



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Hinton

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Hinton

Public Participants

Linda Brown
Bernie Kreiner
Wendy Robinson

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[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our Hinton meeting of the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Alberta. First, I'd like to thank you for coming. We look forward to hearing from you, and we look forward to a bit of a dialogue with the presenters. 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 of Alberta, mainly in southern Alberta.

The rest of the commission I want to introduce. Next to me is Susan Samson, a long-time resident of Sylvan Lake and an experienced municipal politician who has served as councillor and mayor. She and her husband ran a small business in that community. She volunteers extensively there, and for her volunteer activities she's been recognized in receiving the citizen of the year award and the Queen's diamond jubilee medal.

Next to Susan is Mr. John Evans, KC. John is a lawyer in Lethbridge, Alberta. He works with a firm known as Stringham, which is a province-wide firm. Most of his work is focused in Lethbridge, but he also conducts trials throughout the province. John's legal ability has been recognized by him receiving the King's Counsel designation, or KC. He also volunteers on the Alberta Judicial Nominating Committee.

Next to me on my right is Dr. Julian Martin. Dr. Martin is a retired history professor from the University of Alberta. He has advanced degrees from the University of Cambridge and volunteers on many committees and in his home city of Edmonton and now his home hamlet of Sherwood Park. Dr. Martin also serves on quasi-judicial tribunals for the province of Alberta.

At the far end of the table is Mr. Greg Clark, an entrepreneur who hails from Calgary. He is an entrepreneur and consultant, focusing on information and knowledge management. Greg has the experience of serving as a member of the Legislature for Alberta, representing Calgary-Elbow. He, too, is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II medal. He currently serves as chair of the Balancing Pool for Alberta and consults and advises organizations relative to proper board governance.

We are your Electoral Boundaries Commission, and we've been tasked with proposing a new set of electoral boundaries for the province. A couple of things that we must deal with as a commission and wrestle with are, first of all, an expansion of the Legislative Assembly from 87 seats, which is the current number, to 89. The province has deemed it important to add two new seats to the Legislature, and it's our task to determine where those seats go. Our second task is to deal with the immense population growth that Alberta has experienced the last few years, and I'll talk about that in a second.

First, to give you some idea of what our responsibilities are. This commission was appointed by the Speaker of the Legislature in late March of this year, and from the time of our appointment we are on a time clock. We have met as a commission on a couple of occasions in the month of April, planning strategy and planning process and schedule. Then we started our public hearings in late May, and we have been on the road ever since late May. We have criss-crossed the province. This public hearing is our second last; tonight we are in Red Deer. We conclude our in-person hearings this evening, but we're also going to conduct a virtual hearing next Monday. Once we've completed all the public hearings, we will then commence deliberating. What will we be deliberating over? Well, we'll be working on our initial report or what has come to be known as the interim report.

As I said, we're on a bit of a timeline. By late October we must submit an interim report of our proposed 89 new electoral boundary lines. That report must be filed with the Speaker of the Legislature by late October. That will become public immediately, and the public will have an opportunity to respond to it. We encourage you to watch for that report in late October. We will then open up an opportunity for written responses to our initial report, and that will run through November and December. In January we will then conduct a second round of public hearings, hearing from members of the public very specifically in relation to our proposal.

After we've concluded that and receiving input to our initial proposal, we are then tasked with finalizing our final report, which is due in late March 2026, and it must be filed with the Speaker of the Legislature. Once that is filed, then the Legislature takes on the task of passing appropriate legislation, relying on our report in the manner they see fit.

As you know, Alberta is divided into several electoral boundaries – that's a map of our electoral boundaries currently – and each constituency elects one member of the Legislative Assembly. Voters in that riding or constituency or electoral division elect that particular MLA.

To give you some idea as to what we're faced with, it's helpful to compare what the last Electoral Boundaries Commission did. In 2017 the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission issued a report, and their report was based on a population of just over 4 million people. In 2017 the population of Alberta was estimated at 4,062,609. When you take that population and you divide it among 87 electoral divisions, you come up with a mean average of 46,697. That's not the target. The target is a range for each electoral division, and that range can vary from minus 25 of that mean average to plus 25. You can see the numbers for the 2017 commission. They had a range of 35,023 up to 58,371; 2017 was only eight years ago, but it's a long time ago in terms of Alberta's growth and in terms of changes to the province. This time around we are using a population of 4,888,723; that's almost 5 million.

You've probably heard news reports that Alberta has hit a population of 5 million, and that may very well be correct, but we are obligated under the legislation to rely on the most recent decennial census of Canada, which was conducted in 2021. Statistics Canada regularly updates those numbers, and not only does the federal government through Statistics Canada update those numbers; the Alberta government through the Alberta Treasury Board, its Office of Statistics and Information, updates and validates those statistics, those population numbers, on a regular basis. We've come to the conclusion that the best figure, the best population estimate we can rely on, is what we receive from Statistics Canada, filtered and verified by Alberta Treasury Board as of July 2024. That number is the number you see before you, 4.8-plus million.

When we take that number over 89 electoral divisions, we come up with a mean average of the figure you see, 54,929, almost 55,000. The target population per electoral division, then, is the minus 25 to plus 25 range that you see, anywhere from 41,197 to 68,661.

Of course, the population growth has not been uniform across all electoral divisions. It is largely concentrated in the two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton. Our task is to look at the population throughout the province, look at the boundaries, and come up with a proposal and a recommendation to the Alberta Legislature that provides for effective representation. That is the term that we use in Canada for proper representation. We do not use the American system of one person, one vote. We are very distinct from the Americans. We rely on effective representation, and that term has been used by legislators throughout the country and specifically

Alberta and by the courts that have determined whether boundaries are appropriate.

9:15

Now, in completing our task, we must consider several factors, and these are all identified in the legislation, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, that directs how we conduct our activities. First, we look at the relative density and sparsity of population across the province. Secondly, we look at common community interests and organizations that may be within the proposed electoral division. We also use geographic features. That is more prominent in areas outside the city, but even within cities we use geographic features like rivers, boundaries, roadways, et cetera. Communication and transportation lines are also factors that we will use in determining boundaries. Our task as a commission is to create understandable and clear boundaries for Albertans. That's important in order to provide effective representation. It's important for individuals to exercise their democratic rights so they know what division they live in and how they go about exercising their right to vote.

Finally, the legislation provides us with the ability to use any other appropriate factors that we deem important in creating boundaries. We receive that to a large extent from the public hearings that we've conducted. There is nothing that replaces in-person public hearings for us as a commission. We've learned a lot about this province. We've learned a lot about the regions outside of Calgary and Edmonton. We've learned a lot about what Calgary and Edmontonians want. Nothing replaces being in the community. For these last several weeks, while they may have been tiring for us, they have been exhilarating for us as a commission to see Albertans and hear from them directly.

Now we are here this morning in Hinton to hear from you. I have, I believe, a list, and I would call on Wendy Robinson, our first presenter. Please come forward and have a seat at the table to my left. We will try to get our map up for this electoral division. Identify yourself, tell us where you reside, and begin your presentation.

Ms Robinson: All right. Do I need to do anything with this?

The Chair: No, that will pick you up. By the way, the hearings are recorded. The recordings will be on the Electoral Boundaries Commission website. As well, they'll be transcribed by *Hansard*, and everything you say will be on our website eventually.

Ms Robinson: Okay. Good morning. My name is Wendy Robinson. Thank you for giving me a couple of minutes to speak with you all today. I came to this today wanting to speak specifically to West Yellowhead. It is the constituency to which I belong. I live by Nojack in West Yellowhead, and that is the far east end of the constituency here, so range road 112. That's about an hour and a half east. I'm a long-time resident from Yellowhead county. I grew up on the east end of this constituency. I moved away for several years and returned 15, 16 years ago to work in the area.

Where I live has been a part of the West Yellowhead constituency for only the last two provincial elections. Prior to that, our area was part of the Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland county constituency. I've been politically active in our local constituency association for about the last five years now. I also have a degree in political science, so this is, like, just something I love anyway. But I don't have a lot of really clear thoughts.

I just wanted to share with the panel today some of the challenges that I've seen from my work with the constituency association as well as having previously worked for Yellowhead county and worked with our council and understanding some of the challenges

they've had. Right now currently when it comes to municipal boundaries, it does not follow the electoral boundaries, which means that the Yellowhead county constituency has two MLAs with whom they have to engage on a regular basis, which complicates matters.

That was kind of what I had. I just have a couple of scattered thoughts that I thought I would share. I looked at what the purpose of the commission and this panel was, which, as you had spoke to earlier, was some of the common community interests, ensuring that that is the case for our different constituencies and that there is effective representation. Those are kind of my key points.

Coming from the east end and having been a part of different constituencies in the past and working within Yellowhead county and the breadth of the county, I feel like I have a pretty strong understanding of the different cultures that are available. Like, for example, on the east end we have a much more agrarian, agricultural focus. There is very minimal engagement with farming communities to the west. The far east end is much more agriculturally minded as well as I can speak to that the natural travel boundaries or patterns for people on the east end do not follow to the west. They go to the east. If I'm going to drive an hour and a half somewhere, I'm going to Edmonton, where there's a full range of services, right? People on the east end of the county do not frequent Edson, Hinton, or Jasper, particularly, for large amounts of time. They might go to Whitecourt. There is some movement up to Whitecourt for services, but that's about it. Yeah. The people on the east end of the county have much more rural, agrarian kind of concerns and interests.

Like I had said earlier, right now Yellowhead county has two MLAs that they have to engage with regularly. I am not with Yellowhead county anymore. This is just my experience from when I was with Yellowhead county. I'm not advocating on their behalf. But I have seen from that work the challenges that they can face having to have multiple MLAs as well as the fact that there isn't consistency in that boundary. That boundary for West Yellowhead follows down from Woodlands county, and it follows highway 22, and then it cuts off. A small portion of Yellowhead county is part of the Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland Constituency Association, just a sliver, about a thousand people. That would be my basic calculation, that about a thousand people have a different MLA than the rest of the county. The county is a little over 10,000, so about 10 per cent of the county has a different MLA.

As well, the challenge that I experienced in my work is that when it comes to government services, the boundary line there is different from that even. It doesn't follow the municipal line, and it doesn't follow the provincial constituency association line. Many boundaries in health, in children's services, education actually follow along highway 751, which would move the West Yellowhead Constituency Association west about half an hour. I don't know. We're Canadian. We use distances in time, right? That is more natural boundary, including the RCMP as well. I've done some work trying to advocate for some services, and the RCMP boundaries are so different than all the other boundaries, so it makes it even more complicated to try and drive any change or advocate effectively for our residents. Those are just a couple of the key points that I wanted to make about the West Yellowhead Constituency Association.

9:25

I recognize that we're a very large constituency, and trying to organize in this way has many, many, many challenges, but I also believe that it is important that there is some consistency in terms of the populations that are within a constituency association and that that is recognized in the new boundaries with the increased

population. We're rural. It's a challenge, but we know that. That is something that we fully acknowledge when we live rurally, and we can make it work. My only real concern is that east end of the county and how it doesn't really fit in with the way that the current boundaries are set up.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Let me just start, Ms Robinson. So in order to take out that 10 per cent of West Yellowhead county – right? Sorry.

Ms Robinson: East Yellowhead county.

The Chair: The name of the county is east Yellowhead?

Ms Robinson: No. The county is just Yellowhead.

The Chair: Yellowhead. Okay.

Ms Robinson: It's so complicated, right? West Yellowhead and Yellowhead. Yeah.

The Chair: I'm wondering if . . .

Ms Robinson: Can I show you?

The Chair: Yeah. If Aaron could maybe just move the screen – we can't see the screen – and if you could go up and show us what it would take to take . . .

Ms Robinson: So this is highway 21, and the municipal boundary line actually follows, I believe, the river, so it would actually bump out to the east kind of, closer to that . . .

The Chair: On the other side of 22?

Ms Robinson: On the other side of 22, yeah. Like, that is a boundary that's used in Alberta forestry, but that's about it. Yeah. It's not a huge area, but for some reason they have a different MLA than the rest of the county. It wouldn't take much to move that over to follow the municipal boundaries.

The Chair: And you're satisfied it's only about 1,000 people?

Ms Robinson: It might be, with the rural area, up to 2,000, but the hamlet that's in that area, Evansburg, is, like, 700 people.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Samson: Before you leave – sorry.

Ms Robinson: Can I sit down again?

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. You can sit down.

The Chair: The commission will have questions of you, Ms Robinson.

Go ahead, Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Sorry. I just wanted to ask this question because I don't get what you're saying. Are you saying that the boundary on the east side should align itself with highway 22 or 751?

Ms Robinson: No. I think it should either follow the municipal boundary – right? – which is neither of those. It's actually the river.

Mrs. Samson: I'm not sure what you mean by municipal boundary. Are you talking about the . . .

Ms Robinson: Yellowhead county.

Mrs. Samson: Oh, the county boundary. Okay. So follow the county boundary on the east side?

Ms Robinson: Yeah.

Mrs. Samson: Are you offering up another option?

Ms Robinson: Yeah. Or highway 751, which is where there are a lot of administrative boundaries with government services.

Mrs. Samson: Okay. Sorry. I just didn't get what you were saying.

The Chair: You still get two MLAs, then, for that county.

Ms Robinson: You would still have the two MLAs, which is the challenge, but you know it makes it easier to advocate to specific MLAs.

The Chair: Sure. Refresh my memory. Where do you live? It's not on here. The name of your hamlet?

Ms Robinson: Nojack. MacKay-Nojack area. It's kind of in between Wildwood and Niton Junction. It's kind of right in between there.

The Chair: Okay.
Anything else, Susan?

Mrs. Samson: I actually do have a few other things. When you talk about travel corridors, does Whitecourt, which is similar in size to Hinton, have more services that attract people there, or would it be a similar selection of services in both communities?

Ms Robinson: I would say that it's probably similar. It's similar in size. It is a key provincial government service area, so there are lots of, like, the provincial government services that you might be looking for. I actually even think it's very similar in terms of the economies in those communities. People in Edson will travel to Whitecourt; people in my area will travel to Whitecourt, probably most specifically for health services. There are larger doctors' offices . . .

Ms Brown: More doctors, yes.

Ms Robinson: More doctors. Yeah. So people from even in the Wildwood, Evansburg areas would travel to Whitecourt for some services.

Mrs. Samson: Before Edmonton?

Ms Robinson: Well, they would go to Edmonton first, probably, or Spruce Grove. Like, there's an advantage to travelling east, right?

Mrs. Samson: Mm-hmm. You mentioned the agricultural industry more to the east of the riding. With a change in the boundary, do you feel that would eliminate that connection to the agricultural sector?

Ms Robinson: If it went west to highway 751?

Mrs. Samson: Yes.

Ms Robinson: Somewhat. There are still pockets of agriculture that happen further west, like in the Peers, Shining Bank, Fulham area, but it probably would because then the focus really would be on forestry, oil, and gas.

Mrs. Samson: Which are the main industries. And tourism?

Ms Robinson: Tourism to a degree, yeah.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: Just one question. You're talking about highway 751. Is that west or east of 757?

Ms Robinson: Which is 757?

Mrs. Samson: Right there.

Mr. Clark: West. It'd be right up from where you are in Nojack.

Ms Robinson: Yeah. It's, like, almost straight down from Whitecourt. Well, not quite but a little east of the Whitecourt down there. You have to do a dogleg.

The Chair: South and east of Whitecourt.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. The last commission found that this electoral district was growing a bit faster than the provincial average at that time, and now it has just sort of flattened out, as it were. To what economic factors do you put that slowdown in growth?

Ms Robinson: You know, I'm not an economist. I'm not a hundred per cent sure.

The Chair: You're not a demographer?

Ms Robinson: You know, I would say a portion of it, for Yellowhead county in particular, is an aging population. You probably have a lot of people that might either be aging out, as I put it, moving away or passing away, and there hasn't been the influx of people into the area. You could also say automation. Economically we might be doing fine, but if things are being increasingly automated, that isn't bringing new people into the area. High cost of living. Also, like, not everybody is prepared to travel large distances, so it makes it harder for people to choose the West Yellowhead area as opposed to more populated areas.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. Those are good answers. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. Just a couple of things. We've got a little bit of a GIS tool here. Your numbers are pretty much exactly bang on according to what we have, which are some estimates. Yeah. If we added the east boundary up to Yellowhead county, that's adding about 1,000. If we take away, as you say, we go up 751 to the boundary and all the way east, including to the edge of the Yellowhead boundary, I think is what you're talking about . . .

Ms Robinson: Yeah.

Mr. Clark: . . . it's about 1,000 as well, give or take. Yeah. Those are really helpful sort of options in terms of how we can maybe

understand, which is why we come and travel and get the literal lay of the land.

9:35

I'm curious if we can shift our attention to the other end over to sort of closer to where we are and even further west into Jasper. Can you tell me a little bit about Jasper and this area and how the kind of flows go? I presume it's east-west. Is there a connection, Jasper and Banff, or is it pretty much Jasper and Hinton and parts east?

Ms Robinson: You know, you have somebody else that's here that can probably speak to that better. My assumption is that it's probably more an east-west. There could be some travel down to Banff, but that's a really long travel, and it's not something you can do in the winter consistently, right? Particularly core, essential services, you're probably not going to choose that option. You would be choosing to go to the east to Hinton. I know some people will also travel west into B.C. for certain things, Valemount being probably the closest town there. I don't know if that happens quite as much, though. But, yeah, very much definitely, I would say, from Jasper in terms of services, collaboration with other municipalities, things like that, it definitely travels more along the highway 16 corridor east.

Mr. Clark: Great. Perfect. Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you again for your presentation. Thank you for coming. I will excuse you to return to the audience. However, if you can stay and hear other presenters, that would be helpful because we have some time, and we can benefit from people who have gone to the effort to make a presentation.

Thank you.

Ms Robinson: Okay. Sure.

The Chair: Our next presenter is Bernie Kreiner.

Mr. Kreiner: Greetings.

The Chair: Good morning.

Mr. Kreiner: Good morning. Let me give you just a bit of context about myself. I grew up in Whitecourt and went to U of A in Edmonton and then had a career in local government throughout my working life from Fort McMurray, Slave Lake, and then Hinton.

I come from a perspective that democracy is a wonderful thing, and we are blessed in Canada to have a pretty functioning one, but I am a bit concerned about the perception of politics on the street in Canada, and that made me want to come and speak to you, not that you can change that perception directly, but there are some things that democracy can do with boundaries that will make people feel better and have better understanding of their governments. I did a random test at a coffee shop earlier this week. I asked 10 people what riding they were in and whether it was a provincial or federal riding. Five out of 10 passed, and the other five didn't. And this is in a coffee shop where I consider the people are smarter than your average Joe, so it was very interesting.

Nonetheless, I'll speak to my presentation because I'm speaking from a fairly high level on some thoughts. The purpose of democracy is to ensure all voices are fairly heard. We risk moving away from that in Alberta if we're not careful. Having fair electoral boundaries and a support structure for MLAs to engage with citizens to act in the overall best long-term interests of the public is very important, and I'd like to see that strengthened. I think part of it can be strengthened by sound boundaries. Perhaps this

commission's report can advance some of the ideas that I'm going to put before you.

I'm going to speak in two contexts. One is about the electoral boundary questions directly that your mandate has, and then others are what I call MLA support structures and solutions that might relate to better engagement. I know that many rural ridings might be pushing for: let's go tougher than the court decision in 1991 and have a greater than plus or minus 25 per cent ratio. I am not sitting here suggesting that at all even though I'm a rural Albertan. I want everyone's vote to count roughly equally in Alberta. That's fairness, as I see it, cut and simple. I don't want to play politics and make rural ridings special and that a vote counts more there than it does in an urban setting. I used in my presentation 5 million residents for the 89 ridings, but I think that the principle of overall fairness is: let's stay within the 25 per cent throughout. That's my first thought.

I would like to see the government simplified. While service boundaries are another topic that isn't within your mandate, which was mentioned by the previous speaker, certainly electoral boundaries between provinces and federal could be.

In fact, if you do the math, a federal population of a riding is about double what a provincial one is going to be under the new mandate, so why don't you just make life simple for rural Alberta and make two provincial ridings in every federal riding? And dare I say, in eight years let's be smart enough to jointly work with the federal commission on boundary reviews so that the provincial and federal boundaries are determined collectively and collaboratively at the same time in eight years. That's my fundamental thought. I mean, a bit of out-of-box thinking perhaps, because I know Albertans aren't always happy working out things with the federal government, but that, to me, makes democracy easier to understand for Canadians and Albertans.

That would mean that the recently revised Yellowhead riding, that actually got narrowed and goes further down the Rocky Mountains now . . .

The Chair: The federal riding.

Mr. Kreiner: The federal Yellowhead riding.

The West Yellowhead riding would be the north half of that riding. That would be my broad view.

We can talk about some of the interests and alignments and values that I think are somewhat different in agricultural West Yellowhead versus in resource-based and tourism-based West Yellowhead that actually, I think, support an approach like that. In fact, that was part of the consideration that the federal government made when they made the boundary follow the Rocky Mountains more and stretched it from Grande Cache down to that southern area near Banff.

At a bigger picture level I want to reraise the idea that we actually amalgamate between federal and provincial ridings and think about doing that together in eight years and maybe even looking at it more carefully for this round for provincial even though the federal has done its thing in Alberta. I've written my report in a more formal sense, two pages, and I provided it to your secretariat, but I'm just ad hoc'ing the main points from when I was speaking to you. That's where I stand on the boundaries questions as a citizen of Alberta.

What are suggestions of supplemental approaches that could improve democracy related to boundaries and effective electoral representation? I've given that a fair bit of thought as well, and I acknowledge the difficulty of connecting well in rural ridings. In fact, I went to one of these hearings back in Slave Lake in I don't know what year, and an Aboriginal gentleman played a marble

game with the commission. He gave the chairman of the commission the responsibility to pick six marbles, and then he put them under the chairs in the room in two different ways. One was an urban riding where we put seven marbles in one chair and five in the other and said: get six and come back to your chair. And then he timed it when he put 12 marbles in 12 chairs. That's the truth between an urban and a rural riding in terms of trying to represent them well. That demonstration was very effective, I thought.

So what about the idea of actually having and allowing any party to run two individuals as one MLA in a riding? This hasn't been done very often although it does exist in democracies in the world, but that would still require that that riding only has one vote in the Legislature.

The Chair: You're suggesting one party, two candidates.

Mr. Kreiner: No. I'm suggesting that any party can choose, instead of running one person as a candidate for MLA, to actually declare a team of two who would actually only have one right and responsibility to represent the party as one vote but would have two people doing the leg work in the riding.

This structure would allow a team and would allow a lot more connecting with the interest groups and the broad electorates in their riding. That is a true challenge. You know, how many parades do you have to be at on Canada Day, as an example? Not to say that's where a lot of effective engagement occurs, but before and after, at the pancake breakfast, that's what happens, right?

9:45

I also believe that all MLA offices in Alberta should be provided with a very high-tech and effective public engagement computer phone system—I see one of your panellists is in the communications field—that they could use. It's purely optional, but it would be a tool available to all MLAs, irrespective of their stripe. It should be updated regularly. It should be a tool kit that helps them engage in the most scientifically effective ways possible in a modern democracy. I don't know that that's happening well in Alberta today. I think that's another recommendation that could strengthen effective representation long term.

I provide a bit of out-of-the-box thinking for you because I believe that Canada's democracy is one of the best in the world, and I want it to continue. I do believe we should create a vibrant democracy that is fair to all concerned, and that's quoting one of the four-way tests of Rotary, "fair to all concerned." We need a structure that instills confidence, not cynicism, in Alberta. We don't want to be on the slippery slope that other democracies in the world are on right now.

Those are my thoughts, and I welcome your comments, questions, and clarifications.

The Chair: Great. Your written copy has been left with Aaron?

Mr. Kreiner: Yes, I have.

The Chair: Great. Thank you. Thank you for this very well-thought-out and challenging presentation. As I understand it, in Alberta's early history we did have two MLAs per riding in some instances.

Mr. Kreiner: But they had two votes, I think, at that time.

The Chair: Oh, it could be. I don't know.

Mr. Kreiner: I believe so. There are other democracies in the world that run the way I've suggested partially, and it's purely optional in most cases.

The Chair: Okay. I'm sure we've got some questions and dialogue coming.

Dr. Martin, anything you wish to engage in with Mr. Kreiner?

Dr. Martin: Well, thank you. We've heard in many, many parts of the province the difficulties of effective representation that are caused by distance, spotty communications, connectivity, having to drive roads in the winter, the usual sort of things you would expect. I wanted, really, to ask your opinion as to whether your MLA is able to get around to see most of the people in a calendar year.

Mr. Kreiner: He certainly gets to all the communities in the calendar year, for sure. It's a test. I mean, months ago he was put in as a minister, so that's definitely held him back from getting out and about as much as he had in the past. You know, he represents a lot of different municipalities and constituent groups from Aboriginal reserves and Métis settlements as well, so it's a real challenge to be out there because even currently it's a big riding. It's, I think, the fourth largest in Alberta, from what I can see on the map.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you. I do appreciate the creative thinking and also your commitment to democracy as a principle. I think it's why we're all here, our strong belief in that. So thank you, and thank you, all, for coming.

One of the challenges we have in Alberta, sort of a good news, bad news situation, is that we've added about 8 million – not 8 million. It's 800,000 people – it feels like 8 million at times – since the last time we did this. The vast majority of those people are ending up in Calgary, Edmonton, and surrounding areas. One of the things we need to balance out is that, for example, Alberta's two smallest constituencies up north, Central Peace-Notley and Lesser Slave Lake, have about 55,000 people, and Calgary-North East currently has about 85,000. You've got almost, you know, these large variances.

I think you've spoken to that plus or minus 25 per cent, which is pretty well established by jurisprudence and our legislation. West Yellowhead although not quite that dramatic when it was created was about 8 per cent over the provincial average and is now about 6 and a half per cent under. That sort of is the effect of West Yellowhead, sort of staying roughly the same but the rest of the province sort of moving up. That creates a bit of a challenge, but it's off-set by those vast distances, right?

This is all sort of this entire exercise: well, on one hand, yes, but on the other hand, yeah. There's a bunch of back and forth. I guess my question to you is just a little bit like Ms Robinson's. Do you have any thoughts or suggestions if we needed to amend the boundaries at all perhaps to add a little bit of population to start to balance things out a little bit? Is there a logical place to do that, or do you feel like there are other changes that you would suggest specifically for this constituency?

Mr. Kreiner: Yeah. I haven't looked at the big-picture challenge that you guys have in that context, but, to me, Whitecourt and the addition of that area doesn't feel right to me. Even the agricultural part that was spoken about: it's very culturally and economically different from, I'm going to say, even Edson, Hinton, Jasper, Grande Cache. We relate more to folks like Nordegg and Lake Louise and Banff. Even though it's not our travel pattern, that's what we relate to better.

I've watched that change since I moved here in 1993. I call it the change in how many per cent of our region is the granola crowd. The granola crowd is definitely real and has evolved for that territory that I've just described. So I'm more comfortable considering north-south a bit more in the riding, and that's what the federal constituency association changes were as well.

Mr. Clark: Okay. That's helpful. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Susan, any comments or questions?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. Yes, I do have a few questions. In a north-south configuration you would keep Edson, Hinton together with Jasper and look at moving down through the parks.

Mr. Kreiner: Yeah. That's one scenario. You could include Rocky Mountain House or Edson. It depends. It's a bit of a juggling act.

Mrs. Samson: It is.

Mr. Kreiner: You guys have a big challenge in front of you to do that.

Mrs. Samson: Yeah.

This is a question off topic, but your relationship to Slave Lake. Were you employed in the Slave Lake area?

Mr. Kreiner: I was the town manager from '86 to '93.

Mrs. Samson: Can you add any suggestions to us about boundary changes up there? You looked at the big picture about balancing and populations, and, you know, they're in a bad way up there. They fell well below the average.

Mr. Kreiner: Yeah. I don't know. I believe in the principle that every vote should be relatively equal in power, so I think it's going to harm rural constituencies because that principle, to me, overrides anything else. I think it's mostly about having tools, and that's where I turn to the second half of my presentation about a team-based MLA system, where high-tech, effective, what I call interface systems could work better even though face to face is still the best communications tool we have.

Mrs. Samson: I think one of the things that we struggle with when we look at the different options that we're faced with, because there's minimal population in northern Alberta, is taking those ridings and carving them up, which, in effect, loses an MLA. Could you speak to that?

Mr. Kreiner: Well, you know, you could make arguments all over the map, like the fact that 90 per cent of the economic activity of Alberta is generated by the resources of – what? – 20 MLAs' ridings. There are all kinds of those considerations. But if you're really "democracy is about people," then, unfortunately, we have to bear our losses as a rural part of Alberta. That's how I see it. That's hard to accept, and I'm sure you're going to hear many presentations from folks who really would like you to swing the other way and make rural ridings extra special. I think I leave you with two possible tools that can make it somewhat better for democracy.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: A couple of questions. Thanks for the presentation and the valuable information, and I'm going to see if I can get some

more out of you. Would you agree that there is – I’m interested in the granola crowd demographic. In thinking about, you know, an ED that is more north and south, is there less connection, for example, between Hinton and Edson and Whitecourt in terms of sort of the economic drivers?

Mr. Kreiner: I mean, for resource-based we’re all the same around some of those drivers: oil and gas, forestry, and, more in our area, coal. Tourism is the one that the granola crowd values most. It’s actually what I call quality of life.

There’s another sector we don’t talk about enough called the footloose sector.

9:55

The Chair: Sorry; the what?

Mr. Kreiner: The footloose sector. They’re the folks that can live anywhere. They’re living in areas like – well, you saw that happen in Cochrane and Canmore and those areas, and it’s going to emerge in our area fairly quickly, soon, too. Those folks want the granola environment and the culture that’s somewhat different than heavy industrial.

Mr. Evans: Yeah. Tell me about the granola crowd, the footloose sector, that you would say exists. Is there more in Hinton as compared to Edson?

Mr. Kreiner: Yes.

Mr. Evans: And then in . . .

Mr. Kreiner: Jasper had even more, so understand that. It’s interesting when you watch the fire and what it did for Jasper. They stayed, and they still are there, for many months if not years now. The folks moved to Valemount and Hinton because that’s where they feel most comfortable. That’s the closest to the granola crowd that Jasper people have, all right? That’s culturally comfortable for them, other than if relatives were putting them up somewhere else in Alberta or B.C.

I’m sorry. I didn’t answer your question or let you finish.

Mr. Evans: No. You did, actually. That’s helpful.

Then you would say that there is a connection. Thinking about the federal riding, if there was a corridor that captured a significant demographic like the granola crowd and the footloose sector in that north-south corridor, you would say that they would qualify as, for example, a community of interest.

Mr. Kreiner: Absolutely.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Sir, you’ve obviously done some research here. I didn’t check, but tell me. The new federal riding: do they use highway 40 as the eastern boundary?

Mr. Kreiner: I haven’t looked at it carefully enough. Sorry, sir.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

Your proposal, which I think you appreciate is a future idea – we can’t or maybe we do have the jurisdiction to take what you’re saying and lump two rural ridings into one federal one. Have you looked at the Ontario situation at all? As I understand it, the Ontario provincial boundaries mirror the federal ones largely. What you’re saying is a halfway step to what they do in Ontario.

Mr. Kreiner: Yeah. I did not know that’s what they do in Ontario. But my guess is that if you walked into a coffee shop in Ontario, they’d have a better sense of who represents them and who’s federal and provincial because they relate to similar boundaries.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Kreiner: The world is getting more complicated, but democracy should be fairly simple for the people, and it hasn’t continued to be that.

The Chair: Yeah. Federalism is a fantastic governing tool, but it does confuse things sometimes.

Mr. Kreiner: Indeed.

The Chair: Any other questions or dialogue?

Mrs. Samson: I have one more. I hadn’t looked down at this aspect of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. When you started the conversation around the granola gang, would it be a good fit, in your opinion, to take in Nordegg and to the crossing in that area, or would you go as far as Rocky?

Mr. Kreiner: Yeah. Rocky becomes a bit like Edson, where there are starting to become other factors, but I think it still fits. Whenever the agricultural sector has the dominant values, it’s different than the granola crowd needs, okay? That’s my experience. I don’t know today how much Rocky Mountain House is affected by the agricultural, but I know there’s agriculture on three sides of them. It’s like Mayerthorpe, in a sense. Mayerthorpe is sort of the boundary of true agriculture in our area, shall we say, or Evansburg.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Kreiner, in our report we’ll use common terminology, but if we use new terminology, we have to define it. Do you mind if we reference you when we reference footloose and granola sector?

Mr. Kreiner: Sure. I mean, those two are my words. I’m sure there are academic words that say the same kinds of stuff.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, thank you so much. You obviously put some time and thought into this, and we, by our quizzing and conversation, are interested in it. Thank you so much. I’ll excuse you now, but please stay if you can to hear any other presentation.

Mr. Kreiner: Thank you.

The Chair: Is Linda Brown present, and does she want to present?

Ms Brown: No. I just want to ask a question.

The Chair: Yeah. Please come forward and have a seat. Identify yourself. Tell us where you’re from.

Ms Brown: Linda Brown. I live just west of Hinton. I’m not as discreet as the other two presenters, so I’ll just ask the question. Is there a political agenda here?

The Chair: Why do you say that?

Ms Brown: Well, in 2022 the feds redistributed the electoral boundaries to their benefit. Is this possible?

The Chair: Well, I don't know if you were here at the beginning, but we talked about this being an independent commission of the Legislature appointed by the Speaker. I don't know if it's on the website, but two of the members are appointed by the government side and two of the members are appointed by the Official Opposition, so this is an independent commission.

Ms Brown: Hopefully. Okay.

The Chair: I'm not sure I can speak to the 2022 federal system at all.

Ms Brown: Right. Okay.

Why are we redistributing the electoral boundaries? I heard everything that was said, okay? Just give me a direct answer, please.

The Chair: Okay. Why? Two reasons to start with. We're moving to 89 electoral divisions from 87, and we've had about 800,000 people move in to Alberta since the 2017 commission. If we left it the way it is, the representative culture would be fairly chaotic, and there would not be effective representation for Alberta.

Ms Brown: That was a very discreet answer.

Mr. Evans: Plus we're legislated to do it.

The Chair: Yes. We're mandated by the Legislature. The Legislature has said: thus shall you do.

Ms Brown: Right.

I can't really see that map. Are we enlarging or are we shrinking?

The Chair: Well, the last Electoral Boundaries Commission in 2017 pegged the population at 50,604, which I think Mr. Clark said was slightly ahead or above the mean average at that time. Now the population is 51,390, which is below the mean average of 55,000.

Ms Brown: Right. Okay. Good.

Good luck, guys.

The Chair: Thank you. We hear that a lot.

Ms Brown: Yeah. You're going to need it.

The Chair: Okay.

Anybody else want to present or any comments from the previous presenters? We've got a few minutes. We're happy to hear anything supplemental.

Well, thank you so much for coming out. I will adjourn the public hearing now. We'll remain for a few more minutes before we pack up and leave and go to our last presentation, which is in Red Deer this evening. Thanks for coming out.

[The hearing adjourned at 10:04 a.m.]

