



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Slave Lake

Wednesday, June 18, 2025
12:57 p.m.

Transcript No. 24

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Justice Dallas K. Miller, Chair

Greg Clark

John D. Evans, KC

Julian Martin

Susan Samson

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC

Philip Massolin

Aaron Roth

Rhonda Sorensen

Christina Steenberg

Amanda LeBlanc

Clerk

Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of
Parliamentary Services

Administrator

Manager of Corporate Communications

Supervisor of Communications Services

Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Slave Lake

Public Participants

Mike Skrynyk, President, Lesser Slave Lake UCP Constituency Association

Ken Vanderwell, Vice-president, Lesser Slave Lake UCP Constituency Association

12:57 p.m.

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the afternoon session of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission here in Slave Lake. I thank you for coming. We've got a cozy room and just the right size for it. By way of introduction, my name is Justice Dallas Miller. I'm the chairman of the commission.

I want to take a moment to introduce the rest of the commission. To my left is Susan Samson, a long-time resident of Sylvan Lake and an experienced municipal council member and former mayor of Sylvan Lake. Susan and her husband operated a business in that community for some time. She has volunteered prolifically in that community and has received recognition by way of citizen of the year award and by receiving the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee medal.

Next to Susan is Mr. John Evans, KC, a lawyer from Lethbridge, Alberta, with the firm Stringam. That firm is a province-wide firm. John focuses his litigation practice in Lethbridge but also has tried cases throughout the north. John's legal ability has been recognized by way of him receiving the KC, or King's Counsel, designation, and he also volunteers on the Alberta Judicial Nominating Committee.

To my right is Dr. Julian Martin, a retired history professor from the University of Alberta. Dr. Martin received his advanced degrees from Cambridge University. He has volunteered on many committees and with many organizations in Edmonton and now in his home city of Sherwood Park.

I should have indicated that I'm from southern Alberta: Lethbridge, Medicine Hat. We consider Sherwood Park north, but, as a result of this week, I realize it's not.

Next to Dr. Martin is Greg Clark, an entrepreneur and consultant who focuses on information and knowledge management. Greg hails from Calgary and has served one term as a Member of the Legislature of Alberta for Calgary-Elbow. He, too, is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II medal. He serves currently as chairman of the Balancing Pool of Alberta, and he consults widely with various organizations and corporations in terms of board governance.

We are your Electoral Boundaries Commission. We wanted to make sure you had some background as to who we are and where we are from.

The task of our commission is to come up with a new set of boundaries, largely because of two reasons. First of all, the Legislature has instructed us to provide for 89 electoral divisions rather than the current 87, so we're adding two electoral divisions to the province.

To help everyone understand the process that we're going through, leading up to the second issue that we must deal with as a commission, it's helpful to look at the timeline. We as a commission were appointed by the Speaker of the Legislature in late March of this year. We spent time in April in a couple of meetings discussing process and the schedule. Then we began our public hearings in late May, and since late May we've been travelling the province. We've been everywhere, man, as the country song says. This is towards the end of our tour, and next Monday will be our last day of public hearings conducted virtually in Edmonton. After we've completed our public hearings, we will take the submissions that we've heard, the legislation that we've been instructed to follow, and the population data that we will be looking at, and our task then is to come up with a report. That report has come to be known as an interim report, and that is due in late October of this year.

When that's completed, we will file that with the Speaker of the Legislature. It will immediately become public, and the public will have a chance to respond starting the end of October. We will then hear submissions throughout November and December through our website and then conduct a series of further public hearings in January. After that round of public hearings we then address the task of finishing the report and creating a final report. What we come up with in late October will be amenable to response and correction and criticism and public input. We have a timeline of one year from the time we were appointed in late March. We have to file our final report in late March 2026.

Now, as you all know, one member from each electoral division or riding is represented in the Legislative Assembly, and only voters in that constituency have the right to elect that person.

To give some context of the work that we're doing, it's helpful to compare our work to the last work of an Electoral Boundaries Commission. Eight years ago, in 2017, the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission issued its report, and it is the boundaries that they recommended that we're living under and we have lived under in Alberta for the last eight years and effectively the last two general elections.

The population is a key element of what goes into the report. In 2017 the commission at that time relied on an Alberta population of slightly over 4 million people. Specifically, they used the figure of 4,062,609. They divided that by the number of electoral divisions and came up with a mean average of 46,697 per electoral division. That's not our target population. Our target population is rather the range of minus 25 to plus 25, approximately 35,000 to just over 58,000. That's the 2017 commission.

Our task for this commission is to rely on a population number – and we've used population numbers that have been verified by Statistics Canada from the last decennial census in 2021 and updated regularly by Statistics Canada and updated and verified by the Alberta Treasury Board Office of Statistics and Information. As of July 2024 the population of Alberta is 4,888,723. You divide that by the number of electoral divisions of 89, and we come up with a mean average of 54,929, almost 55,000. Again, the target range is minus 25 per cent of that to plus 25 per cent, so approximately 41,000 to almost 69,000.

1:05

In addition to expanding the number of ridings, another huge factor in terms of us completing our report is the huge population growth across the province. The population growth, however, has not been spread evenly across all the electoral divisions, so our task is to go through that population data, realizing where it is, and come up with a plan that provides Albertans with what has come to be known as effective representation. In Alberta and in Canada we do not operate on the principle of one person, one vote. Rather, we strive for effective representation.

In determining that, we have several factors to consider, and these factors are all spelled out in the legislation. We consider primarily, first and foremost, the relative density and sparsity of population across the province. We also look at areas of common community interest; geographic features, most appropriate in areas outside the large cities; communication lines and transportation routes across the province also serve to help us draw boundaries. Our task is to create understandable and clear boundaries for Albertans.

In addition to the factors that I just listed, the legislation provides us with the right to use any other appropriate factors or information that we as a commission deem useful. That's kind of a catch-all phrase, and that phrase, in essence, captures what we're hearing at public hearings and what we expect to receive in terms of written

submissions. At this stage we are interested in hearing from Albertans, and we've heard a lot from various individuals.

That, surprisingly, is photoshopped. No, it isn't. This was our stop in Peace River a couple of days ago.

That's the map of Alberta currently with the 87 boundaries in it. By the time we've completed our report, we're going to create a new map with 89 electoral divisions.

That is an introduction to your commission. We have opened this up for the public, and today we have Mr. Ken Vanderwell scheduled and registered to present.

Mr. Vanderwell, can you just please come forward?

Mr. Vanderwell: I did have one question. I didn't hear you cover it. Is it okay to ask questions?

The Chair: Oh, sure. Come forward and have a seat.

Mr. Vanderwell: Oh, okay.

The Chair: Yeah. Introduce yourself, tell us where you're from, and then, yeah, proceed with the question. Questions are allowed; answers are not guaranteed.

Mr. Vanderwell: My question was on the two new electoral divisions. Has it already been written in stone where they're going to be at?

The Chair: No. It's in wet cement.

Mr. Vanderwell: Okay. But we kind of have a bit of an idea on population growth, when it happens.

The Chair: Yes. We've not made any determination, but we will start that process in late June after we've finished all the public hearings.

Mr. Vanderwell: I have two questions for the folks here.

The Chair: It warms our hearts when we see a presenter bring out maps, sir, so thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: Oh, yeah. Okay. There we are.

Mrs. Samson: Great. Thanks.

The Chair: Sorry. One other thing I should say in relation to this particular area of the province is the provision under what we call section 15(2) of the legislation. You've already cued on to that, sir, so I'll let you tell us what you want us to hear in your presentation.

Mr. Vanderwell: Okay. I appreciate being with you all today. Again, my name is Ken Vanderwell. I'm a long-time resident of Slave Lake. I'm also the vice-president of the Lesser Slave Lake UCP Constituency Association. Our president is here with us as well, Mike Skrynyk. We're basically newly elected into the constituency here, so great to be with you today.

I'm making a submission to the commission today in support of leaving the existing boundaries of the Lesser Slave Lake electoral division where they're at. I actually will be giving you a copy of what I'm saying here today, so you won't have to scribble too much.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: There is, of course, a great fear that this constituency could be split up and added to existing constituencies to the west and east of us. Indeed, I do know that our small population base of around 27,500 is at the threshold of 50 per cent

of the proposed quotient average of about 55,000, which could lead one to that conclusion. However, there are a number of reasons why I believe the electoral boundaries should not be altered.

The first one is the geographical properties of our area. The bulk of the Lesser Slave Lake constituency follows existing municipal district boundaries, and it's roughly contained within the boreal forested area of the province, which is the second map that I've given you; this is called the green zone and the white zone. This is put out by the government of Alberta. I've highlighted on there the same electoral boundaries, just showing that it is a forested area and a resource area for the province of Alberta.

The green zone is recognized as containing highly integrated provincial forest resources such as lumber, pulp, and OSB, that have been developed by companies across the constituency, and of course timber dues are a source of revenue to the government of Alberta. Additionally, oil and gas development within our borders is well documented and occurs on this same land base. The oil and gas resources that flow from our constituency contribute significantly to the GDP of Alberta in the form of royalties, and significant jobs are generated by the resource sectors for the population within the constituency.

On both our west and east flanks of our constituency the green zone gives way to the white zone, and the white zone contains agricultural-suited lands for the farming sector. On the south flank, when we go south here, the constituency gives way to Swan Hills, and Swan Hills has quite a few geographical differences than down here; I call it down in the lake valley. Lesser Slave Lake itself and the tourism and fishing it affords are almost in the middle of our constituency. And heading north, we encompass our First Nation and our Métis friends and their communities in the boreal forest.

On a revenue basis our large boreal forest remote area is suited for resource development, and it is my belief that it should be kept intact to facilitate and enable that to continue. Splitting up the constituency could and likely would lead to competing scenarios on artificially imposed boundaries versus the natural geographic boundaries that are in existence.

The second reason the constituency should not be altered is access within our area. Unlike rural farmland in the white zone of the province, where there is a road probably every mile or two, our constituency has few public roads and many kilometres between communities and major centres that are contained in it. Métis, First Nations, and people of our constituency are quite isolated from each other due to the travel corridors and the highways across the area. With the main shopping, trade, and medical areas being High Prairie and Slave Lake, many constituents travel in excess of an hour to access services here. Highway 2 runs across the constituency from the east to the west, servicing Slave Lake and High Prairie. Highways 88, 754, and 750 basically run north and south in roughly the middle of the constituency, and they service Wabasca, Red Earth, and the various First Nation and Métis settlements.

The third reason I believe the constituencies should not be altered is our large Indigenous population and the Treaty 8 trading and traditional land areas. Our constituency contains an Indigenous identity population of 54 per cent, so over half the people within our constituency have an Indigenous identity. Their interests and their influences are best suited and represented by a single representative at the Legislature.

Eleven First Nation bands are based in the Lesser Slave Lake electoral district. There's the Bigstone Cree Nation, Driftpile First Nation, Kapawe'no First Nation, Loon River Cree Nation, Lubicon Lake Indian Nation, Peerless Trout First Nation, Sawridge First Nation, Sucker Creek Cree First Nation, Swan River First Nation,

Whitefish Lake First Nation, and Woodland Cree First Nation. Most of the region's Indigenous population is of Cree origin.

I would submit to the commission that splitting up the constituency would have a negative impact because the First Nation bands are a large social sector that have done business largely within the traditional constituency boundaries. The main trading areas are Wabasca, High Prairie, and Slave Lake, and there is truly a long history of established trading patterns and traditional lands that they have lived on for hundreds of years. This is best maintained by keeping the constituency whole. The large population on reserves and settlements should not be split up as they identify with each other and the traditional areas they have lived on for generations.

1:15

The fourth reason the constituency should not be altered is the already large physical size of our area and the ability of our MLA to appropriately service and serve the people of the constituency. Thankfully, in the past electoral boundaries review the constituency size and shape was altered. I remember when it used to go all the way up to Northwest Territories, and now it's about halfway down. That was a huge area for an MLA to service. In its current position it's really important that our representative can do face-to-face meetings with constituents, and an overly large constituency areawise would make this very difficult. It's already a problem, I think, for many rural constituencies, and it would be one that would worsen if one is divided up and the portions are added to other existing large constituencies that are out in rural areas.

The fifth reason the constituency should not be altered is that it would diminish the rural voice and interests within the Alberta government. Oftentimes we have seen a tug-of-war between the elected urban and rural constituency representatives on various issues. Keeping our rural constituency electoral district intact will enable our voice to continue to be heard in our large land-based but smaller population-based constituency, where much resource-sector activity brings value to the government of Alberta.

In closing, I would submit that the Lesser Slave Lake constituency should be considered one of the special areas and afforded the exemption provided in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act and, notwithstanding our low population, be left as it currently is due to the five reasons I've outlined above.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir. It's been our custom to engage with the presenters, and I know there's not been one session where we've had no questions or dialogue or discussion.

I'm going to start with Mr. Evans. Any comments or questions that you have for this presenter?

Mr. Evans: Yes; only because you threw down the challenge of no questions.

In terms of the Indigenous population, the Cree nations, the various ones that you named off, their interaction would be mostly in terms of the federal government, so with their MP rather than the MLA or the municipality. Is that your understanding?

Mr. Vanderwell: I think that that is where they do try to represent themselves quite a bit. But, of course, on some of these settlements it may not be federal land, right?

Mr. Evans: On the Métis settlements.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right.

Mr. Evans: And you indicated that they're mostly heading to Wabasca, their trading route.

Mr. Vanderwell: Well, a lot of them would live north of the lake or perhaps a bit west down the lakeshore here, but their trading area would be Slave Lake, typically, because it has a large Walmart and things like that, that those people would be visiting to purchase goods at.

Mr. Evans: And the MDs that you would have in this area, in this electoral district, would be the MD of Big Lakes and the MD of Lesser Slave Lake and a portion of Opportunity?

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah, the MD of Opportunity. I did have it on a different map, but I see it's not on this one. There are a number of MDs that do almost follow our electoral boundaries at this time, both on the east and the west and on the north, so we very much are MD 124, MD of Opportunity up in Wabasca, MD of Lesser – the one over in High Prairie.

Mr. Evans: Big Lakes, yeah. Okay. Thank you very much, Ken.

Mr. Vanderwell: You bet.

The Chair: Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. And thank you for coming out today. I would have been sorely disappointed if nobody came.

On that note, we had a really good presentation yesterday when we were in Grande Prairie, and I wanted you to further expand on how important it is – because you have made it very clear that you don't want to see the riding split up to enhance the numbers in the other ridings. How important is it to you, and what does it look like when we have six MLAs in what I call the north, like, northern Alberta, and you have four municipal districts that fall nicely within your boundary? Plus you have some municipalities as well. Tell me about working together and how important that is, and talk about representation.

Mr. Vanderwell: Okay. I'm still not quite sure what your question is.

Mrs. Samson: My question is: how do you work with the MLAs, where you just pretty much work with the MLA? And then switch that up to the MDs.

Mr. Vanderwell: Sure. We actually have, I believe, a great relationship with the other rural MLAs. We have Minister Williams up in Peace River, who I see a lot. As they travel down towards Edmonton to the Legislature, of course, they will drive through our area or drive through Slave Lake. They often stop. At this particular time our MLA is not part of the United Conservative Party, so we are utilizing some MLAs to step in and help us in that regard as a constituency. We do have Ron Wiebe, who is an MLA over in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti area, who's helping us as well. We do have visits from our MLA out of Westlock, and that's Glenn.

We do certainly talk. We talk about – I don't want to say events – I guess rural events as well as rural areas, things that go on within the rural areas of the province here. I can't think of the word right now. There certainly is talk amongst ourselves as a constituency and our MLAs here.

On the MD front I mostly live in Slave Lake, so when I am dealing with the MD, I typically am dealing with the municipal district here in Lesser Slave Lake. If you're over in High Prairie, then you'd be dealing with the MD over there. I don't see any real animosity between the MDs at all. I mean, we're all trying to work

together. We're all trying to make a living. We're all trying to help our people be able to afford life in northern Alberta. I don't see any true issues there, Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah. You bet.

The Chair: Quick question. Where does your MLA have his or her office?

Mr. Vanderwell: It's right on Main Street, here.

The Chair: In Slave Lake.

Mr. Vanderwell: In Slave Lake, yes.

The Chair: So no other satellite office or anything like that.

Mr. Vanderwell: Not that I know of, no.

The Chair: Okay. Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. And thank you for the maps. I'm staring at one that just highlights the very large number of Indigenous land allocations and all the numbers. It's a huge spread of different communities.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right.

Dr. Martin: I can well take your point that they wish to cohere rather than be split, as it were, and the roadways work to that effect as well. There are not very many of them. They're well travelled. Highway 88 is a dusty road at best and can be very difficult for noncommercial traffic, it seems to me. So there's a lot of movement along the south side of Lesser Slave Lake going east-west. Do you yourself go out much to High Prairie, that end of things?

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes, I do, of course, and it'll be more so now that I'm back with the constituency association.

Dr. Martin: You know, moving from Slave Lake down to Athabasca is one route out, as it were, but the other is to go west. I'm just interested – you have a Costco, but maybe you have to go west for things. Is that an impulse . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: High Prairie has an excellent hospital – of course, Slave Lake has a great hospital, too – so the hospital in High Prairie is certainly utilized by the folks across the constituency.

When you look at Wabasca north of Slave Lake, you can come into Slave Lake on highway 88 or you can come around the lake on the other side.

Dr. Martin: It's where the road comes down there at Marten Beach and comes back down here.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. There are, you know, two ways around the lake, which is what you'd really want, of course, for access if there are wildfires or other things that happen in the boreal forest.

1:25

Dr. Martin: We came in this morning from the west, and we travelled, of course, over lush green farming lands coming up to and on the south flank of the lake as we came in here. There's a lot of agricultural value and activity. Why is the population so low?

Mr. Vanderwell: Over in that part of the world?

Dr. Martin: No, just in the riding as a whole. It's been notoriously low, to be frank, and I'm sure you know that. All the mitigating factors you listed are excellent factors, but what is your feeling for the economic situation of the whole region such that it has not been growing? I mean, the rest of the province is growing by leaps and bounds, but this ED has not had that.

Mr. Vanderwell: So the deterrence to growth in the province or within our area here?

Dr. Martin: No. In the ED.

Mr. Vanderwell: Our major industries of course are oil and gas, and our second major industry then would be forestry. Third industry in the area I believe would be agriculture, so that's more on the flanks of the outside of the electoral division.

Forestry, I had mentioned, is an integrated operation within our province. I run one of the forestry mills here on behalf of our family. When I say integrated, if the trees don't burn and you actually can harvest them, of course, we make dimensional lumber, but the chips that we produce, you know, the round edges of the trees, we ship those to Peace River. Maybe we ship them over to Whitecourt. Maybe those chips go to Al-Pac. So that's integrated operations. They rely upon us for that input for their pulp purposes. When facilities are operating on the land base – of course, the hardwood or the poplar and the spruce grow together – the spruce would come to my mill. The poplar: you would be logging it for another mill, and it would go to their mill. So operations are very integrated.

The reason the forest industry is not going to really grow within our area anymore is that one hundred per cent of the annual allowable cut has been basically designated to facilities. So that's what it supports. The only way to grow that moving forward would be to put more trees in the ground, and then you can grow the stock that you need to increase the industry. There is an opportunity, of course, for secondary manufacturing. Transportation is always an issue, and if you have your secondary manufacturing around the city – and there are forestry secondary manufacturing facilities around the city – they would take our rough stock and they would take it down there. Then they would make whatever widget they are going to make, and they are closer to the folks that it's going to be sold to. So the transportation isn't quite as high.

On the oil and gas sector we certainly do see that sector growing within our area. We've had some major announcements, particularly north of Slave Lake, closer to the Indigenous communities, that they will be taking more oil and gas out of our area. So we see growth around that. We see growth in the Aboriginal community for great-paying jobs coming out of that resource sector. Of course, within even my sector we have, I think, great jobs for those Aboriginal communities as well.

One of the things I think that perhaps stops our area from growing is that a lot of young people maybe are more drawn to the urban areas. They want to live in Edmonton or live in Calgary, and they don't perhaps want to spend, you know, their life or their career up in northern Alberta.

Another thing that we did see is that when Slave Lake had the devastating fire, we had 2,000 people leave, and we didn't get them all back, of course. Fires like that, fires in Fort McMurray, Slave Lake, you know: we see some of the fires that happened here in the last couple of weeks impact those communities. If people don't have a place to live and they've been uprooted once, they may decide: hey, I'm going to live down in an urban area rather than up in the rural areas.

I don't know if I answered your question completely, but those are some of the opportunities I see. Oil and gas can grow. Forestry

I think is basically tapped out, and tourism of course can grow, too. But there has to be money that's put in for those types of things.

Dr. Martin: That's very helpful. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. Yeah. I've got a few questions. Just, again, thank you very much for being here. The real gift for us of being able to travel the province is that, one, we get to see all different corners of Alberta, which is a real gift, and we're pretty lucky to live in the province we do, when we do, and just to hear from people who live in the community, who literally know the lay of the land. It's one thing to look at it on a map, but it means so much more when we come to actually visit and talk to folks in person. So I just want to thank you for coming.

Mr. Vanderwell: You bet.

Mr. Clark: A couple of questions. I want to pick up on the question on sort of Indigenous representation. You said 54 per cent of the constituencies.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. Yeah. Those were stats that I did look up, so I believe they're pretty accurate.

Mr. Clark: Well, indicatively, right? It doesn't need to be perfect, but sort of order of magnitude. That's helpful information. Even if there's a federal responsibility there in most cases or in a lot of cases, I presume that a lot of those kids go to public schools, use health care facilities, social services, like, those sort of provincial – can you maybe talk a bit about that? Is it a blend of the federal and the provincial? What's the impact of that on the MLA's job?

Mr. Vanderwell: I've been around long enough that we did have Pearl Calahasen, who was one of the first Aboriginal women that was our MLA, for a very long period of time. After her we had a gentleman by the name of Pat Rehn, and since then we've had Scott Sinclair. Both Scott and Pearl are of Indigenous background. I think it's great to have them. You know, it was great to have Pearl; it's great to have Scott as an Indigenous MLA. They bring, I think, a different understanding of some of the unique challenges that those communities face.

Of course, when the federal government, I guess, manages the land that you're on, there may not be a lot of opportunities there, so we certainly do see a lot of the more business-minded Aboriginals perhaps moving off the reserve into areas where they can make a decent living and they don't have to rely upon the federal government.

You are right. I see a mixture of kids going to school, and you have the Aboriginal schools as well in some of the communities, you know, down the lake. I think they're well-run ventures, and they do fall, of course, under the province of Alberta, and that is where you see all of the funding for those coming from. I'm not aware if there is any federal funding that is earmarked for that. Someone may have a better education on that than I certainly do.

I don't know if that answers your questions, Greg, or not.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. It does. I think these things are never a hundred and zero.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right.

Mr. Clark: Especially when there's a mix of provincial and federal accountability there.

Mr. Vanderwell: I'd say that more of them would utilize the provincial services than utilize the federal services.

Mr. Clark: That's a great answer. That's helpful. Thank you very much.

Changing topic, then. As you see from the map, the number 27,442, and you had alluded to the 50 per cent, plus or minus. As Justice Miller said in his opening remarks, we're bound by both the act but also by the court interpretations, and that allows us, under section 15(2) of the act, to have a plus or minus 50 per cent; 27,442 is minus 50.04 per cent, so we've got to find at least .04 per cent if we're going to keep Lesser Slave Lake. We can't keep Lesser Slave Lake exactly, a hundred per cent as it is. The question for you is: if we needed to add some population around an edge, where would we do that? And what fits?

Dr. Martin: No pressure here.

Mr. Vanderwell: I need to see a bigger map.

Mr. Clark: Maybe I'll ask a specific question. If we were to go down highway 43, west a little bit . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: Towards Fawcett and Jarvie, down in that area?

Mr. Clark: Yeah. It's a question, I guess, of how far you go. We don't need a whole bunch of population. We want to be cautious of borrowing too much from neighbouring . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: Down into the Westlock area.

Mr. Clark: I'm actually thinking west on 43. My map is being slow because why wouldn't it be. There we go. Like, out past High Prairie, west of High Prairie.

Mr. Vanderwell: Oh, west. Okay.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. West of High Prairie there's a little place, Maurice Lake. It's a lake? It doesn't look like there are a lot of people around there. That's sort of one option. I'm just looking at this, not at all knowing the community, not at all knowing the connections or the land.

Yeah. This is Central Peace-Notley, which has a similar . . .

1:35

Mr. Vanderwell: No, that's – well, McLennan is fairly . . .

Mr. Clark: Right. That has a similar challenge in terms of its population; not quite as acute but not great either. I guess the question is: if we were doing some balancing, would it make sense? In the past you noted that it used to go a little further north. You're thinking: oh, how far north can we go? Great question. How far north can we go?

Mr. Vanderwell: It used to be right up to the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. I see that in 2010 it didn't quite go all the way up there. It didn't quite go to La Crête. It sort of went towards La Crête and then took a sharp left turn there. Effective representation in Canada means we can have big differences, right?

Mr. Vanderwell: Right.

Mr. Clark: The stat I used last night in Grande Prairie was that Lesser Slave Lake and Central Peace-Notley are about 55,000 people, those two constituencies combined. Calgary-North East is 85,000 people. It's so many. We've got some challenges.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. You can drive around Calgary in half an hour in that constituency.

Mr. Clark: And you'll hear eight or nine languages, right? So each of these has their own challenges. It's not a direct comparison. We're not trying to diminish the challenges because, absolutely, the vast geography really does create a unique challenge. But if we needed to go find a little bit of extra population, if you will, to add into Lesser Slave Lake, do you have an opinion on where we might do it?

Mr. Vanderwell: On the last boundary commission, they did add in Calling Lake and some of the communities further to the east. Some of those had Aboriginal settlements on them. That was to I think collect that. I would see us going further to the east. To the west – I don't know if my president can make any comments on that. He may have a little bit more knowledge than I do on the west side, if that's allowable.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Clark: Absolutely. We'd love to hear from you.

The Chair: Absolutely, yeah. Just grab the mic. You can stay there just as long as you grab the mic so we can pick up the audio.

Mr. Skrynyk: Currently, right now, the MD of Lesser Slave River is split to the south. In the Flatbush region, which is still in this MD, they are represented by the MLA out of Westlock. That may make some sense to bring them back into the fold of this constituency. I served on the MD council for 13 years, so I'm familiar with that quite a bit, that we had a split region with that.

Mr. Clark: Sorry, which MD is that?

Mr. Skrynyk: The MD of Lesser Slave River No. 124.

Mr. Clark: Okay.

Mr. Skrynyk: That's the one surrounding Slave Lake here to the ...

Mr. Clark: Oh, I see. Yeah. It just goes a bit south there almost between Athabasca and Swan Hills.

Mr. Skrynyk: Yeah, and the boundary line is somewhere up around Flatbush region. Flatbush is into the Westlock area. On the balance of where people live and where they do business and stuff, it would make more sense that that part of the constituency would come back this way. I don't know populationwise whether that would really be enough to help or not.

Mr. Clark: We don't need much.

The Chair: Oh, yeah, we don't need a lot, just .04 per cent.

Mr. Clark: We need about eight people. Any babies born in the last little while?

Mr. Skrynyk: If I may comment on some of the stuff I've heard here. You know, you talk about federal responsibility and provincial responsibility for the Indigenous. In my experience and what I've seen over the last while, it is becoming more and more of a provincial responsibility, and there is a lot more of the stepping up with the province in trying to help with this. Recently we have a consortium of Indigenous bands that have got together and purchased a part of tamarack energy. So there's a lot of stuff going

on in this region. Everybody's working together. To split them up just wouldn't make a lot of sense to me.

The Chair: Sir, just for the record, could you just give us your name?

Mr. Skrynyk: Mike Skrynyk.

The Chair: How do you spell your last name?

Mr. Skrynyk: S-k-r-y-n-y-k.

The Chair: Glad I asked you.

Mr. Skrynyk: You would never get it.

And my background: I mean, I'm born and raised in this area, from the Kinuso area, actually. I have family in High Prairie, graduated in High Prairie, so I'm well aware of that area, also. I was on council, MD 124, for 13 years. Currently the president of the UCPA, which is just new.

The Chair: This is Pearl Calahasen's old constituency?

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right.

The Chair: Her name came up in Edmonton as being a true mentor and someone that cultivated younger people to get involved in politics.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes. Actually, I run into her and her husband at Walmart once in a while. They still live on the lakeshore here.

Mrs. Samson: I just have one question. Oh, I probably have more. I'm looking at the boundary. Going along with what my colleague Greg is asking, can you tell me anything about Kimiwan Lake and the McLennan town or whatever it is on the western boundary of Lesser Slave Lake? Is there any significant population or tie? I see the boundary goes right through the lake itself.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah. I'm not aware of that. I know that there's a fairly large French community over in that area in Falher and Guy and McLennan.

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. They show it on the map here: Falher, Donnelly, McLennan.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right, yeah. I know that because some of the contractors that work for me are out of that area, and they're all French.

Mrs. Samson: Would they naturally travel into Slave Lake for shopping, that you know of?

Mr. Vanderwell: No.

Mrs. Samson: Go the other way?

Mr. Vanderwell: They'd probably go to Valleyview or perhaps over to Grande Prairie.

Mr. Skrynyk: Just to Dr. Martin's point there on why the population has difficulty in growing: agriculture is becoming commercialized, and large agricultural family farms are not there anymore, so that's part of the issue. Another issue that we have here is that we have a huge shadow population that works here.

Dr. Martin: Talk to us about that, if you wouldn't mind, sir.

Mr. Skrynyk: Well, we have a huge shadow population that come into the area, work with the industries, predominantly in the oil and gas, that do not live in this area. They come here and they work. There's the industry that drives this province. The GDP of northern Alberta is huge for this province. The people that come here to work are not counted in the census. But there is a large shadow population that works here in the wintertime in camps. We run into that same thing with the municipalities when we're doing our population census. There's the shadow population, that is difficult to track, but it is there. You don't run the resources of what we have here without people being here to do it.

Dr. Martin: Sir, could I follow up on that? Do you have a way of pointing out to us, perhaps just by pointing on the map, where those camps typically are located?

Mr. Skrynyk: Typically they would be in the Wabasca area. Red Earth would have more of them. Like, Wabasca has probably got more. Red Earth would have camps in there. Even Big Fish Bay has a ton of people that live in there year-round and work in the region. They rent cabins, and they rent annual recreational lots, where people live in their fifth wheels or in cabins and work in this region. The forestry and the fire – we're a tanker base here. Forestry brings in many pilots and things to fight fire. They all stay in places like Big Fish Bay. The hotels in Slave Lake and High Prairie are full constantly. Like, it's difficult to get rooms. So that's the shadow population that's not being counted.

1:45

Dr. Martin: We have heard of this long and loud from Fort McMurray and places over there for many years. I really wasn't aware of it here, so that's very helpful. For you, too, has it been a persistent factor, or is it recent?

Mr. Skrynyk: No, I believe it's been persistent. Like, I've been on council for years, and it's persistent.

Mr. Vanderwell: From my perspective it's actually grown over the years. We run a camp out at our facility here in the industrial park. We have employees that live in Boyle, and they travel over for their shifts. They'll stay four shifts, and they'll live in our camp, but they don't actually live within the constituency at all. We have a 22-person camp there, and, you know, the majority of those people have a farm or established place somewhere else.

A lot of them are younger people, a lot of millwrights that we hire on. You know, that age group, their free time is very important to them, so they will come up on a different shift schedule. They'll maybe be 10 days here and then seven days at home, and seven days will likely be a different part of this province. But they still work here.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: So just like Fort McMurray.

Mr. Evans: I have a question on the shadow population. When they are living in camps, it sounds to me, based on what you said about the shadow population, that it would be more of an economic driver and less of a drain on, you know, municipal resources for example. But to be certain about that I need to know: are these other camps, like in Red Earth, so far away that they just stay in the camp the entire time they're working? They don't come into Slave Lake; they don't go to High Prairie, things like that?

Mr. Vanderwell: It depends. If you're in a camp that does provide you with meals and things like that, there would be really no reason

to leave. Some of the other camps are kind of a little bit more independent units. I'm thinking of our own camps, where we provide the room, but they come in to get their food in Slave Lake or they do their shopping and things.

Mr. Evans: When it was being discussed, say, the Wabasca camps and the Red Earth camps: would they be the types of camps where the people would stay in the camp the whole time? Then, if that's the case, if you could tell us more about sort of the numbers of the camps where they don't stay all the time, where they are more interactive with the community.

Mr. Vanderwell: Do you know more about the oilfield camps than I do, Mike?

Mr. Skrynyk: With certainty? No. I don't want to give you any false pretense here, but I'm just trying to think. In history in the oilfield camps – I'm not sure what it is right now, but it may not be the same people in the camps. Like, a company will book 20 rooms for the year just so that they have the capability of bringing people in and out as business requires. That is the standard practice in the oilfield, where a company will come in and book a certain number of rooms to be used by people in all aspects of their business. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Mr. Evans: That was helpful. Thank you.

The Chair: Sir, you've been involved in municipal government, and you also referenced the census. I think you did, Mr. Skrynyk.

Mr. Skrynyk: Yes.

The Chair: Of course, when municipalities conduct a census, it's important for their relationship and their funding with the province. No doubt. Have there been any attempts by the municipal governments that you're aware of to try to quantify or count the shadow population?

Mr. Skrynyk: I think there have been some attempts to try to quantify it. It's very difficult. What do you consider shadow population? What's your definition of shadow population? What's the timeline of them being here? It's very difficult to quantify a standard. A standard has never been set out, to my knowledge, to that effect.

The Chair: We just know it's there.

Mr. Skrynyk: We know it's there. But, to my knowledge, I have no standard as to how it's quantified.

Mr. Vanderwell: A prime example, Justice, would be over in High Prairie. The Tolko mill had a fire a number of years ago, and then they've just recently started operations again. They would have had a large shadow worker contractor population that would have come into High Prairie and area to actually help rebuild that mill. And then, of course, once it's up and running again, then it would go back.

Mrs. Samson: Can I just make one comment? What I heard yesterday that really resonated, and it applies so much more importantly here in this riding, is that you have a large shadow population, but they're not counted anywhere, and had they been counted or if they were countable, we would not be in this dilemma about the low population number for this electoral division. That's the bottom line, really. I mean, population is where we start with drawing the boundaries. It's not where we end.

One of the items that they said – you know, we look at communities of interest and the geographical and boundaries that are clear and understandable and any other factor that we find relevant, and I find the shadow population to be very relevant in the north. When you go into camp and you're completely looked after for food, housing, and you just go and work, and then when you're done, you go home, and if there's an election, you're not voting here, you're voting there, that's causing the problem in your riding. Like, they get everything they need here, and you don't get the vote, and you also don't get the provincial funding that goes with it.

The Chair: Following up on that, let me ask. To your knowledge, do the First Nations in this electoral division self-report to Statistics Canada in terms of population or respond to the census? They have the option not to. Do you have any idea?

Mr. Vanderwell: I have no idea, but I would suspect that they do because their funding is per capita.

The Chair: Yeah. It's per capita universally, but for some reason some First Nations do not participate in the census, and I don't know why. But they do have Indian affairs, or if that's the right department, whatever the successor department is.

Mr. Vanderwell: To provide the information for the province and that type of thing.

Dr. Martin: Changing topics, I want to talk road time. Now, on an average day, in an average truck, how long would it take you to get from this town to Wabasca?

Mr. Vanderwell: An hour, hour and 10 minutes.

Dr. Martin: So that's really not an onerous journey except under hard weather conditions.

Mr. Vanderwell: You came down highway 88. You know how onerous it could be.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. That can get really bad. Let's just continue to do the thought experiment. It's an hour and a bit to there, and then to Red Earth – what? – two, two and a half?

Mr. Vanderwell: It's two hours to Red Earth.

Dr. Martin: All right. And out the top?

Mr. Vanderwell: If you're heading way up north there? That would be probably three and a half hours.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Before you break into the next constituency area.

Mr. Vanderwell: Cadotte Lake would be – you're probably three hours to Cadotte Lake over on the west side there, on 986 I think it is. Actually, the furthest one, Calling Lake, which is way down in the bottom right, would be the longest.

Dr. Martin: If I want to visit the Gambler people, this is the Calling Lake route. So I'd have to go dip down and then come through . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: Through Athabasca.

Dr. Martin: Okay. What's that going to be?

Mr. Vanderwell: That would be a three-hour trip. I have chip trucks that run over that way every day, and it's two hours one way in good weather.

1:55

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. That's helpful. As you know, certainly here in Alberta we measure distance in time.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right.

Dr. Martin: It's a nice way to get our bearings on what the transportation logistics are for effective representation.

Mr. Vanderwell: And we use our vehicles as time machines.

Dr. Martin: Yes, we do. Thank you.

The Chair: And offices.

Mr. Vanderwell: True.

The Chair: I think you mentioned that the MLA for Peace River will drive through your constituency on his way to Edmonton.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. Minister Williams. Yes.

The Chair: So from this town to Peace River: what's the drive?

Mr. Vanderwell: Is it four?

Mr. Skrynyk: No.

Mr. Vanderwell: Three and a half hours? Or three hours?

Mr. Skrynyk: Probably about two and a half or a solid three.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah, true. It's about five hours from Edmonton. We're about halfway up. It might be two and three-quarter hours.

The Chair: And he would come down 88?

Mr. Vanderwell: No. He'd come through High Prairie, probably. He'd come down to Valleyview.

The Chair: A much better highway that way.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah. Now, Dan could also come down 88 as well if he decides to go through La Crête.

The Chair: Right, which is in his . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right.

The Chair: Actually, back to that. This may be a foolish, noneducated question, but we heard in Peace River that the government is making available some forestry land to be turned into agriculture. Any talk of that here?

Mr. Vanderwell: Oh, yes. Yeah.

The Chair: Oh, is there? Well, tell us about that.

Mr. Vanderwell: Actually, our company – my dad had a great vision. We're the largest owner of private land that a forest company owns. We've planted trees on those lands. So as La Crétien families grow, because that is one of the things that they do . . .

The Chair: That seems to be well known here.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. Yes.

. . . a lot of them are even coming down into the Slave Lake area, and they're looking for quarter sections of farmland. I'll get

approached from them quite often, Justice. You know: Ken, will you sell me a couple of quarter sections? I say: well, I won't because I'm growing trees; I'm growing future stock on them. But we do see that happening. The pressure is on, I think, on all the fringes to start to turn some land over to what we call the white zone so that it would actually be agricultural land. The forest industry in particular is not really opposed to that because it does make sense, some of the areas that they want, that it should be, you know, switched over to agricultural land and agricultural purposes.

The government of Alberta does have a difficult time protecting forested areas, so our industry is actually the only one that pays holding and protection charges to the provincial government. Unfortunately, they're having a difficult time protecting what we're paying them to do. Anyway, that's a Todd Loewen question.

The Chair: So your company or your family owns a lot of forestry land, and you're reforesting.

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right. We have Crown land, and then we have all of our private land.

The Chair: Okay. So you lease a lot of Crown land as well.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes. We have joint forest management areas with other companies, and then we have timberlands that we bought under quota back in the '70s and '80s.

The Chair: Okay. So there's pressure on all the landowners, the Crown as well as . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes. There's lots of pressure on Crown land. There are species at risk. There are the various Aboriginal lawsuits. There are special places. There are parks. I mean, it just goes on and on, what's happening. Really, the path forward, you know, just as a point of interest for our industry, when I speak to Minister Loewen on it and any minister I can get a hold of that's in forestry: we need to grow more trees per hectare. I mean, that's just like in farmland. They increased the amount that they get off per bushel. We need to increase the number of trees that we have on Crown land so that we can lessen the effect of the burden on land and what's happening with the pressures on land base.

The Chair: I always consider that people who plant trees have long-term visions and are not impatient people.

You know, we love the dialogue, and we love to learn, so you'll get more questions.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. I wanted to just have you talk to me about communications. How is the Internet here? Like, there was a reference to having meetings in your vehicle when you're on these long trips. Can you do that? Do you get Bluetooth when you're driving?

Mr. Vanderwell: There is fairly good cell coverage, Susan, in some areas. In Slave Lake, after the fires, Telus came in and actually put fibre optic within the whole community. That was one of their great moves to really help off-set what happened here in the town of Slave Lake.

Of course, we've got, you know, fibre optic coming through here. I have noticed a lot of fibre optic even out in the industrial park areas now, that are 12, 15 kilometres out of town. I do see that there. I know that they have it pretty well in all the education – you know, Northern Lakes College is all on fibre now.

There are some spotty areas. Like, as you head out of town, you get out about 20 or 30 kilometres, you'll hit a couple of dead zones, but by the time you're around the Fawcett area, which we had talked about earlier, you know, the cell coverage is pretty good. If that helps you.

Mrs. Samson: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. So the message you want us to hear is that you're a special electoral division. You know that you're on the knife's edge.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes; .4, you said, right?

Mr. Clark: You need 241 people. They don't need to be over 18; they just need to be people.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Well, thank you very much for coming. Much appreciated.

Mr. Vanderwell: Thank you very much for the extended time. Much appreciated.

The Chair: We learn so much at each one of our stops, so thank you.

We'll adjourn the public hearing now. We're happy to chat informally if you wish.

[The hearing adjourned at 2:02 p.m.]

