Alberta, and it'll show you where that boundary goes. I believe it's just south of Whitecourt, and it kind of goes along. It covers Cold Lake.

The Chair: Okay. Do you have an idea of the percentage of, say, resource development or tax revenue?

Mr. Marshall: Well, I can talk about wonder valley – that's Kevin O'Leary's AI data centre – \$70 billion. The total build-out on that, if it gets to completion, will be a quarter of a trillion dollars because the \$70 billion is just for the power generation and the infrastructure to support all the AI, the electronics, and everything that goes in the building. The vast majority of that is going to be in the buildings itself. That in itself will be a wealth of knowledge.

The amount of resource revenue coming out from south of here in the Montney, Duvernay, into the Greenview area and even into my region – I can take you out and within half a mile of my place I've got Archer. I've got CNRL. I've got Ovitiv all around me with

multiwell pads. Do I have the specific numbers? Actually, that's one thing the RMA, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, has been trying to get, the information from the government to actually see what is the total resource revenue that's coming out and feeding the coffers for the province so that we can help. It's another way of saying: look, this is what we're giving to the province; we need some investment back into our region around road infrastructure, hospitals.

Mr. Evans: It'd be on an MD-by-MD basis, the revenue?

Mr. Marshall: It could be. Again, the province should have a lot under the treasury and stuff, have those exact numbers and stuff. They would know that. Sometimes it is a challenge to get that information from them, but we know it's in the billions of dollars.

The Chair: Do you have access to people in the executive of the association?

Mr. Marshall: We try to work with our MLA to get them to get the information for us. Actually, Minister Horner is going to be here on Thursday, so I plan on having a discussion with him.

The Chair: Can we give you some homework and see if you can get that information for us and submit it or have someone submit it to us in due course?

Mr. Marshall: If I can. We've been trying this for a year, so if I can get it, yes, I will. Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. I've monopolized enough. Mr. Evans, any questions or comments?

Mr. Evans: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Yes. Thank you for coming out. I have a real concern, the same as yours, that the northern ridings – more than just Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Central Peace-Notley but also Lesser Slave Lake – are really challenged. I don't know if you know, but stop me if you know. We have another tool in the act that outlines the boundary commission, the things we can do. That's what I was messing with my papers about. It says that we can have up to four proposed electoral divisions that share a boundary with the province, and their populations are extremely low. That's what we're faced with right now with Central Peace-Notley and Lesser Slave Lake.

Can you talk to me about that connection, that cross-trading, the importance of having every one of those MLAs in place? Like, don't let me put words in your mouth. How important is that, to have all those ridings in place with MLAs?

Mr. Marshall: I believe it's very important. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here. Again, Todd's riding, which is Central Peace-Notley – originally he's from the Valleyview area. I mean, when he first got elected as Wildrose, this riding was split into two. The city was split into two, and we had the Wapiti, and then I can't remember what they were called back then, but it got split. Todd ended up with that long – it covered Valleyview, and then the city was primarily the city riding itself. Then some of that was broken out to cover into the Wapiti riding under Ron Wiebe right now.

Again, if I look at the city of Edmonton, you can be engaged with your people. You know what's going on in the community. You

know exactly what the heartbeat is, what's going on in Edmonton and Calgary. When Todd has to go from Fox Creek to Valleyview to Falher and all those small communities all the way up to Clear Hills county, it makes it a lot more challenging to know. For that MLA, the workload on those MLAs becomes more. Are you really having a proper representation?

I know you plan on going from 87 to 89. I'd like to see them in the north myself. We don't need it around here, but I'm looking – again, another massive revenue stream that comes out of Fort McMurray. You're going to Slave Lake with what's coming out of the Nipisi. I used to live in Slave Lake. My sister still lives in Slave Lake. What's coming out of the Nipisi field there is another huge boon from the royalty stream to the province, and they've got, I think, three different sawmills and lumber facilities in that region as well, and there's a pulp mill there.

There's a lot of resource revenue that comes out, but we need the proper representation. If the MLAs are not familiar, if they're having a hard time to connect with the community because it's so broad, it just makes it that much more challenging than it is. Like I said, when you can walk 15 minutes, you don't have to drive to your constituency office in the cities and stuff. It's just that.

We're very fortunate to be where we're at. No disagreement. I'm very fortunate that we meet the criteria and stuff and that we have the representation we do. I'm talking for the whole north because I truly believe that if we do this right even though it may not fall within those guidelines, we're going to benefit all of Alberta by having this set up properly so that we have proper representation.

7:00

Mrs. Samson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Marshall: You're welcome.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. Yeah. Just to set your mind at ease, you're correct on those numbers from way back. That proportion didn't change for a long time, actually, and then it just skyrocketed, obviously.

You're not the first person to tell us in the last three weeks about huge distances and how that negatively impacts effectiveness of representation, which obviously is the core purpose of this enterprise. You're not the first person to talk about the difficulties that the MLA is put to because of the huge distances. The logistical effort is mission critical and impacts the budget and all sorts of things in significant ways.

Loads of MLAs have to talk to tons of councils, but here it's the distances. I think you're quite right about the two great economic centres being here and at Fort McMurray. We heard much the same story in Fort McMurray, incidentally, about the challenges of distance. I mean, they only have two roads in and out. You don't really have all that many more roads either when you come down to it; you have to go past Fox Creek one way or another.

I am interested, first off, in the fact that there is growth here in population and that people have come more than they've left. To that, you and all your colleagues are to be much credited for building communities where people wish to live. Both the EDs of immediate consequence here to this hearing, Grande Prairie itself and Grande Prairie-Wapiti, are examples of resource-rich and active communities. I'm glad for that.

The numbers all bear out what we would look at if we were plain lazy, and we're not. We agree with you, I think. I know we agree with you that the population can't be the primary driver, and I think it was highly emphasized last time, but we take the act as a package.

The legislators in their wisdom have said that anything, including all these factors, is normal and healthy, so don't just run after a target. We've been pestering all our speakers on any number of topics that might seem obscure on a simple reading of the act. As far as our attentiveness to your anxiety, please rest assured that we are attentive, too.

The difficulty for us remains pretty clear. I mean, even if we accepted – I don't know what we would have to accept, but still we have to live within that actually quite generous vision that the legislation provides us. If we could give everybody more MLAs or double their travel budget – well, we can recommend it, but it's not in our hands.

Mr. Marshall: The worst thing the province did was get rid of its airplanes. That's the worst thing they did.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. I was very shocked about the airplanes.

The Chair: We just talked about that.

Dr. Martin: It's shocking. You know, we can express shock and dismay, but we can't demand it in our report. I think that's all I have to say.

Thank you.

Mr. Marshall: Actually, if I may respond to some of what you said. You talked about some of the population. In our region we just did a census, both us and the city. The city is sitting at just, I believe, 70,000 now. I know the county just did one. We were at, I believe, around 21,000; we're just under 27,000 now. We just finished it last year. Our age demographic is, I believe, in the low to mid-30s. I think ours is a little higher than the city's. I think the city's is kind of 32-33. Don't quote me for these. I know it's in that range, but I can't remember the specifics on that. So we are a very young demographic.

I know that within the legislation you are bound by the act. You have to follow it. You have guidelines to follow. I will, again, challenge the board. Within your report, looking at the challenges, that number hasn't changed around population; it was the same the last time other than the numbers have changed itself, but the guideline is 25 per cent within the mean average. That's a statistical number, and they looked at that. But I'm hoping that we can convince you to see that if we continue down this path, the representation for the rural areas, especially if we continue with the population growth towards going into large urban centres, is going to be even more and more challenging. And trying to meet those numbers and still have effective representation is going to be just about impossible. I would hope that, even within that report, you would make a recommendation that they look at this and have it changed because I don't think it's relevant anymore. Going forward in the future, it's going to cause more issues than the way it's currently worded, especially around the population.

The Chair: Sorry. What should be changed?

Mr. Marshall: Looking at that population number, just saying that: okay; it's got to be the average. There are this many people in the province; here's the average. There are this many ridings, 89 ridings, so if it's divided out, this is now the average that should be in the ridings, plus or minus 25 per cent, right?

The Chair: I don't want to leave you with any false hope. That would be very unlikely to me.

Mr. Marshall: No. It's up to the government to make that change. I had wanted, after the last electoral boundary review, to get in front of the government so that that change could be made, for them to look at it because it's got to be made at the provincial legislative level. It's not at your level, but you can make that recommendation as to – I believe that you can point out that there could be an issue going forward if you continue with this criteria that you have to look at.

The Chair: I don't want you to leave with any false hopes. We cannot touch that minus 25, plus 25. We can make exceptions under section 15(2), but that has a long, long history and it's endorsed by the Supreme Court of Canada, so we can't really adjust those numbers. That's what I'm saying. You know, that gives us the flexibility.

Mr. Marshall: I'm not asking you to adjust the numbers. I'm asking you to make a recommendation to the legislative body that if we continue with the criteria that's set out here, the next time around it's going to be even more challenging to do that.

Mrs. Samson: Can I just say it in my own way so that we're on the same page?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Samson: As the population in the province increases, we know that it's going into Calgary, Edmonton, and, well, in this case, Airdrie, too. Those numbers grow exponentially and make it impossible for the rural northern ridings to meet the criteria.

Mr. Marshall: Or even some of the southern ridings.

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. We see that in Drumheller.

That's the concept. The number now, this year, that this commission is dealing with is a number of 55,000, plus or minus, but that number is only going to grow in eight years when the commission meets again and the challenge is that instead of having two ridings that fall below the 25 per cent, it could be three.

Mr. Marshall: Or even more.

Mrs. Samson: Or more because it's the nature of growth and the nature of how this is.

Mr. Marshall: The way the demographic population is going has changed over the last 100 years. It's a more technological society than it is a hands-on, in-the-field working society.

The Chair: But because it's a percentage, it grows.

Mr. Marshall: When I look in the north, we're not growing as fast. I mean, we are in our area, and we will maybe be okay in the Grande Prairie area and maybe in the Wood Buffalo area, but as soon as you get up to Peace River and into High Level – I look at Minister Williams. He's got all the way from Peace River right to the Northwest Territories border. It's pretty challenging. Again, the population isn't there, and it's not growing that fast unless something – actually, I'll double-check that. If you look at the La Crête area, they're pumping out babies left, right, and centre.

7:10

Mrs. Samson: We just talked about that. We were just told that.

Mr. Marshall: Maybe it won't change there.

The Chair: We have section 15(2), which is that special category.

Mr. Marshall: But it's still limited as to what you can do there, right?

The Chair: There's a limit of four, and we've only used two.

Mr. Marshall: But my concern is that if it continues this way, those four won't even come close to managing when you look at the full – like, if we continue on that way, I think it needs to be looked at through a different lens. I am imploring you to at least make those recommendations, that they look at that going forward.

The Chair: Okay.
Sorry.

Mr. Clark: Not at all. I think it's important stuff.

Mr. Marshall, thank you for coming. It's good to see you again. I have a few questions. I hear you. Absolutely. I mean, it's really striking just spending time here, right? First off, I always love coming to the Grande Prairie area. Like, it's part of the reason that we've met a few times. It's always just good to kind of come up here.

I'm also struck by coming to Grande Prairie having been in Peace River. Like, there's a big difference, right? It's a city, a proper city. You know, as a result, like you say, there's some growth here, but even then the growth is still lagging the rest of the province a bit. I think you're right in terms of the trajectory over time.

You know, the other thing I agree with completely is that the folks from other parts of the world and lots of people from other parts of the country – one fascinating stat I heard the other day is that the city of Toronto itself is shrinking. There are actually fewer people there now than there were five or 10 years ago, and where are they coming? Alberta, almost exclusively. You're right; Calgary tends to grow first and then gets a little priced out or houses are not available, Edmonton – we're seeing that in the population numbers, and I would argue Grande Prairie and area should be a magnet as well because there's a ton of opportunity here.

Just to give you a sense of the scale of what we're talking about, if we add together the Central Peace-Notley and Lesser Slave Lake constituencies, that's 56,000 and some-odd people. Calgary-North East has 85,000 people. This is the kind of juggling act we have, right? As Justice Miller says, we have some legal parameters of what we have to stay within, but then we also have folks in other parts of the province saying: "Hey, wait a minute. That's not fair. I need representation, too."

Again, just to go full circle back to what you're saying, effective representation and the flexibility we have as a panel and the Canadian construct are that it isn't just one person, one vote. If this was the U.S.: too bad, so sad. That's just the way it is. We're just going to go 89 divided by 4.8 million, and that's it, regardless of what that does geographically. Fortunately, we don't have to do that, so we do have some flexibility. I guess that's probably what I wanted to make sure we're clear on.

With that, I'm interested in the two Grande Prairie constituencies. Last time I think it was Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti, if I'm not mistaken, right? They were split. The city Grande Prairie was split in half.

Mr. Marshall: It was one east and one west.

Mr. Clark: One east and one west.

This time we now have one fully urban Grande Prairie and then one partial Grande Prairie and rural surrounds. How does that work? How is it working for you?

Mr. Marshall: Well, actually, between the municipalities, between us, the city and the MD of Greenview, we've got a partnership around economic development. We call it Invest NW. We work very well together. One of the things we've noticed when we've gone down to CERAWeek and other large conventions and stuff is that most of those players want to see that municipalities are working together. They don't want to go into where there's a war. It's not good investment practice. The same as our MLAs are working well with us. We work together with those two MLAs because they recognize that we're stronger as a region, especially if we have to go to the provincial government.

I also sit on and I'm the chair of the Water North Coalition. This is all of the NADC area for all of northern Alberta. It's around our water, waste-water operators, and anything to do with water and waste water. Again, we're 10 per cent of the population. When you have a small community going to the province, are they going to listen to you?

Part of the reason we created this coalition was: let's have a unified voice from the north to go to the province to talk about what our issues are around water, waste water, whether it's operators, succession planning, getting resources, water for life, AMWWP, capital investment, and stuff. We recognize that we are stronger working together as a region and promoting what we have here than we are if we're going off one on one. I believe our MLAs, from what I've seen, are onboard with us, and they recognize that. That's one of our strengths. Why we've got what we have is because of that unified front and working together for the benefit of our people up here.

Mr. Clark: I've certainly had a bit of experience on that regional economic development piece. I agree with you one hundred per cent. There are a lot of horror stories where potential companies come and they find that there's infighting and they just want nothing to do with it. I agree with you completely, and kudos for doing that. I think that's the way to go.

Where you do have maybe differences of just emphasis or focus: you've got one MLA that's working on Grande Prairie sort of city issues and then one MLA that's working on those city and rural issues. How is that working? Is that working, where you've got MLA Dyck, who is Grande Prairie, and MLA Wiebe, who is Grande Prairie-Wapiti? It sounds like they work pretty well together and with the different municipalities. Is that effective when you've got one that focuses just on the city?

Mr. Marshall: Because we're working as a unit – this is our number one priority for the region, and we push that number one priority. We're all speaking from the same song sheet. It's not that the city is doing their thing. We may when it gets to some other smaller stuff, but when it comes to the larger – highway 40X; to get a connector around the city so we get all that heavy traffic out of the city coming up from the south. Everything, all the dangerous goods have to go straight through the city. We're the only city in the province that that happens in. So that's our number one priority for all municipalities and our MLAs.

Maskwa Medical Centre, electrical distribution: another thing we're working with Minister Neudorf on. If you look at our area, we've lost businesses. One of our councillor's brother had a nitrogen plant in Clairmont. He shut it down because it's cheaper to ship it in from B.C. We've lost the Alberta advantage in the north from power distribution. We're paying just about three times the distribution costs than what we are in Edmonton and Calgary and southern Alberta. It makes a huge difference when you're trying to get these large players up here from a business standpoint.

We're all singing from the same song sheet. So it's not that the city is doing their thing, and MLA Dyck is supporting them. We're all together, and we're supporting the same aspect to move forward.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Marshall: The other thing, too, from an economic development standpoint, is that we're 100,000 here. But if you look at the retail resources they have here, with the Costco, the Walmart, and all the other stores, yeah, we don't have as many as the cities do, Edmonton and Calgary. Like, they'll have four or five. But we have pretty much everything that the larger centres do. The city services an area of about 300,000 to 350,000 people. On Fridays you'll watch the B.C. plates coming in from Dawson and Fort St. John; on Sunday they're all going back home and then even north and stuff. The area that we service from a retail servicing standpoint is huge as well.

Mr. Clark: Okay. I have one more question if the judge will indulge. Looking to the east, then – you mentioned Minister Loewen's constituency of Central Peace-Notley. One of our sort of challenges there – and as the justice mentioned, we can go plus or minus 50 per cent on some of those. Central Peace-Notley is one of them, but it's right close to that line. If we needed to borrow, if you will, parts of another constituency, perhaps Grande Prairie-Wapiti or somewhere else, are there kind of natural spots there? If I look along – what was that? – highway 43, like you say, or elsewhere. If we needed to add a little bit into Central Peace-Notley from . . .

Mr. Marshall: Currently they're using the Smoky River as the west boundary.

Mr. Clark: It looks like. Yeah. Exactly. So a little bit west of that, does it make any sense at all for any of those communities or that part of the province to kind of cut into Central Peace-Notley? Or any other thoughts on that entire constituency? I know it's a fairly big one. If we need to expand that a bit to bump up that population, do you have any suggestions how we might want to look at doing that?

7:20

Mr. Marshall: Well, I mean, if you come west, you're going to chip into the county. But, again, Todd is another one that we work quite closely with as well. We have a pretty good working relationship with most of our MLAs. If it did move across, if that boundary got changed a bit to keep Todd viable, I don't think people would have a problem with it. I'm only going to speak for myself.

Mr. Clark: It's a tough question. I think the big message I'm hearing from you – make sure I've got this right, though – is that the folks up north and in this region work closely together. We draw lines on a map. We've got counties. We've got cities. We've got constituencies. We've got reserves. There are lots of different . . .

Mr. Marshall: Even Martin Long cuts into the MD of Greenview. He's on the southern part of MD of Greenview, and we've got Ron on the northern side. So, I mean, even that municipality – it's a large municipality, mind you – is cut into sections as well. If it got moved, so be it. If it makes sense to do that, then I don't see a problem. Then we've got three MLAs that we can hammer on.

Mr. Clark: That's good. That's really helpful. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Mr. Marshall, the really neat part of this exercise that we're on as a commission is that we touch on the philosophical

basis of what a democratic system looks like. You touched on that a little bit, the rule of minus 25, plus 25, okay? I mean, when you get down to it, how do we run ourselves as democracies? That's the neat little philosophical, if you like it, and I think you touched on that a little bit. But then we've got to get intensely practical. Like, where do the lines go, and how does it impact, you know, members of the Legislature? How does it impact the voters, and what type of voters does it impact?

Now we're on the tail end of our public hearings across the province, and I was struck by the distaste for anything suggesting a hybrid or a blended riding in some of the places we visited. They did not want to be mixing rural and urban people at all. By the look on your face, you betray your thought process: how can you not get along that way, right?

Mr. Marshall: You're shooting yourself in the foot if you can't get along with your neighbours. You know what? The only . . .

The Chair: Well, I mean, in fairness, it's bigger cities. They don't think they have common interests with, maybe, people on the fringes of their municipality.

Mr. Marshall: I would challenge that. Who is looking at that? Is it your municipal leaders?

That's one thing we had to get out of ourselves. Our constituents don't care where the municipal boundaries are. No different than where those boundaries are. All the people on the ground want is for you to do your job as a municipal leader or even a provincial leader and provide them the services and the quality of life and look after them. They don't give a rat's patootie about where the boundaries are. For those communities that are looking at that, I would say that it's only the municipal leaders that know where those boundaries are. I know where the boundaries are, but 90 per cent of the people don't. I didn't know where the boundaries were until I got into politics.

The Chair: In response to the issue of whether blended or hybrid ridings are helpful or effective, you would probably vote yes for that, right?

Mr. Marshall: Yeah. Well, we had it before. The city was split into two. The city may have had a different perspective in the past because the city and the county were like this in the past. We are not like that anymore.

The Chair: I'm struck by the fact that no one from the city government is here.

Mr. Marshall: Yeah. I was surprised, actually, because Aquatera, our water utility – we just had the AGM and the meeting there, so I just left the mayor and the other mayors.

The Chair: Grande Prairie is not unique. Province-wide we have not had a lot of representatives from municipal governments.

But let me throw one other thing to you. As we look at how previous Electoral Boundaries Commissions have looked at solving the challenge, especially historically, it's always been rural, urban, rural, urban, rural, urban, and urban means Calgary and Edmonton. We have those two different terms. I'm struck by the fact that that is the wrong terminology and that rural and urban do not constitute urban being Calgary and Edmonton and rural, everything else. We have now got a province that probably needs four descriptors at least and more regional focus and looking at effective representation. We saw that a little bit in the south, and we are

certainly seeing it up north. So I guess I'm throwing that out. Would you agree with me on that?

Mr. Marshall: On looking at things differently?

The Chair: With at least four different terms instead of just two, rural and urban.

Mr. Marshall: Help me understand what your four terms would be. I am open to it personally.

The Chair: I guess maybe the three: Calgary and Edmonton, hybrid, and rural.

Mr. Marshall: Yeah. I don't see a problem with it. Again, if you look at what people want on the ground, it's mainly people in my position or in your position that would understand what those boundaries are. Most people don't. I do have some people thinking – and that was part of the problem in the past, where the city and the county were like: the city wants this. There was that, and there's still some of that. But it's the leaders at the top that are starting to change that because the leaders were part of the problem in the past. So if we change it at our level, then we can drive that change and show the people that it's better to be a unified front than it is to go at each other. It's not constructive, and it's not conducive to anything good.

The Chair: Okay. Anything arising from that?

Well, thank you very much, Mr. Marshall. Thank you for your written submission as well. It's obvious that you've thought about this for some time, processed it, and you have flown the flag for this region very well. Aside from my comment that “we ain't gonna touch and we're not even going to recommend a change of the minus 25 and plus 25,” we will take your comments into consideration.

Mr. Marshall: Which ministry does this fall under?

The Chair: We're actually under the Speaker of the Legislature.

Mr. Marshall: So it's Mr. McIver now? Okay. I know Ric quite well.

The Chair: Yeah. We will submit the report, and then, as I maybe didn't say so clearly, when the final report gets submitted, it's up to the government to take our recommendations and implement them, tweak them, change them, or establish the boundaries.

Mr. Marshall: I understand the criteria you're under, and just at my level I need to speak to our representatives and see if they can start pushing that, to look at things differently. I know there are larger problems when it gets to the federal level and stuff, but I really think that for the benefit in the long term we need to start looking at things and be prepared for what is coming our way and looking ahead versus not being prepared.

The Chair: Please consider doing that homework for us and getting resource numbers to us if you could.

Mr. Marshall: I will see what I can find out for you guys, and I will send it to Susan because I have her card.

The Chair: Good.

Okay. We will adjourn this evening's public hearing. Thank you again for presenting, Mr. Marshall.

Thank you. We'll adjourn.

[The hearing adjourned at 7:30 p.m.]

