



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings

Westlock

Wednesday, June 4, 2025
1:02 p.m.

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Westlock

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[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Electoral Boundaries Commission afternoon hearing. We're happy to be in Westlock. This is our third day of the week, just having left Edmonton. Glad to be out here. Thank you to everyone for coming, and a special thank you to those of you who are going to be presenting.

By way of introduction, my name is Justice Dallas Miller. I'm the chairman of the commission, and I would like to briefly introduce you to the other commission members. For full bios please go to our website, which is abebc.ca. Check with Aaron before you leave if you are not sure what the website is.

First of all, to my immediate left is Susan Samson, a long-time resident of Sylvan Lake. By the way, I'm from Lethbridge. We consider Sylvan Lake central Alberta. Susan is an experienced municipal politician and served as a council member and mayor in the town of Sylvan Lake. She has volunteered in her community for quite some time and for that was recognized as citizen of the year and is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II jubilee medal.

Next to Susan is John Evans, KC, a lawyer with a firm in southern Alberta known as Stringam. John conducts trials throughout the province, and his legal ability has been recognized by Executive Council by way of being awarded the King's Counsel, or KC, designation. John also volunteers as a member of the Alberta Judicial Nominating Committee.

To my immediate right is Dr. Julian Martin. Dr. Martin is a retired history professor from the University of Alberta. He hails from Sherwood Park, and he is the pulse of the capital city region for us. Julian has volunteered on committees throughout his career and currently serves on the Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board, and we're glad to have his experience and wisdom on the commission.

At the end of the table is Greg Clark, an entrepreneur and consultant in the area of information and knowledge management. Greg is a businessman and consults widely in the area of board governance. He holds an MBA and a designation from the Institute of Corporate Directors. Greg has also served in the Legislature for a term, representing Calgary-Elbow, and his wisdom and experience in that area are very important.

As you probably are aware, we are an independent body established by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to fulfill the requirements that are set out in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. Every eight to 10 years it's the law in Alberta that the boundaries must be examined and looked at for the express purpose of redistribution.

In this current round of commission hearings we've got two basic tasks. We have many tasks, but the two main ones are to find where the two new electoral districts should be located because the legislation has expanded the Legislative Assembly from 87 to 89 seats. That's one of our main tasks. In order to give you some sense of the timeline we have – and this is all set out in the legislation – we were appointed as a commission by the Speaker of the Legislature in late March. Once we are appointed, the clock starts ticking, in a sense, for us. Our timetable is set out starting from the time of our appointment.

In April we met as a commission a couple of times to discuss process, discuss scheduling, dates, things like that. Then in late May we started our public hearings in southwestern Alberta. This week we're in Edmonton, here, St. Paul. Next week we go through central Alberta, and the following week we are in the north in Fort McMurray, Peace River, et cetera.

After our public hearings, which will end in late June, our task is to write a report based on our legislative mandate, based on the

population of Alberta, based on what we've heard in the public hearings, and other factors in the legislation. That report will be filed with the Speaker of the Legislature, it will be gazetted, and it will be available to the public. It's at that time that you will have something clear in terms of what the commission's thinking is as a result of this series of public hearings and reviewing the population statistics and boundaries, et cetera.

Once our interim report is filed with the Speaker, we will then have a second round of public hearings. I'm not sure we will be back in all the same places, but we will cover the province as best we can. Because it's winter, when we are doing the second round, we may chicken out and do some virtual hearings that way so we don't have to travel on Alberta's winter, January and February, roads. That is unclear yet. We haven't decided that, but we will have in-person meetings and a combination of virtual hearings.

That gives you a sense of our timeline. Of course, each electoral district in Alberta – currently there are 87 – elects one Member of the Legislative Assembly. To give you a sense of perspective and what has happened and what the last two elections have been operating on, in 2017 the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission gave a report, and their report was based on the numbers you see on the graph before you, just over 4 million people.

In 2017 that population of 4,062,606 was extrapolated over 87 constituencies and resulted in that perfect average number of 46,697. In Canada and in Alberta we do not operate on the system of one person, one vote. Rather, we operate on the basis of effective representation. That's terminology out of the legislation and out of the case law that has been governing Canadian elections since the advancements and the signing of the Charter of Rights and Freedom.

That was the target zone for 2017's report, 35,000 people per riding to a maximum of just over 58,000. For our commission the statistics or the population that we will be relying on is 4,888,723. That figure arrived as a result of relying on the 2021 national census affecting Alberta, and that figure is regularly updated by the Alberta Treasury Board Office of Statistics and Information such that we've calculated and we've arrived at the conclusion that the figures that we're going to rely on are the figures verified by the province as of July 2024. So that's that figure, 4.88 million.

1:10

Now, you've probably heard news reports that Alberta's population may be even higher than that, and it may very well be, but ascertaining population statistics is somewhat of an art as much as it is a science, and we have made the decision to use the figures that are verified as of July 2024 by the provincial Treasury Board. Of course, the population has increased dramatically since 2017, and that population growth is not spread evenly across the province. It's located in the two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton, but our task as a boundary commission is to hear from Albertans, take the information we hear from the presentations, the data, and the written submissions that we received, and come up with a recommended electoral map that provides for effective representation.

In doing that work and coming up with our report, we will be relying on, as I said, the presentations, but we'll also be guided by the terms in the legislation. We will be looking at the relative sparsity and density of population and the rate of growth in areas. We will be considering what's come to be known as community interest, including boundaries of municipalities, regional and rural communities, Indian reserves, and Métis settlements.

We'll also factor in geographic features. Geographic features can be prominent and helpful for electoral boundaries, especially in areas outside the large urban communities. Means of communication and transportation routes across the province will also play a factor in determining electoral boundaries. Our goal is to create understandable

and clear boundaries. We also have the ability to incorporate and bring into effect or bring into our process other factors that we consider appropriate in terms of drawing the boundaries and creating new boundaries.

At this stage, we want to hear from you. We publicized. We're glad to see at least five or six people signed up, and if you haven't signed up and if you're here just viewing, we may have some time to see if you voluntarily at the end want to make a presentation.

By the way, I failed to introduce the clerk of our commission, Aaron Roth. If you have a written submission and you want us to get a copy of it, just leave a copy with him, and he'll make sure we get it.

If we go to the list, the first presenter is Glenn van Dijken. Typically, we limit the presentations to seven minutes. I don't think we're going to have a problem with time this afternoon, so we're flexible. Mr. van Dijken, we're not going to shut your mic off at the seven-minute mark. So you don't have to worry.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, and welcome to the true centre of Alberta. If you travel just, well, about three-quarters of an hour to the west, the geographical centre of Alberta is just west of Fort Assiniboine, close by Swan Hills, and I know Speaker Kowalski made a huge effort to ensure that Albertans understood that this is the centre of Alberta.

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to come to Westlock. Welcome to the constituency of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. I've had the honour of representing the people in this region for, now, 10 years, initially with the constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and over the last six years, it's been the constituency of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

What I'm going to try: I know I put in a written submission as well, but what I hope to try and do here today is try and help the commission understand the struggle we have as rural MLAs to actually do effective representation over sparsely populated areas in large geographical areas. It is about effective representation. Our constitution has that outlined.

Rural MLAs spend a considerable amount of time on the road, and it becomes very difficult over such large areas to remain visible and accessible. This riding: if you travel two hours to the east, you'll get to the eastern boundary, Mallaig. I was privileged to speak at the graduating class of 2025 in the Mallaig school this past weekend. Yes, it's a little over two hours from my home to there, and it makes it very difficult to participate in other events in the constituency when four and a half hours out of the day is, essentially, driving. So this is one of the areas of challenge for a rural MLA, the amount of time we spend on the road and trying to make personal contact with constituents.

The other complexity that I would suggest is that our riding, this riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, consists of parts of nine different counties. We have seven towns. We have a number of villages. I think there are four villages, nine summer villages, 40 hamlets. These are all municipalities with elected representatives that the MLA is charged with engaging with. I believe in just the counties and towns alone I have 128 elected representatives that I engage with. Most of that engagement we try and do through the mayors and reeves because it just becomes very difficult to do it in a way that everybody stays on the same page. When the councillor phones me or e-mails me with a concern, I try and make sure that the mayors are also aware of the concern that's being brought forward to the MLA.

Another area of elected governance that we as MLAs oversee and that is part of the education file that the province has jurisdiction in, is that I have seven school divisions within my riding. Some of those school divisions I only have one of their schools, but it's a

reality that I do have to get to know those trustees and those boards and get to understand what their needs are as well, what's working for them, and what's not working for them. That just adds to the extra burden that a rural MLA faces. Many of my urban colleagues, with their elected representation, the elected representative that they deal with – we have more MLAs in the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary than we have actually councillors. So some of my colleagues from the large urban areas will share councillors. Same thing. They primarily deal with two school boards. Some might deal with an extra charter school or an independent school board as well. This is where I believe that effective representation starts to dwindle, when so many of the decisions are made based off population base.

Another area of engagement that a rural MLA is charged with is essentially being on the front lines of our industry, our four main industries: agriculture, energy, forestry, and tourism. The vast majority of these industries and their footprint in this province happen in rural Alberta. The concerns that come forward from, say, our ag industry, our forestry industry, and our energy industry is that as rural MLAs we are a lot of the time the first line of communication that they have towards government. It is our job to be that first point of contact for local businesses, and we're expected to advocate regularly at all levels of government. That ongoing engagement adds substantially to the workload of rural MLAs.

1:20

I guess that the primary concern I have is that when the decision-making is based largely off population base, it becomes very obvious that for effective representation to happen in a heavily populated area versus a sparsely populated area, it becomes very hard for the individuals that are representing sparsely populated areas to provide effective representation. I think what I will say is that the legislative flexibility does exist to ensure that we can find effective representation in this province. I would encourage the commission to fully utilize the variance that section 15(2) speaks to in the ability to have for electoral ridings, and I would suggest that largely that will be northern areas because we are very sparsely populated the further north we go.

But to fully utilize the opportunity to land in that 25 per cent to 50 per cent population base for four ridings in the province, I would also submit that the flexibility is there to provide effective representation throughout Alberta both in large urban and sparsely populated rural. The ability to have a variance of 25 per cent below in what I consider real rural – that's large geographical areas, sparsely populated areas – regions. In order to accomplish effective representation, there will need to be a consideration for that 25 per cent below. You know, it's outlined in the act, the reasons for that.

I think it's important for the commission to recognize that when we're talking about regions like Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, West Yellowhead, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, even when you have to have all of these names just to identify one riding, it indicates that possibly that riding is much larger than it should be in order to ensure effective representation.

One other item I will bring into the conversation – and I know the commission is not making decisions based off the elector numbers, eligible voters, but it struck me in the last election that our riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock had more eligible voters than many of the large urban ridings, whether you go to Calgary or to Edmonton. Currently, in May of 2025, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has more eligible voters in this riding than 14 out of 20 Edmonton ridings, and this riding has more eligible voters than seven out of the Calgary ridings, which to me is somewhat of an

indication that we're a little bit out of balance on how we distribute when we strictly look at population.

Now, the legislation doesn't allow you to take that into consideration, but I do want you to recognize that it is an indicator that you could utilize to give you a better understanding of the dynamics within rural – real rural – versus large urban. I think where I will land here is, I think my final appeal to you is: rural Alberta and rural Albertans deserve fair and effective representation, not just numeric parity. The cumulative burden of geography, industry engagement, municipal complexity, and constituent casework must be fully acknowledged. Rural Albertans are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for realistic and workable representation.

This commission has the opportunity and the legislative authority, I might add, to ensure flexible and just boundaries in sparsely populated areas such as this region. We are in the largest town in my riding: about 5,000 people in the town of Westlock. In order to give good representation for all rural Albertans, I respectfully urge the commission to apply the 25 per cent to 50 per cent variance for qualifying rural ridings under section 15(2). Apply up to 25 per cent variation to sparsely populated rural ridings to ensure that effective representation is possible.

I also would submit to target urban ridings with high density to absorb up to 25 per cent more population. Some might consider that to be unfair. I would consider that to be understandable and recognizable for effective representation as outlined. Consider the unique workload, distance, and voter representation for rural MLAs when you outline the boundaries.

I know that when the last commission did their work, when the final report came out, it was significantly different than the initial report. I would urge the commission to do the work early, to come out with an initial report that will require minimal interruption, difference, before the final report.

The former MLA for Athabasca-Redwater-Sturgeon, alongside myself, when the final report came out: we were very concerned with how our ridings had hardly changed, and all of a sudden we had this riding just about four hours of driving from one side to the other. We had really no ability to change that at that time.

So thank you for your time. I really am very much appreciative of the work that you're doing. I do believe that, in order to have effective representation for rural Alberta, there is a need to utilize the legislation and utilize what's outlined in section 15 to ensure that what I call real rural – it's large areas that's sparsely populated – can find effective representation.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. With your presentation, I'm sure there are going to be some questions of the commission. I'm going to start on our left of the table here.

Mr. Evans, any questions or comment?

Mr. Evans: What would be your proposed solution to the size of the current constituency and the difficulties that you face in representing the constituency geographically, the size that it is, with the numbers that it has? Would you pare it down even more? What would you do?

Mr. van Dijken: This constituency, in my opinion, is far larger geographically than it should be.

Mr. Evans: Okay.

Mr. van Dijken: I believe the commission – if I was in your seat, I would take a look at the large urban areas and work my way out. I would look at Edmonton centre, Calgary centre, even our mid-sized cities. I think mid-sized cities are in good position for representation, but if we take a look at Edmonton centre – the former MLA Clark would understand this – the ability to increase the population base

within the centre of Edmonton and Calgary, to draw new boundaries there and then work out from there.

1:30

I truly believe that the number – what was the number that was cited? The average population base would be about 55,000 in the centre of Edmonton and the centre of Calgary, to understand that effective representation up to 68,000 can be accomplished. That would be the starting point of how your ridings grow out from there.

I don't expect that, say, Red Deer-North or Red Deer-South should be considered as needing to be adjusted from that 55,000 mark downward. They're rural, but they're not what I would classify as "real rural," out in the sparsely populated regions. I'm not saying that all rural ridings should be targeted to be 25 per cent, but I do believe that – you know, currently I represent half of St. Paul county. I represent Swan Hills and Big Lakes county. I represent half of Lesser Slave county. In some of those boundaries to reduce the municipal workload that is required, it would be helpful for rural representation.

Mr. Evans: Let me ask you this, Glenn. Two questions. One, are you envisioning this like a series of concentric circles? We'll take Edmonton, for example. We have a circle in the core of Edmonton, whatever that looks like, and then another circle, and then we would have these series of circles in the concentric format, that would be the boundary type of a solution?

Mr. van Dijken: I'm not sure what you by concentric.

Mr. Evans: Circles within circles.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. No, I don't believe that that's effective. I believe that you would have Edmonton-City Centre and then you would have a number of ridings built around Edmonton-City Centre and then a number of ridings built around that, to accomplish the goal of starting to move in a direction where you can see the ability to reduce the numbers in the rural areas, the real rural areas.

Mr. Evans: Let me ask you another question, and it's on where we have a split county, for example. That county, I think you said you have two of those.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. I have four, actually, four of the nine.

Mr. Evans: Okay. So each of those counties would then have, really theoretically, at least two MLAs representing them.

Mr. van Dijken: Correct. Right.

Mr. Evans: Does that provide more effective or less effective representation for the county? This is just me thinking on my own without any guidance, even from Greg, but I would think you would have better representation because there would be two MLAs voicing the concerns or, you know, the agenda of that one county. Is that true?

Mr. van Dijken: No. I hear that's a possibility, but how it actually plays out really depends on who's elected in what riding. I'm going to reflect on the working relationship with the county of St. Paul in my last term. We had a resident from the county of St. Paul as our elected MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. He did the majority of my work in St. Paul county, to just be frank, because he recognized that he was right there and able to do it and be the face of our representation for the county of St. Paul.

I think where it becomes difficult is trying to provide effective representation when you have nine counties at the table. It becomes

very difficult, like, for one MLA to handle that. It's very hard to actually accomplish that representation.

Mr. Evans: It's a lot of voices.

Mr. van Dijken: I'm going to be honest. Some of the concerns are not fully represented because of the workload that's put on an individual in that circumstance. Like, MLA Piquette, he understood it as much as I understood it, that this is going to be very hard to properly represent all of these areas. So that was a concern right from day one when we saw that current map.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you

The Chair: Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Just a couple of questions. I read your written summary, and I paired it up with MLA Cyr's written summary for his comments referring to Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. A couple of questions regarding that. The population of Athabasca, your riding, the number that we're dealing with to make decisions is 46,782. The number is plus or minus that 25. It hasn't shown any growth since the last electoral division. I see that the suggestion is to move the reserve that's located in the corner of your adjacent riding, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, the one that's located in the corner, the southwest corner. Can you shed more light on that reserve moving over? How do the people who live in that area feel about that?

Mr. van Dijken: I wouldn't be able to speak to the Saddle Lake reserve and their feelings towards the potential of being put to another electoral division or constituency. I would submit to you that where I'm not against that if that was to be decided, I still don't think it fixes the difficulty of effective representation. It just essentially moves a group of people that are currently represented in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and swaps it with a group of people that are currently represented by Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, and I don't see that it makes a significant impact on the concern that I have, that having effective rural representation does require a shrinking geographically of these large rural ridings.

Mrs. Samson: The other follow-up to that is that also in that suggestion, between those two written submissions, was half of the county of St. Paul – like, half straddles your riding, and half straddles electoral district 51. Can you shed more light on moving that into 51?

Mr. van Dijken: I think that's perfectly reasonable, but I do believe that if it was just moving half of St. Paul county into another, it's going to put that population base significantly over. I guess the best person to talk to about effective representation in that case would be the local MLA there. They do have a larger town there with Cold Lake, so that helps to put the population base up. Yeah. You know, when the constituency was initially constructed or put forward, there was conversation with the town of Swan Hills and swapping out some of, say, the town of Swan Hills in Big Lakes county, from this riding, and to keep the population base, we would take the little piece of Westlock county above the area that is not currently in the riding. We would take on that, keep the population about the same. They actually frowned on amendments to the final report, so no work got done with that.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: While, I said, sir, I'm not sticking to the seven-minute timeline, we're approaching 30 minutes. I want every commissioner to have a chance, so one quick question from each of Julian and Mr. Clark.

Dr. Martin: Well, thank you. I'm particularly struck by the number of hamlets and school divisions and summer villages and the like. How do you arrange your schedule to maintain a respectable cycle of communication with those people?

1:40

Mr. van Dijken: Like I said earlier, most of my communication is with the mayors and reeves of the towns and counties and villages. The hamlets are largely a function of the counties. We have an understanding with the summer villages that most of the communication between the area and the MLA will be done through the counties. It's about trying to work together to actually allow that communication to happen.

There are times where we – you know, a couple of the summer villages we had some issues about five years ago with high water levels and that kind of thing, and they had to directly come to the MLA. They were working quite closely with the county on other projects, so it was felt that the best way to actually manage that side of the file was with the reeves of the counties. Most of the summer villages are to the east of us here in the Athabasca region.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

The Chair: Greg, any questions?

Mr. Clark: Thank you. Yeah. I will try to be brief. I have a lot of questions. MLA van Dijken, thank you so much for coming. Good to see you again. Yeah, I always enjoy travelling the province. It's a real privilege to be able to be here and get around. You know, one of the big, big challenges we're grappling with – and I hear you, absolutely, on the big challenge of dealing with such a large geography. There are some benefits. You're in a beautiful part of the world. We're pretty lucky to be in Alberta anyway, and there are some benefits, but I hear completely the big challenges you've got.

One of the things we have to struggle with – kind of good news, bad news, right? – is that the population of Alberta has grown enormously, and a lot of those people just come to the cities. I'm looking at the numbers of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. It started off in 2017 exactly on provincial average, and now it's 15 per cent below. You've sort of stayed the same; the province has just gone like this. It's stable. The challenge is that all of a sudden you just haven't changed at the same rate.

On the flip side, we've got seven or more constituencies that are more than 25 per cent over the population number. Some of them are 50 per cent over, and we don't have the ability to go the other way, right? Like you say, the 15(2): we can be below 25 per cent on a few, but we can't be above 25 per cent on any. So that really makes it a puzzle, right? Even if we're a little bit, you know, inequitable in terms of allowing for some smaller populations in rural, there are just some changes that have to happen kind of legally, right? That's a real struggle.

In that context, would it help – and I'd love for you to talk about your consistency offices and constituency staff. They do a lot of the front-line work. Do you have constituency offices in more than one spot? Even if you do, would it help if the Legislature would provide – not like it's in our remit to do this; we can't do this. We can recommend and ask and poke and prod, which previous commissions have done. I've just got a lot of time for an argument that says: you can't be everywhere. Even if you made it smaller, you still can't be everywhere. But could you do with more staff and a bigger budget to

open more offices, have more people actually in the different parts of the constituency? Would that help?

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. I will speak to that. We currently run with two full-time and one part-time staff. The constit office: we did have one in Athabasca, one in Barrhead. But it becomes difficult when the conversation is: Smoky Lake should have one. Then it seems like everybody's an hour from the constit office.

I will say that technology has made the constituencies smaller, because it's not the same, but I can do quite a few of my meetings virtually. Having the constit staff working together – we did close the Athabasca office and utilized all constit staff in the Barrhead office just because they find it works better to be together. I don't think you solve all of the issues by increasing a budget. I do believe that in order to – just take a look at the legions that we represent. I represent, I think, eight or nine legions now. On Remembrance Day we like to get around to each of them at least once in a term, but we can't. Ten years now, and I've been able to get through pretty much all except for Mallaig for their Remembrance Day ceremonies. And graduations: they all have kind of the same time frame, and you're two hours that way and you can't get to it. It does become hard. I don't think it's necessarily a budget issue. So that part of it – I like to engage but even, like, agricultural societies: we have 22 agricultural societies in the riding. It becomes a big part of advocating for your constituency, trying to ensure that your societies and not-for-profits are properly represented and able to access the services they need as well.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, sir. I'm going to conclude with a couple of quick questions, though.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. As you appreciate, we're going across the province. Two days ago we had the MLA for Edmonton-Meadows. If you look at the uppermost population figure, his constituency, I think, is about 67,000 right now. He's at the upper limit. He has a population base that probably carries seven or eight different languages than English as their first language. Small geographic area in the east part of Edmonton. But he's got a challenge, too, and it's those types of challenges we're faced with. I'm not arguing against what you said. I just hope you understand that we've got presentations all across the spectrum that way.

Having said that, if we look at the upper limit of 68,000, approximately, for MLAs – I'm not sure if you realize this – even with 89 ridings Alberta has some of the highest population per MLA, when you get to that category, in the country. Was there any discussion in caucus, that you can share, or in the House or when you drafted this legislation to move only to 89? I think there's – you know, I'm starting to see that maybe there's room for a bigger house with the population that we've got. Just very quickly if you can respond to that.

Mr. van Dijken: I think you would see that there was casual conversation. But even in the legislation that was passed there would have been conversation recorded with regard to the need to move to 89. I think the decision was largely based in the Legislature off of – I believe B.C. has the same number of MLAs.

The Chair: I think they have more. I think they have 92 or something like that. I'm not sure.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. It was going to be – a lot of the conversations I had with colleagues was essentially, you know, that we've got to try and align ourselves with other jurisdictions and ensure that we're being responsible how that's distributed.

The Chair: Okay. A different question. You made a comment about the interim report and the final report back in 2016-17. We're fortunate. We can travel the country in beautiful weather this first go-round. I'm cognizant that after our first report and working to hear from a broad base of Albertans on that report, we're not going to be able to go to – I don't think we're going to be able to go to St. Paul, Westlock, Drumheller, all the places we're going now. As an MLA and as someone representing this riding, do you appreciate that if you want to give us feedback on the first report, you may have to do it in Edmonton, you may have to do it in a larger centre, or you may have to do it remotely?

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. What I would say is that as long as the initial report comes back in more or less the final form, it makes it a lot easier to represent. I think the frustration that we experienced in the last endeavour to do boundaries was the fact that the final report was massively different than the initial report. If it's going to be a final report, I think it would be understandable if the initial report comes out and there are minor tweaks to be done, which is kind of understood that there might have to be minor tweaks, to have that in a couple of locations. I can understand that, absolutely.

1:50

The Chair: Okay. You've caused us to think more long term on this, so thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation and your answers and the dialogue. Much appreciated.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you for the work you're doing.

The Chair: Okay. Our next presenter is Nick Gelych. Nick Gelych? I've got Nick. Who's Nick?

Mr. Gelych: Right here.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blakeman: I'm Joe Blakeman.

The Chair: Okay. Oh, you are here. It's a tag team. Okay.

Mr. Blakeman: We represent actually Lac Ste. Anne county. I'm the reeve of Lac Ste. Anne county, and Nick is deputy reeve.

The Chair: Okay. Give us a second here, sir.
Okay. Good. We'll hear from you.

Mr. Blakeman: We're in Shane Getson's riding, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and our only concern would be the urban-rural mix. I think that's one thing that we don't want to lose, our rural identity, when these lines are drawn, right? A keep-Edmonton-Edmonton kind of thing. Right now I think there are five counties inside of there. We all get along. Everything is good. You know, Shane has been a great MLA. We don't have the same social and economic needs that the city people do, and I think that's what our concern would be. If we get mixed into that, the MLA's decision-making, the drive for funding to the different municipalities, and all that changes the minute that that urban mixes in there. That's probably our biggest concern.

The Chair: So keep it rural. Keep it rural. Don't bring those city folks in.

Mr. Gelych: We can go north-south. We can go west. We just don't really want to go east.

Mr. Blakeman: Yeah. It doesn't sound like there are any plans – for lack of a better term, there's nothing derogatory about the urban or the rural mix. That's not the point.

The Chair: That's what they said about you yesterday.

Mr. Blakeman: And true enough.

Yeah. I think it's more or less taking a look at it from a – you know, I was in the private industry for quite a few years, retired, then got into the municipal government side of things. When you see – how can I say? – the struggles that it is with regard to a private entity trying to get a hold of government and at the same time in the municipal sector trying to get a hold of government, there are different needs that are required at that point in time. One is a private issue that needs to be addressed, and I have a mission and I have an obligation to the shareholders.

The other one is, you know, our obligation to our ratepayers. When we start taking a look at grant funding and you take a look at the bridge files, you take a look at all – how can I say? – the assets that we have to maintain on a day-to-day basis and taking a look for additional grant dollars and then getting it confused in with the urban sector, which have totally different needs or requirements than what we do in our area. You know, you could talk about mass transit, whatever the case may be, versus a bridge file. There are two different aspects, and both require a certain need to be taken a look at.

At the same time, when you take a look at the numbers and what MLA van Dijken has said about the fact that the miles that have to be put forward and see what our MLA has to do with regard to meetings – at one point he's in St. Albert at 4 o'clock, and he's got another meeting in Edson or Entwistle at 7 – I think from a safety perspective it actually puts our MLAs at risk. Trying to put more staff in the picture is one of the questions that we heard earlier. People don't want to talk to staff. They want to talk to their MLA. That the – how can I say? That's the issue and that's the ordinance that we actually place on these MLAs, that there's a target on them and people want to talk to them personally.

I took a look at some of the discussions that we're having and taking a look at – I'm also the president of Shane Getson's constituency association. When you take a look at the demographics, we have approximately around 46,000 in our riding.

The Chair: Sorry. You said your riding name?

Mr. Gelych: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Blakeman: God's country.

Mr. Gelych: As Shane puts it, yes.

When we take a look at the numbers, and just off the top of my head I think it's around 46,000, but when you take a look at what the requirements of some of these people are, we have, I think – what is it? – 14 summer villages.

Mr. Blakeman: We have 12 just in our county.

Mr. Gelych: Yeah.

Mr. Blakeman: So we're going to offer some to Glenn.

Mr. Gelych: We look after our own hamlets, as stated earlier, but we do have a couple of other municipalities, a town and a village. At the same time we wind up – for lack of a better term it tends to be that we as a county – how can I say? – take a little bit of the issues on our shoulders. They look to us as, and I'm just using this again in a form that it shouldn't be, but more of a big brother. They look at us to say

that if there's any assistance or any help that is needed, they come to the county, and then it's up to us to go ahead and deal with the MLA or deal with the governing body at that point in time to try to come to a reasonable solution to any of the issues that we have.

It can be as simple as, and I don't know if you ever heard about it, but the weir at Lac Ste. Anne, that seems to be a big issue because of lake level. One side of the lake can be happy because the water levels are right. The other side is unhappy because the water levels are either too low or too high, and it's up to the governments and municipalities to deal with things. It makes it easy for us when we have an issue like that to deal with specifically one MLA and, at the same time, dealing with the issues that are current with us.

The Chair: Okay. Anything else?

Mr. Blakeman: No, I don't. I think just, you know, being children of the province, all the municipalities, I think it's easier for us in our case just having the one MLA. I did hear that discussion with Glenn, and when we just have that one body to go to – as we represent the other municipalities whenever they seem to get into trouble, there's always big brother. It's just easier that way.

The Chair: Let me ask you about the name. Are you happy with the name of it?

Mr. Blakeman: Well, my family's been at Lac Ste. Anne since 1906, so I'm good with it.

Mr. Gelych: A name is a name. You know, you grow with it. The one thing that I kind of heard, one of the questions that kind of came up with regard to the demographics, and you made mentions around certain – and I totally understand that we may have specific issues because of geographic footprints that we need to contend with and deal with. Other people maybe have demographic issues around language or social issues. Totally understanding.

I think the big thing is that when you take a look at, as I alluded to earlier, the requirement for the people actually to have visible contact and personal contact with an MLA, maybe the numbers have to change in certain areas, especially around urban areas versus rural areas so that you could take a look at it in a dual role rather than just saying that we're going to look at it one way as being just a total demographic issue with numbers. Maybe there's a geographic component that you can put into with square miles or travel or whatever else that you kind of looked at. I know that just adds a little bit to it, but maybe that's something that we need to look at. Maybe the numbers are lower and maybe some of the Edmonton or city ridings, we can give them higher numbers, but it's a lot easier to travel 15 minutes from meeting to meeting than it is four or five hours.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, gentlemen, for this time.

Mr. Clark: I don't have any questions. I absolutely empathize with the real challenges in large municipalities. You know, like you say, there's an inherent trade-off – right? – in terms of access to the outdoors, nature, and the rural lifestyle, and the flip side is that you've got these big spaces to deal with, and it does make for a challenge.

I guess maybe the quick question I would have: you mentioned there's a sort of – you'll work with your residents and you'll sort of filter those questions up to the MLA and act as a bit of a clearinghouse for that. Is there some benefit in doing that in the sense that some of those issues are genuinely municipal? Some of them are probably not the highest priority on Earth. It has been known to happen occasionally, and then you can maybe kind of gather up a few things that are sort of consistent, like issues. Back in the day I would tell my

constit staff that if there are five e-mails or phone calls from constituents on a specific issue, like, wow, there's something really serious going on because no one really ever calls their MLA unless it's a big deal a lot of times. Is there some value, though, in that, in being able to kind of clear that out and provide a kind of a singular voice to your provincial rep?

2:00

Mr. Blakeman: I think a lot of it, too, is that you don't want to be redundant. If you've got three or four summer villages complaining about the lake level, and then they're blaming us for a weird – and we'll use that for an example. It's better us get together and have that discussion first and then carry that forward to the MLA as a group instead of each individual going with a different story. I think everybody in high school played that game, didn't we? You started hearing, and you know what it was like when it got around to the other side.

We think it's beneficial. A lot of it is infrastructure. It's probably the biggest thing that we work with our other municipalities. Then it's, like, grant funding. We have a commission set up with our other municipalities. We work as a group there. Then when we need to build a transmission line, whether it be water or waste water or something like that, we're going as a group to our MLA instead of each individual. We found it to be actually very productive, for that matter.

Mr. Gelych: I think that's one of the things that we did initially, when we got on council two years ago, was we tried to build those relationships with those communities so that we can in some way foster – how can I say? – a generated interest in a topic rather than going ahead and having an entity of, you know, a few of us.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: Julian, a question?

Dr. Martin: I know you're both, in fact, the managers of the Lac Ste. Anne municipality. How far afield do we get from there? Sometimes it would seem logical, and you'd have to go and drive 50 miles to get the conversation you need. Is that the case?

Mr. Blakeman: The conversation with our MLA or just within our own municipality?

Dr. Martin: With other reeves and the like.

Mr. Blakeman: Yeah. We have, I think, seven municipalities around us. Different counties. Fortunately, because through the RMA we're called the Pembina zone, we do meet once every three months with all of them.

Dr. Martin: Right.

Mr. Blakeman: We're all in there, but if we have a certain discussion, yeah, it can be quite a little drive to talk to them. You know, especially mutual aid agreements and things like that, which are becoming more and more important with the state of the environment and what's going on.

Dr. Martin: In terms of total population the riding probably isn't growing, but have you got hot spots where you've got growth?

Mr. Blakeman: Yeah. These numbers that we're using today, are those generated from the last census?

Dr. Martin: No.

The Chair: They're generated from the last federal census, 2021, supplemented regularly and verified up until July of 2024.

Mr. Blakeman: Because we know for a fact that we're running out of land in the east end of our county. When I say running out of land: we had lots of subdivisions, country recreational, and recreational properties on the lakes. We had a lot of them that were empty. You know, lots of empty lots. Like, you'd have, say, a 15 per cent rate. Our inventory probably went from 1,500 down to about 100.

Mr. Gelych: Yeah.

Mr. Blakeman: People are moving out. The other thing we see with the economy is that a lot of people can't afford their two houses, so they're leaving Edmonton. You know, you used to have the cabin at the lake and you headed out on your acreage, and then you'd have a house in Edmonton. Now they're getting rid of the house in Edmonton, and they're building their retirement home or they're moving their children out because they think the education is better in rural. We're seeing that a lot on the east end of our county. The east end of our county is west Sturgeon county, Parkland county, and we know that they're growing just by the development that's coming across our development office desk. It's incredible.

Mr. Gelych: Yeah.

Mr. Blakeman: Yeah. It's a hot spot from about the middle of our county east towards Edmonton.

Dr. Martin: These are good problems to have. Just remind yourself of that.

Mr. Blakeman: Well, we wish it would be more industry and less residential sometimes. But, yeah, one brings the other, though, right? We're lucky enough to have the north, and that's important, too. We have that highway 43 corridor that runs right from the beginning of the southeast end of our county right up to pretty much Whitecourt. That's an important driver along with the heavy rail there. That has brought some industry, so it would be nice to keep that together.

The Chair: Susan?

Mrs. Samson: Just a question regarding counties. Are there any counties in your electoral district that are split? Could you speak to whether you support or not split counties? Where it would straddle two electoral divisions.

Mr. Blakeman: Yeah. Yellowhead county is Shane and Martin Long.

Mr. Gelych: Yeah. Woodlands.

Mr. Blakeman: There would be Woodlands county, which would be Martin and Shane again. I don't know if Glenn has got a piece of that. Yeah. Glenn has got a piece of Woodlands, too. Then south is Shane and Boitchenko, Parkland county split.

Mrs. Samson: How do you feel about split counties? Do you manage them, or would you like to see the whole thing in one or the other riding?

Mr. Blakeman: I personally would like to see it in one riding. I think it's easier although east of Calgary I've seen Wheatland county. I think they had four MLAs in Wheatland county and one time was the previous – they just changed. McIver is the new Speaker of the House. Anyways, they had just changed. It was Nathan Cooper before.

I think that was beneficial on the De Havilland thing for them to bring that in because they had a lot of MLAs saying: we need it; we need it; we need it. But on average I think it's easier for us to deal with one person. I think it's just more one person, one party, too. You know, that could happen. If you start splitting the counties, having two parties, you never know what you're going to get. The idealism between our two major parties in the province are quite different. When we're a little bit oil and gas and a lot of country where we're at, it might not be the best for us if that was split.

Mr. Gelych: Totally understanding that, you know, when you take a look at the county borders, it would be rather difficult to say that we're going to encapsulate one county or two counties or three counties. I think it would be difficult to do on your part, but if you could maintain a sense of – how can I say? – the demographic issues that we deal with pertinent to the urban versus rural versus let's say an industrial area, so to speak, it does help us to kind of actually get to the point where we can accommodate what our ratepayers are asking.

In our case, we aren't a Sturgeon county. We're not a Yellowhead county. When we start talking about municipal revenues, we're a small county. When we talk about having a good problem such as residential, that is a good problem to have. The unfortunate thing is that our tax assessment is based specifically on country residential or residential, which makes it onerous in trying to operate the entire county without – how can I say? – that industrial or the commercial background.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

Mr. Blakeman: It's definitely easier on the people running the polling stations if the whole county is in the same constituency. In the last federal election it was quite split, and the question flies: why am I here and my neighbour is across the road? You know, that kind of thing.

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. Exactly. Thank you.

The Chair: John, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, thank you for a most informative presentation and dialogue.

Mr. Blakeman: Thank you for your time. We know you have a tough job ahead of you.

Mr. Gelych: Yes. Thank you very much.

Mr. Blakeman: I do agree there should be more seats than they're saying.

Mr. Gelych: Yeah. I had a note there.

Thank you, gentlemen, ma'am.

The Chair: That now takes us to Heather Stocking.

Ms Stocking: Well, first I want to thank each of you for accepting to be on the commission and the staff assisting you – I'm sure that it can get a little hairy at times – and as well to everybody who shows up to these things.

My name is Heather Stocking. I am from Barrhead, and I am now living in Athabasca. I am not an elected official. I am a private citizen, but I think that because of where I'm from and where I live it gives me some unique insight into this constituency.

Personally, I want to thank MLA van Dijken for pointing out the geographical centre of Alberta. I'm just going to take a point of privilege here. My aunt was mayor of Swan Hills when they did that, and she worked very closely with then MLA Ken Kowalski to make that a tourist attraction, so just a point of privilege.

I also want to mention that I know personally that MLA van Dijken has shown up at events far away from home. We know, as you pointed out, there are the issues with weather and travel. An event I can think of clearly is in Grassland, which is – what? – an hour and a half away from home one way, and he shows up at these things, and he continues to show up at these things, and I appreciate his diligence on the travel. I can't imagine how many kilometres he's put on in those 10 years. So it is extremely relevant to look at the size of these constituencies.

2:10

I don't really have a long presentation although I did make a few notes while people were talking. I'm here speaking to you today to keep the Barrhead, Westlock, Athabasca, Swan Hills portion at least intact. For generations the Barrhead to Athabasca corridor and the Barrhead to Swan Hills corridor, Swan Hills to Athabasca has been a trade route. For years when I volunteered at the Barrhead Blue Heron Fair, we saw people come from Swan Hills, from Westlock, from Athabasca. Now I'm living in Athabasca. There's a magnificent river rats music festival every July, and you see people from Swan Hills, Barrhead, and Westlock come to Athabasca. We know that that movement is there within those four communities.

More than one business recognizes that these communities are tied together. For years it was the *Barrhead Leader*, *Westlock News*, *Athabasca Advocate* newspapers. They shared a second section which covered news across the region. Now, of course, since the pandemic it's *Town and Country Today*, but it's still a shared newspaper, communal news at the front that they figure will be of interest to any reader and then alphabetically *Athabasca Advocate* right in the back of the paper.

Alternative land use services: ALUS is Barrhead, Westlock, Athabasca. They're another business that recognizes that geographical tie. While these businesses and other businesses that might be named after this geographical region would continue regardless of where the boundaries are, I think that it speaks to the importance of keeping these communities together.

Actually, to your point, Athabasca is growing. There are no rentals to be found. Airbnbs in the area have been snapped up and are being rented for months at a time. The town is going to give a property tax break on new buildings, and they're actually working with the Athabasca University on some vacant land to determine whether they can expand a subdivision. So it's not that the growth isn't there; it's that there's nowhere to grow because there's nowhere for people to move. The growth is happening. We just need to get a place for people to live.

And then the last thing is that I don't want to ignore the east end of the constituency, but Smoky Lake, that end, has never, in my experience, been necessarily, like, a trading area with the Athabasca-Westlock. They seem to go more east and south. So if there was a place, you know, to move, that would be where I would move it. Like, I would keep this geographical – the kind of triangle of Swan Hills, Barrhead, Westlock, Athabasca: I would like to see that kept together as much as possible.

That's it. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Questions? John?

Mr. Evans: No. Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. Thank you for your presentation. I think I'm challenged because we have a county that falls below the magic number of 55,000, and I guess I'm overwhelmed. I came out of Edmonton and everything is way too big populationwise, and here we're faced with not enough population. I know I was feeling around about the county of St. Paul moving out, the half that's sitting in there, but I'd never contemplated Smoky Lake and parts to the east. That's quite a big jump. I just don't think – you know, population is only one criteria in the mix, but it's a big one. We don't base everything on that, but it is the starting point. I take your comment. I understand what you're saying, but we're leaving it at that.

Thank you.

Ms Stocking: Fair enough. Yeah.

The Chair: We're also tasked with naming the electoral divisions.

Ms Stocking: Yeah.

The Chair: I assume you're content with Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Ms Stocking: Sure, or it could be named after former MLA Ken Kowalski. I don't think the name necessarily has . . .

The Chair: Names are very important overall.

Ms Stocking: They are. They are important.

The Chair: Okay. Julian?

Dr. Martin: Thank you. Thank you for pointing out the difference between the economic activity in the western part of the riding and the relative stable to stagnating situation out Smoky Lake way. Do you think that's been the case for a long time, or is it a function of oil and gas? What comes of this?

Ms Stocking: Well, if you want to get into oil and gas, I think that, you know, if counties got paid on the oil and gas wells, that there wasn't that tax break. That hit counties hard. I mean, yeah, there are a lot of things, right? Right now, today, tariffs and the threat of tariffs and who knows: there are a lot of things that fluctuate. But definitely I think that the slowdown in the oil and gas has contributed greatly to that.

Agriculture is agriculture. We're always going to have crops and cattle and swine and whatever. Yeah, it's a definite impact when that oil and gas takes the hit.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Thank you for being here. I appreciate it. No questions.

Ms Stocking: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
That takes us to Landen Tischer.

Mr. Tischer: Hi. My name is Landen Tischer. I'm glad you all made it out here. I'll probably keep it a little bit short. I only managed to get four pages, so four minutes. I'm no speaker.

Yes. I'm a farmer from Barrhead with a political hobby. This is my first time involving myself in the boundaries discussion. I've travelled this riding a bit in the north in my spare time, and occasionally I've driven out east of Smoky Lake on vacation. In my past I have worked in agricultural retail, selling and moving agrichemicals, as a support worker for people with complex needs, a disability and a drug

addiction, and I was previously a horizontal directional driller. That's low-impact underground infrastructure for the oil field and in municipalities.

As a directional driller I was drilling both in towns and out on a pipeline in the oil field. In fact, I've had a few years as a diamond club member at the Best Western hotel in Edson, platinum member at the Econo Lodge in Fox Creek, and I'm working on my Wyndham rewards in the Ramada in Hinton. Do you know what these towns – Barrhead, Westlock, and Athabasca – typically don't have? It's people who max out rewards cards in hotels and actually in the chain hotels, but I wouldn't chop up a riding for hotels, and Westlock does have a Ramada.

I find it interesting because the economy here is different in Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. There are pipelines, there's oil and gas, but they're routed through people's fields under the wheat and barley and canola and cattle. Every couple of fields may have a pumpjack, but that's not the main driver of our communities. We don't have nearly as much of a population surge during the busy season. I call them oil towns, and I suppose they call us farm towns.

Farm towns are made up of landowners and moderately sized business owners, who have a large influence on the culture of our communities, the needs and the politics of those towns. There is a large ignored economic sector in rural communities, the agribusiness. We need representation who has the ability to say the hard things to protect their small-business owners and farmers. It's representation who can tell the oil corps to pay their lease in full and not in half and make sure that the towns and counties are not writing off taxes owed to them by these fly-by-night gas entrepreneurs who start oil companies and sell them to their friends: insert large oil company here.

2:20

When we mix our economic drivers too much, we will have an MLA that either has to play favourites or go into hiding. Do they go around to the oil companies and say, "You need to pay this county for your oil lease," or do they say, "Well, we need to let them have a little break because they're running behind in these small towns?"

Our representation would have an easier time if they were less committed to one industry or the other. With oil towns they are getting iced drinks and pools built by a single oil company while farm towns have to fund raise and fight with the county to pay for these facilities.

In farm towns the emergency runs out of staff on the weekends and closes while the emergency doctor in an oil town asks if you've done cocaine this evening before you explain your pneumonia symptoms. It's just a different way of life in Hinton there. It's happened to my friend. He had bad pneumonia, and they were like: did you do cocaine? And he was like: what? Because where we're from, we don't really ask that.

There's even variation on farms from our area to the farms down south or to the north in the Peace Country. Here a large number of farms are not corporate. They don't have a payroll, and there are fewer seasonal workers. I have not worked this out numerically; however, the farmer identity is different than southern farmers whose wheat grows a foot tall and three X9 combines drive seven to nine miles per hour all day.

Ours is often stuck at four or five miles per hour. It's not an X9. Mine's a Case 8230, it's different, but it has been chipped to have the power of a class-9 combine. But the point isn't the speed. It's that the X9 is the top of the market, \$1.2 million per machine, and I got mine second-hand, old, for \$200,000. It's a different farm life, and it involves different conversations.

Out here we sometimes have the opposite problems to urban areas. It seems that although our communities were built in the '70s, we aren't getting new sidewalks with bike lanes, however popular those may or may not be. We have grass-covered sidewalks that end at random points. In our farm towns hospitals are in danger of shutting down on the weekends due to the lack of staff rather than being overloaded. We are losing surgical capabilities for something like an appendix burst on the weekend or a pregnancy, while also replacing every hip in the area right here in town. The north of this area closes more schools than it builds while to the west it then overcrowds tiny niche schools. Some areas with a small population have three different school systems while the next town over has a single grade with the same population of each of those schools.

I say this because we have a different problem set in different municipalities out here, and it quickly changes on the border of cities and the suburban hellscape where a person can sit in traffic to leave their neighbourhood. In our towns it often takes 15 minutes to walk to the grocery store, five minutes to drive anywhere in town, and you may understand there are different pressures on representing our communities. Even though we can talk to anyone instantly, we're further from the group than we were before.

It could be difficult for one MLA to build our communities. While one area is made up of provincial campgrounds and tiny social halls, which have been slowly falling apart, and also needing to research for a business park in Acheson or something like this. Representatives out here need common threads to maintain their own riding and develop the areas in a particular way they need.

This riding seems to cut into other territories, particularly when it gets out east. Ashmont relates to St. Paul more closely. Many people in Barrhead or even Smoky Lake haven't had contact with people in Ashmont or Mallaig. Vilna still remains relevant to us. These people are often quite disconnected from the riding. So I would hope that we would move more to the west than moving more to the east, in the St. Paul direction.

Athabasca and Fort Assiniboine have a unique relationship due to being river towns accessed by the Athabasca River in the past. It's not that the communities are connected that way anymore, but Fort Assiniboine is a 200-year-old settlement that was built as a trading post for the Hudson Bay Company, while the grain industry took off in the area around the 1900s, much like Athabasca Landing became known for its grain production during that time.

There are differences in the riding that are difficult to contend with: the change of appearance of the land, that a person can easily see from Google Maps. When we look at Google Maps, there's a lighter path that is generally farmland and a darker path that is forest and where the oil hides. I find there is a difference between oil and gas in this riding and oil and gas in Fox Creek or Valleyview, where the land is owned by farmers here, and over there they're digging up Crown land. There are different concerns when making pipelines on private land and public land, and it would be easier for representatives to make these decisions and support them if their area is kind of cut out in that way.

Thank you for putting effort into this riding. It takes a lot of work to understand the nuances of what looks like a big, flat piece of ground. I believe the communities can be very different and have different needs, and trying to keep them together helps. I hope that you see that, too. This is a huge undertaking, and I can't imagine myself trying to split these up to make them make sense.

Thank you for coming out to Westlock and listening.

The Chair: Thank you. You've done very well in those seven minutes. Questions, starting with you, Susan?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. Specific to the riding that you live in, 49, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, can you drill down and say: do

you like it the way it is, or should we be looking to move more to the north through that natural corridor of Westlock-Athabasca?

Mr. Tischer: I think that going north might be a little bit better than going east.

Mrs. Samson: Because you identified that Smoky Lake disconnects that area.

Mr. Tischer: Yeah. Even though the fellow I was talking with, with Smoky Lake, doesn't know what happens past Spedden.

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. Right. I see it now on the map. It's pretty small.

Mr. Tischer: Yeah. Well, I mean the area, but like that cut-off there. It's weird.

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair: John?

Mr. Evans: No, nothing. Thank you.

Mr. Tischer: Also, I saw that the St. Albert and Lac Ste. Anne – disclosure: I was with the NDP candidate, trying to figure out how to get down to all the towns to win them over. I mean, like, it's a tough game anyway, but, man, for St. Albert there, for Lac Ste. Anne, that was great. A whole road that just went all the way through. You could just go and drive through. I was a Peace River-Westlock candidate, and we had 33 – or, no, the road going to Whitecourt. You could actually just follow the road going all the way up north, and you could go off and diverge off to the different communities. Making it accessible and following along a road also helps. That's a little off my thing.

Mrs. Samson: That's good. Thanks.

The Chair: Julian?

Dr. Martin: No.

The Chair: Greg?

Mr. Clark: I'm just looking up Spedden to make sure I know. That's good. I do appreciate you coming down, and it was a thoughtful presentation, so thank you.

The Chair: Okay. So you were a candidate in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland or this one?

Mr. Tischer: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. Yeah.

My rival is here. You do a good job, Glenn. I appreciate you.

The Chair: Good. Well, thank you so much. We always appreciate people that have travelled the electoral district over – I don't know; what is it? – 30, 35 days' span to connect with people who've got a different perspective or a more in-depth perspective, so thank you very much.

Mr. Tischer: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Aaron, I think that goes through our list.

Mrs. Samson: We have another MLA locked in.

The Chair: Do we? Do we have another presenter?

Ms Hoffman: I presented yesterday in Edmonton. I'm just here to watch.

Mrs. Samson: We saw you.

The Chair: We were hoping – we thought you were a stalker, but . . .

2:30

Mrs. Samson: Now we know.

The Chair: And we appreciate stalkers.

Ms Hoffman: I'm a roadie, yeah.

The Chair: EBC groupie.

Okay. Well, anybody off the floor? In light of the presentations, the discussion, the conversation, the back and forth, any comments that anyone wants to make or corrections?

Mrs. Samson: Or questions?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Doidge: Do I speak in a mic if people can hear me?

The Chair: Well, we actually need it recorded. Sorry. I should have maybe warned you about that. If you can just come forward, just have a seat, take your time, and identify yourself.

Ms Doidge: Hello. My name is Karen Doidge, and I live northwest of the town of Athabasca, within the county of Athabasca, so Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock is my provincial constituency. I've been very, very busy with work, and I just caught the information about this meeting on short notice, so I'm not terribly well prepared, but I did just have a couple of questions. I do think that addressing the electoral boundaries is a brilliant idea, because it is quite obviously a problem when we can have constituencies such as Lesser Slave Lake or Central Peace-Notley with 26,000 and 27,000 constituents versus some of the Edmonton and Calgary constituencies with 68,900 and 65,500 members, which are numbers I know you're all extremely clear on.

I do feel that I have deep sympathy for our MLA and for other MLAs who are in large constituencies, physical ridings where they have hundreds and hundreds of kilometres to travel all the time. However, I do feel that, when we get too grossly broken up in terms of what we feel as individuals – and I think one of the big problems right now in society is people don't feel represented. If you look at 69,000 people having one MLA versus 26,000 people having one MLA, you feel: my vote does not equal the vote in another constituency. So I really appreciate why you have to look at this, along with all of the other permutations and complications that the other speakers have so clearly elucidated.

I also really appreciated Brandon's speech or presentation on . . .

The Chair: Landen.

Ms Doidge: Landen. Sorry. Yes.

Landen's presentation on the differences, and Heather Stocking's

on the communities involved and how some, as in our particular riding, how Smoky Lake and east are not tightly knit as a community and an economy with the rest of us in the west. I don't know if Lesser Slave Lake is the constituency, as a very small one, that would have a connection through Swan Hills and Chisholm and the others; Smith because Smith, which is in there, the Lesser Slave Lake provincial riding, is part of the Athabasca Aspen View school division. So if taking some of these super small ridings and seeing how they could perhaps separate and join a decent mid-sized constituency such as ourselves I think might be a grand idea because there are connections on the highways and with business and a lot of these that I know you would take into consideration.

I also think that Albertans, that Canadians want to be well represented in our different levels of government, and that right now, provincially, we have a lot of our MLAs who have auxiliary roles assigned to them, so they are receiving in terms of salary more than a standard MLA's salary. If one is looking at the financial burden of increasing the size of the Legislature, perhaps look at having more members, and then some of the members wouldn't have to have dual roles in a cabinet situation, so financially that would compensate there. Again, if you're balancing out your constituency numbers along as much as possible with size, then the amount of hours each MLA has to put into work in terms of travel and people to deal with might be more readily balanced and worth the additional MLA that you might have.

I just wanted to thank you very much for taking the time to be on this commission and looking at making life more fair for Albertans and for people to feel more thoroughly represented, and then they'll be more engaged in elections and in their community.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, ma'am, for coming forward on an impromptu basis.

Ms Doidge: Very impromptu.

The Chair: In fairness, any commission members want to have a dialogue or ask questions? Okay.

Yes, sir. Landen

Mr. Tischer: Are there towns with shorter names we could pick to name it after? Athabasca whatever it is: it's literally long.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Spedden. That's easy.

Well, thank you very much.

Thank you, everyone, for coming. We will stick around if anybody has any questions about, you know, who cuts Julian's hair. Any questions about our role? Okay. Thank you, everyone. We will remain here if you want to talk to us individually and have a chat. We're happy to dialogue.

If you know of anybody in St. Paul, we'll be there tomorrow.

Mrs. Samson: And Brooks.

[The commission deliberated]

[The hearing adjourned at 3:15 p.m.]

