



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Edmonton

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1:33 p.m.

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the afternoon session of our second day of the second week of public hearings for the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. We had a very busy day yesterday. I think we had 39 presenters, and no one has nodded off, I can assure you, on the panel.

You can see, first of all, that our Electoral Boundaries Commission is an independent commission established by the Legislature of Alberta. You'll see our nameplates in front of us, and if you want more background information, you can go to the website to get our bios.

We've been given two challenges or tasks to do as a commission. The first task is to deal with the change in the number of electoral divisions. We are moving from 87 electoral divisions or ridings or constituencies to 89 for the next provincial election. That's been prescribed to us by the Legislature. Of course, individual voters in each electoral district elect the MLA to serve them and to represent them in the Legislative Assembly. So expanding the number of seats from 87 to 89 is one issue.

The second issue that we must deal with is population and the population increase, and it is significant. Just to put it in perspective, back in 2017, at the time of the last Electoral Boundaries Commission, the population base for Alberta at that time was just over 4 million people. To put that in context, the 2017 Electoral Boundaries Commission had an average of 46,697 persons per electoral division. That's not our target. The average isn't our target; rather, it's the population range of minus 25 per cent of that average to plus 25 per cent. In 2017 they ranged from just over 35,000 to a little over 58,000 as the target for effective representation.

Fast forward to today. For our commission, we're dealing with a population of 4.8-plus million Albertans, and we have, as I said, 89 electoral divisions to deal with. The average per riding results in 55,000. Again, that's not the target. The target range is minus 25 to plus 25 per cent, so 41,000 to 68,000.

Our task as a commission is to hear from Albertans as to where we should allocate the boundaries and to look at the legislative criteria and review all the submissions and come up with and recommend to the Legislature boundaries that provide effective representation. We are not under the one person, one vote situation, as they are in the U.S. Rep by pop does not reign in Alberta or Canada. In fact, there is no jurisdiction in Canada's history that strictly applied the one person, one vote principle. Rather, we operate under effective representation.

When this commission was established in early April of this past year, we went to work and did these basic tasks. First of all, we looked at a data source for population. We met as a commission and agreed that the population of the last decennial census from 2021, updated and refined by the Office of Statistics and Information for the Alberta Treasury Board, would be the best and most consistent. Ultimately, it was agreed upon that those population figures would be used. We've cut it off at July 2024 for the updated statistics, and that's what we're operating on. If you've read the report, you can see the rationale behind that.

Early on in our life as a commission we received several written submissions, and we reviewed them. Then in late May and throughout June we travelled across the province to hear publicly from Albertans as to what we should do in terms of allocating boundaries. We heard hundreds of submissions all the way from Peace River to Medicine Hat, from Lethbridge to Fort McMurray and points in between and, of course, spent considerable time in

both Calgary and Edmonton. After those public hearings, in the months throughout summer and early fall, we worked very closely with the good folks at Elections Alberta, who had the mapping tools and the population data and ability to help us move things around and create our interim report.

If you're here and you're interested in this process, you probably have looked at our interim report. That was submitted and tabled with the Speaker of the Legislature in late October of this past year. Immediately after we gave it to the Speaker, he presented a copy to each member of the Legislature, and it went on our website.

Of course, in completing our report, we paid attention to the legislative factors of sparsity and density, rate of population growth, communities of interest, municipal boundaries, geographic features, means of communication and transportation between various parts of Alberta, and all that led us to create boundaries for electoral divisions that provide, in our view, effective representation that has boundaries that are both understandable and clear.

1:40

Now, to say that our interim report is perfect – no one at this table, I think, is going to defend it and characterize it in that way. We have humbly made some submissions and made, I think, maybe some errors in our report. We have had lots of people seconding that fact and reporting to us that, yeah, we have overlooked some things. So the interim report is very much subject to revision, and we understand that.

We further heard from Albertans through the public portal on our website from early November to December 19th. We received over 1,100 submissions. I'm told by the folks at the Legislative Assembly Office that this may be the highest or the second-highest – we lag behind the daylight time zone committee, apparently – in terms of public response. So we certainly have got the public's attention on this.

We have had a very full week last week, a very full day yesterday. As I said, I think we had 36 presentations yesterday. Not quite as full a day today. We're conducting these hearings from last Monday till this week, and we look forward to hearing from presenters this afternoon.

Our first presenter is the hon. Nathan Cooper, the person that hired us and then promptly left. Welcome to Alberta, to Edmonton. I'm sure you've looked at our report and you have some things you wish to tell us.

Mr. Cooper: Excellent. Thank you. Good afternoon, commissioners and committee clerks and Legislative Assembly Office staff. It's so nice to see so many familiar faces in the room, and it's a great pleasure to be here.

For the purposes of the record and for clarity – I wish to make some lawyers happy before I begin – I wish to state at the outset that my remarks today will be presented solely in my personal capacity, that nothing in my presentation should be interpreted as representing, reflecting, or conveying the views or positions or policies of the government of Alberta. My comments are offered strictly as an individual with unique experiences, including prior service as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and as a member of the Assembly. I reiterate that the views expressed herein are exclusively my own and not attributable to the government of Alberta, who is my current employer.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Cooper: Now that that's out of the way. Having said those things in a very formal perspective, I do think that it's important that it is said that my goal here today is solely as someone who has a unique viewpoint as being a member of the Assembly – and I

know that other former members of the Assembly have presented – but also the former Speaker. As the former Speaker and a current private citizen, I do want to thank you for your service to the people of Alberta. You guys are playing a very vital part in our democracy, and I think that the work that you do and the hours that you spend are often thankless, so thank you from somebody who appreciates the importance of it.

I also wanted to thank you for the work that you did in the interim report. My presentation today will not speak to any specific constituencies, as I'll leave that up to those who live in them or have strong feelings about them, but more broadly the report that's presented. I would particularly like to highlight appendix D. It's my hope that dozens and dozens of people also read it, which is probably close to the truth. It really does highlight some very important factors when it comes to creating a boundary commission and, as you mentioned in your opening remarks, Chair, the importance of balancing effective and equal. Of course, equal is important, but so is effective.

Our democracy is one of the institutions of our society that when our democracy is healthy and our society is healthy, those two things are codependent on each other. Having a strong commission that recognizes the importance of both of the cross-section of effective and equal: it is critical to the success of our members to be able to represent their constituents effectively.

For context for you from my perspective as a former member, in the last year that I was elected, the constituency that I represented was about 10,000 square kilometres. Now, that's sort of in the middle of the pack. Immediately next door to me Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is close to 30,000, and Drumheller-Stettler is, as you know, also close to 30,000 square kilometres. Now, when you compare that against some of the urban colleagues, like say Calgary-Buffalo, who represents 10 square kilometres, 1,000 times larger than the constituency of Calgary-Buffalo was Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. It in its very nature creates some challenges when it comes to effectively representing those constituents.

I had the honour and pleasure of serving 17 municipalities, over 100 locally elected officials, three school divisions, two postsecondaries, nine high schools, and when I compare that to the job that my urban colleagues had, they largely represented less than five municipal elected officials because of the divisional nature of those constituencies. Some of my colleagues had no high school in their constituency, and much different expectations of their presence in a community. For example, if one of my Calgary colleagues attended a high school graduation, it was accepted that there was a member of the Assembly there. It would have been impossible or poorly received for me to ask my colleague Jason Nixon to come to this graduation in Olds on our behalf. The people of Olds would be like: why is that guy here and not our local official? There are very different social, political, and very real expectations that are placed on members representing rural Alberta than representing urban Alberta.

I like to say that we have the same job but our jobs are very different, and I think it's important that the commission recognizes that vital difference. If you look at the last year that I represented the great constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – this is one of my favourite things that I used to talk to grade 6 students a lot about. They would ask me: what is the worst part of your job? Every time I would tell them: driving. In the last year that I represented Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I drove 70,000 kilometres in my vehicle. If you take that and divide that – let's say you could drive 100 kilometres an hour. I spent 700 hours driving in a vehicle. That's 29.2 full 24-hour periods or 87 and a half full work days that all I did was drive. That doesn't include all of the meetings and social

engagements, fundraisers for the community that I would have had to do in those days that I also drove, often being out on the road for 12 to 14 hours a day.

These are the types of considerations that I think are vital for the commission to continue to take into consideration when they're looking at the population variance allowances. Your interim report and the history of electoral boundary commissions have done a very good job of highlighting that there is a 25 per cent plus or minus variance that is acceptable when it comes to the difference between equal and effective representation, and I urge the commission to make the most of those variances, to accept with a level of comfortability that the job we do is the same but the expectations and requirements are different. I am of the opinion that there shouldn't be a rural riding in the entire province that is also a plus in population because we've already set our rural members up in a situation that creates additional requirements on their time, talents, and resources. I encourage you, as you consider the final report, that you look at this very, very critical and challenging balancing act that you must make around the difference between effective and equal representation.

I'll conclude my remarks there. I know that you have lots of other people to present today, but I thought I would leave some opportunity if you had any questions that I could be of assistance on, or things you've been contemplating that you might like to ask. I'd be happy to field those questions for you, and if this isn't the format for that, that's okay. I'll conclude my remarks there, again thanking you for your time and energy that you've given to the province of Alberta. At the end of the report I truly believe that our province is going to be better as a result of the work that you've done, the five of you, and it certainly can be a thankless job. I'm sure you've got lots of feedback on the draft report as well.

1:50

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cooper.

Questions. Mr. Evans, we'll start with you.

Mr. Evans: What are your thoughts on use of eligible voters in a constituency as a factor under 14(f)?

Mr. Cooper: Like, I think that using eligible voters is a fair and reasonable manner. The reality is that when someone enters the office of a member of the Assembly, presents to them, "I have problem X or Y," at no point in time in my over a decade of service to the Assembly did I ask the question if they were a registered voter or not. The point is that we serve the people that live within the boundaries of the constituency and, quite frankly, sometimes beyond those boundaries, and so using the total number of electorates in the constituency, I think, is a fair number to use, particularly in light of the fact that that is the number that members of the Assembly believe that they're servicing or meeting the needs of, not necessarily the total number of voters.

Mrs. Samson: Two questions. One only requires a short answer, but not this one. Thank you very much for coming, too; it's a pleasure to see you here. How do you feel about hybrids based on your comments around that rural has a greater expectation of their MLAs? So hybrids meaning that combination of . . .

Mr. Cooper: Sure. I think that there are circumstances where hybrids are a fair and reasonable decision for the commission to make, and in particular, places close and around major urban centres. The reality is that Sherwood Park, you know, very much views itself as a part of Edmonton, and so if there is some expanding of the rural-urban areas in and around major centres, I think that this can be a fair use of those ridings.

I would say that if you were to get quite a ways outside of an urban area, that presents some challenges. But, you know, if the majority of your trade, the majority of your social fabric, of your life, is shared, I'm not of the opinion that it can't be shared in the form of representation as well. I think, like, to do something like Calgary-Olds: obviously that's not possible. The further you get out from the city, I think, the riskier it gets, but I don't think that the commission should be constrained only to urban boundaries, where it may make the most sense.

Mrs. Samson: That legislation gave us that opportunity, but just a real quick comment now: what's your button on your lapel?

Mr. Cooper: Oh. I'm a former politician, so no short answer is possible. This is the Alberta tartan in the form of the wild rose, and a gentleman by the name of Michael – oh, I can never remember his last name. He created an Alberta tartan dress that now sits in the Royal Alberta Museum, and he came and brought it to the Assembly, and they took some photos of it in the Assembly at the time that I was the Speaker, and he gave me the pin.

Mrs. Samson: Lovely. Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: The wonderful thing about it is that when I am representing the province of Alberta in the United States, many people actually ask me about it, so it gives an opportunity to talk about the Alberta tartan, which I'm keen to talk on, and the Alberta wild rose is one of our symbols.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Martin, one question, please.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, it's great to hear you on these topics, and I'm glad that you pitched at a very high level, but you hit some key points I want to dwell a bit further on. You had said that whether urban or rural, it's the same job but it's different, and in particular it's different because of the high expectation of face-to-face meetings with an MLA at every possible club and meeting in your district; 4-H clubs, schools, it goes on and on; 700 hours' driving time just in one year, and we're not talking about the far north, where I'm sure it's more. It represents a huge commitment of time. There are layers of expectation upon you. Would you say that characterizes most of the rural ridings?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. I can't think of a rural riding that it wouldn't characterize. I think that there is a different level of personal connection that rural MLAs experience with their constituents than urban MLAs, whether or not that comes down to going to the grocery store and being recognized in the grocery store. I'm certain that happens to my urban colleagues. My sense is to a lesser extent. I also think that people feel personally attached to their member of the Assembly with respect to rural MLAs.

As I highlighted the graduation situation, you know, someone like Speaker McIver, who has 25 years of service in the city, no matter what riding he is in in Calgary, they feel some connection to him. That's not the same in rural Alberta. People really feel connected to the person that represents them. I think it's a challenge that members face. There's also a massive expectation, whether it's judging a 4-H public speaking event, whether it's at a community fundraiser for the local ag society or Rotary Club or Kinsmen Club, the list just goes on and on. If members aren't present, there is a real sense that that member isn't doing their job.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, good to see you again. Thanks for being here.

Mr. Cooper: Good to see you.

Mr. Clark: I just want to build on what Dr. Martin was talking about. You raised the comparison between Calgary-Buffalo and its very small geography and Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills or some of the rural constituencies. I completely agree that it is the same job but different. I will say that as an urban MLA you would also get pigeonholed in the grocery store. My kids were not thrilled about that as well.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I can confirm.

Mr. Clark: I just wanted to explore some of those differences and similarities. You have multiple councils, school divisions, and a variety of municipalities, and you need to deal with that in the rural areas. But in somewhere like Calgary-Buffalo, you have a very high-acuity population that has needs around AISH or its successors, health care, education, housing, homelessness, addictions. We had someone earlier today from a constituency office talking about some of those unique challenges of the inner city.

That's the trick we have to balance – right? – if we're trading off, which in our interim report we already have in making some of the rural constituencies somewhat smaller than the average and urban somewhat larger. I think we've tried to address some of that, but I think there's a risk that if we go too far, then we're going to put it out of balance and make those two jobs even more difficult, right? I guess I just wanted to get your perspective, having sat in the Legislature and worked with rural and urban members, just how you would square all of that.

Mr. Cooper: I guess it's important to note that I don't think there's a perfect solution to the problem because the challenges that both of those members face are uniquely different. Will there ever be the perfect balance? It seems unlikely. But I think to strive to recognize the differences is critical.

2:00

I think many urban MLAs would also have multiple offices, and there are unique costs associated with that. I'm of the opinion that urban MLAs can increase staffing in a way that helps deal with some of those challenges, with respect to interacting with marginalized communities that we sometimes see in urban areas greater than rural areas. I also appreciate the fact that their office spaces are often more expensive than in rural areas. So there is this delicate balance, but I think that it is imperative that the commission undertakes this balancing in a way that recognizes the unique challenges that rural MLAs face.

I also think that it's fair to say that rural MLAs, not on volume but often on per capita, would share similar challenges with marginalized communities, whether it's AISH, access to housing, or other concerns. Sometimes it's easy to believe that those problems don't exist in rural Alberta, and I think that it's important to be reminded that those offices also deal with those concerns and challenges. We need to recognize that they also deal with delicate communities.

Mr. Clark: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, I want to drill down on a couple of things that you said, not by way of correction but, I hope, by way of clarification. You made the point that no rural riding should be above the average. Did I understand you correctly?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. I think that . . .

The Chair: Okay. Let's just leave it at that.

What we're struggling with is terminology and changes to the Alberta landscape. You've come out as a nerd by acknowledging that you read appendix D. You're the first person, I think, in public that's admitted that. It warms the author's heart, I can assure you. But Alberta isn't rural and urban anymore, and that's what I think we learned by going through the history and travelling this province. There's mushy middle stuff. Let me use this example. Would you consider Leduc-Beaumont rural?

Mr. Cooper: Well, I used to joke with Minister Horner that the definition of a rural MLA is whether or not you had a Starbucks in your constituency, so Leduc-Beaumont wouldn't fall into that category.

In my opening remarks I didn't address the sort of rest of Alberta: the Red Deers, the Lethbridges, the Grand Prairies. I see MLA Nolan Dyck is here. I'm sure he has some feelings about Grande Prairie. I'm sympathetic to your position that constituencies like Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are shrinking in terms of the total number that exists like that because of these sort of rural, this cross between rural and urban, constituencies. Even, you know, Sylvan Lake is quite urban, and so we walk these fine lines of: the rest are in the middle. I think Leduc-Beaumont is a good example of a hybrid riding, from my perspective, because much of its commerce is done inside the capital. I don't think that that's a true definition of a rural riding, and that's also why I'm comfortable with the lines of urban municipalities being blurred a little bit into some more of what we would consider to be rural constituencies.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

One last, maybe difficult question. You've served in an independent capacity in the Legislature as well as in a partisan capacity. From your perspective as former Speaker how valuable is a report from this commission that is unanimous as compared to one that isn't?

Mr. Cooper: I think the commission and each of you as commissioners have an important part to play in the final report. If there are certain things that the commission decides that members of the commission don't agree with, I think it's important that Albertans know that this is a difficult process and to arrive on a unanimous decision is a challenge. I don't think that any commissioner should feel discouraged from writing a minority report or expressing the areas of the report that they agreed with and areas that they didn't. I mean, I think it would be wonderful if it could be unanimous in arriving at a position, particularly in light of the fact that two members were appointed by members of the opposition caucus and two members were appointed by the government caucus.

You know, any time we can get political foes, if you will, to agree is good modelling for members of the Assembly and political discourse more broadly. That said, I think that political discourse can be done in a way that's meaningful, respectful, and logical. If the report isn't unanimous, provided that it's done in those ways, I think it's a reasonable position for the commission to have.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. I knew that was a hardball, actually, so thank you for your answer.

Mr. Cooper: That's nothing compared to U.S.-Canada relations.

Dr. Martin: Can we ask about that?

The Chair: Okay. In light of that – and this is even more important – I invite presenters to stay to hear the other presenters to get a perspective. Please, we invite you to stay. I know you probably have other demands, but during the break I'm sure there are people that would love to pick your brain on what you're doing now.

Mr. Cooper: Excellent. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our next presenter is Kathryn Joel. Good afternoon.

Ms Joel: Good afternoon. Thank you.

The Chair: Please make yourself comfortable and identify yourself and tell us what electoral division you are living in and which ones you wish to comment on.

Ms Joel: Yeah. My name is Kathryn Joel. I live in Edmonton-Strathcona. I live in Allendale, so I want to really comment on urban Edmonton. First of all, I wanted to thank you for your work on the 2025 interim report and for its careful, principled application of the concepts of communities of interest and effective representation. I wanted to in particular thank you for the decision to avoid hybrid ridings and to keep municipalities and established communities intact, which promotes clear, understandable boundaries and preserves shared social, economic, and civic interests. Your approach strengthens voters' ability to engage meaningfully with their elected representatives and supports effective representation in practice.

I think the commission has also appropriately applied the constitutional principle of effective representation by reallocating seats to reflect population growth in Edmonton and Calgary while reducing representation in areas experiencing population decline. The interim report advances relative parity of voting power and ensures Albertans have equitable access to legislative and constitutional representation. It's important this population-based adjustment be preserved in the final report.

I guess I would also encourage the commission to continue recognizing that the growth in Edmonton is not limited to suburban areas. I live in Allendale, near the centre of the city, and I run a small business downtown. I have a small cooking school located on the MacEwan campus. From both perspectives I personally see ongoing residential, commercial, and economic growth in the urban core. In my own neighbourhood this includes infill developments, basement suites, new apartment buildings. Downtown is also continuing to grow. I think these changes increase density and complexity in central neighbourhoods, and the assumption that growth is occurring primarily on the periphery can risk undervaluing the representational needs of urban communities.

2:10

I guess, in this context, the proposed removal of Edmonton-Riverview did catch my attention. I know there's a lot of building going on in that community. Also, I do believe that maintaining core ridings will help ensure that central neighbourhoods continue to have representation that reflects our specific needs.

Overall, the interim report reflects a balanced, legally sound, and forward-looking approach to electoral boundaries. I respectfully thank and encourage the commission to maintain these principles in the final recommendations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, ma'am. Much appreciated.

Your cooking school: what's the name of it?

Ms Joel: It's called Get Cooking.

The Chair: Oh, okay. I drive by one every time I go to Elections Alberta.

Ms Joel: Come to a class.

The Chair: Questions, Mr. Clark?

Mr. Clark: No. No questions beyond a thank you for being here. I appreciate your presentation.

Ms Joel: Thank you.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. I'll echo Mr. Clark's remarks, really. I'm glad you came. I'm glad you think that overall the interim report is good. I'm glad you read it.

Ms Joel: Thank you.

The Chair: Did you read appendix D, though?

Ms Joel: No. I'm sorry.

Mr. Clark: There's a test on the way out.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for coming out. I appreciate your comments.

Ms Joel: Thank you very much.

Mr. Evans: Thank you. I don't have any questions for you.

The Chair: Ms Joel, I've been meaning to say this about the Edmontonian presentations. I mean, we've travelled the province, and we've been in communities. Every community has its own sense of pride of ownership or pride of community. You know, I have not spent a lot of time in the last 30 years in Edmonton, but I have stopped referring to Edmonton as in northern Alberta as a result of this commission. I think maybe somebody presenting later will appreciate that. But I am very impressed with the very collegial pride that Edmontonians have almost universally presented, both first round and this round. You exemplified that, so thank you very much.

Ms Joel: Thank you. I'm not from here, but I love living here. Edmonton is amazing.

The Chair: I'll excuse you from the table, but please remain to hear, if you're able, the other presentations.

Ms Joel: Well, thank you very much.

The Chair: Our next presenter, Nolan Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: Well, it is a pleasure to be here today. Thank you so very much for being here and allowing me also to step in. I'm the MLA for Grande Prairie, and I am very much looking forward to our conversation here today.

I do have a few things just for context. One, I know it's been a huge amount of work for you with this commission. I know it's been at points contentious, but thank you for doing the work for Albertans. It is important work that you do, and it has long and, interestingly, lifelong implications for all Albertans. So thank you.

I'm going to speak on a couple of subjects here. One is just Grande Prairie itself. I'm going to talk about the rural-urban conversation, and then I also want to specifically talk about northern Alberta for a moment, too. I'm going to wrap my comments around kind of those three things. It sounds like those are also kind of where the conversation has gone here so far.

In regard to this whole thing my conversation really goes around effective representation. As some prior conversation has said, representation should reflect the work required to serve a riding, not just the headcount. To be clear, that is a geographical question. Obviously, there's a headcount question in there that you guys are looking at, but representation is, as has previously been mentioned by prior people, geographical. It is a conversation around representation and relationships and also government bodies, and I just want to highlight a couple of those in general across Alberta.

For instance, I represent a Timbit in northern Alberta. I have a very unique riding. I only have two-quarters of rural riding. I am completely urban in northern Alberta. My counterpart has about a quarter of the city, give or take, of Grande Prairie. What we represent would be equal to what all of the MLAs in Calgary would represent. I have multiple school boards while they have two. I also have two I represent, potentially three depending on how you count. There are 15 councillors in Calgary – I have nine – but they have 26 MLAs. There are two of us for our city. Ish. I'm going to count a little high.

Also, there's opportunity for multiple councillors to have multiple effective and elected representation on the provincial level, which one council through a mayor, obviously both similar style, similar official capacity to have the same. But the amount of relationships that rural MLAs are managing is significant to the point that many people have five-plus counties. My counterpart, MLA Wiebe, I believe has four different school divisions. I apologize. I didn't fully count. I believe he has eight different councils plus Grande Prairie, and he has also multiple distances to drive. It's about three hours across the constituency.

Those are variables in the conversation to effective representation that I think should also be – I just want to talk about elected officials for a moment. They have an elected right by their municipalities for access to government services and to represent their constituency needs as well on a municipal level. That is a distinct need for rural Alberta in a different way than a city has. Obviously there's a population count, but each one of those municipalities has unique needs and unique conversation for an MLA to represent, so it's multifaceted. I just want to point that out.

In regard to Grande Prairie, I just want to talk about also the rural-urban reality, and I'm going to speak from my perspective right now. As a mid-sized city MLA, engaging in rural aspects of a constituency which I do not represent is actually part of my job. I'll explain this this way. Many people live in my constituency that work outside. We have significant gas assets and significant agricultural assets from outside the city. Grande Prairie is the hub of the community. We represent roughly a catchment area of 300,000 people, so we have services for significance there. In my official capacity as an urban MLA I often talk about homelessness, mental health and addictions, health care, various other subjects as well, but there's also representation of the workforce that is solely focused on technically rural issues: forestry, energy. I've been able to help and have huge passion for the energy and forestry industry based around these things.

This would just be my perspective right now as well. In regard to the conversation around the effective representation only in the city, broadening that expansion and understanding rural and urban situations and problems is an asset to the MLA because you understand the whole complexity and can understand a further

complexity of our economics across this province. Not to be forgotten, northern Alberta is an economic driver, but so is rural Alberta. If you want to fully understand your job as an MLA, not just for your constituency but as an Albertan and representing holistically that aspect, that is an important aspect. I will stand behind it that the rural-urban conversation, representation in mid-sized cities, is an important one that I think we should consider strongly because of the economics of it, too.

I've been building to this as well. Northern Alberta, rural Alberta, but specifically northern Alberta: the current plan to remove a seat in northern Alberta does remove representation. Once again we're talking about the complexities of being an MLA, the time of being an MLA, the logistics of being an MLA, the representation for other elected officials for an MLA. Those are all aspects – and other nations. Northern Alberta predominantly has most of the nonurban or very close to urban centre nations, and those also require representation. That's important for all northern MLAs. For clarity, I don't have a nation in my constituency, but I believe every single other northern MLA does. Those are important conversations that potentially a city MLA or a predominantly urban MLA aren't going to have, those dynamics at play. It's also time, and time is not a bad thing, but it does add time into your life.

I think we have some other complexities there in northern Alberta, and my hope is that you would leave or build upon the amount of representation, not just based around headcount in northern Alberta but upon the geographical, upon the elected, upon service delivery, which I haven't touched on, and also the economic impacts of this province on those elected conversations. As I've said, the economic contribution of northern Alberta is significant, and with that I'll just tell one quick story here.

2:20

In my riding there is significant investment from those that come – we call it shadow population, but also shadow business population – to Grande Prairie to do business because their workforce is there, or just outside of my constituency, but their population lives in Grande Prairie. Those businesses meet with me because they need to know what's going on in Grande Prairie. And this is across northern Alberta. We are working hard for our constituents, but we also work for other urban MLAs because the business is there. That business is very important, and I think that there's an opportunity there as well, because they are looking to know what's going on in the constituencies and how they can impact the community, sometimes financially, sometimes encouraging their company to be involved in different aspects.

Hopefully I've been somewhat clear in my conversation, but geography, governance complexity, service delivery, economic contribution, elected, are all parts of this that I would contribute as important. Thank you for the time. I believe my six minutes ended maybe two or three times ago, so thank you for the time, but happy to answer questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dyck. You've given an interesting spin on shadow population. Not a spin, but an interpretation. You know, we've talked about that a bit, but your perspective is I think new. We did read the letter from the northern MLAs, of which you were a signature. It was the first piece of feedback we heard, so thank you for that.

Mr. Evans, any questions of this presenter?

Mr. Evans: No, but thank you very much for your presentation and for being here today.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate the extra information. You spoke very well about your relationship being a mostly urban constituency and how you understand what's going on and speak for the rural. Can you explain to us your relationship with MLA Weibe and how you work together? Because he's the other side of the coin, where he is just a touch of urban and all rural.

Mr. Dyck: Well, absolutely. Maybe I can talk about . . .

Mrs. Samson: In relationship to the business of Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Absolutely. Maybe if I take a step back, Grande Prairie is built upon three predominant industries: energy, agriculture, and forestry. There's a little bit of technology in there and some various other things, but those are the predominant three industries that we have.

We work well, and in fact we share office space together to also cut down cost, but the relationship works well not just because he understands Grande Prairie, but we are also able to advocate as a region and take our perspective a little bit larger than that.

Northern Alberta works very well together. Our counties, our cities work very well together, and I always just joke that it's because it's cold outside and you have to be together in order to create warmth, but the reality is that there's a connectivity there because there are fewer people, but you go and find a community. It's also the work aspect as well. Grande Prairie produces a lot of work. Northern Alberta produces a lot of work, so there are different opportunities and different cultural aspects there.

As to how we work together, I was able to help him advocate for a new hospital for one of his small towns. Well, that helps Grande Prairie because it actually gives the opportunity for our hospital in the future to not be one of the only landing zones for emergencies. That's super important, and he was able to advocate with me to start a new medical school, so we have a joint view that the important things in the region can be able to be moved forward collectively, which often are contrary or at times can be contrary not just politically, but maybe a different MLA has a different thought on something. Even those nonpartisan things can be very well worked together as a region. That's, I guess, where I think our partnership has gone really well in representing.

I'm not going to ask, also, if somebody has a problem, and I know them: oh, you live across the street. Right? It just doesn't meld that way in Grande Prairie. You're a Grande Prairie. If somebody comes from outside of Grande Prairie: oh, my business is in Grande Prairie. If I said that, it would be instantly a refusal of government to help. That doesn't make sense in northern Alberta, so there's a cross-pollination of being willing to engage.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. That's an excellent answer.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. I have much appreciated your very rapid-fire description of the number of municipalities and school boards and the like that you and your immediate colleague have to deal with. The portrait that you and several other presenters have given us is that of what we call laminated governance. You have to be involved and appear to be involved throughout that whole stack all the time, so it occupies virtually all your time when you're back in your own riding.

I wanted to ask: we're inclined to make a recommendation about the budgeting that's provided to the Members' Services Committee on behalf of the MLAs because we've heard a fair bit about the complexity of staff work, which is exactly involved in the logistics of that laminated stack of relationships with municipalities and who

knows what. Can you speak to the issue of your own personal staffing budgets and how this constrains your work?

Mr. Dyck: Absolutely. As an urban MLA I would say that some of the challenges come in because there is more casework often as an urban MLA. But where the difference between myself and when I'm chatting with MLA Wiebe, who is predominantly rural, is that his logistic is then all of a sudden: what do you do for staff? Well, there's not really a huge budget for travel. What do you do for overnight trips if all of a sudden you have a big constituency? For Minister Williams, if he has to go to one side of his constituency, there's only limited hotel space. If you're on La Crête and you have to go down to the other side, well, that's three hours and you have six hours of meetings. Is it reasonable to put in a 12-hour day? Well, we do it, but also sometimes you're tired and you're like, "I need to get a hotel room," but there's a limitation on that throughout the year.

The budgetary limitations on staff also: they wouldn't be able to come because I don't have a budget for some of those travel things, especially in larger rural constituencies. In my constituency right now it's 20 minutes across. I'm not getting a hotel room, but in larger constituencies there's a logistical problem even for you. For everyone on the commission who lives out of town, you probably have a hotel room, and that's appropriate after a long day of work, but for us we would have to travel back home. So I think there's some of that as well. Is there an expectation for staff to come along? I would love a staff member, but I'm often solo for those so that we can actually be more effective together. Then also just the casework load: there is lots of work to be done, and that's the challenge.

So part of it is staffing dollars. Part of it is that you have to be careful as an MLA because you are responsible for any overtures, personally, for those budgetary concerns, unlike with a ministry where you go to Treasury Board and ask. So there's no contingency of, "Hey, I actually need an extra staff," but I either have to then underpay them or I can't maybe get them to do the work because there's not enough budget to give them full capacity.

Sorry for the long answer. There are some complexities in there, but I can see the challenges myself, yes.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

Mr. Clark: There are many things that we wish we had control over, that being one of them, perhaps having more than 89 seats to work with, but I think just to build a bit on what Dr. Martin was saying: you know, if we look at how we address some of the unique challenges of the north. Grande Prairie is north, undeniably, but as you say, there is north and then there's north, north, right? Like, there are some even grander challenges for some of your colleagues, which you've outlined, and they've done a fantastic job in also telling us about, too. So we've heard that loud and clear.

I think one of the things we wish we had as part of our tool kit – we don't, but we can strongly recommend to the Legislature – is for Members' Services to provide a substantial differential, actually. It doesn't replace an MLA. Having another office, another staff member is not an MLA, but it's part of the way there. It's one of a series of potential solutions or at least, you know, tools to do that. Again, I say that just empathizing with the unique challenges of being a northern MLA.

2:30

You talked a bit about growth in the region. It's good to see that there has been some growth. Our numbers show about 10 per cent since the last boundaries commission happened, so absolute growth has happened. Relative growth is about half the pace of the rest of the province. That is a bit of a challenge, you know, as things shift.

In the interim report the upshot of it is that those 10 northern constituencies are on average about 10 per cent smaller than the average whereas the previous boundaries, 2017, were actually only about 8.4 per cent. It's not like this is only a mathematical exercise, but just know that we have – in our struggles with how we address this, we have tried to address this to some degree. Having said that, we also have heard loud and clear from the north that we really do need to relook at how we've laid things out. I just wanted to say all of that.

My question, then. The shadow population you mentioned: you feel like we should accommodate for that and count those folks even though they're not eligible voters. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. Dyck: Let me put this in context. Let's just use our hospital, for instance. The shadow population around Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Slave Lake, High Prairie utilizes that hospital. Now, you can say that other places do as well, but it is because they're working there a significant portion of the year on shift. They are coming to Grande Prairie. When somebody does get hurt, we will be responsible for them. I'm proud of that. We want to service anyone that gets hurt that's appropriate. We're not going to gatekeep health care. That's ridiculous. The shadow population then all of a sudden becomes a part of the services that we offer and we have to represent. If it becomes purely a numbers game, then the services are weighted maybe to those that live there versus actually those that are utilizing services.

I think that it's an interesting question. The shadow population in Fort McMurray, I mean, is in the tens of thousands. That would actually add a couple of seats potentially to Fort McMurray if you count those in. I think there does need to be some weight put on that because, at the end of the day, I still represent those people. Predominantly – I will say this. Maybe weight it so that those people that hire those people for the area – they haven't moved in, but they are using services a percentage of the year.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much for presenting and for bringing the perspective of your region of the province. Again, I know you're a busy guy, but if you are able to stay to hear other presenters, please remain.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you so very much for your work here, and thank you for listening today and asking your questions.

The Chair: Okay. Keeping with the Grande Prairie theme, is Adam Woods present? Nope.

Brianna Morris. Good afternoon. Please identify the riding you live in and what districts you wish to comment on.

Ms Morris: Good afternoon. I live in Strathcona-Sherwood Park, which I'd mostly like to speak about but also just talk generally about representation in Alberta. I spent most of my childhood and early adulthood actually in the riding of Calgary-Lougheed. While completing my master's degree in political science at the University of Calgary, I married a farm boy from Saskatchewan. In 2015 he and I moved to Fort Saskatchewan. A few years later we bought a home in Sherwood Park, and in 2022 our family moved to the riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park, where we now live happily on an acreage near Uncas.

In the 10 years since moving to the greater Edmonton region, I can recall visiting Beaumont three times, once for a wedding and twice to meet a colleague who lives there for coffee. I nearly made it a fourth time during a leisurely motorcycle ride, one that ended with me in the ditch off township road 502 just west of highway 21.

The ambulance took me to the Leduc community hospital, not to Strathcona community hospital. I share this because it illustrates something important. The natural transportation corridors and daily rhythms of life for residents of Strathcona county simply do not lead to Beaumont. It's not a place we routinely go. I work in Edmonton, and while I occasionally shop or attend events here, most of my daily life – gas, groceries, church, children's programs – happens within Ardrossan or Sherwood Park.

For these reasons I disagree with the proposal to include half or any portion of the city of Beaumont in the riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Even through my limited visits it's clear to me Beaumont is a beautiful, vibrant community. It deserves representation from someone more familiar with it than a resident of Strathcona county is. While I'm admittedly not familiar with the daily patterns of life for Beaumont residents, I can't imagine why they would go to Sherwood Park when the amenities of South Edmonton Common are closer. I appreciate the difficult task this commission faces, and I hope that you can still accommodate feedback from Strathcona county residents like myself about how community linkages play out in practice.

I'd now like to spend my time discussing representation more generally, not with my Strathcona county resident hat on but my political science hat. I strongly disagree with those beseeching the commission to strictly apply the principle of representation by population count. I appreciate the commission's recognition of the challenges inherent in representing geographically large ridings. Rural ridings should have smaller populations than urban ones.

I say this as someone who worked as a political staffer for several years serving both rural and urban MLAs. The scheduling logistics involved in meeting constituents are simply not comparable. To illustrate, using Google Maps, the distance from the northernmost point of Calgary-Currie to its southernmost point is a nine-minute drive. West to east is eight minutes. Contrast that with Peace River-Notley. Without even considering the furthest extremes, the drive between Manning and Fox Creek is three hours and 18 minutes.

I'm not suggesting rural MLAs work harder than urban MLAs. Effort varies from person to person, but for an MLA who wants to be present in their community, the practical demands of a large rural riding are inherently greater. Rural MLAs have the same 24-hour day as everyone else, and community events do not conveniently spread themselves out to make attendance possible. An urban MLA can feasibly attend several riding events in the same evening. That's not possible when the events are three hours apart.

During my political science studies I enjoyed exploring theories of representation, especially in a Canadian context. The interim report refers extensively to the concept of effective representation and highlights both the legislative role and the ombudsman role of elected representatives. Serving as an ombudsperson essentially means acting as a problem solver and advocate. In your deliberations as a commission I encourage you to place less emphasis on population count when doing so undermines this key advocacy portion of representation.

Provincial issues tend to vary more from municipality to municipality than from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Consider Hanna, Alberta. When the coal phase-out was accelerated in 2015, the town lost 200 full-time jobs, 7.5 per cent of its population. Proportionally that would be the equivalent of Edmonton losing 65,000 jobs or Calgary losing 92,000. If such an economic shock occurred in Edmonton or Calgary, multiple MLAs would share the responsibility of advocating for those affected. The employees would live all throughout the city in different ridings. In a rural riding they live and work in the same, usually, other than what MLA Dyck just said, and one MLA shoulders that burden while also serving other communities spread across a large geographic area.

Representation is not only about legislating and voting in the Assembly. When it comes to policy-making and decisions about where infrastructure is most needed, the government is supported by a skilled public service that conducts research in province-wide consultations. Political caucuses and parties do their own research and consultations, too.

MLAs are not the sole channel through which constituents can provide legislative or policy feedback. Even if they were, a thoughtful MLA knows that among their 50,000 constituents positions on policy are neither cohesive nor fully knowable. They won't be able to vote in a way that makes all their constituents happy. Responsible MLAs understand they are more than a trustee acting solely on their own conviction, but personal judgment is part of the equation. It's about making informed statements and decisions grounded in strong engagement with constituents and other levels of government.

There is simply no substitute for in-person interaction or seeing a place first-hand. That becomes exponentially harder as ridings grow geographically. There is no substitute for an MLA in the meaningful work of physically showing up and having presence in classrooms to teach students about democracy and at community events that knit a riding together. An MLA cannot send a public servant from an Edmonton office tower to a Canada Day parade on their behalf.

Finally, we all know the phrase: no taxation without representation. Rural Albertans pay the same income tax rates as urban residents, yet geography inherently limits their access to essential public services, particularly health care, which accounts for close to half of provincial government spending. Given this disparity it's reasonable to expect some understanding when rural ridings have smaller populations. Acknowledging the access challenges faced by the people and families who grow our food is a small gesture of reciprocity.

My goal in presenting here today is to embolden this commission that there is public support for boundaries that support multiple forms of representation. Not all Albertans are fixated on numerical parity. Geography shapes daily life, access to public services, and an MLA's ability to meaningfully advocate for the people they serve.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Morris.
Questions, Mr. Clark?

Mr. Clark: I have no questions beyond a word of thanks for coming in. I very much appreciate your presentation. Thank you.

2:40

Dr. Martin: We've heard a very great deal and indeed from the immediate previous speaker about the complexity of relationships and expectations on an MLA and on their constituency staff as well because of the tighter range of relationships between municipalities and school board trustees and 4-H clubs and school boards, and it goes on and on and on. There's a cultural expectation – let's put it that way – of a high degree of presence from the MLA and his immediate staff, and it's because of that, then, and the geography issues and the logistics involved there that you think we should not feel compelled to look for population parity with the urban areas. Is that a fair summary?

Ms Morris: Yeah, that seems quite accurate. Yes.

Dr. Martin: Very good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: No questions, but thank you for coming out.

Ms Morris: My pleasure.

Mr. Evans: No questions. Very much appreciated your presentation, though.

The Chair: Ms Morris, we cannot definitively say what the future will hold in terms of our final report, but we get the sense that our arranged marriage of Beaumont and Strathcona may not survive.

Ms Morris: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. You're excused. If you're able to stay, maybe not, I'd be interested to talk to you about your political science studies and how that affects what you just brought to us.

Ms Morris: Thank you.

The Chair: Our next presenter, Alexander Dowsey. We are moving right along on time here.

Mr. Dowsey: Good afternoon. Thank you very much. Yes, my name is Alexander Dowsey. I live in the riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm in more of the Norwood end. I'm here to talk today, actually, about naming more than anything else. I'm a historian. I come from a family of historians. It's always been one of my passions. I suppose I've earned a new badge of nerd, having come to speak at one of these commission meetings now, so I'll add that to my collection.

I wanted to speak today with regard to the naming of several of the ridings proposed by the commission, specifically about the use or overuse of cardinal directions in the naming of many of the ridings in Edmonton in recent years. I understand that especially in smaller urban areas, which are comprised of only one or two ridings, it makes sense to use cardinal directions to provide some differentiation between those two, but in a large urban area, especially a large established urban area like Edmonton with very complicated definitions of what constitutes the cardinal points in the city, it can become impractical and confusing both for voters and representatives to understand where exactly those lie. It doesn't necessarily really reflect the communities that they represent either. Furthermore, as the city continues to expand, the precise location of its cardinal points changes constantly, creating further issues resulting from relying on them principally for names.

I think we've all been in the position at least once or twice in our lives as Edmontonians where someone resurrects the perennial debate about where north Edmonton and south Edmonton are. The answers that people provide to that often demonstrate most clearly why relying on cardinal directions in a fast-growing and diverse city is unreliable at best. If you follow the postal designations, then where I live in the inner city is considered northwest. I'm barely north of the urban core and I'm firmly east of it, which is rather confusing. If you go by the river, then places like Edgemont and the Uplands are considered being in the north despite being as far south as Mill Woods. It's very subjective and interpreted very differently by the general public.

If we have the opportunity to tie a riding's name to a distinguishable feature, a development area, a geographical landmark, or a historical or cultural connection, then I think it's important that we do. It makes ridings easier to recognize. It gives the public a greater ability to place ridings geographically and gives them more certainty and connection to place rather than a broad cardinal direction does. I did a written submission for the commission a while back, and I gave a few examples of what that

could look like for ridings which have been proposed in the interim report, focusing on riding names which rely in part or in full on cardinal directions.

In the case of places like Edmonton-South West and Edmonton-South East I suggested using the names of residential and development areas, which are fully encompassed by the proposed boundaries, Edmonton-Windermere and Edmonton-Decoteau, respectively. For places like Edmonton-West Henday and Edmonton-South I suggested things like local geography. Edmonton-Kinokamau, the lake which sits between the major residential areas of the proposed boundaries of West Henday, and Edmonton-Blackmud as the proposed boundaries of Edmonton-South include much of the southern course of the Blackmud Creek as well as the community that shares its same name. Lastly, for Edmonton-North West and the new proposed boundaries of Edmonton-West-Enoch I suggested names which tie into their historical and cultural connections. Edmonton-Grand Trunk, an homage to the history of many of the neighbourhoods in northwest Edmonton as a crossroads across Canadian railways, and Edmonton-Maskëkosihk, the Cree name for the Enoch Nation.

I hope that this provides some food for thought. I know it's not a very exciting topic but one that I'm particularly passionate about, and I hope you give it consideration. Even if it is a rather mundane issue, it really helps, I can say from some experience volunteering in several elections, voters to know where exactly they are in the electoral landscape. I've had many challenges with friends who live in south Edmonton who are confused which of the Edmonton-South ridings they live in because it's not easily distinguishable right off the bat. It also gives them a chance to develop their own identity and carry that history forward.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is a great example of that. Norwood hasn't been the name of my neighbourhood in many, many decades. It was renamed Alberta Avenue with the renaming of 118th Avenue, but it remains part of our riding's history and legacy and certainly an integral part of our identity as a community. I certainly think of myself as a resident of Norwood. I just think it might be an exciting opportunity to introduce that when we're considering the naming of ridings.

I want to thank you all, of course, for all of your hard work on this. I know it's been a sort of marathon every time you have to redistrict the whole province. It comes with challenges every time as well. Thank you so much for your time here today.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much for your presentation, and thank you for focusing on – it is part of our mandate, names, but it's the third, and it's the forgotten part of our mandate. I trust that your presentation is all encapsulated in your written submission.

Mr. Dowsey: Yes, almost verbatim, basically.

The Chair: Good. Yeah. Well, thank you for that reminder. It's most helpful, and it'll be of assistance.

Any questions, Mr. Evans?

Mr. Evans: What are your thoughts on the naming policy that the city used in terms of the various wards?

Mr. Dowsey: Oh, it was quite interesting. I thought it was a great opportunity also to invite Edmontonians to learn more about our history as a city. I often describe it to people that the history of Edmonton: you have to scratch beneath the surface to really find it, but there's actually a lot of richness there, especially incorporating names that incorporated episodes in Edmonton's history, Nakota Isga for example, or others that are owing to the history of Inuit

communities coming to Edmonton for treatment for tuberculosis, which is long out of the living memory of the city. It was a fascinating experience. Edmonton-Métis, the ward where I live, has a very large First Nations and Métis community in it. That might not be a history that people might know much about.

Names are a way and have been a way in Alberta's tradition of carrying on that history. Whether it's been the names of figures or historic neighbourhoods, I think it's actually a really fascinating way to get people involved in that identity, even if it's not necessarily our top-of-mind thing when we're thinking about renaming places. I know it's sometimes a little infuriating to experience the thing that you've always known as one name being changed to another one, but it presents opportunities as well. I think that's broadly been the experience of a lot of folks as Edmonton's new names have gone forward.

Mr. Clark: Would that be applicable here in light of your concern about the confusion that names can result in as it relates to the electorate?

Mr. Dowsey: Oh, certainly. I think also, you know, it's part of that kind of, like, buy-in, that interplay or conversation with people when we're creating these areas. I don't know if they necessarily find that same sense of connection if it's sort of a more generic name. Edmonton-North West could mean any number of areas. Whereas I know for folks especially in the Lauderdale area, where Grand Trunk park sits now, that is something that is part of people's families' history there. I think it would probably be a moment of some pride for some families who are moving to those areas or who have lived there for generations to see that reflected in the name of the ridings that are representing them.

2:50

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Can you comment on the difficulty that people like me have struggling with Indigenous names? Like when Edmonton went to that, do you have feedback on that concept? I notice you have recommended for Enoch.

Mr. Dowsey: Well, I always think about it in terms of perspective. If I was a first generation immigrant coming to this country or maybe newly landed, I might struggle with some of our English place names, let alone any other place names that are around. That's always part of the challenge of just words in general.

I think if we have the resources available to especially help folks phonetically – I know during several municipal elections many campaigns include phonetic spellings and pronunciation guidelines for wards as an aid. But once it works its way into the lexicon, it's remarkably resilient. I mean, many Indigenous names have been longstanding names for places in Edmonton, like the Saskatchewan River itself, the word "Saskatchewan" being an Indigenous word originally, as with many of the rivers in our province. I think it's one of those things that comes with repetition and persistence more than anything else.

Mrs. Samson: Excellent point. Thank you.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. I take your remarks to heart, although obviously there are a great number of difficulties. I mean, you know, we've got this very lumpy situation. We've got districts in the province named after people. We've got districts named after big geographical features: Livingstone. I'm just looking at a map of Edmonton. I'm thinking Edmonton-Gold Bar: that label has been around for quite a while, but the Gold Bar neighbourhood is just

one little bit of that very large riding. These things get awkward fast.

I'm not a great fan of having lots of hyphens, you know. That's sort of evading the problem. I think we have to pick our spots. That may be as good as we get this time around.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: This is the longest conversation we've had about names. Thank you for this because exactly as Justice Miller said, it is part of our mandate.

Mr. Dowsey: Much obliged.

Mr. Clark: I feel like I've circumnavigated the city on the Henday here in my thinking. I've touched on a number of things as we talk here. On one hand, clarity and understandability is a key part of our role here, so we want to try not to change things wherever we can avoid it. People are used to it. It may not be perfect by today's standards, but people know that name. The flip side is that we have the opportunity to be bold and we can do some of this stuff. One of the things I would observe is that in the past one of the things that the Legislature may choose to change from the report is names, one way or the other. Right?

I wonder if we would approach that with maybe a little – I don't want to say a lack of caution . . .

The Chair: Humility.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Humility but also like: hey, you know what? We're just going to based on – the one caveat I would say is that when we're talking about Enoch, I want to be very, very careful to not presume without hearing directly, and we really haven't. That I think would be one distinction. Some of the other suggestions you have are interesting to me.

Thank you so much for that. I've marked it here, and I've got your written submission up as well. Thank you very, very much.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you for that. I made a note that generally in our recommendations – taking this job, I had to read a lot of legislative material, and when the last report was tabled, there were a couple of amendments to tweak to deal with names.

I think we just don't have the time to really delve down into this, but it would not offend me if an MLA made some amendments to properly name it after our report is released. We should probably, you know, give them – not as if we need to give them the latitude.

Thank you so much for bringing this to our attention.

Mr. Dowsey: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

David Bilyk.

Mr. Bilyk: In the hot seat. Good afternoon, everybody.

The Chair: Good afternoon. We're only running 10 minutes late, but don't let that pressure you at all, sir.

Mr. Bilyk: I think I'll be quick. Quick and to the point is my style.

The Chair: No. Do the same thing that you've heard me say numerous times.

Mr. Bilyk: Sure. I'm Dave Bilyk, from Strathcona-Sherwood Park, hopefully your last presenter from Strathcona-Sherwood Park on this matter. I'm just a resident there. I'm here to discuss how maintaining our boundaries is the most mathematical and socially sound path forward for our community.

The interim report proposes moving Heritage Hills out of our riding. I strongly disagree. Effective representation is best served when families and their local schools remain together. Moving Heritage Hills fragments the school catchment areas for Davidson Creek elementary, Heritage Hills elementary, and we urge the commission to respect the status quo of the Clover Bar boundary that our residents already navigate daily.

Just another comment that I just thought about: you were talking about hybrid ridings. We're the perfect example of a hybrid riding, where 50 per cent of our population is represented in that strip on Clover Bar Road, and the rest of it is in the rural area. The reason it works so well is because we're intertwined with our community. We have Strathcona Wilderness Centre. We have all the amenities out in Ardrossan, and we all share those things together with Sherwood Park and with Strathcona-Sherwood Park. At no time do we ever migrate over to Beaumont. But I just wanted to say that a hybrid really works well in our situation.

My second point: our riding currently has a population of 51,006. I want to draw our attention to the shovels-in-the-ground reality of this population. We have 9,600 new residents already in the pipeline through two major developments. The Ardrossan expansion: according to the Strathcona county-Ardrossan area structure plan, the hamlet is being serviced to grow from a base of 1,200 to a target of 6,000 residents. The Hillshire subdivision, which I just drove by today and they're working hard at: per the Strathcona county-Hillshire local improvement plan, the 62-hectare project south of Wye Road contains roughly 1,300 residential units projected to house 4,800 people. These developments alone represent a 19 per cent increase in our current base.

Even if we remove Heritage Hills, which is about 3,150 people, and then add Beaumont, which I estimate to be about 13,000, that creates massive net gain. Combined with our 19 per cent organic growth, this riding will hit over 70,000 residents before the next boundary review. At 29.3 per cent over the provincial average, you would be creating a riding that violates the statutory 25 per cent limit. It is mathematically more stable just to leave the boundaries the way they are.

Next, our identity is tied to the north and east, formalized by the common bonds agreement with Fort Saskatchewan and our membership in Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association. We must also listen to our neighbours there. The city of Beaumont has been extremely vocal in their opposition to this plan, with their council voting unanimously on December 9, 2025, to reject the split. They share no social or economic connection with Sherwood Park. Forcing Beaumont into our riding dilutes the voice of the two distinct economic regions.

Also, the solution to the commission's population goals lies north, not south. Under Strathcona county's municipal development plan, a northward urban expansion has been legally mandated. The scale of growth: Bremner is designed for a target population of 85,000 residents. Active development right next door to them on the north side of highway 16: Akenside and Cambrian Crossing are under construction right now, with Cambrian alone slated for 12,000 residents.

Focusing Sherwood Park's expansion on the northern corridor respects our legal blueprints and prevents unnecessary fragmentation of neighbourhoods like Heritage Hills. Furthermore, if a precision adjustment is deemed mandatory, the town of Tofield, at approximately 2,100 residents, is a superior alternative to Beaumont or Leduc county, as it respects the highway 14 and 21 corridor. However, we maintain that Tofield should be considered as a last resort compared to the stability of our current map.

In my conclusion, in summary, my strongest recommendation is just to leave the 2023 boundaries unchanged. Our current population growth trends provide overwhelming support in maintaining the status quo to ensure we do not exceed the statutory variance limits in the coming years. If an addition is forced, the northern corridor – Bremner and Akenside, like I mentioned, and maybe Tofield as a last resort since they're in Beaver county and not Strathcona county – are the logical path forward.

3:00

Finally, I just want to thank everybody here, the commission. I appreciate the hard work you're doing and the extremely tough decisions that you need to make. Thanks for your commitment to listening to all of us Albertans.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You said, I think, that a council unanimously rejected – which council?

Mr. Bilyk: Beaumont.

The Chair: Oh, okay. Sorry. I thought it was another.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much for that. Again, it's very much appreciated when citizens come in and participate in this process. It's, as you said, the hot seat, so it can be a little intimidating. We try not to make it that way, but it's appreciated that you have taken the time to come out.

Just for some context. One of the things that we're struggling with is that Alberta's growth has been so significant that although Strathcona-Sherwood Park and Sherwood Park have both grown in absolute terms, they've grown at a relatively slower pace than the rest of the province. Strathcona-Sherwood Park is about 7 per cent larger compared to 20 per cent for the province. Sherwood Park itself is 10 per cent, so at about half the rate. Growth is happening. Part of the question I guess I have for you is: is it high density, either low-rise, certainly not high-rise, and that sort of development that you're seeing, or is it more single-family, detached-type development that you foresee?

Mr. Bilyk: I think it's more single family, but there are, you know, your duplexes and fourplexes and such like that. But like I said, the numbers you might be looking at are in the rear-view mirror. These are actually shovels in the ground going forward that council has approved. What did you say, 7 per cent? I stated that it's probably closer to 19 per cent. Our riding is going to improve just with those two developments alone.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Yes.

Thank you very much. I like the fact that you have lots of numbers and they're very recent numbers, I take it.

Mr. Bilyk: Yes.

Dr. Martin: I wanted to look at two bits of it. One is the Hillshire development, and you say that that is slated for 1,300 units, give or take, did you not?

Mr. Bilyk: Yup.

Dr. Martin: Is that three or four storeys high? Does it include any of that kind of construction?

Mr. Bilyk: Three or four storeys? There are apartment buildings in there. Yeah. There are many of those in there plus the single family. It's a mix.

Dr. Martin: Okay. That would characterize as well the other development that you specified near Ardrossan. They, too, are going to have a mix.

Mr. Bilyk: They're having a mix as well. They're slated to have 6,000 shortly, and then they've already got approval, preapproval, for up to 10,000.

Dr. Martin: Right. And we're not even talking about Bremner. I know they've scraped the ground, but, you know, it's going to take them 30 years.

Mr. Bilyk: It's going to take 20 years or so. Yeah. They've already been fighting for it for 30 years.

Dr. Martin: And what's the other one? Cambrian.

Mr. Bilyk: Cambrian is right next door. They've already got the shovels in the ground.

Dr. Martin: Well, I happened to go by there at some point in the autumn and there are 500 single-family houses there.

Mr. Bilyk: On the north side of highway 16.

Dr. Martin: You know, it's growing very rapidly.

Mr. Bilyk: Yeah. We don't mess around out there.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: No questions, but thank you for coming out. I appreciate your time today.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: No, no questions, but thank you very much.

Mr. Bilyk: Thank you, all of you, again as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our next presenter is Roxanne Carr.

Chelsea Balzan. Good afternoon.

Ms Balzan: Hi.

The Chair: Please tell us where you're from and which ridings you wish to comment on.

Ms Balzan: Absolutely. I live within the boundary of the Edmonton-West-Enoch electoral district, and I'll also be providing some feedback about the Edmonton-West Henday district changes. If you'll humour me at the end, I'd love to speak about cardinal directions and naming because I have some feedback on that, but I didn't prepare that in my notes.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak to you today. It's my first time presenting to the commission, so this will be the first time you're hearing from me. I am the president of the Glastonbury Community League in west Edmonton. We serve the areas of Glastonbury, Granville, and the north part of the Hamptons communities. If anyone knows where the west-end Costco is, that's the northwestmost edge of the area that I'm talking about.

Like all of the 160 leagues in Edmonton, our league is led by a group of dedicated volunteer community members who provide opportunities for Edmontonians in our area, including providing places of learning, culture, recreation, and education. I'm here under our mandate of advocating for our community.

First let me say that I appreciate the hard work and care the commission has put into striking a balance between competing priorities. It's clear through the submissions and it's clear through what you're hearing here today that there are so many factors that go into making these recommendations. I don't envy that job. I thank you for acknowledging and reacting to the huge growth that Edmonton has experienced and adding additional representation for our city.

The areas of Edmonton around the outside of the Anthony Henday, where I live, have seen the most growth in Edmonton. To provide a bit of context, the communities that I represent began to be developed about 20 years ago. In that time the league has built several playgrounds and the splash park. Housing development in our area is ongoing, and our league is in the process of building a rink and building for community programming.

For further context the 2021 federal census put the Glastonbury community league catchment population at 13,560 residents. We've had a number of high-density areas developed since that census. Our population will grow significantly again in the coming year or two as the final areas of the Granville neighbourhood are built out. Yes, there is Tyvek on some of them already.

The same is true of most if not all of the urban areas outside the Anthony Henday and specifically within this electoral district. That means that Edmonton-West-Enoch will quickly have a much larger population, and we're also in close proximity to the west line LRT, which hopefully will be completed in 2028 and will continue to increase the desirability of our expanding area.

The neighbourhoods in the Glastonbury community league catchment are directly adjacent to Enoch Cree Nation. We share valued connections. The league supports the nation's facilities by paying for our members to have access to the River Cree twin rinks for skating, and the nation supports our league with sponsorship and advertising in our community newspaper. There's also no doubt that we all depend on provincial and municipal infrastructure directly adjacent to the nation. I hope that much feedback is received from Enoch Cree Nation, its leadership, and its members as they are best placed to comment on their inclusion in the majority urban riding versus rural.

On the elements of Parkland county that have been included in Edmonton-West-Enoch, my opinion is that they do not have more in common with Edmonton residents than they do with those in Devon and the surrounding area. It's true that some may work in Edmonton. In my household it's actually the reverse. We live in west Edmonton, but my husband works in Devon. He travels through the area that we're talking about in question daily and stops in Devon for things on the way home from work, uses some of the provincial infrastructure in Devon on occasion. As a family we spend time in and travel through the area regularly, whether it be to go to a u-pick, the corn maze, the botanical gardens, or get to the family cabin.

We recognize, when spending time in and travelling through this area, that this is distinctly different from Edmonton with differing wants and needs. Spending time in an area is not enough to demonstrate that you are aligned as a community of interest.

Am I right to assume that this is the first urban-rural-First Nations hybrid electoral district?

The Chair: I think you are probably right.

Ms Balzan: Okay.

I have no doubt that combining a First Nations, rural, and urban riding together will cause a split focus for our MLA and dilute the representation of the residents in the riding. I'm concerned about an MLA being able to effectively represent the needs and concerns of three distinct different constituency groups. I understand that all MLAs need to represent a multitude of needs, but we're talking about a hybrid riding that has three communities of interest with complex needs, not just two. A solution to this dilution of representation would be to keep Edmonton-West-Enoch as a hybrid urban Edmonton-First Nations riding, moving the Parkland county portion to Stony Plain-Drayton Valley-Devon.

My final piece of feedback is on behalf of the area directly north of us, represented by the Lewis Estates Community League. If you look at where Enoch ends, in that top right corner is half of the Lewis Estates neighbourhood. The second half of it is in Edmonton-West Henday, and today in the 2017 districts it's in Edmonton-West Henday in its entirety.

3:10

The Chair: Completely, yeah.

Ms Balzan: Yeah.

The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues provided feedback earlier in the process regarding the importance of keeping communities whole. In my conversations with the president of the Lewis Estates Community League, they are against being split between two ridings as it would mean having to advocate with two MLAs and interacting with two constituency offices. As an organization responsible for advocacy for our residents, this hinders our ability to effectively represent our communities and, perhaps even more concerning and more importantly, can cause confusion among constituents.

The communities of Rosenthal, Secord, Lewis Estates, and Glastonbury are well aligned. We call ourselves West Henday. I realize we're not in the West Henday district in the new drawing of the map, but we have a lot of the same concerns. We're newer neighbourhoods. We don't have the same infrastructure that other communities do. So there could be an opportunity to pull those communities all into Edmonton-West-Enoch. My written remarks, that I can provide, show the boundary of what that could look like.

That's the end of my formal comments.

On cardinal naming. Today our riding is in Edmonton-South West. It's not easy to see here, but we're distinctly not south. My street name has NW on the end of it. I agree that the cardinal naming is confusing. I definitely understand what you're saying about needing to have input and guidance from Enoch on whether we might use a Cree name in the new electoral district. What a better way to create conversations. I have learned how to say sipiwiyiniwak, which is my ward for Edmonton. I know what that means. It has meaning. I think that thought, that idea is something that merits looking at.

In general, not a fan of the cardinal labels. I'm open to the idea. Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you. Thank you for the various points that you've made. Much appreciated.

Mr. Evans, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No, no questions.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. Excellent presentation. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

I'm just reflecting a bit; you've covered a lot of ground. Did you say that you have a map you can share with us and give to Mr. Roth?

Ms Balzan: Yeah. I did sort of indicate the areas that I was talking about with respect to the community issue of splitting the community.

Mr. Clark: Yeah, that's incredibly helpful for us. In these high-growth areas it's quite a challenge for us to square the circle, if you will. Your feedback is really very helpful. Thank you very much for coming.

Ms Balzan: Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

That takes us to – we're way ahead of the game now – Bodda Ammar. No?

Okay. That completes the formal list. Although, there's someone here that is wanting to present. We've got the time, so it's perfect.

A.J. Wrenn, please come forward and identify yourself and tell us what electoral division you are residing in and which ones you wish to comment on.

A.J. Wrenn: For sure. Thank you. I have five pages, and, fortunately, these are the little pages. My name is A.J. I'm from Edmonton-North West.

The Chair: Last name?

A.J. Wrenn: Wrenn.

The Chair: How do you spell that?

A.J. Wrenn: W-r-e-n-n.

The Chair: Okay. Edmonton-North West?

A.J. Wrenn: Yeah. Before I forget, I like the idea of calling it Grand Trunk.

The Chair: Oh, really?

A.J. Wrenn: I love the cultural heritage names. That was something that, when I was door-knocking for my city councillor, came up a few times. I still remember the post on the Edmonton subreddit, people complaining about the names. When I posted the playlist from the city of Edmonton and the pronunciation guide and the explanation of all the names, the videos that they made are awesome. If you don't know how to say it, I highly recommend checking there because they're pretty brief and they do a nice job of explaining what it means. I may have cried when I looked up the one from my riding.

I'm going to mostly be speaking about Edmonton, so that's probably the best one to pull up on here. As far as the overall thesis, I feel like I'm going to be saying something that many of you have probably thought many times: given the amount of population growth we've seen, doing your job with only being able to add two seats seems unreasonable. I have a little bit at the end talking about relative populations and what systems looked like a long time ago and how I feel like we've kind of fallen behind.

Edmonton and Calgary are both among the fastest growing population centres in Canada and the provincial government was even spending tax dollars inviting more people to come from other provinces. Now that the job market has been flooded and youth unemployment is rampant and the labour force participation rate is as bad as it's been since the '70s, it feels like Edmonton and Calgary are poised for poor representation.

I think it's most obvious for Edmonton from the numbers. There are only four ridings in all of Alberta with over 61,000 people, all of which are in Edmonton. Edmonton is also one of the most prepared for population growth in Canada, with a large footprint and generally low population density. With excitement from urbanists and chagrin from NIMBYs, Edmonton is also being a leader not only in Canada but in all of North America for being pro development and reforming zoning laws.

Not only are hundreds of thousands of Edmontonians now proportionally worse represented now, but based on growth and being the most pro-market zoning legislation in Canada as well as having a city council that isn't afraid of building more, I think that will just get worse over time. I can see all four of those ridings – Edmonton-McClung, Edmonton-West Henday, Edmonton-Riverview, and Edmonton-North West – all being well beyond the 65,000 in a fairly short period of time.

At some point if urban and suburban centres continue growing and rurals continue stagnating or shrinking, rural voters will effectively be shut out of politics. I appreciate and understand that. According to growth trends it isn't an if; it's just a when. I think many rural folks would agree with me if I were to say that it's already happened.

I don't think the solution is five more seats instead of two, though having more seats to deal with would certainly solve a lot of the issues that people have brought up. I think one of the things that really needs to be considered is that Canada has a very unique demographic makeup, a very unique geography and culture, but our governments don't really reflect that very well. Fair Vote Canada made a system called rural-urban proportional specifically to address this issue. I encourage everyone to look into it and consider it. I know that's not within the purview of your guys' decision today, but I think it's something that I wish I was singing to the choir on. If that's just something that you guys consider in the future, I think that would be great.

For comparison, in 1930 there were 63 legislators for under 300,000 registered voters. Cities used to have district-level single transferable vote proportional representation, and other districts outside of cities used instant runoff voting. Over time we simplified our voting process to first past the post. I think that might have been a mistake. I hope that now in 2026 with the Internet and AI I'm confident that Albertans can do what they did 100 years ago and be able to make decisions by doing more than just, like, a single tick in a box. I think having some sort of changes to the system might really help that.

3:20

I know one of the comments earlier was about having more people in offices. It isn't as good as having more representatives, but it's close. It made me think: okay; what are some comparable things that might have a mix of urban and rural like Alberta does? I looked up Montana. They have a population of 1.14 million. They have 100 representatives and 50 Senators. Edmonton on its own has 1.2 million people in it. I also can't think of a place that talks more about being small government than the U.S., so if their states have much more representatives than we do with a fraction of the population, I don't see why expanding our representation would be

such a bad thing, especially when you look at how much growth there was in the '20s, '30s.

They were adding new MLAs constantly and then taking them away. I do appreciate having a little bit more stability with the eight-year time frame, but if you look at the number of MLAs that have been added in the last few decades relative to 50, 60 years ago, it's not comparable at all. Everyone, I think, is worse represented now than they were five decades ago. In my opinion, the biggest piece that needs to come out of this is that we need a lot better representation or a lot more representation.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

You touched on some really good points. Just to supplement, we operated in Alberta on 83 electoral divisions from 1986 to 2008, and that's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven elections. But the public climate at that point was government cuts, live within your means. As I recall, in my previous life that's what the public wanted and no expansion. Since 2008 we've only expanded six seats to the next election. Yeah.

Comparatively, Montana is maybe a little bit of a stretch to compare.

A.J. Wrenn: It was the closest thing I could find that proved my point.

The Chair: Well, yeah, and it's in everybody's mind because of all the great TV series that come out of there lately.

Comparatively with our Canadian fellow provinces, we're not that far off the mark. I think we have a little bit of a study in there. But thank you very much for your presentation.

Questions, Mr. Evans?

Mr. Evans: No. No questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: No questions, but thank you. That was very interesting.

Dr. Martin: I'm just having a thought experiment here. I mean, the whole business of what would constitute effective representation is very much on our minds all the time, all the different features that go into it and how it stacks up rather differently in different parts of the province: rural, downtown core, maybe suburbs. You know, there are lots of different ways to weight different factors. I mean, the city of Edmonton: in terms of effective representation I take it that you are thinking largely of opportunities of advocacy, so you want more MLAs. This is a thought experiment. We have no say over this kind of thing, but in terms of effective representation, which is your major concern, you know, you've got a million people and you only got 12 councillors. What if you had – I don't know – twice as many councillors? Would that be an improvement in the effective representation of the people of Edmonton?

A.J. Wrenn: I feel like if our municipalities had more ability to make high-level decisions, that might be true. However, when I was learning a lot about the municipal issues that I thought were important, often the answer was, you know: why wasn't something done about this? Well, it's because it's actually up to the province to allow the municipality to make those decisions. So I think if the municipalities had more control over what they could do, that might be a good solution, but as things stand I think there's too much red tape for municipalities to make a lot of the decisions that would be high impact.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Good point.

Mr. Clark?

Mr. Clark: It's a really interesting point, actually. We had submissions in the last go-round from a former Speaker, in fact, that wants fewer MLAs, interestingly enough. I think your point is really well made and interesting about not just the number of MLAs and the type of representation but also the system. Unfortunately, those are not things we control, so we are put in the legislative box that we were knit into, so unfortunately – but we certainly can consider and discuss . . .

A.J. Wrenn: I know it's the wrong venue. I just want more people singing the same song as me.

Mr. Clark: Well, and as I like to say, *Hansard* is forever, and this is now on *Hansard* and part of the public record. It is something we can consider as a recommendation to the Legislature in saying, you know: would we have found this to be a better process if we had more members to work with? It could very well form part of our dialogue, so thank you for that suggestion.

A.J. Wrenn: Yeah. I appreciate the desire for cost savings, but I look at it more from, like, a macroeconomic view in that if you're spending money on a big project and you're hiring foreign consultants, that money just kind of disappears, but if you're expanding the amount of representatives that you have, what are they going to be doing with their money? They're going to be spending it in Alberta and you're kind of increasing the velocity of money. That's one of the things that I think a lot of places are struggling with right now, that a lot of money is going from their community to elsewhere, and I don't see that same problem with political candidates unless they're parachute candidates from the other side of the country, but that's not here nor there or, from what I understand, very common in provincial politics anyways.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Wrenn. A most interesting presentation. We have all taken note, and we'll see if we can make some form of recommendation along those lines.

A.J. Wrenn: Okay. Perfect.

The Chair: Thank you.

A.J. Wrenn: Thank you, and thanks for squeezing me in. I appreciate it.

The Chair: No problem. I think we have two more presenters for the afternoon list, but they are absent. They're not here yet, so we will take a break. Ten, 15 minutes maybe?

Mrs. Samson: See what happens. See who shows.

The Chair: Okay. We'll be back here at 3:45.

[The hearing adjourned from 3:28 p.m. to 3:48 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. We're going to reconvene the commission's hearings. Do not be enticed with someone giving you candies to shorten your presentation.

We've got two more presenters for the afternoon, and I'm going to call on Mr. Bodda Ammar to come forward. How did I do pronunciationwise?

Mr. Ammar: Well, it's Bodda Ammar.

The Chair: Bodda Ammar.

Mr. Ammar: Let me just spit out this candy, though.

Mrs. Samson: What?

The Chair: Aha. Guilty.

Mr. Clark: Susan. Gotcha.

Mrs. Samson: Okay. I'm quitting. You guys just did it in.

The Chair: Okay. We're concluding the afternoon session with two more presentations for the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Please, sir, identify in the microphone your name and the electoral division you live in and which ones you wish to comment on.

Mr. Ammar: Good afternoon, commissioners. My name is Bodda Ammar. I live in Edmonton-Whitemud, but I'm commenting on Edmonton-Meadows today. I work in the Edmonton-Meadows constituency office as a staffer there. I know my colleague Yadvinder Bhardwaj presented yesterday as well, making the case for an additional Edmonton seat based on population data and variance distribution. I'm here today to offer something a little bit different, the operational reality of, you know, what these numbers mean on the ground along with new evidence that strengthens the case that he made as well. I want to thank the commission for its thoughtful work, and my comments are offered in alignment with your mandate of effective representation.

Before I present the data, I want to emphasize one critical point about this commission's work. According to Elections Alberta and the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, the commission is appointed every eight to 10 years. The last redistribution was in 2017, and the boundaries you draw today will govern Alberta's elections until approximately 2033 to 2035. Of course, that's not a short window. That's nearly a decade, during which Alberta's population will continue to grow, and, of course, the pressures we're seeing today will only intensify. This means that redistribution can not only reflect where Albertans live today, but it must anticipate where they will live tomorrow. The commission's interim report emphasizes durability, and I'm here to present evidence that Edmonton's growth trajectory requires more forward-looking seat allocation than currently proposed.

Commissioners, I'd like to present data that wasn't included in yesterday's submissions. According to the Alberta government's regional dashboard using data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Edmonton had 18,384 housing starts in 2024, an increase of 39.4 per cent over 2023. Calgary had 24,369 housing starts in 2024, an increase of 24.5 per cent over 2023. So let me be clear about what this means. While Calgary had more absolute housing starts, today Edmonton's growth rate is nearly 60 per cent faster than Calgary's in terms of housing starts, and of course, housing starts are a leading indicator. They tell us where population pressure is headed, not just where it is today. Every housing start represents future residents, future families, future constituents who will need representation, yet the commission's report proposes giving Calgary two additional seats while giving Edmonton only one.

The most recent Statistics Canada data from January 2026 confirms a trend. From July 2024 to July 2025 Edmonton's growth rate was 3 per cent, while Calgary's was 2.9 per cent. Edmonton is now outpacing Calgary. If we're drawing boundaries that must remain durable for the next 8 to 10 years, we should be accounting for where growth is accelerating, and the data shows that that's Edmonton.

I want to give you a window into what these numbers look like from inside a constituency office. Edmonton-Meadows and some

other Edmonton ridings generally serve some of the most diverse populations in the province. According to the 2021 Canadian census, in the Mill Woods federal electoral district, which largely corresponds with our area, visible minorities accounted for 55.9 per cent of the population. That's more than double the national average of about 26.4 per cent. South Asians alone represented 32.4 per cent of the population. Research from Dr. Sandeep Agrawal at the University of Alberta estimates that approximately 85 per cent of residents in this area are immigrants or their immediate descendants.

These residents don't just need more quantity of service; they often need more intensive service as well. When a newcomer family comes to our office, they're often navigating multiple systems for the first time: health care, education, immigration, housing. They may not speak English fluently. They may not understand how to access government services. They may not have anyone else to really turn to. Our office becomes their lifeline, and we're often the only resource available to them in their own language.

So let me give you a sense of some of the volume. On a typical Friday our MLA may have between 10 and 20 constituent meetings. Our phones are frequently busy. Our waiting area is sometimes full of people who have just walked into our office seeking help. Constituents sometimes tell us they can't get through not because we're not trying, of course, but because we often lack the capacity to serve everyone who needs us at all times.

3:55

MLAs are elected to serve everyone in their constituency, of course, whether they voted for them or not, but when the population is this dense and this diverse and growing this fast, the quality of that representation suffers. We believe the only structural solution is to reduce the number of people each MLA must serve, and that would mean adding an additional seat in Edmonton.

The commission's interim report consolidates six central Edmonton ridings into five, effectively taking away a seat. Then it adds two new ridings in the southeast and west. The net result is only one additional seat for Edmonton. Meanwhile Calgary receives two new seats within city limits plus an additional seat in the Airdrie-Cochrane area. Yet according to the commission's own appendix E, Edmonton has seven ridings exceeding over 6 per cent variance above provincial average and Calgary has only three. As I've shown, Edmonton's housing starts growth rate is 39.4 per cent, significantly higher than Calgary's 24.5 per cent, and Edmonton's population growth now exceeds Calgary as well.

The commission's principles emphasize durability, and over the next eight to 10 years Edmonton's growth will only accelerate relative to Calgary, so shouldn't Edmonton receive proportional seat allocation? I'm not asking you to take away a seat from any other region. I'm simply asking you to reconsider whether one additional seat adequately reflects Edmonton's structural, ongoing, and accelerating growth.

To close, commissioners, the boundaries you draw today will shape Alberta's representation until the mid-2030s. Edmonton's growth is not temporary or speculative; it is structural and accelerating, and the housing starts data and the Statistics Canada figures and the on-the-ground reality for us at the office all point to the same conclusion. Respectfully, I submit that one additional seat in Edmonton would strengthen effective and durable representation not just for today but for the life of the map.

I thank you for your time, commissioners, and for your service to Albertans.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We want to open it up for some questions. I should just note the absence of one of our commissioners, which just occurred just as you started to present, Mr. Ammar. He wears several hats, so he has to be in a special meeting for the next hour. That explains his absence.

Mr. Clark, any questions?

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

Thank you very much. I just wanted to reiterate, and I believe your MLA had proposed this, that right now Meadows is about 53,000 population and Mill Woods is about 59,000. The thinking there was that on the east side of Meadows there's a lot of net new growth and building out. As you suggest, and to borrow a saying from a great Edmontonian, skate to where the puck is going to be, which is, I think, to summarize part of what you were saying. Let's accommodate for some growth.

But you also want Larkspur back. If we added Larkspur, that would be 6,000 more to you, and Meadows would now be 59,000 and Mill Woods would be 53,000. The thesis we were working on is that Mill Woods is mostly built out, not zero growth but mostly built out. Meadows is still building out, so we were leaving the headroom in Meadows. Would you like us still to flip Larkspur into you? If we can't add more constituencies, which I know you're asking, how would you reconcile that?

Mr. Ammar: I mean, I would say that, you know, I'd ask the commission to ensure that the ridings with the highest growth trajectories, I guess, like the ones in the southeast, are drawn at the lower end of the variant range to, like, provide for that extra room.

I want to stress that, you know, just from my perspective, the one additional seat isn't asking for special treatment. It's really asking for proportional treatment based on the data. I would say that an additional seat would help alleviate some of these issues that the commissioners might be having with the map.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Well, thank you very much. We had a lot of fun chatting with your colleague about things like Larkspur and the struggle over getting the population kind of sorted right.

You raised two broad issues. One is about the burden of being a constituency officer and the range of queries. You gave us an illustration. You know, on a Friday we can expect X number of humans with Y number of topics. That is entirely true, and the volume of that is a burden on you and your immediate colleagues. But staffing isn't our remit. We are fully alive to the difficulties that any MLA has with respect to adequate staffing budgets and to hire enough people, to get adequate premises and equipment, and to perhaps pay performance bonuses or have a salary ladder. All those things are consequent of having budget room. We are prepared to make very strong recommendations to the Legislature about the need to make a more robust and generous members' budget allocation. Some of your difficulties: we hear you, it's burdensome, but it's a staffing issue.

Mr. Ammar: That's true, Commissioner Martin. But while I agree with that, I also think that a lot of the issues come to having just one MLA being the only representative for so many people. A lot of times staff aren't able to simply fill in for the MLA when it comes to important stakeholder events or community events. For example, on a given weekend in Edmonton-Meadows there might be Diwali celebrations, there might be a mosque event for Ramadan, a Sikh

gurdwara function, a community gathering, all happening simultaneously. Of course, the MLA can only be in one place at a time. We have to pick and choose often. Communities sometimes feel neglected because we simply cannot be present at every event. Of course, having a staffer present helps a little bit, but they need that representation from their MLA.

You know, you're right that a lot of the issues can be helped with increased budgets for staff, but we think that the actual population of the ridings matters as well for the MLAs.

Dr. Martin: Well, point taken, but that's true for every single riding in the province.

Mr. Ammar: Of course.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. We've heard a lot from MLAs and former MLAs from a variety of places that, you know, clearly are rural. What I call the laminated stack of governance relations that are required for those MLAs is astounding, equally as astounding as those you describe. I'm not convinced that we can make much of a distinction on how the MLA's schedule is subdivided. It always will be.

I also wanted to just mention the population issue. Yeah, there is some headroom, as my colleague said, in Edmonton-Meadows, but it also exists in four of the five central Edmonton ridings, all of which are under the provincial mean population.

You know, we're alive to the issues of Edmonton's growth and certainly that of Calgary's. That is why we struggle with trying to accommodate the problems people can foresee in the period of five to eight years. We want to try to deal with rates of growth of the coming two years, at best, because that is something much more tangible to us.

Mr. Ammar: I just want to say again that, you know, when it comes to our areas, where it includes areas of very high diversity and high populations and large numbers of newcomers and new Canadians, it does add a level of complexity to the MLA's work, where it may not exist in all other areas in the province. I think that when it comes to him having to be present at multiple areas, that does also come with dense urban concentrated areas, where various communities coexist and demand his representation and attention.

4:05

When it comes to, you know, the central Edmonton ridings, I understand the commission's rationale that these areas have grown more slowly than the city's periphery. However, I note that the net effect, then, is Edmonton only gains one seat despite having the fastest growth rate among major cities according to Statistics Canada.

Dr. Martin: Well, it had the fastest growth rate. We can't predict the future.

Mr. Ammar: Right. I presented some data where it could help maybe give us some data on where that might be going, with Edmonton having, you know, over a 3 per cent population growth rate and some of the highest housing starts in the country, so that gives us an idea of where Edmonton's population is going.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that answer.

Mrs. Samson, questions?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your presentation. I have no questions. Thank you.

Mr. Ammar: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Ammar, thank you for your presentation, and thank you for the haunting reminder of the fact that what we do continues on to 2034-35, possibly. Yes. Thank you so much.

Mr. Ammar: I appreciate it. Thank you for your service and for your work for Albertans.

The Chair: Yeah. We'll excuse you. If you can remain for the last presenter, you're more than welcome to do so.

Our last presenter of the afternoon, Mr. Scott Sinclair. Thank you for coming.

Off the record I'll tell you a story about your lapel pin sometime.

Mr. Sinclair: What? Sorry.

The Chair: Your lapel pin. I don't want to occupy the time.

Typically we leave six minutes for the presenter and four minutes for questions, but it's a rule that's honoured more in the breach than the observance, Mr. Sinclair. Please proceed.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you very much, Mr. Justice, and I would appreciate it. I did time this twice, and I made a small amendment. I'm around seven minutes the second time, so if there was a minute's grace, I would certainly appreciate it.

The Chair: Soldier on.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you.

Hello, everyone. My name is Scott Sinclair, and I'm the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake. Before I begin, I'd like to say thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I would also like to thank each of the members of this commission for their service on this panel and to the people of Alberta. I'd also like to thank anyone who's taken the time to participate in any fashion in this process, especially those who have joined me in advocating for Lesser Slave Lake and more northern representation. I was incredibly proud to hear last week from Member Samson that our submissions from the north made up almost 10 per cent of the submissions for the entire province. You can correct me after, but I think you said 100 out of the 1,100 roughly, which is pretty incredible given the size of our area. It's also why I often repeat the phrase from the *Game of Thrones* show, that the north remembers.

I'm aware of the scrutiny and the ramifications of the decisions or life-altering changes that this board will eventually propose to the powers that be. This board's decisions will surely have a lasting impact on the people of northern Alberta, and each of your names will have an inevitable connection to these aforementioned changes. This public pressure and heavy burden are not easy to wear, but I've seen each of you demonstrate compassion and understanding in previous presentations that I've watched and listened to online, and I'm optimistic that I can appeal to both your hearts and minds here today, which is why I feel compelled to advocate so strongly for the people of Lesser Slave Lake, those who've elected me to fight for them and make sure that they have a strong voice and a seat at the table.

My mushum, or grandpa, Sam Sinclair always told me that decisions were made by those in the room, wise words that have always stuck with me and are so obvious to me now, now that I've seen it first-hand as an MLA, which is why the passion and commitment that I'm trying to demonstrate is not meant to offend anyone here today but to reaffirm to the people I represent that their voices are being heard in a meaningful way so that any decision being made by the people in these important rooms or fancy buildings should always reflect everyone in this province, no matter how remote or far away they are from them.

Quite simply, a life in northern Alberta is worth just as much as a life in Calgary or Edmonton. Therefore, my specific recommendations will be twofold and concise. Number one, please keep the Lesser Slave Lake riding as is. And number two, I'm pleading with you to not get rid of any seats or ridings in northern Alberta at all because it would further dilute the representation which is already drastically underserved and too often ignored by our neighbours to the south of us. My comments are grounded in the requirements of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act and in the commission's own findings in both the 2017 final report and the 2025 interim report.

Section 14 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act requires the commission to consider sparsity and density of population, common community interests, geographic features, existing municipal and natural boundaries, and the availability of transportation and communication when drawing electoral divisions. Another important one, section 15(2) of this act states that up to four proposed electoral divisions may have a population that is as much as 50 per cent below the average population if, in the opinion of the commission, the nature of the sparsity of the population, the rate of population growth or decline, or other circumstances justify the greater deviation.

Not only has Lesser Slave Lake historically met the criteria set out in sections 14 and 15(2), but because of all the glaring and obvious examples it feels like this exception was specifically written to protect the riding of Lesser Slave Lake, not delete it. In the 2017 final report the commission identified Lesser Slave Lake as one of a limited number of rural northern divisions that warranted a population variance greater than 25 per cent below the provincial average due to geography, sparsity, distance between communities, and the need to ensure effective representation. At the time the population of Lesser Slave Lake exceeded 40 per cent below the average, and the 2017 commission maintained the division in recognition of those statutory factors. The 2025 interim report confirms that northern Alberta continues to experience sparse population distribution, long travel distances, and limited service centres. Those conditions have not materially changed since 2017.

In addition, on permanent population counts I believe it's worth noting that our region experiences a significant shadow population that should also be weighed and considered. A shadow population featuring seasonal workers, rotational or shift-work employees, wildfire evacuees, previously mentioned by Mayor Franki from Slave Lake in her submission last week, all put significant stresses on the services and infrastructure of our area, all important details I know this commission has already heard from other submissions from the north, but they're all relevant to the exceptional status under section 15(2) of this act.

In closing, it's important to me that this commission does more than just politely listen to us. Positive intentions and understanding for the plight of northern Alberta are considered worthless if not supported by meaningful actions. I believe the private citizen from last week's name was Nathan Steinke, and he made an incredible point last week when he said – I'm paraphrasing a bit here – that the exceptions of section 15(2) should be embraced, not erased. If Lesser Slave Lake does not meet the requirements of exceptional status in 15(2), then, quite frankly, I don't even know why it exists. If this commission recognizes 15(2), it's not just following the rules the way they're intended; it's embracing fair representation and acknowledging that the exceptional status for northern ridings brings our communities together instead of driving them apart. No pun intended on the driving part; I know we've been talking about that a lot with northern ridings.

Deleting a northern MLA is not just inconveniencing our people; it's erasing northern voices completely. I've spent the better part of my tenure as an MLA advocating or educating colleagues, ministers on the challenges faced by northerners, and I'm not alone. It's important to mention that all the northern MLAs have been united in their efforts to maintain the status quo, demonstrated recently by their letter of support that they've sent to this commission a couple of months ago. That show of unity is not only unprecedented; it's incredibly rare and impactful. That means you have the consensus of all the elected representatives saying to this commission what I hope you now realize: the people of northern Alberta do not support the proposed changes in the interim report and do not support deleting another MLA.

I can't tell you how difficult it is to compile a six-minute or seven-minute speech that will impact a decision for so many people for the next seven to eight years before this issue gets revisited. If this commission does not protect ridings with exceptional status such as in section 15(2), it's inevitable that we will continue to lose northern MLAs, and the decay of smaller rural communities becomes real and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

4:15

We could spend endless hours conjuring arguments and specifics on possible changes to the acts, but this commission doesn't need to reinvent the wheel here legally or morally. Somebody already charted a course for you to follow with section 15(2). Please don't abandon the exceptional status. Embrace it, not just because it's been written that way in the act but because it's the fair and right thing to do. The people in this room have the power to change course. You've had the chance to listen. Now it's time to act.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Sinclair, thank you very much.

Mrs. Samson, do you have any questions or comments?

Mrs. Samson: This is very emotional. You had eight MLAs right in. It was quite incredible. When I think about what I heard from around the province, you know, the demise of the riding, it's been personally painful. I can't imagine what it's like for you. I'll leave it at that.

Dr. Martin: I think I echo all of the opinion about the difficulty of this current boundary. I think it's well beyond a hundred letters that came in as well as the one, what I call, big northern letter, which all your colleagues had signed and you in your own letter allude to quite extensively. I think the need for a northern voice, the key sentiment and motivation for that letter, is heard loud and clear. We are very much of the mind to reconsider the boundaries that we had put in place. You know, the interim report actually acknowledges that it's interim, and the whole purpose of the second round was to get the input to end up with a better solution, so I'm not stubborn about the boundaries. Some of them we just didn't get right, and this probably is the principal case in point.

We've heard a lot from your colleagues and fellow MLAs all saying the same thing. We've heard from each of them and from at least another 10-odd presenters if not more in the last couple of weeks about the granular details of life in the north, transportation challenges, representative challenges for mayors and reeves and day-to-day citizens. We have learned so much more in the last month than we ever knew about the north. You should be proud of that because it has made a difference.

Thank you.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you. If I may briefly respond. I made I would call them maybe footnotes that aren't really involved in the speech that I think are important to mention, you know, some of them symbolic, some of them real data, and some of them anecdotal. It was already mentioned. Treaty 8 was signed on the south shores of Lesser Slave Lake. Lesser Slave Lake has the highest population percentage of Indigenous people in the province, and right now they have a First Nation MLA that currently represents them. There are 14 Indigenous communities, 11 First Nations – Sawridge, Bigstone, Whitefish, Woodland, Lubicon, Loon Lake, Peerless Trout, Swan River, Driftpile, Sucker Creek, Kapawe'no – and three Métis settlements: East Prairie, Gift Lake, and Peavine.

It also has the historical Pearl Calahasen who proudly served the Lesser Slave Lake riding from 1989 to 2015, who was the first Métis woman elected to the Legislature. I know she was briefly mentioned last week when I listened to submissions. I also think it's worth mentioning Jennifer Churchill made a really thoughtful submission based on a regional group called ANCA.

The really heartbreaking parts of some of these decisions is that we were following – and when I say “we,” I mean the area, not me specifically; it was before I was even an MLA – the directions of ministers at every meeting we would go to for rural municipalities or at the Legislature prior to this, asking us to advocate as a group. ANCA is the first of its kind, as far as I know, the only one that has First Nations, Métis, counties, and municipalities all advocating together as a consensus. Currently, outside of deleting an MLA in the north, just the redrawing itself is going to basically push everybody back not quite to zero but pretty close to it. A lot of the feedback I've been given, that I didn't even share, is that it's hopeless. There's no point in me coming here today. “They're just going to ignore you no matter what,” and “We're going to go right back to the way it was before,” and “Everything is going to have to start from scratch.”

The riding I represent is a very diverse one. To me, when you talk about section 15(2), which I mentioned in my speech, the harmony of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together and having two regional hubs, Slave Lake and High Prairie, are really worth mentioning. You've got a teacher there from Jousard, mentioned that she goes to health care appointments in High Prairie and that she grocery shops in Slave Lake. Well, under the Mackenzie county proposed riding, if you look here on the map – now, I can walk up and point to it – if you could see where Lesser Slave Lake is, there's the cut-out that looks like the open end of a crescent wrench here. There are a lot of communities right along the south side of the lake, four First Nations – you have Swan River, Sawridge, Driftpile, Sucker Creek – and the Métis communities as well as non-Indigenous communities: Jousard, Kinuso, Widewater, Canyon Creek. I could go on and on. There are over 30 communities in my riding right now. All of these communities right now utilize both Slave Lake and High Prairie.

I know the leaders of the communities had a bit of a back and forth on which one was the actual regional hub. I would tell you that it's one or the other. But there is not a single person, I don't believe, from Jousard or any of these communities that would ever think of driving all the way to High Level, which would be their new centre hub, to be able to access services. They'd have to drive through both of the new proposed ridings, through High Prairie one way or through Slave Lake the other. This is the challenge of when you just stare at a map as the crow flies. It looks like a straight shot to High Prairie, but there's just no way of getting across that lake.

When I first started as an MLA, I had an impromptu visit from the Premier to East Prairie after the fires that destroyed nearly the entire community. On a day's notice I had to change all my plans. I was supposed to go to Wabasca, which is north of highway 88,

and I was supposed to be there at 1 o'clock. But you hear that the Premier is coming; you drop everything. I made it there for 8 in the morning and met her. Two important facts. The chairman at the time, Ray Supernault, his name is, who's the chairman – that's the word for chief for Métis councils and communities – got tear eyed in the room and pretty emotional because a Premier had never visited East Prairie, as far as he knew. Now, I don't know that for a fact, but he said that, or maybe as far as he knew. That means something to me. That's the first, very important one, is how little they see of our elected leaders.

The second one was when I was jockeying my schedule with somebody who worked out of the Edmonton office. They said: “Don't worry. You could just go straight from East Prairie north up to Bigstone. I'm sure you'll make it there by 12 o'clock.” I said, you know, facetiously, like: I don't know if we have a helicopter or a private jet that I don't know about, but I won't be able to get there till the end of the day. That's one of the most difficult parts already with this riding. I have to choose which side of the lake to go on. No matter how hard I try and how many miles I put on my truck, which is a lot – you mentioned Minister Williams and how he lives in his truck, just like I do – you just can't get there. Going to the same Canada Day: you can go to one side or the other, but you can't do both.

These are real examples and anecdotes from real people. I just want to convey the emotional part. You have lots of data, I think, to review now. But to me it's the feeling of being, you know, ignored. It's almost that they've accepted that this is the way they're going to be treated by people in bigger communities. To me, I think we can do better as elected leaders and as people involved in making these decisions. It's not a difficult one. It's small things.

We mentioned future population with cities. Now, this is not the purview of this panel, but decisions like this have definitely a consequence on it. I speak a lot about resource revenue mapping because I want to be able to identify for Treasury Board areas where resource leaves our area but doesn't necessarily come back for transportation and infrastructure. Now, I won't get into the politics of any of that, but that is a belief. I don't think people in northern Alberta deserve exceptional status or deserve special treatment. I believe that this is the only way we can grow a balanced population in this province.

4:25

If we don't have access to health care, if we don't have access to roads, it's difficult to divide up that population properly. The Grande Prairie county reeve was largely in support of leaving everything the same. She's seen some growth, and I would say that it's not because of industry and the size of the community but access to core services in that area. So although it has nothing to do with this panel necessarily, the reason I make these cases is so that if I come here in eight years and we've got nicer roads and we're delivering health care services, then it would make me very happy to say that our population has gone the other way and we can alleviate some of that population growth that's bottlenecked in Edmonton or Calgary. I know it doesn't have anything to do with your decision necessarily, but it's, I think, the frame of mind for the way I'd like to see this go, and then we would be able to have different conversations here at this table as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

I just want to thank you so much for being here. Also, through you to your community: we've heard loud and clear that feedback.

That feedback was early. It was forceful. It was reasonable and thoughtful. You know, people really did bring their own perspective as individuals, as citizens and also as elected officials, yourself and other elected officials, municipal and provincial. It's very meaningful for us. It is an interim report, and that is exactly the purpose of it. In essence, as you do an interim report, we're almost asking a question, and the answer has come back pretty definitively as it relates to the north.

I wanted to ask you a little more about the south side of the lake, or really just the lake itself. We've clearly bisected that, and that's been a lot of the feedback that we have received. Maybe can you just tell me a little more about the relationship, the history – I know Treaty 8 was signed on the south side of the lake – but just today, the connectedness and how those communities work together?

Mr. Sinclair: Yeah. I'd be happy to. There are the formal connections with groups like ANCA, which are the advocacy groups for bringing communities together to lobby, you know, politicians largely. One big small town is what I say northern Alberta is all the time, and there's nothing more true than the south side of the lake, including Slave Lake and High Prairie.

This is something else I wrote down. When they plan out something as simple as regional events, they'll have rodeos and parades on different weekends because we just don't have enough people, volunteer base, people spending money, and small communities like Kinuso, Smith, High Prairie all actually have rodeos and they get thousands of people. It's really remarkable. Then we have, you know, parades and treaty days at every single one of the First Nations communities, but a lot of them are shared right along the one side of that lake. Right from highway 2, it goes from Edmonton to Westlock to Slave Lake and then it continues west to High Prairie. All of those communities that I mentioned that are now in the proposed Mackenzie county are all communities that share and live and work together in a common-sense way.

Now, they also have shared regional groups on the First Nations side and groups like ANCA, but everybody works together, you know, for the most part. I don't want to pretend it's all peace and harmony. There are, obviously, disagreements over allocations of resources and everything, but largely people make decisions as if they're one big small town. It makes it an easy place to represent because the people are so amazing, and lots of times as long as I give it to them straight, even if it's not the answer they want, they're happy. I just couldn't foresee a situation where somebody from Jossard or Driftpile, which is in that area you're talking about – I could not imagine that MLA for the Mackenzie county, whoever that ends up being, being able to service those communities in a meaningful way. It would be just impossible.

I believe Sue asked the question to somebody – I can't remember the person on the panel last week – about flying from La Crête to Calgary. That's just not an option in our riding. That was taken away a long time ago, but even if it wasn't, we don't have regional airports that are easy to get in and out of either. During Pearl Calahasen's day, she actually did have a few flying communities. I think Garden River might have been one of them.

In regard to the opposite argument, or the counterpoint, I won't mention his name, but I had a conversation off the record with a Calgary MLA at the Calgary Stampede the first year I was elected. He told me he's just amazed by how much driving we have to do in our area because I was trying to explain to him – he asked how long it took me to get to Calgary, and I said: oh, it took eight hours. I was in a Treaty Days celebration in the morning at the Woodland Cree First Nation, which is three hours from Slave Lake, which is my hometown. You're another six hours from there to Calgary. Now, don't double-check my math; I speed a little bit in my truck

sometimes. He was saying he could probably walk or bike ride his riding in less than eight hours.

Now, to me, that is a perfect example of why the exception for 15(2) exists. No more, no less. You know, I heard all the points from the gentleman before me about urban representation and the sprawl and the growth, and I understand all of that, but it's just very difficult to be able to not ignore somebody if they're that far away over such a short period of time with roads.

Access to Internet is another one. I don't get phone service in some areas. I have a booster and a Starlink, but there are just some areas where I have to wait like in Husky and Fawcett Lake. I'm not sure if anyone knows. Between Slave Lake and Edmonton is where I do a lot of Zoom meetings. I start driving because I've got to get somewhere, but I know that I'm going to lose somebody. Everybody is polite the first couple of times on a Zoom meeting, but by the third time they're kind of fed up. So I just sit at the side of the road at the truck stop there and do a lot of the business of the day. Then I get to where I'm going, and usually it's nighttime.

Those are realities that I know every rural MLA faces. My only point, I guess, is that it just doesn't need to be any more difficult.

Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Sinclair. I do have a couple of points I'd like to just clarify. First of all, it's my assessment of what we read and what we heard last week from the north that it was bipartisan. Everybody rows in the same direction up there no matter what political side they are on. It kind of reminds me of the old joke: why do grandchildren and grandparents get along so well? Common enemy. To some extent, you know, you're in a part of the province where you all – and, in fact, Ms Churchill may have described it. Everybody works together because you have no choice. You've got common distances. You've got challenges of roads and all those things.

So your position is to keep Lesser Slave Lake intact as it is now under the 2017 boundaries, correct?

Mr. Sinclair: Yes, sir.

The Chair: No tinkering or moving around the edges. You're not really concerned about bringing in new territory or taking some out.

Mr. Sinclair: You know, if I'm allowed some latitude on kind of – I've only heard brief conversations and some of the other submissions on this. But based on the feedback I've heard, there are areas, if we needed to add to the riding to gain a population, where the deviation was closer. If you asked if I'm a hard "please don't touch it," please don't delete a northern MLA at all would be my position. However, if we needed to add some population, there are a lot more similarities to Swan Hills being there are lots of people that work in the House Mountain area. My dad commuted and lived in Swan Hills, and it's only an hour from Slave Lake, so a lot of the shared . . .

The Chair: So you'd take those in.

Mr. Sinclair: Yeah. There's a lot more in common.

I could tell you the opposite would be true of – this is no slight against anybody from Saddle Lake, but I don't believe there would be anyone from Slave Lake that goes through Saddle Lake or vice versa. People from Saddle Lake don't come to Slave Lake, I don't think, or Westlock or Barrhead, to access any core services. Now, I mean, I'll say that here on the record, and then three people might phone in, but out of the amount of people that live there, common

sensewise it's just not something that's tethered together in a meaningful way at all.

I hope that answers your question a little bit.

The Chair: Okay. I think we universally appreciated the presentations from I think it was the mayor of Lesser Slave Lake, Ms Churchill. Is it Jennifer?

Mr. Sinclair: Yeah.

The Chair: And Mike Evans.

Mr. Sinclair: Yeah. And Ken Matthews.

The Chair: They really stick in my mind, their presentations, for their, you know, clarity, their professionalism, and just raising the need, as you have.

4:35

I want to ask a bit of a comparative question. This doesn't come up very often, but I am in the process of preparing the narrative for the final report already, and I'm looking at Saskatchewan. You know, each jurisdiction is different. I've actually looked at northern Ontario, and I'm looking at Saskatchewan. Have you as a legislator looked at how they operate in Saskatchewan? It affects section 15(2), the ridings, and all kinds of things.

Mr. Sinclair: I have examined, I would say, more of what I would call alternative options for the way I might propose drawings if there was a separate meeting where we were sure that we were losing a riding. You know, I've been very hesitant to go down that road because I want the people that I represent to know that I'm here to do exactly what they told me to do, which is that we don't want to lose a northern MLA. So it's very difficult for me to examine alternative – I mean, obviously, you have the burden of having to make these decisions. I'd be open to sitting down with anybody on interprovincial matters. I think that's important, and in our position as MLAs and ministers we do it all the time. It's, I think, a great yardstick to be able to use. Yeah.

The Chair: I would say compare and contrast because Saskatchewan is very different than northern Alberta. Very different. They have taken an approach to just say: okay; legislatively you're not touching the two northern ridings, and here they are, irrespective of population. We live in an unusual world where we have more limited transportation in the north than we did, I'd say, 25 years ago. Commercial air travel is history, as I understand it, in the north where it used to be quite common before. We have a better road system, I guess, in northern Alberta than Saskatchewan, but now we're undergoing far less air travel availability.

I want to go back. If you haven't read appendix D to the report, which provides the history of electoral boundaries in Alberta, often politicians are accused of self-interest. That's one of the reasons we've moved to independent commissions over the last 20-plus years. In the early '90s – I think it's the early '90s; late '80s or early '90s – there was a legislative commission that did a lot of work. It's called the Bogle commission because Bob Bogle chaired it. I tell you, that commission historically has done a lot of work that has impacted what we do now. It kind of arose at about the same time as the Saskatchewan reference came out of the Supreme Court of Canada. Of course, we were just learning about what the Supreme Court says about the Charter for section 3.

That legislative commission actually did a – they went to Winnipeg. They consulted with Manitoba legislators, Manitoba

electoral officers. They did the same in Regina in Saskatchewan and did the same in Victoria. I have to say that it's unfair to tar that legislative committee with the same brush that often politicians get tarred with. They did incredible, groundbreaking work that influences us, and the essence of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act comes from that. Section 15(2) comes from that. And each jurisdiction, it seems, has created their own little niche area to protect the north and provide for effective representation.

I say all that to say that I may want to talk to my commissioners and talk about some groundwork for the legislators to do in the next eight years because you're the people on the ground, and maybe it's time to do a bit more work like that.

Mr. Sinclair: I appreciate that.

The Chair: I know that's out of left field.

Mr. Sinclair: No, I don't mind. I actually appreciate the open communication.

A couple things if I may. One is the very fact that this commission, you know, is having to make a decision on the secondary report here in Edmonton instead of our area of Lesser Slave Lake, one of the ridings that is most impacted by being deleted. I think it says a lot about the difficulty in representing that area right now. You guys are going out under a very tight timeline to try and propose a report back before the legislative session begins and then to be able to make a fair and bipartisan decision before then.

I've also lived in Saskatchewan. I played junior hockey there, so I've got a big love for their community.

The Chair: Oh, with who?

Mr. Sinclair: Yorkton Terriers and Estevan's.

The Chair: Oh, okay. That's near my hometown, where I grew up.

Mr. Sinclair: Saskatchewan reminds me a lot of northern Alberta, though, the way they band together and that one big small town theme that I mentioned. It boggles the mind, actually. If you go there, they love the Roughriders, but they don't have an NHL team, so whatever the SJHL team is is fully supported by the entire community. Melville is 20 kilometres from Yorkton, and they both have Junior A teams with different fan bases and sponsorship groups.

Now, I don't want to get off – I'm a politician. I don't mean to, but I could be here until 6 o'clock. What I was just trying to say is that in terms of points of reference, you know, I watch a lot of TV. I'm not formally educated, but I love *The West Wing*, and I like all movies regarding politics. It's one of the reasons I got into it. They mention the founding fathers all the time. I think that when you think about whoever it was – and I don't even know the names; excuse me – who thought of section 15(2) and thought of putting in exceptions for ridings like northern Alberta, I think they were foreseeing what was already happening here with growth in the urban communities. They understood, just like we mentioned to the gentleman before, the forward thinking – Dr. Martin, you mentioned it back to him as well – and trying to predict where it was going.

Well, to me, effective bipartisan people who care about northern Alberta – party politics aside, Danielle Larivee, the former minister, the MLA who represented the NDP from 2015 to 2019: I think she probably came before this community and largely was able to get them to change their minds or at least respect section 15(2) at that time even in an area that's largely conservative. She knew it was

the right thing to do for northern Alberta. I could only imagine – and I don't want to speak for her, obviously – that the partisan politics that you mentioned could have been very prevalent for her to be able to add another urban riding. Now, I think she put the people of northern Alberta and the people of Lesser Slave Lake first, and I'm grateful for that. I say that as somebody who represents, you know, the conservative side of politics.

Now, I'm an independent member, so I would say the same thing. Whether this hurts my place personally or my career personally, it was important for me to speak out in the Legislature and on Facebook and any other means I had necessary because that's what I ran on and that's what people asked me to do.

Travelling to commissions like this is impossible. I know you had a small turnout. We just have, you know, traditional newspapers now to let people know, but it's difficult to get people out. When they're not driving to work two and a half hours one way, sometimes there and back, at the end of the day they come home at 7 and they're rushing to the rink and they get home. It's a crazy rat race of a different kind than the people who live in cities.

You know, the last thing I'd mention, that I forgot to mention earlier, as an anecdote was that I advocate strongly, and it was one of my positions as the parliamentary secretary for Indigenous policing at the time – you hear all these anecdotal stories. One of

them was about a 911 call. Now, it was from the Woodland Cree First Nation. It took six hours for police to show up, and this elder had to sit with this grandson for five hours because the kid just bled out from a stab wound. That's a perfect snapshot of the difficulties. Again, I know it's not related to this panel, all of the real-world experiences that we face that are completely different from arguing over a 25- to 30-minute turnaround time at a 911 call in an apartment building in downtown Edmonton. Those have a direct correlation into the real things that matter to people up there.

I know I could have found a bunch of legal eagle points probably, but I think you guys have all the information in front of you regarding precedent and roughly where to go with this. That's why it was important for me to try and attack a little bit of the heart, not just the mind. Sorry for the long answer.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Sinclair. Much appreciated.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We will now adjourn the afternoon proceedings and reconvene this evening at 5:30.

[The hearing adjourned at 4:44 p.m.]

