



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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9:08 a.m.

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to day 2 of our second week of public hearings for the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. We are glad to be in Edmonton for the second week.

I want to just give some background of our commission and the work we've been doing and what we expect to complete in the weeks and months ahead. First of all, our commission was established by the Legislature of Alberta, and it's an independent commission composed of the five of us. If you want to see some background on us, you can go to the website. Our task is to basically deal with two issues that have been handed to us as part of our mandate. First of all, the Alberta Legislature has expanded the number of seats in the Legislature from 87 to 89 for the next provincial election. Our task is to draw new boundaries, taking into account those two new seats. Of course, individual voters who reside in the electoral division are the people that select their member of the Legislature to sit in the Legislative Assembly in Edmonton. So we have to deal with the increase from 87 to 89.

To give you some idea about the second challenge that we have, it has to do with population. To put things in perspective, in 2017, when the last Electoral Boundaries Commission reported, Alberta had a population of just slightly over 4 million people. They then used the formula based on the population at that time to determine the average number of residents in each electoral division. As you can see – the math is portrayed there – the average population per electoral division is 46,697. That's not the target for our purposes of effective representation. Rather, we have a range that we shoot for. That range is minus 25 of that average to plus 25 of that average. As long as we're in that range, we're designing effective representation for Albertans.

Fast-forward to this commission. The population of Alberta is 4.88 million at this point, and we divide that among 89 ridings, which gives us an average of just under 55,000 inhabitants per electoral division. Again, that's not the target. The target is the range of below 25 to plus 25. Our goal as a commission is to fulfill the legal requirements for voter parity in this country, and that is to provide new boundaries for the 89 electoral divisions that provide effective representation.

We were appointed as a commission in April of last year, and we have been fairly busy since that time. I want to touch on four things that we have done leading up to our interim report. First of all, we met and discussed the various possibilities as to what standard to use for population. We agreed upon a source of population based on what the legislation requires us to refer to being the last decennial census. But that was in 2021, so it's somewhat dated. We then employed the statistics used by the Alberta Treasury Board Office of Statistics and Information to update the 2021 census. That's updated quite regularly, on a quarterly basis, so we determined that the most accurate census data for us to use was the census data as of July 2024.

After we agreed on some of the ground rules, we then reviewed hundreds of written submissions that were presented to our commission after our website was up and running. From late May to throughout June we travelled the province, all the way from Pincher Creek to Fort McMurray and down from Peace River to Medicine Hat and the major metropolitan centres in between. We had several public hearings, heard from hundreds of Albertans, and took all that information, both the written form and the public presentations, into account.

Then we sat down with the staff from Elections Alberta, who have very sophisticated mapping tools and population data, and they assisted us greatly in preparing our first, interim report. That report, which you probably have seen or referenced if you're here and are interested in this process, was provided to the Speaker of the Legislature on October 27 of this past year. Immediately he tabled the report and provided a hard copy to each of the members of the Legislature, and that is on our website. The key term is "interim report." It's an interim report in order to get the feedback of Albertans. In preparing that interim report, we relied on the legislative criteria such as sparsity and density and rate of population growth, communities of interest in the areas, municipalities, regional and rural communities. We took into account geographic features and available means of communication and transportation between the various parts of Alberta, all leading to the task of providing effective representation with understandable and clear boundaries for the electoral map.

We then opened up our portal on our website from November 3 to December 19 for further public input and submissions, and we received in excess of 1,100 submissions on our interim report. Now we're in the next to final stage before we prepare our final report, and we're conducting public and virtual hearings. Last week we were in Calgary for two and a half days and then conducted two full days of virtual hearings, and we're in Edmonton early this week. We will commence deliberation at the end of this week after we complete our public hearings. That gives you an idea as to where we are at, what led us to this week. I'm sure you have reviewed the report. We're now open for public presentations from those who have signed up.

+ I believe our first presenter is here, Mr. Dwight Dibben. Just make yourself comfortable. Have a seat. Identify yourself. Tell us what electoral division you are in and which ones you wish to comment on.

9:15

Mr. Dibben: Well, good morning, Mr. Justice and commissioners. My name is Dwight Dibben. I am the chief administrative officer for the village of Forestburg in southeast Alberta, currently in the Camrose electoral division. My comments today would refer to both the Camrose electoral division as well as the Drumheller-Stettler electoral division, which we would like to make representation to.

The village of Forestburg did submit a written submission. It is EBC 2025-2-253, which I will be referring to in my presentation. I believe commissioners have it or have the ability to access it. As well, we provided our recommendations on what we consider to be a modest boundary change for these two electoral divisions for the next provincial election.

Just in my brief comments I would also make note that I am the immediate past public school trustee for the Battle River school division from Flagstaff county as well as a volunteer firefighter for the Forestburg fire station in our regional service, which has a point of relevance to the presentation that I wish to make.

I would say at the onset that Forestburg, in our council in reviewing the interim report, absolutely supports the principles that were espoused in your executive summary, absolutely supports the principle of effective representation and the notation that absolute parity is impossible. Just as this is true for the provision of public services across the province, we feel it is the same for electoral boundaries.

In our written submission we brought forward to the commission a little bit about the history of Forestburg and the southeastern portion of Flagstaff county. Up until the provincial election of 2019 and the ceasing to exist of the Battle River-Wainwright constituency,

Forestburg and areas south of it were actually a part of the former Stettler electoral division. You have to go back over 45 years before you would see Forestburg included in the Camrose electoral division. The genesis behind our suggestions to the commission as well is backed up in our submission about recent activities, communities of interest. Where our economic development activities have largely resided these past especially seven years have been with communities and rural municipalities south of Forestburg, not those north that are currently in the Camrose electoral division.

Some may know, but the 2017 federal policy decision to shut the coal industry had a devastating impact on our community, as it did with communities such as Hanna, Grande Cache, and others in the province. Council has been working tirelessly over three iterations in terms of working with government, working with its neighbours to actually reposition the community and the surrounding areas for life after coal mining. We lost the Paintearth mine.

The Battle River generating station, which is located some eight kilometres south of Forestburg, although it is on the south side of the Battle River and in the Drumheller-Stettler riding, actually has an agreement with the Forestburg fire department that we are the first first responders that actually arrive or respond to an emergency at the Battle River generating station. This has been in existence for over 50 years, when it was owned by Canadian Utilities. In fact, there was a gas feeder line break two and a half years ago that our station was the first on scene. We arrived on site in under 15 minutes and were able to help local services and aspects control the blaze while other authorities were able to address the supply issue and ultimately arrest the issue. I use that by way of example of demonstrating the ties that we have with communities that currently are in the Drumheller-Stettler electoral division going forward.

In terms of trying to assist the commission in its mandate of understandable and clear boundaries, that led us to take a look at: what would an understandable and clear boundary change look like for these two divisions? That was our proposal to the Camrose electoral division. I'm not sure if you have colour, but it shows, basically, a removal of the southern highlighted area from the Camrose electoral division to Drumheller-Stettler.

When looking at it from the Drumheller-Stettler perspective, it really kind of squares the top of the riding, which would in fact make it much more palatable, I would say easy, for an elected representative, regardless of where they would actually hail from or where their constituency office may be in the riding, to effectively represent the electoral division with the changes that we are proposing.

One aspect, too, just in terms of geography: when we look at distance from major centres, Forestburg is actually 20 kilometres closer to Stettler than it is to Camrose. While Stettler is around 7,000 people and Camrose is around 20,000, most services that our residents require, whether that be in the way of medical, ophthalmological, physicians, dentistry although we have a clinic and a dentist in Forestburg, chiropractor – we have one – massage therapy: a number of our citizens already go to Stettler rather than Camrose even though some would look at that and think that that would be the natural trading area for our community.

We certainly appreciated the opportunity to take a look at the interim report. Certainly, as a former public service – my last job was with the government of Alberta. I had the honour of being Alberta's Public Service Commissioner and going through a couple of these exercises in my past and presenting to one in Calgary some 20 years ago now, it seems. It's not an easy task, and certainly in reviewing the submissions that came forward, it is not surprising, the vast differences of opinion when it comes to large urban residents and smaller rural residents. In many ways you have a

thankless job, but I do on behalf of our council thank you for doing it.

I should mention, before I leave, our submission. We have also advised our partners in our economic development and other activities in the BREOC Committee of our presentation to the commission to solicit their support. That includes Paintearth county, the towns of Castor and Coronation, as well as some of the other members in the northern part of the current Drumheller-Stettler electoral division. We have asked them if they would provide, you know, letters of endorsement to the commission. Of course, councils are just getting back into the swing of things after the new year – we've only had one meeting ourselves – so we hope that those submissions may come back to the commission here in the weeks to follow.

We just wanted to make one note of curiosity on our part on the suggestions of the interim report, and that was to make a carve-out of the Camrose riding. Basically, take a sliver of the Camrose riding north to include the town of Hardisty and a minor part of the rural area south. As the former school trustee for this area I found that kind of curious as the communities of interest for the town of Hardisty and surrounding areas, if not Camrose, actually fall into the Wainwright area, which includes Buffalo Trail and other areas along those lines.

I noticed from the public hearing – I believe it was held in Drumheller – my friend Mr. Golka, who made the presentation to the committee along those lines. With all due respect to Mr. Golka and some of the objectives there, more than half of the students in the Hardisty area actually go to Central high school, which is in Sedgewick, in the Camrose constituency. About 40 per cent go to Irma, which is actually in the Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright constituency. The same with communities of interest on sports, minor sports. A very few number of students actually go into communities which would be in the Drumheller-Stettler constituency, which includes the Clearview school division. I just wanted to make that note.

9:25

Certainly, when it comes from proximity to major centres, Hardisty is closest to Wainwright. It's over 100 kilometres away from the two major areas in Drumheller-Stettler and 70 kilometres away from Camrose.

Just for purposes of when the commission goes back if looking at this, our proposal would bring in the urban communities of Forestburg, Alliance, the surrounding areas, which right now – and I appreciate the comments the chair made about population and the challenges of population. Certainly, since 2021, if you take a look at the most recent estimates to the end of 2024, Forestburg's population is either 807 or 934. We know we haven't lost that. Our school has increased over 20 per cent in the past five years in our K to 12 school. We know our community is growing, and we do have a spur line that's being constructed this coming year. We have, pending once the spur line is done, economic building activities that should be in the neighbourhood of \$4 million to \$10 million. The community is growing. We plan on doing our own census as now we are required by provincial law if not later this year, in 2027, once these industries have built and started operations, with high belief that we will actually achieve formal town status within the next three years.

With that change, we note that the population numbers certainly would not impact the Camrose average population. In fact, the reduction to that still has Camrose well within if not above your average line, and it certainly serves to bolster the numbers of Drumheller-Stettler. I understand the commission's job would need

to look at augmenting those boundaries in the population for that riding going forward.

With that, I'll stop. I don't know if there are any questions, but I do thank you all for your time and the opportunity to present today. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dibben. You noticed maybe a smile on my face and my colleagues'.

Mr. Dibben: I did.

The Chair: I'm not going to exaggerate it, but Hardisty was of some controversy the first time around. I was the only one that took the position that you're taking, but don't tell anybody that.

I'm curious to know – the rivers are good natural boundaries until they're not good natural boundaries. We've used the Battle River. You're suggesting hiving off that little tip. What's that highway? I can't read the print. Is it 608?

Mr. Dibben: Yep. I believe so.

The Chair: Is that an adequate boundary, then?

Mr. Dibben: Yeah. We suggested that as the northwest boundary of the Drumheller-Stettler electoral division, which is just north of Donalda, township road 430.

The Chair: So 430 all the way across?

Mr. Dibben: That's correct. And that catches up to, actually, highway 13 just south of the town of Hardisty.

The Chair: Okay. So continue on, and in one fell swoop we can solve both of your problems.

Mr. Dibben: Correct. From a numbers aspect and given your controversial Hardisty issue, you could easily loop up on either end and include the village of Heisler as well as the town of Hardisty. Heisler would give you another 160-odd residents that would go to Drumheller-Stettler. Of course, I believe the population of Hardisty right now is some 550 people give or take. I'm not sure what your numbers of July 2025 suggest. That's a data set that we haven't seen, but that, again, would not be material to the Camrose numbers and their averaging.

The Chair: Good. Well, thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Dibben: Yes, sir.

The Chair: Any questions?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your presentation. I did study it when I was reading your written submission, and I like the fact that you're asking your partners for support so that nobody is caught flat footed with a possible change in the riding.

Just out of interest, what did Forestburg switch to economically after the coal disappeared? In a short answer. Sorry; I don't . . .

Mr. Dibben: The Battle River generating station converted to natural gas, but that resulted in unit 3 being shut down and a reduced output of units 4 and 5, which are the only other active ones. Their retirement dates have been pushed out into the 2030s, but since then the station has been sold to TransAlta, and as a part of their larger acquisition of a number of assets output from that station has declined very significantly in the last two years.

We're also an agricultural service centre but with the Battle River railway, which is a short line operator and building a spur. Ashcor,

which is a subsidiary of ATCO, mines the fly ash, which is a by-product of coal-fired generation. As the plant operated through the decades, fly ash replaced coal in the seams as the land was being reclaimed. Now it's a commodity that's essential in concrete, so fly ash is being remined, bagged, and basically shipped domestically as well as internationally as a necessary building block of concrete. The world's demand for concrete is not shrinking. We are looking at a transload facility on the spur line. We have a couple of other companies that have purchased land along the spur line to build once it's in place that, basically, are looking at manufacturing commodities and then shipping them by rail.

Mrs. Samson: That's fascinating. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Dibben: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mr. Evans?

Mr. Evans: No questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Thank you very much. Really intriguing. I will note, however, that our numbers – you know, in this interim configuration Camrose is 54,500.

Mr. Dibben: Oh, so just below your average number.

Dr. Martin: It's in the target range.

Mr. Dibben: Right.

Dr. Martin: We're not obsessed whether you hit the number or not, but it's there, and your proposal would strip out 2,000.

Mr. Dibben: Probably about 1,800 is our calculation. Yeah.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. We're pretty close, then. Our magic machinery tells us a bit higher, though.

But, you know, I'm intrigued by your remark about Hardisty. From certain points of view, certain communities of interest, Hardisty is linked with Wainwright as much as anything else.

Mr. Dibben: I would agree.

Dr. Martin: So, you know, your line of argument is: yeah; the linkages are to Sedgewick on the one hand and to Wainwright on the other, so it's a toss-up which way it goes, but it should go.

Mr. Dibben: Or it could stay where it currently is. Yeah.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Right.

Mr. Dibben: When you get into the corners like we are kind of in in electoral boundaries and you have, you know, smaller urban centres, we've seen that, if you go back even beyond my time, when you've been where you are in municipal jurisdictions, often those are the ones that get shifted to make those boundaries and those numbers work.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. The Hardisty block, so to speak, including along the Battle River and the older configuration: that's 900-ish, that whole block. Okay.

Well, thank you.

Mr. Dibben: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Clark: No questions, I guess. I was just looking to see if we had a submission from Hardisty. I don't know. I don't think we did. I couldn't find one, but that doesn't mean . . .

Mrs. Samson: Oh, 253.

The Chair: Way back. The first round.

Mr. Clark: But 253: that's Forestburg.

Mrs. Samson: Oh, sorry. Yes.

The Chair: There was a specific request, as I recall, from Hardisty.

Mr. Dibben: We didn't see a written submission from Hardisty. We just saw the verbal presentation that was made at your Drumheller hearing during the first round.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Just for your reference our numbers would say that the part you talk about in your submissions, moving about 2,300 people just south of 430 under highway 13: Heisler is 132 according to this. Just to be really clear, Heisler is north of 430, but in your view, it kind of fits with Forestburg. If we're going to do it, just a little bit of a bump in, and we're not going to have dozens of people from . . .

Mr. Dibben: And I'm sorry, Mr. Clark; 2,200, you said, would be that sort of . . .

Mr. Clark: Twenty-three hundred would be that number south of 430 on the alignment you talked about going south of Hardisty plus 132 for Heisler. And then, yeah, as Dr. Martin said, that Hardisty piece that you would suggest is another 1,000 people roughly, that bump out there. Again, it's all within the range although it starts to shift things a little bit.

9:35

I just want to say thank you for your public service. This sort of really detailed information from folks who live in the communities and tell us exactly how things go is just invaluable. It really, truly is because we can look at lines on a map and we can read submissions, but actually hearing from the folks who are there in the communities makes a huge difference. Thank you.

Mr. Dibben: Thank you very much. Thank you all very much for your time.

The Chair: Mr. Dibben, thank you.

For people listening to this conversation and hearing the small numbers, it may seem like peanuts. It may seem very insignificant to ridings that have 60,000-some in the large urban centres, but this is a big deal for large landscapes and people that travel hours to get to their service centres. That's the conundrum that we face: how to provide effective representation across the province. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Dibben: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Please remain, if you are able, to hear the other presenters.

Mr. Dibben: I will.

The Chair: Our next presenter is not here, but we're going to substitute just like they do in – we've got a designated hitter. Bradley Lafortune, we're going to pull you up from this evening. Anybody who makes our evening shorter.

Mr. Lafortune: I'm not usually early, so I'm pretty proud of myself today. This is good.

Thank you very much. I'll be brief today. My name is Bradley Lafortune. I'm here from Edmonton, Treaty 6. I appreciate the opportunity to present on the interim report today. I'm here with, I guess, three hats on, as many of us wear different hats. I'm a long-time resident and voter in Alberta. Specifically, I live in Edmonton-Strathcona, currently Edmonton-Strathcona, with my family. I'm the executive director of a small nonprofit called Public Interest Alberta, which is a society under the Societies Act in Alberta.

I want to speak to a few interrelated themes very briefly today. First, I'd like to talk about the importance of maintaining alignment between representation and the material realities and concerns of communities in general within the interim report. I was very pleased to review the interim report's dedication to maintaining and strengthening effective representation while managing to add two electoral divisions to the current 87. We also appreciate the commission's careful consideration of population variance in this regard. You know, a 25 per cent variance to us one way or the other is high. We've long advocated for a tighter variance of five per cent, but I understand that that's just not really feasible given the constraints that you have as a panel.

With that in mind, you know, it is very good to see that the commission is considering this sort of very careful rationale for going to the outer edges of those variances. We think that you've done a fine job on that – kudos – but we do want to state that Public Interest Alberta has advocated for a tighter variance of five per cent on either side.

Second, I want to talk a bit about hybrid ridings, you know, going from the current number to expanding that, especially in Calgary. The commission does a good job of highlighting in the report the balance of written submissions that highlight, I think, the general skepticism towards rural-urban ridings, or hybrid ridings as we call them here. I share this skepticism in general from a number of perspectives: fiscal, democratic, representative, and practical as well. In Edmonton, in greater Edmonton in particular, where I kind of have direct interest as a resident as well as where a lot of our advocacy focuses on urban issues, there is, as I'm sure we're all aware of, a long-term and largely unresolved policy conversation and tension between the provision of services in greater Edmonton and within Edmonton considering the tax base issues that we have.

I'm sure that you've seen, if not our submission – we did submit a written submission, I should say, for your reference as well as, you know, echoing some of the concerns that the new mayor of Edmonton has stated when it comes to condensing some of those central ridings in Edmonton given the population growth that we're experiencing in the city centre. Then when you consider access to acute care and health care, even recreational centres in greater Edmonton, the relationship that we have between our communities in Edmonton proper and greater Edmonton, it's, I would say, very concerning for us to go from six to five central ridings in the city of Edmonton. I want to make that pretty clear.

We've touched on a little bit of, you know, stress on our basic infrastructure to programs and services, acute care, recreational facilities. It is clear that the burden of representation and governing is different and distinct within Edmonton proper at all levels, including within the Legislative Assembly. In particular, when I look at the proposed riding – I believe it's Edmonton-West-Enoch – I do have concerns about the ability for that new member of the Assembly to effectively represent the interests of Enoch First Nation as well as the urban population and then going out into Parkland county because of the difference of the interests of those communities. Of course, they're overlapping, but they are distinct, as we know. They do have

different relationships with the government and with the Legislative Assembly. You only have to look at Enoch Nation's relationship with Alberta health and the new corporations that administer our health care system when it comes to addictions care and recovery as well. There are a lot of different relationships there between that nation and the city of Edmonton.

Then, generally, I would just say that, you know, as Edmonton and Calgary's fiscal positions become increasingly strained, in our view, by a number of factors and our urban populations continue to boom, quite frankly, I think these tensions between communities and bedroom communities or suburban communities and the larger centres will become more fraught. That's a major concern for us.

Specifically, the reduction of central Edmonton representation from six to five seats is – I have in my notes here “a mistake.” I don't want to be aggressive, but I do believe that it is a mistake. I'm just going to say it, you know, quite plainly.

I've been a long-time resident of central Edmonton. I've lived in Edmonton centre, on Jasper Avenue. I've lived on campus, specifically as a university student 20 years ago. I now live in Edmonton-Strathcona in the Ritchie neighbourhood. I can speak to personal experience and say that, you know, while I consider myself to be someone who believes in public health care being available to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay, and I believe that it's very important that the provision of services, especially with the increased strain in social distress that's happening in our urban communities – it is becoming much more challenging for members of the Assembly to effectively represent their constituents, whether they are homeowners, renters, or even unhoused. Those issues are becoming more and more fraught in our communities while at the same time our population in urban settings in those five or six ridings – five being proposed – is booming.

The new bylaw renewal – I don't know if anyone's an Edmonton resident here, but you probably got involved in that conversation if you are – has meant that infill housing and, you know, zoning changes are happening very, very quickly, including in my home neighbourhood of Ritchie. I think in the past four to five years we've seen about a quarter increase in population in those core constituencies, from 2021 to 2025, and that's only going to accelerate further with that zoning bylaw and mature neighbourhoods turning over and people wanting to live closer to amenities and services.

9:45

Specifically, you know, I want to speak to Edmonton-Strathcona briefly. Proud resident of Edmonton-Strathcona. Been in Ritchie neighbourhood, which is now being proposed to move over in large part to Edmonton-Gold Bar, which is just the constituency west here in Edmonton. I know it's down in the weeds. It's a bit of a microdigression for me, but as a resident, I have to speak to that. You know, if you look at the 99th Street boundary there just south of Whyte Avenue, which is 82nd Avenue here in Edmonton, what we're currently looking at in the interim report is separating the Ritchie neighbourhood from west Ritchie, which is just west of 99th Street towards the University of Alberta campus, and that would remain in the currently proposed Edmonton-Strathcona. But the rest of Hazeldean and Ritchie, which is about 7,200 residents, 7,300 residents – higher, 7,500?

Dr. Martin: Nine thousand.

Mr. Lafortune: Nine thousand. Holy smokes. I'm looking at 2021. Okay, we're booming. Nine thousand residents would go over to Edmonton-Gold Bar. And I believe there's room for play there when I look at the variances. Strathcona is under by about 1.5 per

cent in the proposed, and you could maintain Ritchie and Hazeldean in Edmonton-Strathcona and still be well within our margins.

As the previous presenter said – you know, I have this in my notes as well – it's probably a thankless task that you're doing. You're travelling a lot of miles, so I want to say thank you. I'm probably not the first. I think it's a good map. I think you followed the principles very, very well and there's some room for tweaking, so I appreciate the opportunity today, and I'm happy to chat about any questions you might have.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, sir. Yes. A Calgary presenter described our task as hugging a cactus, or a thankless task. I don't want to take up too much time because I know there are going to be questions from the rest of the panel.

Your public interest group advocates for a five per cent variance. Do you do a comparative analysis to reach that? In other words, do you study other jurisdictions?

Mr. Lafortune: Yes, we have looked at other jurisdictions.

The Chair: Okay. So all I want to know is: can we chat after, and maybe I'd like to look at your material?

Mr. Lafortune: Absolutely.

The Chair: Okay. So questions, and I'll start with you.

Mr. Clark: You know, more just a comment because we were chatting this morning, actually, about Edmonton-Strathcona and, really, we've heard a lot of feedback on that inner-city Edmonton piece. What we're really grappling with is where the growth is in Edmonton, how present tense that is. MLA Hoffman yesterday brought in some photographs of actual, you know, building in progress and infills and more multifamily, so that, I think, bears us to have a good close look, which we absolutely will.

Part of the challenge we have right now with Edmonton-Strathcona is that if we include the neighbourhoods you're talking about, we're upwards of, like, 62,000 or so, and then Gold Bar becomes underpopulated, and then you need to kind of cascade. Part of Edmonton's glory and challenge is the river and the ravines. It's a fabulous feature but also presents physical barriers and kind of psychological barriers, right?

Mr. Lafortune: Totally.

Mr. Clark: It's how Edmonton has organized itself, right? That's what we're kind of struggling with and is part of the rationale for the previous Riverview straddling the river, not straddling, you know, all of that sort of stuff. So I'm sure you can well imagine, you know, the conversations and debates we have behind closed doors of how to kind of sort this all out. So this was really the accommodation, I guess, to say: “All right. Well, we'll keep those neighbourhoods together. They just won't be within Strathcona anymore. Now they're in Gold Bar.” Right?

I recognize Mill Creek and the ravine is a big boundary. We actually originally looked at what that would be, and the numbers were quite high in Strathcona, quite low in Gold Bar, and we frankly decided to go the way we've gone. But your feedback is helpful, and we also will take a close look at those development plans you mentioned.

Mr. Lafortune: I appreciate that.

Mr. Clark: Not a question so much as just some context.

Mr. Lafortune: Wonderful. Thanks.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Yeah.

I thank you. I follow on that very same line of remark. Ritchie, Hazeldean, and Argyll: 9,000. Surprising. Most of it in Ritchie. But then you're faced with the dilemma that my colleague just described. You put them into Edmonton-Strathcona and pump its number high by doing so, and simultaneously the Gold Bar number is low. What we've done is sort of try to balance it out.

On that point, you will notice that of the five ridings that our interim map provides in sort of central Edmonton, all four of them are below the mean. There hasn't been the growth that one may have anticipated. The growth rate from the earlier configuration to July 2024 was nowhere near what the growth rate outside the Heday has been, so that actually is a macrolevel consideration.

You know, people say that things are growing, but the data doesn't support that. I mean, let me add colour to that. The anticipated addition of more densified housing stock in the last two years: some of it will appear. Area structure plans are fantasies built by planners. They're not the same thing as bricks and mortar. So we're very interested in the imminent construction of things, which is why bringing in photographs of current buildings is interesting, because it passes my Tyvek test, right? If they're really building it, then I'm really going to take it seriously. The rest of it is aspiration.

We're always struggling with that problem. No one is suggesting at all – our interim report is quite careful to say, you know, that it's the rates of growth that need to be compared. Absolute figures are one thing, but rates of growth are another. The central core is not growing at a rate that the outer areas are, and they need the attention more immediately.

Thank you.

Mr. Lafortune: Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate it. I like that you used the word “skepticism” with hybrids because we've heard a lot harsher language. I was pleased to see the hybrid with Enoch into Edmonton. We had a submission that talked about communities of interest and the trading corridors and things like that. I take into consideration that the way they manage themselves, the Enoch, will be completely different from what's going on in Edmonton, like running the casino and what that does to some of the Edmonton properties – I like that relationship that was brought up yesterday – but that would happen no matter where the boundary was. I am interested in seeing how that plays out because we did use hybrids very sparingly, not just because it was there but because maybe it was appropriate. Did you want to add a comment to that thought?

Mr. Lafortune: Sure. Yeah. I mean, I will just say initially in response that I agree. You know, the special relationship that nations have with the provincial government will exist in positive ways regardless of where the provincial boundaries are – I fully agree with that – engagement on things like health centres and other programs and services directly with the nation, and that's a good thing.

I do think in principle that I like the interim report's reflection on, you know, the careful considerations of the impacts that hybrid ridings have on representation. While I did notice that the report reflected on the feedback that – rural-urban divides are not black and white, right? I grew up in Saskatchewan, and if you lived in Saskatoon, you were only a few miles and maybe one generation

away from the farm, and that's very similar to here in Alberta. So it's a grey area.

At the same time, using hybrids sparingly I think is the right approach because of the intergovernmental issues with respect to asymmetrical provision of services and the ability to tax and provide those services, so I appreciate the commission's careful consideration of hybrid ridings. I just think that with this sort of – you know, you have this domino effect, which I imagine is talked about a lot, and that's tough. So it's less specifically about Enoch and more a general skepticism of hybrid ridings that I have.

9:55

Mrs. Samson: Right. Thank you very much. I appreciate those comments.

Mr. Lafortune: Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: I have no questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lafortune, please . . .

Mr. Lafortune: Yeah. I'll follow up.

The Chair: If you are able to stay, great. We can chat during a break. I'm afraid that you and I could nerd out for a long time on the discussion of hybrids and the variance, but I am interested in your organization's research on that area.

Mr. Lafortune: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

It takes us to Mr. Chris Gallaway. No, he's not here. Okay. Sorry. Hermina Joldersma. Good morning, ma'am. Just make yourself comfortable. Tell us what electoral division you are in and which ones you wish to comment on.

Dr. Joldersma: I will if you just give me a paragraph.

The Chair: Sure.

Dr. Joldersma: I thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation. I appreciate your work to ensure that electoral representation in Alberta is optimally fair, and I wish you wisdom as you make your difficult decisions. I have lived in five different ridings in Calgary and Edmonton, and that's why I didn't say a riding: Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Varsity, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and Edmonton-Strathcona.

In between Calgary and Edmonton I spent 10 years in Yellowknife. One of the jobs I had there was assistant returning officer for the 2019 federal election, second in command for making sure that election happened fairly and properly. I have good tales to tell about it. That job and my time in the north generally gave me great appreciation for the challenge of effective representation in huge geographic areas with sparse populations.

I have always been an alert, engaged, and especially curious citizen. Besides getting to know my Calgary and Edmonton neighbourhoods and then the north, I have also explored much of this province, from High Level to Drumheller to Medicine Hat and Waterton. I have given talks to quilt guilds in Vermilion and Camrose, ridden the Stettler steam train, gotten stuck in gumbo at Red Rock Coulee, and with my late husband even took a road trip to Manyberries to see the old CPR station and section house. In other words, I pay attention to and love all of this beautiful province.

My key message today focuses on the ridings I've lived in. Their common characteristic is that they're core or inner city. That means dense populations, walkable neighbourhoods, need for public transportation, significant current development, and social challenges. It is important to provide these ridings and their communities effective and fair representation that recognizes and respects their unique character.

About population growth in these ridings reliable statistics are not easily available for people like me, and I trust that you have better information. What I was able to find indicates that growth has been steady for several decades now. This accords with my experience. For example, I was on the Parkdale Community Association's development committee some 20 years ago. At that time we were dealing primarily with infill duplexes, so two homes on one 50-foot lot. Proposals for condo complexes were few. I visited a couple of months ago. The number of new multifamily buildings was staggering. In Calgary Beltline, where I owned a condo for 10 years, development of large, multiunit buildings continues apace. In Killarney low rise seems to be preferred, and there are lots of those.

A few examples from my own riding, which is Edmonton-Strathcona. I live in a new low-rise, condo-style building that was completed in 2023. Our 26 units and 45 residents replaced four small post-1950s homes. From my window I can see another condo building, newer than ours, with 50 units. There is an eightplex on the next block replacing a single-family home. I recently walked by what I took to be an infill duplex still under construction, past the Tyvek stage. Since I am curious, I accosted the youngish man who was just exiting. He was happy to talk. He, his brother, and his cousin had pooled their money to purchase the lot and replaced the single house on it with not two but seven new units. He was just waiting for the final city inspection. I wished him luck. One of the units was townhouse style, he said, and he and his wife planned to move in. He asked about the neighbourhood.

What is the unique character of these core neighbourhoods? I think the people who live there, like myself, are curious folk who love interacting with strangers. We value the spaces and amenities that allow us to do so. We value choice in amenities and unique small businesses. We value interesting streetscapes, fun festivals, meeting people while walking, biking, or taking the bus. I do have a car, but I prefer walking and public transportation because I have more interesting experiences. We value community gardens and open yards. For example, on our property we chose not to erect fences. As a result, we have great chats with folk walking by, and seniors from neighbouring high rises do daily tours of our gardens in the summer. We often interact with those living more precarious lives, and we value the social services which seek to support those who are less fortunate than we are. What I am asking is this. Please see our inner-city ridings for what they are, vibrant, cohesive communities with significant population growth in their futures.

Having lived in Calgary-Buffalo and having Manyberries on my brain because of this presentation, I compared numbers. In 1991 Manyberries had 96 residents. Now it has 60. Its electoral district of Taber-Warner sits at a minus 10 deviation from the average. I do not begrudge the citizens of Manyberries or Taber-Warner their representation. Concerns of rural areas are important and need to be addressed. But urban core communities are similarly cohesive. They similarly have interests and concerns. When I see that Calgary-Buffalo, with almost 78,000 people, if I read the map right, deviates at plus 41, I do raise an eyebrow. There may be good reasons. I just want to plead that residents in core neighbourhoods, current and especially future residents, should also have fair and effective representation by MLAs who appreciate and understand them.

Thanks again for the work you do and the opportunity to make this presentation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Questions, Mr. Evans?

Mr. Evans: No questions, but thank you for your presentation.

Mrs. Samson: I loved your presentation. Thank you.

Dr. Martin: Which neighbourhood in Edmonton-Strathcona are you residing in now?

Dr. Joldersma: I think it's called Old Strathcona. We're just east of Gateway, where it meets Saskatchewan Drive.

Dr. Martin: Yes. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Well, that's just about as dense as it gets in Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Joldersma: It's very dense. I heard what you said about, like, the stats not showing that there is that kind of growth, but I wonder whether, for example, our building is included in those stats already, whether that new condo with the 50 is included. There's another one coming, which amazingly has, I think, 18 units in it. There's that eightplex, which is brand new. What I see is a lot of development, and it's very recent. I don't know whether – your statistics will be better. I hope they're better than anything I was able to find.

Dr. Martin: Well, our statistics are keyed on July 1, 2024. Of course, things have grown. I could nerd out on census building and how to use them, but we're quite confident that our numbers are solid, and that data set covers every part of the province. That's the other part. Growth can be lumpy in the country as well as in the city, but these data sets seem pretty good at any rate. We're not trying to ignore continued growth. We are really quite interested in the rate of growth compared to other places.

Dr. Joldersma: Sure.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you. I really appreciate your presentation and you coming out here. I've said it to one of the previous presenters, and I say it quite often, to the point probably of getting a little tedious to my colleagues here, but it really matters when we have folks who are from those communities, and especially someone who's lived around the province, provide us some context on the specific conditions on the ground in your neighbourhood or your community. That's what this is all about, and we appreciate your thoughtful work in preparing that submission.

My question is that one of the things we're wrestling with is – we've heard perspectives from all over the province. Part of the challenge we have is that you have some areas that are far north, very remote, and it's quite – you know, there are unique challenges to representing the far north. It's a vast geography. What I've heard you say is that that is – I don't think you would deny that. Don't let me put words in your mouth. But at the same time, you're saying that in inner-city Edmonton, inner-city Calgary there are some of those wicked problems, too. Some of those things are different maybe, but they're quite unique to these neighbourhoods. Could tell me a little bit more about that?

Dr. Joldersma: There are only six minutes, but I was thinking about access to health care in Manyberries and in my neighbourhood. I live a 25-minute walk from a really good hospital. When I get there, though, I might have to wait for an incredible number of hours. Somebody in Manyberries who needs to go to a

hospital needs to drive quite a long way. That, too, means that their access to it is delayed. What we share in common is delayed access to health care, for example, and that has in some ways very different reasons that need to be looked at in both instances.

10:05

I would say that people in the north need representation. People in sparse areas need representation because they have unique needs such as that, for example. That wouldn't be unique to Manyberries. Then people in sort of the denser populations also have unique needs that need people who understand and would seek to address those.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. You know, at least as you've seen in the interim report, we've tried to balance that out by saying that we will somewhat underweight on a percentage basis. It's not just a numbers game by any means. It's effective representation. But at the end of the day numbers are what we're using. We've said we'll have a slightly smaller constituency in areas outside of the urban areas and a slightly larger constituency, but we've tried to kind of balance that.

Dr. Joldersma: Yeah. To me it looks pretty decent, actually.

Mr. Clark: That was going to be my question. Thank you so much.

Dr. Joldersma: Yeah. I was thinking about that deviation in Calgary-Buffalo. I'm thinking East Village might be the kicker there. I don't know.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Dr. Joldersma. Anyone who is from Strathcona and mentions and knows Manyberries impresses this panel.

Dr. Joldersma: I know.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Dr. Joldersma: You know Manyberries? That would be my question. It used to be on the CBC weather report. They would say, "And in Manyberries it is," and that made me want to go see it. It was a great trip.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our next presenter, and we're actually bang on time: Kayden Tonita.

Mr. Tonita: Good morning.

The Chair: Good morning. Tell us what electoral division you're in and which ones you want to comment on, please.

Mr. Tonita: I reside in the Ritchie neighbourhood in Edmonton-Strathcona. That will be in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency should this map move forward, but I also work in the office of Edmonton-Gold Bar MLA Marlin Schmidt, have for the past couple of years. I do call Sherwood Park my home, though, and I will speak briefly to that at the end of my presentation.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed.

Mr. Tonita: As I said, my name is Kayden Tonita. I work in the office of MLA Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar. I currently live in Ritchie and hope to move to Sherwood Park again, back home, soon, in the coming years. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback.

I do appreciate the commission's recognition of growth in major centres; however, Edmonton's population growth, both recent and

projected, requires more representation than currently proposed. As constituency staff in Edmonton's urban core I do daily see first hand the strain on social services, the increasing number of residents seeking help. Constituency offices often serve as the first point of contact for folks in distress, connecting them to central resources, helping them navigate a complicated bureaucracy, and often dealing with these folks on some of the worst days of their lives. This demand for services is concentrated in urban core areas, where vulnerable populations live and where those front-line services exist, so I please ask that you consider that.

When I did see the proposed amalgamation for Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Riverview, I did have some immediate concerns. These are some of Edmonton's most high-needs and complex constituencies. From my experience in Edmonton-Gold Bar I know how overwhelming casework can be, walk-in traffic. Our office already manages a high volume of urgent requests for assistance, casework, daily correspondence. Merging Glenora and Riverview would make it increasingly challenging for one MLA and one constituency office to handle that high volume of correspondence and casework. Keep in mind that the MSA, the budget for an elected official, really only allows for one full-time staff, one part-time staff. So that's one and a half staff members to manage, you know, tens of thousands of constituents and growing.

Additionally, as I mentioned, the urban core is where most front-line services are located, where the Albertans who require the most assistance and even in crisis live. Reducing representation here risks leaving residents underserved. It will push surrounded constituencies to have to absorb those higher volumes of casework. I strongly urge the commission to reconsider this amalgamation and instead explore adding more seats in Edmonton to reflect the scale of current and future growth.

I do encourage the commission to consider the impact of infill and densification on Edmonton's urban core. In my neighbourhood of Ritchie I live on the corner of 75th Avenue and 97th street. On my corner you can see five lots that have been razed to the ground, split into multiple properties, multiunit dwellings, garage units, so where there might have been a dozen folks living two years ago, in about a year we'll see upwards of 30 folks living in those same properties. That scale of growth and concentration needs to be considered.

Like I said, temporarily population might dip, but it will ultimately go up again after that construction is complete. This is not an isolated trend. It reflects Edmonton's broader push towards infill development, which will significantly increase population density in those established neighbourhoods. These changes underscore a need for adequate representation in Edmonton to match the scale of future growth.

I do want to commend the commission for keeping Edmonton ridings within municipal boundaries, avoiding those rural-urban constituency combinations. This approach respects those communities of interest, which is so important, as well as local governance structures.

In closing, I would like to just speak to Sherwood Park. I encourage the commission to review the municipal boundaries in Strathcona-Sherwood Park when finalizing the maps. We just underwent a municipal election. As well, they reviewed their ward boundaries. Specifically, you know, including Beaumont in the Strathcona-Sherwood Park constituency is concerning. These are definitely very different communities, significantly different geography obviously, municipal government structure, also cultural identity. Beaumont does have a vibrant francophone community, which would be a shame to see split up down the centre of the highway there. That doesn't necessarily make sense, to have

representation from Strathcona-Sherwood Park representing a francophone community in Beaumont.

Additionally, looking at those municipal maps in Sherwood Park and the area structure plans, the development structure plans for the new communities north of the Yellowhead, Bremner specifically is expecting 80,000 people in the next coming years. If you look at those municipal maps, they account for that growth. I would just ask that the commission to please consider those areas as well as you map out the Strathcona-Sherwood Park and Sherwood Park constituencies. Incorporating this growth in your calculations will help ensure fair population distribution and effective representation.

Thank you so much for the work and for considering my points. Edmonton's urban core and Sherwood Park's future growth deserve thoughtful boundaries that reflect communities of interest and ensure Albertans deserve the representation that they need.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tonita.

Mr. Clark, any questions?

Mr. Clark: You know, you've raised a point here that I haven't actually heard raised before but have some personal experience with in my past life, the nature of the constituency work. Again, as you've probably heard if you've been listening this morning and throughout the process, we really are grappling with the kind of work and the challenge that it is to be a rural MLA, in particular in the far north. Even just dealing with the vast geographies of rural areas is its own challenge: lots of different municipal councils, lots of different school boards, just time on the road, windshield time as we say.

But you've raised something I haven't quite heard put that way, at least this round, and that is the complexity of some of the issues you're dealing with and just the sheer volume of it. Can you just speak to what that looks like on a day-in, day-out basis in the constituency office?

Mr. Tonita: Yeah, for sure. Obviously it's dynamic as current events or actions from the government cause concern. You know, rollbacks to AISH or the addition of the ADAP program resulted in hundreds of calls and visits, walk-ins to our office of folks whose livelihoods depend on those programs who are concerned they're not going to have them anymore.

Two years ago, when I first started in the constituency office, it was at the peak height of fear about vulnerable people and, you know, perception of unsafety in communities, so town halls, walk-ins to my office, folks very concerned about that, but then also, as we've seen since COVID, vulnerable folks' populations have doubled. Those folks are coming to our office for basic needs, finding out how to get connected to resources.

Then, of course, you know, folks, in light of changes to our health care system, struggling to get hip and knee surgeries: that has increased significantly as well as folks trying to get Alberta Works or work permits to stay in the community where they lived for a number of years. All have increased precipitously. I know from speaking with my colleagues that that has also increased significantly. As I mentioned, the services for a lot of these folks, the front-line services, folks in most distress, exist in the urban centres.

I think that answers some of your question.

10:15

Mr. Clark: It does. Can you just remind me: you've used the acronym ADAP for the AISH replacement. What does that stand for?

Mr. Tonita: AISH is the assured income for severely handicapped folks. ADAP: forgive me. I don't know the acronym, but it's a work

replacement for folks who should be on AISH. I don't want to get too political.

Mr. Clark: It's ADAP. Okay. I can look that up. Thank you.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much. That was very interesting. I just have a couple of comments that I've offered earlier today. I guess I'll repeat myself. You see this map. We have a screen here, too. I'm looking at this one, but perhaps you can see this one. You see the five proposed ridings, and four of them are below the population mean. That's in our adjusted figures. As you well know, because it was desperately low in population we've included into Gold Bar Ritchie, Hazeldean, and Argyll, which is awkward, as we've been told, but the awkwardness cuts both ways, right? If we put them into Edmonton-Strathcona, then that riding would be 62,000, because that's 9,000 people. If we take them from Gold Bar, then, you know, you're way too low. So that's the set of dilemmas that we have.

Now, we've heard a lot and it's certainly the gut feeling that things are growing, and no one would deny it, but it's the rate of growth. The updated map takes us to Canada Day of 2024. Growth is continuing. The rate of growth in all five of these areas is significantly lower than outside the Henday. That's our first responsibility, I think, if you've got to choose between the two. The rate of growth in Gold Bar is the lowest of all. That's a problem for us, but it is part of the reasoning behind why we've configured these things the way they are.

My other remark is with respect to Sherwood Park. The mighty hamlet is not a municipality. It's a hamlet inside a county government.

Mr. Tonita: It's a specialized municipality.

Dr. Martin: It's specialized. The boundaries you see there, particularly on the south and the north, are the urban service area. Sherwood Park is not growing very fast.

Mr. Tonita: It's going to double its urban population in 20 years.

Dr. Martin: No. That's wrong. Bremner . . .

Mr. Tonita: Bremner accounts for 80,000 people. Cambrian and Hearthstone as well.

Dr. Martin: It's fifty years. I have asked the county government, and Bremner will take that long to come out to 80,000. The area immediately north of the Yellowhead, Cambrian, is filling out now. There's 500-ish and soon to be 1,000 people there, but Bremner, even though they've scraped the ground, isn't projected to grow at a very rapid rate. Again, that brings us back to a problem we struggled with, which is: how much forward projection can we take on board? Not very much is the answer. That, too, is a constraint on how much anticipated growth we can take on board in our present deliberations.

Mr. Tonita: May I comment on his comments?

The Chair: Very briefly because we're over time already.

Mr. Tonita: Briefly. Absolutely.

You're talking about greater growth in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I don't invoke Edmonton-Gold Bar as reading into population but, again, keeping in consideration the amount of constituency work that's going to be impacted for all the surrounding communities in the Edmonton core areas. Sherwood Park: I would also just remind you to look at the Hearthstone development, which I think in one or two years has increased by 5,000 people. There are a significant

number of folks there. The rate of growth there is higher than we were expecting. I just ran a municipal campaign there. It's growing quickly.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Very quick answers; very quick questions.

Mrs. Samson: Just going to comment. You talk about being stretched in your office financially. Well, I think we're going to recommend a note in our report because of the kinds of stretching are occurring right across the whole province. And if we as a commission are not given enough of the electoral divisions, more than two, the least we can do is ask for more financial support. Thank you for highlighting that aspect.

Mr. Tonita: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: No questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Just in light of what Mr. Clark said and what Mrs. Samson said, you're a full-time employee for your MLA?

Mr. Tonita: Yes.

The Chair: So that's 40 hours a week or the equivalent.

Mr. Tonita: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. And you're the only one.

Mr. Tonita: I'm the only full-time staff. Yes.

The Chair: So there is another staffperson.

Mr. Tonita: There is a part-time staff. She works three days a week.

The Chair: Okay. Okay. Good.

Thank you. I'll excuse you. Please remain, if you can, to hear other presenters.

Our next presenter is Lisa Vanderkwaak. Make yourself comfortable. Tell us what electoral division you are living in and which ones you wish to comment on.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Thank you. My name is Lisa Vanderkwaak. I'm the mayor of Beaumont, so I'm in the Leduc-Beaumont riding currently. As you know, there is a proposal to . . .

The Chair: And want to stay there.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Absolutely.

The gentleman before me kind of set up my presentation beautifully. If I may continue, thank you, Chair Miller and members of the commission, for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I recognize the complexity of your work and the responsibility you carry in balancing population parity with the constitutional principle of effective representation.

I am here today on behalf of Beaumont residents and Beaumont city council to respectfully ask that the commission reconsider the interim proposal to divide our city and instead keep Beaumont whole within a single provincial constituency for these reasons. Beaumont is a small, 25,000-person city that's cohesive, and we deserve to have representation as a whole. With a population of 25,000 and growing, we are less than half the provincial average for a proposed riding. Given that scale, dividing Beaumont into two constituencies, I believe, is unnecessary.

More importantly, while 50th Street is a visible roadway, it is not a meaningful political boundary for our residents. Electors understand their representation through municipal boundaries, not through internal roadways, and residents share schools, recreation, all kinds of facilities across that 50th Street boundary. That, I believe, would weaken the voter clarity about that kind of invisible line down 50th Street.

The second reason is because of effective representation. I believe it will weaken our representation in the Legislature as well as our municipal governance. Effective representation depends on clarity, coherence, accountability. Under this proposed split, as you know, Beaumont would have two MLAs for the same city-wide priorities: transportation, education, all the things that we would advocate to the province for. This creates duplicated advocacy for a small city, inconsistent messaging, and, I believe, diluted accountability.

From a governance perspective, city-wide issues function best when we have one clear provincial advocate. A split would complicate intergovernmental co-ordination from a municipal level, increase administrative effort, and weaken Beaumont's ability to advance shared priorities. Rather than strengthening our representation, I believe it will divide the city and would actually weaken our representation.

Now, the final point I want to make is probably the most important and strongest – the previous gentleman alluded to it – and that is in determining electoral boundaries, the commission is asked to consider community of interest, minority representation, and municipal integrity as well as growth patterns. Beaumont aligns strongly with each of these principles. Beaumont forms an integrated and functional regional community with parts of Leduc county and Leduc city. Our residents already share commuting patterns, economic ties, school divisions, recreation programs, regional services. These are precisely the kind of connections that the commission, I believe, relies on when identifying coherent communities.

By contrast, Beaumont does not have the same functional ties with Strathcona county or Sherwood Park. Residents do not orient their lives in that direction, so by including part of Beaumont in Strathcona-Sherwood Park, it would place our residents in a constituency that does not reflect how we live and function.

10:25

Now, the last point here is that Beaumont also has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity as one of four officially bilingual municipalities of Alberta and, more importantly, the only city that is bilingual in all of Alberta. The other three are either a town or a hamlet. This uniqueness matters, I believe. It represents a city-wide recognized minority-language community that deserves clear, unified representation. The principle of effective representation under the Charter expressly allows for consideration of minority representation and community identity, which supports keeping a culturally distinct bilingual city like Beaumont, especially because it's small, intact within a single constituency.

Yes, Beaumont is a fast-growing community. In fact, it's the fastest growing in the Edmonton area and remains well below the provincial average population, but I believe any population imbalance will naturally correct over time while if you divide a cohesive, culturally distinct city, this would create a lasting representation issue.

Let me just put it into practical terms. Splitting Beaumont into two constituencies would be assigning two principals to the same school. The students, teachers, and programs are exactly the same, but leadership, advocacy, and accountability are divided. It doesn't improve outcomes; it actually creates confusion.

In closing, I want to reiterate that Beaumont is a small, unified, bilingual city with shared services, strong regional ties, and a clear community identity. Keeping Beaumont whole respects the commission's own criteria, strengthens effective representation, and ensures our unique city continues to be clearly and fairly represented at the provincial level. On behalf of the city of Beaumont, the Beaumont city council, and the residents of Beaumont I respectfully ask the commission to keep Beaumont whole within a single provincial constituency, preferably with parts of Leduc county and Leduc.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mayor Vanderkwaak. A most appreciated presentation. We cannot make promises at this stage although we recognize that we have made mistakes in the interim report. Let me leave it at that. However, you do appreciate that if we restore it, your electoral division and your MLA may be faced with a higher than average population in the riding, right? I mean, there are trade-offs.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Yes. There's variance, for sure, within that.

The Chair: And you'd rather have that?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Yes, I believe, for the reasons that I expressed in terms of community of interest, just natural regional partnerships, and the way our residents already live and function along with, of course, our cultural identity. I think it is very, very important.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. Mr. Evans, any questions or comments?

Mr. Evans: Yeah.

Can you tell me about the school districts? Which school districts apply to Beaumont?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Black Gold school district. Within the city of Beaumont we have both the private Catholic school system as well as French immersion. In fact, one of the reasons why a lot of people move to Beaumont is because we have French immersion from kindergarten to grade 12.

Mr. Evans: So is Black Gold school district just in Beaumont?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: No, no. That goes into Leduc, Leduc county, I believe, all the way over to Calmar. Yeah.

Mr. Evans: And did I understand you to say that there's connectivity between Beaumont and Leduc, not Leduc county but Leduc? Would you say that that's greater than the connectivity between the residents of Beaumont and going into the city of Edmonton for services?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: I would say the connectivity with Leduc: because of the airport and because of the services over there, we often share emergency services as well as recreation. For example, when our pool shuts down for repairs, we send our people over to Leduc city, and they do the same for us. So we have a lot of shared collaboration that's already happening.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. I'm so glad you showed up in person here because Beaumont has been a real hot spot. I want to just repeat

what I heard; that is, you would be prepared to have Beaumont join in with the city of Leduc and sit at a population of approximately 64,000, with Beaumont being 25,000 and Leduc at 39,000, which is high over the target population, but you're prepared to do that knowing that you're going to experience growth. And you would prefer that over joining Edmonton?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: For the reasons that I mentioned as well. Thank you for that question. It is purely from the already existing community ties that we have, the recreation facilities that we share, the collaborations that are already happening. It better reflects how our community already lives and functions. So, yes, I believe this is the best case scenario to continue to help Beaumont thrive as a city.

Mrs. Samson: Perfect. Thank you very much for your time.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: You're welcome.

The Chair: By the way, are you a new mayor, or were you mayor before?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: No. I am a brand new mayor.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Congratulations.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Thank you.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mayor. I wanted to continue this theme. I wanted to ask you about commuter patterns. Now, you suggested – and it's traditionally been true, I think – a lot of people going to Nisku, for sure. What about the commuters going north? Let's take it for granted they're not going east, right? What about the commuter patterns of people living by preference in Beaumont but working in Edmonton? Is that a significant commuter pattern?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: Obviously, you have people who do work in Edmonton as well. That's going to happen just naturally because we are close to the Edmonton border as well. But historically and what we see continuing is that the patterns of migration and transportation and all those pathways more go towards the west.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. Yeah. That was something I was wondering as well. Interestingly, I was just looking up a presentation we had from – we have two options in south of Calgary, blending Okotoks with a piece of Calgary and then not doing that. One of the presenters said that, you know, just because there are a lot of commuters from Okotoks to Calgary actually indicates that they're very different places because people choose to live in Okotoks very deliberately. Would you say that that's also the case in Beaumont even if there are people who commute to Edmonton?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: I agree a hundred per cent. People move here for a different reason.

Mr. Clark: Just for total clarity, if we were to say, "Well, actually, what we think we'll do to address this challenge is loop Beaumont into Edmonton as a part of Edmonton as a hybrid constituency, Beaumont-South East Edmonton," would you be in favour or opposed to that?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: I would not favour that just for, again, the reasons that I expressed. We already have very strong ties with parts

of Leduc county and Leduc city that really help us just to move forward together and also representation at the Legislature.

Mr. Clark: Last question on that point. What's really interesting is that we get both sides of it. Sometimes we've moved a constituency such that somewhere used to have two MLAs or even three, and they say: "Wait a minute. You've reduced our representation. We have fewer MLAs to advocate for us. We used to do a strength in numbers thing, and now we only have one." Then we also have – and I'd say it's running about 50-50 – those who will say: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. We have one MLA. We want to build a strong relationship with that one member of the Assembly. They understand us, and they will strongly advocate, and we won't be diluted." I'm just curious. Obviously, I think the latter would be your argument. You've made that very strongly. But had you thought about, "Wait a minute; maybe there's some value in having more than one in MLA"?

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: I mean, there is but not at the expense of splitting our city in half. I take into account – I know when you're making these decisions in terms of population parity, you don't really necessarily look at how many voters are there. If you look at Beaumont currently, 25 per cent of our population is under the age of 14, which means there's a large demographic that do not vote. Currently it's a very family-oriented community, and it's only going to continue to be that way just because of the uniqueness of Beaumont. When looking at it from that perspective, I believe that the best case scenario is to keep it with Leduc county and/or Leduc city.

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

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Vanderkwaak: You're welcome. Thank you for the time.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Our next presenter is Tara Sawyer. You've heard my routine. Welcome. Tell us about your electoral division.

10:35

Mrs. Sawyer: Good morning. I'm with the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills electoral area. Firstly, thank you for allowing me to speak today. I did want to acknowledge the significant amount of work that goes into the process, balancing the geography and the population, the services, and community connections is complex, and I did appreciate the thoughtful approach reflected in your interim report.

But, as I mentioned in my written submission, I do have concerns about adding the Sundre, Foothills area into the constituency. The Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills region primarily is agriculture based, and daily life reflects that. People are focused on the issues that affect their ability to farm, ranch, move goods, and support food production. That shapes everything about how people travel to the businesses they rely on and to the services that matter most. The Sundre area, by contrast, is shaped much more by forestry, outdoor recreation, and its foothills geography. Those communities often focus on different practical issues, things like wildlife management, land-use access, forestry operations, and tourism-related activity. Neither set of concerns is better or worse; they are simply rooted in different landscapes and industries.

When two regions have such different day-to-day realities, it can make it challenging to represent both effectively, especially across a very large geographic area. Rural representation relies heavily on being physically present, understanding local priorities, and staying connected to long-standing community relationships. Expanding

the riding westward changes those dynamics in ways that are important to consider.

There are several areas where the proposed boundaries reflect how people in my region live and do connect. Keeping Trochu, Huxley, Three Hills together is one of your decisions that I do encourage. These communities share school systems, health services, recreation, cultural programs, and many daily travel patterns. Highway 21 ties them together naturally. I appreciate that Carbon remains aligned with Kneehill county. Carbon's tricampus school partnership with Acme and Linden is important to families. They share many recreational and educational resources. Keeping those communities together maintains stability for students for the wider region.

The region has a long history of consistent boundaries, which is an important consideration. Communities such as Trochu, Three Hills, Acme, Beiseker, and Irricana have been represented together for decades, some since the 1940s. That continuity matters. It builds a sense of strong identity for residents and supports long-standing relationships between MLAs, municipalities, service organizations, and community groups. In rural areas those relationships are especially vital. When boundaries shift suddenly, it can disrupt those connections and affect how local needs are understood and communicated.

More broadly, rural communities function differently because of their geography: the distance and the daily life. In agriculture-based areas like mine, people regularly travel for equipment, vet services, auctions, inputs, and seasonal work, often along predictable corridors that connect specific towns and hubs. These realities differ from regions shaped by forestry or tourism, where priorities naturally include wildlife interactions, Crown land access, and seasonal recreation. Recognizing those differences helps ensure boundaries reflect cohesive communities of interest and practical service patterns.

I also want to note in a broader context about representation in central Alberta. Rural and urban regions often prioritize different day-to-day matters. In agriculture-based areas residents watch closely for policies that affect their ability to grow food, access inputs, move goods, and manage land and water. In more urban settings the emphasis can look different, more on dense transportation networks, housing, and urban service delivery. Both perspectives are important, and people expect to see their lived realities reflected in how constituencies are organized. In this part of the province residents consistently express that they want to feel that their rural experience is understood and visible. When constituencies cover very large geographies or when the number of rural seats is reduced in a region, it can affect how present their MLA can be and how their specific priorities are heard. That context is front of mind for many families, producers, and small-town organizations in central Alberta.

I am concerned about what appears to be a reduction in rural seats in the overall revisions and ask that this be revisited with careful consideration of submissions from the affected regions, including ours.

Irricana and Beiseker have strong practical ties with Acme and nearby towns. Students from those areas use the Acme pool for school swim lessons, families rely on Beiseker's hockey arena, and many volunteer organizations draw members from all three of those communities. People commute regularly between them for work, school, and services. These connections form a natural social and economic corridor that has existed for many years.

Transportation routes play a key role in rural daily life. Highway 2 is a major link for Olds, Didsbury, and Carstairs, and aligning communities along this corridor reflects how people actually move for work, school, business, and recreation.

In summary, what I wanted to say is that there is a long-standing tie between Kneehill county, Mountain View county, and the town of Olds. Trochu, Huxley, Three Hills, then Irricana, Beiseker, and Acme all maintain strong practical connections with their communities. Pardon me. Sorry.

Mrs. Samson: We're getting you some water.

The Chair: Aaron, can you get the . . .

Mrs. Sawyer: I tried to drink some before I came up. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Samson: Everybody's getting you water.

Mrs. Sawyer: I thought I could hold it back.

Rural regions require attention to geography, service demands, and established community patterns. As noted in my written submission, Cremona's geography does align more naturally with the Foothills region.

Thank you again for your time. I hope the local context I've shared today is helpful as you consider the boundaries.

The Chair: Certainly, take your time.

Aaron, can you bring the screen up, this particular riding, Mountain View-Kneehill, please, in a large format?

Mrs. Sawyer: The other thing I wanted to mention is that I encourage maintaining rural population thresholds 10 to 15 per cent below the provincial average to account for the unique demands on rural MLAs. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just had the map brought up. Any questions, Mr. Evans, of this presenter?

Mr. Evans: Okay. I was just doing the exact same thing, trying to see what the proposal was as compared to the existing. You're suggesting that anything west of Cremona should not be in – that's where we should draw the boundary?

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah. Like, putting that western line sort of back where it was – off the top of my head I'm already forgetting – just outside of Olds. I can't see it from here.

Mr. Evans: Isn't it highway 20?

Mrs. Sawyer: I think it's highway 20. That, over putting that on the other side.

Mr. Evans: Twenty-two.

The Chair: Cremona was the old boundary.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah.

Mr. Evans: We heard submissions from Crossfield, and Crossfield was quite happy with where we had put them in Airdrie. Do you agree with that?

Mrs. Sawyer: Well, as the MLA of the area – I think I forgot to mention that part. I am the MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Evans: We knew.

Mrs. Sawyer: I have a good relationship with them, so I do know that, in speaking with the mayor, she likes the idea. I, of course, would love to keep them, just because I do know that they still do some work within that corridor, but it's one of those things. When

we talk about the numbers, I know, when you're looking at our area, trying to keep us within a certain number of population: it's harder on the rural side, so of course, for me, maintaining Crossfield and knowing how they interact a bit with Carstairs, but I do understand that she's not opposed to that change.

I actually am not opposed if it went that way either. However, just in terms of that corridor, I know with the interactions I'm already doing with all of the different counties, villages, and knowing all the groups that work together and that, it's just concerning to me whereas Sundre and over really is a different kettle of fish that does not really fit into what primarily is my area.

Mr. Evans: We kind of moved things east and west, and what we've heard from almost everyone in regard to this area and central Alberta is that it's more north and south. There are a couple of areas where there is an east-west corridor, but otherwise it's north-south. Would you agree with that?

10:45

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah, I would.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for coming out today. I have two points I'd like your opinion on. Trochu, Three Hills on highway 21 is of great interest to all the people on that route, including Elnora, Delburne, and they have expressed some interest in communities of interest and joining it into Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I'd like your comment on that. Then I have one other area I would like you to comment on.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah. I would disagree. That's why when I mentioned Trochu, Huxley, Wimborne, that whole area, Trochu-Three Hills, they're all very closely tied to each other. But, also, those school systems are tied closely. I mean, when you talk about the sports teams and the community groups, the 4-H clubs, that all belongs in Kneehill county, so suddenly moving those ones into there doesn't make sense. Like, families, schools, the agriculture: Trochu-Three Hills should – it makes more sense to keep it here. I find that there is still a lot more connection that happens on my end than on the Sylvan side.

Mrs. Samson: My other area that I would like your comment on – and I know that it's a change for the riding – is for Sundre to come in. I want to just say that in a province as vast as we have, we often have electoral districts that have different points or different ways of economy and geography, but I suspect, like, Sundre is not that far off the main highway 2 corridor. Would you not suspect that they're going that way for their services, schools, medical, all that? Is there not a community of interest at all with Sundre?

Mrs. Sawyer: Even in speaking with the Olds mayor, it really is quite different. There are some that come through, but, as I mentioned before, in terms of their needs and what they focus on, it is very different. You would think that because it's close to Olds – but there is a very real difference.

I will say that just in terms of size, I mean, presently having a rural riding, obviously, it's quite large. I'm going all over, which is why when you moved some of the lines, it made sense. But going far in that direction, to me, isn't necessary, and I do think it really waters down the representation on what matters to them and how they connect with what matters within my area. That, to me, is still something that needs to be considered, and the corridor is just different. Highway 2: all the towns that I have, I mean, that is their

common connector for businesses. I'm not seeing people go into Sundre because of what it is. Do you know what I mean?

Mrs. Samson: Yeah. One way.

Mrs. Sawyer: They're not coming into there for school and things, right? I hope that helps.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Would you say that the magnetic field of the mountains sucks Sundre, but the field loses its power east of Sundre? Is that what you're saying?

Mrs. Sawyer: I get to enjoy it from afar, from my farm. I mean, yeah, to jest about it, but the reality is that it is really different. They are different. To me that is something, when it comes to the community and knowing the groups and how they interact.

The Chair: But you appreciate, then, that puts us into a numbers problem.

Mrs. Sawyer: Well, that's what I did want to stress because it also seemed like our numbers were sort of being played with to put us more up. That's why I was saying that we really need to remember keeping that 15 per cent less threshold for rural MLAs. I can tell you that to get to places to give proper representation when you have a large – you know, where I reside within my constituency, it's a little over an hour to hit each quarter and, with a lot of those towns, trying to be there and make sure they feel seen and to address them can be tricky.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you, and thank you very much for your presentation. I, too, want to talk about highway 21 and some issues associated with that. We heard a lot about Trochu. I was very intrigued by your remarks about the long history of quite stable boundaries for this riding, and in doing so, you mentioned Irricana and Beiseker, which are currently not in your riding.

Mrs. Sawyer: They are in my riding currently, yes.

Dr. Martin: You were making an assertion about a community of interest. One can see an economic interest because it's on the railway, but you're saying that interest exists in other spheres as well.

Mrs. Sawyer: Beiseker and Irricana are in my constituency at present. In your proposal, you're taking them away, and I'm saying . . .

Dr. Martin: You want them back.

Mrs. Sawyer: Give them back. I mean, I can understand, and I will say: that is the connection. I mentioned it in terms of the recreational side, which sounds unlikely, but the close ties like Acme and Beiseker school have together: coming to use our pool for their swim lessons, all of our kids. That's the hockey arena. If you're going to play hockey, unless you're going to Beiseker, they all become Blazers, right? So yeah, they're still in there. I understand moving it into Airdrie, given proximity, especially potentially Irricana. I can see you wanting to do that, but that divider right there – and if you think of even the banks, like, the community of Beiseker, and it's agriculture businesses that all the farmers in our area. That is very closely tied.

Dr. Martin: So that hope is, to follow the final sum: that whole area is classic rural. This is grain-farmer world.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yes. Grain and cattle.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah. Ag society is very strong.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. I've got a few questions. First off, I just want to thank you so much for coming because it's so important for us to hear from folks who actually represent their communities and have a clear understanding of what the literal lay of the land is. So thank you very much for being here.

Mrs. Samson already asked about Trochu, so I won't to ask about that again. What I'm interested in is that the current boundary in 2017 stretches a long way east and south, south actually all the way from Strathmore to the Siksika reserve and includes Hussar. So in essence, what we've done is sort of cut that part off and gone the other way. My friend Google Maps tells me that it's an hour and fifty minute drive from Hussar to Olds, which is a long way, but in this new configuration Olds to Caroline is only a little less than an hour, about 50 minutes, so you save about an hour driving.

I'm kind of wondering about the part west of highway 22 there. That feels like that's the mountains, right? That whole big part up over there: highway 22, highway 53 – I think that is under Caroline – the Clearwater River there. I guess I'm just curious if you feel like losing the south and east portion in this new configuration makes a bit of sense relative to – like how does that, kind of, land with you now in your current constituency configuration? It won't show on here because it's sort of south and east of that, but it does stretch quite a long way south. I'm just kind of curious about that.

Mrs. Sawyer: You're referring to down . . .

Mr. Clark: Yeah. The current 2017 boundary goes all the way – you can't really see it on the map.

Mrs. Sawyer: You're referring to, like, going down, Rosebud to Standard?

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Exactly.

Mrs. Sawyer: Which is why you'll note, in my submission, that I never commented on – I mean, I understood moving those the way you wanted to, which is why I didn't argue that point. I understood why you would do that piece. I guess the way I looked at it: even, you know, maintaining that original boundary, therefore leaving Sundre where it was, we would both be okay in our numbers just because of the percentage being rural. I guess what I'm saying is that we shouldn't be topped back up to those numbers and keeping it lower. And we are seeing growth. No, we're not going to see it the same way. Obviously not. But that's why as rural keeping that lower percentage, I think . . .

The Chair: So your presentation is a two-pronged approach. Cut off the west, and use the average towards the 15 per cent.

10:55

Mrs. Sawyer: Well, yeah, like, as it states that you normally would. I noticed that you weren't really following that. I don't mean that as a criticism. It had gone up, and I was just saying, well, that you adjust here and here and then we're basically, in my mind, in that sweet spot of that, you know, 15 per cent difference as a rural riding. It does make a difference to an MLA representing those areas.

Again, I can't stress enough that people in rural ridings really want to feel represented, and when things start to get too large – they already feel there's fewer of us than in an urban setting, so not wanting to see it get bigger and lose that voice.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Clark: Thanks so much for being here.

The Chair: Yes, thank you, Mrs. Sawyer.

Mrs. Sawyer: Apologies for that cough.

The Chair: Just to give you some perspective, we have 10 minutes for each presenter, in theory, six minutes of presentation, four minutes for questions. You can see that I as a chair have failed miserably in enforcing that. On average it looks like we are using 20 minutes per presenter. We've rushed through our break or we've missed our break. So in that context I'm calling the next presenter, David Dorward.

And don't expect more than 20 minutes. I guess that's what I'm saying. Mr. Dorward, have a seat. Tell us where you're from and which ones you want to comment on.

Mr. Dorward: Firstly, maybe a minute or two cough time. That's a blessing that you would allow this MLA some time for that, and take your break. I mean, I don't know how many . . .

The Chair: No, no. We're soldiering through.

Mr. Dorward: I'm David Dorward. I was an MLA 10 years ago in Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'm not going to be very micro; I'm going to be more macro today. I hope your final report will speak to future Legislatures. Please take the time to let them know what you have learned through this process. I believe you have severe handcuffs on you through the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. I see places in your interim report where you're somewhat boxed in.

I'm happy to see in your report that many times that you consider the needs of people over the needs of the Assembly or the government or something else, and I thank you for your service on the commission. But I don't think you do that necessarily enough when I see the words like "having either lost population or grown at a rate that is less than the province as a whole." I say: so what? Arguably these areas need more attention, perhaps, not necessarily less.

Sections 15(1) and 15(2) are prime examples. Why four? I won't elaborate on those sections. For those watching, I'm sure you're aware. That's an overly prescriptive number, perhaps, of what your good work could determine. Why does that section not allow a number of constituencies to break the rule on the high end? Why is it just the low end? I'll bet a lot of folks in this room think that we have two large segments of Alberta: rural and urban. I submit, with respect to representation, we actually have three.

As an MLA who literally was three minutes from my constituency of Gold Bar when I was at the Assembly, where I could be visiting with constituents right after a session of the Legislature or door-knocking, my constituents were favoured over those, for example, in Calgary or Red Deer or other places who had to wait for a Friday or Saturday to see their MLA in person. Of course, both being completely different than a geographic expanse of rural area. Do you see how equality fails and fairness must form a big part of all you do?

I know there will be other presenters who will comment on the incredible difference that it was for me and other urban MLAs to share responsibilities with 19 others. In Edmonton, 20 MLAs presently. An MLA in Edmonton shares with 19 others because we

as a group support a comparative handful of school boards and one municipality. Rural MLAs' work with groups is incredibly different than urban, and I'm not sure that the representation reflects that enough. In other words, a rural MLA by him- or herself must look at maybe six different community areas, municipalities, way more school boards, et cetera.

Overall, please consider and pass on through your report the difference between equality and fairness. Fairness must trump equality, and people, individual Albertans, must trump rules.

You use the words "Indian reserves" in your report, which is acceptable. However, consider speaking to First Nations and see if they are okay with that. The option is "Indigenous reserves."

Why would the Assembly diminish the work of yourselves to the extent that they sat in a room and decided 89 was the right number this time around? If they knew that, why have a commission? Please recommend that that not necessarily be done in the future. Perhaps a close range of seats would have been better, with a view to letting the commission decide what would be the most appropriate. What I see is you pitting one constituency against another, indeed, even the rural-urban divide, to see who wins in the keep-it-to-89-seats rule. In this regard, I would draw your attention to page 38 of the report. The second-last paragraph is a real head scratcher. This is not your fault; you wrote it as it is. I just think that you really don't have the flexibility you need here, and that paragraph really states that quite well.

Throughout your work I hope that you see things from a person's perspective, not the perspective of the act or the MLAs or something else. Consider the person who needs help with health care or a business owner who needs help with a regulation. Is it easy for them to contact their MLA? Is it as easy as it was for folks in my area to contact me? No. It never will be. We can't correct that, but let's not make it worse for them.

Even if population goes down or doesn't meet the average, they didn't do that, the people still there. Their needs don't change. So what is running the ship here? Page 37, second paragraph: when you said in the interim report, "the Commission's dilemma," that's a hint that you indeed have some handcuffs causing you to have a dilemma.

Back to the act. Section 15(3) is an interesting little part of the act. It says, "Crownsnest Pass is not a town" – good grief – just to support section 15(2). How silly. I think that the Albertans in that municipality likely believe that they're as important as any other location of 6,000 good folks.

Let's talk about situations where you have recommended that the urban-rural divide – hybrid, I think I might have heard from Mr. Clark – be broken down. Where you have a constituency that's both rural and urban, I say: yes, yes, yes. I think you need to discuss and talk about the individuals there. For me, the people that live close to Edmonton or any other urban centre are my folks. I mean, they'll interact, they'll shop often at the same stores, they'll come across the same boundaries, and they're affected by the same rules. It's being Albertans. I think that's what we need to focus on rather than this divide between people. Let's bring people together and have homogeneous scenarios.

Many of the points I've made are well said in your report on pages 7 and 8, where Justice McLachlin discussed the right to vote. I hope in the week before the sign-off of the report, a date which is coming fairly quickly here, that you review those words. They include the following statement. "It emerges therefore that deviations from absolute voter parity may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation."

Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Clark, any questions?

Mr. Clark: Thank you, and thank you very much for being here and for your past service to the province. Good to see you. Really interesting. You were the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Is that right?

Mr. Dorward: Correct. Yeah.

Mr. Clark: You referenced that earlier. Interestingly enough, we had the constit assistant for Edmonton-Gold Bar's current MLA in here this morning, and he was talking about the challenges that are faced in representing complex populations and the workload that it takes to manage AISH, health care, social service, Alberta Works, education, you know, those sorts of things, addiction, housing, homelessness, the sort of urban issues that tend to kind of come to the front door of a constit office. Can you speak a bit to that work you had to do as a constituency level MLA?

Mr. Dorward: There certainly is a tremendous amount of that, but I do want to emphasize with regard to my comments that there are 20 coming together to support individuals and groups in the community that assist and support and help those individuals. So while you're the MLA speaking to that particular constituent, you have this body of reference. If you're a smartwise MLA, you will know what the doors to get open for that individual are.

11:05

You didn't ask it in this way, but if you were to compare with rural and if the population is similar in a rural setting, you have maybe different but very similar situations in many communities in rural Alberta as well. I think they are more dramatic in the inner constituencies, no doubt, but you have a lot more in an urban setting to be able to handle the weight of that and supporting and building and finding ways to help the groups that do look after those individuals.

Mr. Clark: I agree completely that the geography in rural Alberta is a big challenge. We've just heard from the previous presenter in central Alberta. It's especially acute in the far north. That's undeniable. The vast geographies are really a challenge.

Previous commissions have recommended that there be a differential funding for constituency offices. It's not a replacement for the MLA. It never will be, especially with technology emerging and Zoom calls and a little bit better cell coverage, again, between different parts of the province. When you were in the Legislature, was that ever contemplated, having a somewhat substantially greater budget for those rural and remote MLAs?

Mr. Dorward: Yes, it was. Absolutely. I wouldn't call it an issue, but you happen to be talking to the person that probably cared about it the most. I'm an accountant. I was a CMA cost accountant before I was a CPA, so it's very close to me. The model of that, in my opinion – still probably is; I haven't thought about that issue for a long time – is a broken scenario. I would support the rural more in that regard than I would me in an urban setting. I always thought that the rural scenario did not properly look after the individual person that happened for whatever reason to be a rural Albertan. Even look at staffing. I mean, the cost of having one person at an office in an urban setting versus having disparate offices in rural settings is quite a big difference.

Mr. Clark: You and I are one hundred per cent aligned on that. I think, in the grand scheme of things, it is tremendous value and, frankly, not that much money, you know, for the value it provides back to Albertans. You and I are aligned on that a hundred per cent.

Thank you so much for being here.

Mr. Dorward: You bet.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much. Thank you for being here, Mr. Dorward. I, too, think that we need to make a set of recommendations about legislation and, with respect to Members' Services, about a significant review of not only the budget but the rationale for the work that that committee does.

I wanted to press you further on your characterization of Alberta as urban and rural and, I would suggest, suburban as well, which leads into the discussion of hybrids, I think. We struggle with what might constitute a reasonable hybrid, if I can put it that way, because at this very moment there are at least 18 hybrid situations in the ridings of Alberta. We've recommended a few more, but much of the discussion seems to presume a dichotomy, urban and rural, and I think that's false. I think there's a whole spectrum of forms of life in different communities between the core condo in a skyscraper and a guy bailing hay. A huge spectrum in Alberta is increasingly about that piece in the middle as well as the growth in the urban centres.

Now, you've said that fairness must trump population equality. Translating it into our technical terms such as they are: that's where our discussion has to go. That's about how we deal with hybridizing here and there. Can you speak more to your notion that hybrids – you said, "Yes, yes, yes," so let's put a bit more flesh on it, please.

Mr. Dorward: Yes. For sure. Thank you for the opportunity. Having the advantage of 74 years under my belt, I think that I am at an advantage situation in that mom and dad both grew up in rural places in Alberta, so we, as urban kids with an engineer and a nurse parents, exited the urban setting about 4 o'clock every Friday and came back Sunday night because we went either, you know, to Viking or Morinville. We lived a lot of rural. Back in those days in the late '50s and '60s and '70s Alberta was much more segmented as far as that was. Rural folks were kind of rural, and they might have travelled into Morinville, or they may have made the long, long trek into Edmonton. That doesn't exist in our culture anymore. People are way more able to make decisions to get them out of the urban settings.

In fact, I'm not a sociologist, but I think there's been a change of that in the last 10 years whereby people are exiting cities and making decisions to be able to get somewhere. They can work from that place on their same jobs and travel once a week. Therefore, this whole thing about there is a – you know, what really bothers me, unfortunately, is that the discussion often breaks down to, "Well, you're going to get more votes in the urban regarding this party, or you're going to get more in rural regarding that party," which absolutely should be not a part of the conversation whatsoever with respect to any of this conversation. It's about the individual people that live there.

I think that if you were to say in 1965 that you got red for this and blue for that orange for this and purple for that, you would see: oh, that's urban kind of context where I grew up, and there's the rural folks. I think if you now did that picture, you would see those colours coming right together in a lot of ways and coming really close together when you get within, say, a 20-minute or a 30-minute drive.

Let me state it another way. You know, some people inside the city have to drive 30 minutes to get to work. There are lots of people who say: I'll drive 30 minutes rural to get to work. That puts them out 40 miles. As you get closer to the urban centre, then you've got a real blending of the Albertan. You get a little further away, sure there are the rural areas. I don't want to discount the fact that they have their own areas that need to get looked after.

I'm getting really close to my 20 minutes.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

The Chair: Very quickly, Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

Thank you for your presentation and your history, too, to bring to the table. I like your comments on EDs. I think that's where we really struggled, only getting two and trying to make sense out of the growth with only two extra. If we had more, we wouldn't be here. Well, we would, but we wouldn't be arguing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: Briefly. I wasn't going to ask a question to, you know, accommodate time, but this has come up and I do want to pick your brain on this. Would you agree, having been an MLA, that even in Edmonton-Gold Bar you would have had various communities of interest, people with different interests and groups of different interests, that you would have to accommodate and represent?

Mr. Dorward: No. I can interpret . . .

Mr. Evans: It was homogeneous?

Mr. Dorward: Homogeneous. That's how I've always pronounced it, but same thing.

I guess Gold Bar is very much like that. We don't have any strong ethnicity within Gold Bar. We don't have a slice of the downtown, which brings a whole, you know, socioeconomic issue relative to that. When I said no, I really meant not that other people wouldn't share with the 20 that are there to share that. I mean, if you want my honest opinion . . .

Mr. Evans: The 20 what?

Mr. Dorward: The 20 constituencies.

Mr. Evans: Oh, I see.

Mr. Dorward: You've got 20 MLAs, and literally eight can show up at a board meeting for whatever. You know, like, I'm going to overemphasize here, but I will do it. If we had 16 MLAs in Edmonton versus 20, I can honestly say that I'm not sure that any one person at any one time would be disadvantaged.

Mr. Evans: There's that much overlap?

Mr. Dorward: Absolutely. There's a ton of overlap.

The Chair: Thank you, sir. Can I just encapsulate? I want to do that and then clarify. First of all, hybrids: you're fine with them as long as they're appropriate, right?

Mr. Dorward: Absolutely, and it's really hard to make a general comment. It absolutely needs to be specifically looked after with a focus on the people that live there.

11:15

The Chair: You made some mention of the term "Indian reserves." I tried to follow the legislative language, and I know it may be outdated. Anyways, that was the language of the legislation.

Mr. Dorward: I was the associate minister of Aboriginal relations, so I'm sensitive to that. My comment was that if the First Nations are okay with that wording, I certainly don't have a problem.

The Chair: Yeah. Well, I mean, we've not heard from them on that. We're following what the legislation says.

I'm confused on your comments on 15(2).

Mr. Dorward: Well, 15(2) demands – it demands – that you can only have a variance of three. You can have three constituencies that break the rules.

The Chair: I think it's four.

Mr. Dorward: No. Well, I think there are three that you can, but they have to break four of the following rules.

The Chair: I would say: meet four of the following conditions.

Mr. Dorward: Let's say it's four, is one. Yes, four constituencies, but there are only three that can do that. I think you can break those rules in three cases. Here's the bottom line for me. I think it's overprescriptive.

The Chair: We've only used one in our report.

Mr. Dorward: Okay, but I think that you should open it up and say that we should do more perhaps. We shouldn't even have that restriction. Why is the restriction in the legislation if you've only had one? Maybe somebody else in a future commission wants to have four or five, is my point.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I'm not sure I'm following you, but I don't want to prolong it. I'll excuse you. If you can stay, maybe over the lunch hour we can have a further conversation.

Mr. Dorward: Oh, yeah. I'll put some more money in my meter. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Our next: Michael Mathiote. Please take a seat and just give me a minute here.

Okay. Sorry, sir. Please identify yourself and tell us what electoral division you're in and which ones you wish to comment on.

Mr. Mathiote: Yeah. Sure. Good morning, commissioners. My name is Michael Mathiote, and I live in Edmonton-City Centre. I registered to speak because I took the time to read the interim report carefully and review the population data behind it. I understand the constraints that this commission is working under. I want to be clear at the outset. I do not believe this commission has full freedom to solve the problem that it's been given. This observation is central to my remarks.

Under the current legislation the number of seats is capped at 89, and only two new seats are permitted. At the same time, the commission has correctly concluded that further consolidation of rural and northern ridings would undermine effective representation by creating districts that are geographically too large for a single MLA to serve and, you know, not to mention the Carter decision. I agree with that conclusion. Given these constraints I understand the trade-offs in the report.

As the previous gentleman alluded, you've actually mentioned, you know, things in the report. Edmonton: effectively, there's a consolidation, a hybrid riding, so they get a net gain of one. I think Calgary gets a net gain of one. In rural Alberta there is, I think, a consolidation of two seats – was it four? – off-set partially by the growth in the Airdrie-Cochrane area. Anyway, from a mechanical perspective I understand why these choices were worked.

Where I want to focus on is what the updated population data implies about how quickly this map will age. In your report you've used the data from 2024 midyear. The data for 2025 came out six days ago. I think the current total population is 5,029,346, which gives us a provincial average of 56,510 per riding. This is an increase of roughly 3 per cent in a single year compared to the interim report baseline. More importantly, this growth is not evenly distributed. Edmonton and Calgary are growing faster than the provincial average. Suburban areas are growing faster still, and rural and northern regions are growing more slowly. Even where rural populations increase in absolute terms, they fall below parity because the provincial average keeps rising.

The result is that even a well-designed redistribution becomes outdated almost immediately and always in the same direction. I initially came prepared to oppose the core merger and the creation of a hybrid riding in Edmonton, but after working through the numbers, I reached a different conclusion. Even if this commission were to reverse that decision, which I understand it cannot, the result would simply be dilution of the urban vote elsewhere. This is not a failure of the boundary design. It is a structural consequence of the framework. The arithmetic is unavoidable. If the number of seats is capped and you can't reduce the number of rural seats and population is increasing in the urban areas, then the only result is going to be dilution of the urban vote.

This is reflected in the proposals that are in the interim report. Urban populations are increasing their share of voter populations. The number of seats is capped. Rural seats cannot be further reduced without violating effective representation. Therefore, urban voters must absorb the imbalance. No configuration of boundaries within the current legislation can eliminate that outcome. At best it redistributes where the dilution appears.

You know, just looking at the numbers from the 2025 estimates for July 1 published by the Office of Statistics and Information can already infer certain things. Like, for example, in your report Drumheller-Stettler is already at 23 per cent. By the next election it'll hit or go over the 25 per cent. In fact, even with the 2025 information it is probably very, very close, less than 1 per cent to going over. There are also several ridings that have probably gone over the 15 per cent. This would be, like, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Slave Lake-Westlock-Athabasca. Mackenzie, as we already know, is over the 25 per cent.

I understand that the plus or minus 25 per cent is often treated as the outer constitutional guardrail, but the plus or minus 15 per cent functions as an early warning line. It signals the representation quality is beginning to erode and future drift is likely. In a fast-growing population ridings that start near minus 10 per cent will cross minus 15 per cent quickly, long before the next redistribution. We already see this happening in the updated data. Ridings that were previously inside the range are now crossing it not because of boundary choices but because growth in urban Alberta is pushing the average faster than the framework can respond. The plus-minus 15 per cent is a predictive indicator of structural stress, not a snapshot.

My concern, therefore, is not that the map is careless. My concern is that the legislation guarantees persistent worsening urban vote dilution regardless of how careful the map is. That has three consequences. Urban underrepresentation will re-emerge quickly after redistribution, the commission will be forced to rely increasingly on section 15 justifications, and public confidence in electoral fairness will reduce not because of bad faith but because the system cannot keep up with growth.

I'm not asking the commission to redraw Edmonton. What I'm asking, I hope, is more realistic. I ask that the final report explicitly state that under the current statutory seat cap ongoing urban vote

dilution is mathematically unavoidable. Boundary adjustments alone cannot resolve this, and future legislation should reconsider the seat cap, redistribution frequency, or other growth-responsive mechanisms. Putting that conclusion on the record matters. It clarifies that this is not a failure of the commission but a limitation of the framework you are required to operate within.

Thank you for your time and the work that you are doing.

11:25

The Chair: Mr. Mathiote, thank you so much for a real punchy and comprehensive presentation.

I'm going to limit it to one question per side just to kind of catch up. Mr. Evans or Mrs. Samson.

Mr. Evans: No questions. Thank you for your work.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your work. That was very well said, that the system can't keep up. Thank you.

Mr. Clark: No questions for me, but thank you so much for being here.

Dr. Martin: I'm doing something I almost never do, and that's that I entirely agree with you. I wonder if we can get a copy of your presentation.

The Chair: Please provide a copy to Mr. Roth.

Dr. Martin: Wherever Mr. Roth is. I'd be happy to take a copy of it because I'd like to review it at my leisure.

The Chair: I'd like to comment on a couple of things. First of all, I don't think we can go the step to 2025. I'm quite certain we have agreed as a commission that we're going to have a standard, and we're going to stick to it. We're not happy, but no census is perfect. So that's the one thing.

Secondly, you perfectly identified the tripartite issue that we deal with, and that is that in order to provide effective representation, we either need a lot more seats or we take seats out of the rural to accommodate the cities, but you said: or dilute the urban vote as the third option. That's how I understood it. I would phrase it a little differently. I would phrase it as the courts have given us the option of hybrid or blended ridings. I'm not sure if I understood you correctly, but I try to shy away from terms like "dilution." However, I did really like your early warning sign of 15 per cent. I think I may plagiarize that in the report.

Thank you very much. If you can provide it to Mr. Roth, we'd appreciate it.

Mr. Clark: Thank you for being here.

Mr. Mathiote: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Our next presenter is Trenna. Trenna Benesocky?

Mr. McLennan: I don't know if I'm as good looking as Trenna, but I'll have to do.

The Chair: So you're not Trenna?

Mr. McLennan: No, sir.

The Chair: Okay. Who are you?

Mr. McLennan: My name is Matthew McLennan. I'm a councillor with Sturgeon county, second term, division 3 councillor. I do have some prepared remarks. They are on my phone, so they're a little bit challenging for me to read. Bear with me if I stare at my phone

for a while. I just wanted to give you a quick insight as to maybe perhaps some of my perspective.

The Chair: Sorry. Just organizationally here: Trenna booked this time for you?

Mr. McLennan: Correct.

The Chair: You know who she is and all that?

Mr. McLennan: She's our chief of staff.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Mr. McLennan: Myself I was born in Leduc, Alberta, raised there, moved to the city of Edmonton to go to university and completed university in 2004 and lived in the city of Edmonton until 2014. Then I made the decision to move west, to move to Sturgeon county. I've been living in Sturgeon county for over a decade now. I just thought that might help to preface some of the comments.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide input on behalf of Sturgeon county council. We appreciate the commission's work and the thoughtful consideration that has gone into the interim report. There are several significant changes being proposed, and we recognize the challenge of balancing representation across Alberta's growing population. Sturgeon county is pleased to see the proposed St. Albert-Sturgeon riding name maintained as it better reflects the unique character of our region and its close connection between urban and rural communities. We also believe the decision to keep its boundaries unchanged is a sound one.

However, council has deep concerns with the proposed changes to the Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland riding. While we understand the intent is to move closer to the provincial population average, the outcome of these changes would in our view be detrimental to residents. The proposed 12 per cent population increase represents considerable shift, combined with a significant expansion of the geographic area. This would make it more difficult for constituents to access their MLA and, likewise, for the MLA to effectively serve their communities. Today the constituency office of MLA Getson is located in Onoway, centrally positioned to serve residents across the current riding. Under the proposed boundaries residents in the north such as those living in the Vega area would face well over an hour's drive just to reach the office. For many residents across the north and outlying communities such travel distances create barriers to access and engagement.

The proposed riding also brings together communities with very different local priorities. The needs of residents living near St. Albert or the Edmonton border are not the same as those in the far north of the riding. That diversity of needs makes equitable and effective representation a real challenge.

Council is also concerned about the broader trend we continue to see, a gradual erosion of the rural representation in the Legislature. The last boundary revision already shifted seats towards urban centres, and this report appears to continue in that direction. All newly added seats are in Edmonton and Calgary, with more blended urban-rural ridings across the province. While it is true that most Albertans live in cities, we cannot overlook the rural Alberta contribution. The majority of the province's land base and economic activity takes place in rural centres.

Rural issues are just as significant as urban ones, but they are different, and they are compounded by distance and access. Meeting your MLA should not require setting aside a full day. Sturgeon county council respectfully urges the commission to revisit the proposed boundaries for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and consider maintaining

them as they are today. The existing population remains well within the legislative threshold, and keeping current boundaries would reduce confusion for residents and support more equitable access to representation.

Just a kind of personal comment to conclude is that I've seen even in my area, which is the division 3 area, which is just west of St. Albert, so it touches the St. Albert boundary, and I go as far west as west of 779 – Lac Ste. Anne county is to the west of us – even within that area we see a real divergence of priorities. Recently St. Albert, three years ago, annexed a portion of Sturgeon county. There are real challenges around where rural meets urban, and the priorities are even different from, you know, a few miles away from St. Albert to 779, the highway there.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your position. If there are any questions, I'd be happy to try and answer them.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Clark, Dr. Martin, either of you?

Dr. Martin: I'm actually focused now on this map of Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. You feel it is far too sprawling and produces many confusions and complications. Is that correct?

Mr. McLennan: Yes. I would say that the biggest concern that we have is focused more on the distance, I believe. It's more the travel time towards a meeting with the MLA. You know, before I presented here today, I was curious if there was an online option. What I've come to find is that the online and the virtual options are good, but there's something important about face-to-face contact. I mean, there are so many nonverbal cues that you get when you speak with residents or people face to face. We really feel that's very important. The further distance a resident needs to travel really impedes that connection, and then likewise for the MLA to be able to physically be in all of the areas.

Dr. Martin: Can I ask one question about this area?

Mr. McLennan: Sure.

Dr. Martin: The city of St. Albert annex: is that what this dotted line may represent? That's their city boundary. It seems quite a bit of it's in a different riding.

11:35

Mr. McLennan: I'm actually, yeah, just to the west. There's Big Lake there. I'm west, and then I go up to just south of Rivière Qui Barre. The area that St. Albert annexed was north of highway 2 primarily and then west of Carrot Creek. The area sort of highlighted to my right is not the newly annexed area.

Dr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Evans or Mrs. Samson?

Mr. Evans: No questions for me. Thank you for coming and providing us additional submissions.

Mrs. Samson: No questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McLennan: Thank you kindly. Have a good day.

The Chair: Our next presenter is Victor Carpay.

Mr. Carpay: Thank you, guys. Yeah. Normally I work at home, actually, and the blinds go down and all of the natural light comes

in, so it's a lot to sit in a hotel like this with this lighting for five or six hours. I'm not used to it.

Thank you, guys, so much for listening to all of the presentations and everything else. Mine is for a specific area, the Sherwood Park boundaries. I moved to the Edmonton area four years ago from Calgary to Sherwood Park, and I've grown to love Sherwood Park and the community there. I have lots of friends in Strathcona county. I go there for a lot of different church events, community events, and I know a lot of the schools there well and the people who teach. So I'm very connected with the Sherwood Park community. What I want to talk about – if we go to the current Sherwood Park boundaries, if that's possible, on the screen.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Carpay: Thanks. I speak quickly, so maybe that'll save you guys some time. We'll see.

Right now you can see that little box there going, what used to be a part of the Strathcona-Sherwood Park riding. That area there is Heritage Hills. The current boundaries for Sherwood Park in terms of the urban division have been existing there for well over a decade. I would argue that in Heritage Hills, since it's been represented by the east side of the riding for 10 years, to abruptly make this artificial cut into that side and looping into Sherwood Park doesn't make sense. It's sort of an invisible neighbourhood line that doesn't make sense with the history of Sherwood Park currently. It would disrupt long-standing community ties, the connection that they've had to their MLA for 10 years. So there are a few problems there with splitting Heritage Hills.

I'm also here today because there are a few nurse shift workers who can't be here who've submitted reports on suggestions for how to change the Sherwood Park boundary a little bit to include all of the Strathcona county residents who are currently under the representation of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. My idea is pretty straightforward. Rather than carving up the Sherwood Park urban area, the commission can instead adjust population and representation by extending the constituency into the northern part of Strathcona county, where there are strong existing ties and shared municipal priorities already.

What I would propose is that to the west the constituency of Sherwood Park would follow the North Saskatchewan River, which coincides with the Strathcona county boundary, and to the north it would follow the Fort Saskatchewan city limits up to highway 15 and then follow highway 15 east to the county boundary at range road 204 and to the east follow Strathcona county boundary south along Elk Island national park down to highway 16 and then to the south follow highway 16 west back to highway 21.

The reason for this: the configuration would not disrupt the urban divide that exists between the two ridings. Secondly, it would hit the goals of having 53,000 to 54,000 residents in the area. And then, most importantly, a big priority when we're looking at local maps is that there are municipal levels of government, there are the Strathcona county levels of government, and they're supposed to connect to the provincial and to the federal in a manner that makes it easy for politicians to represent their constituents well.

If you look at what I'm proposing to take out of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and loop into Sherwood Park, the places there in Strathcona county include residents who vote there, who pay property taxes to Strathcona county and to Sherwood Park. It would ensure effective representation and that the whole of Sherwood Park is under two MLAs, the same way that the map is trying to do with Lethbridge and other areas to keep things in good correspondence.

Another thing that I'll add is that a lot of the things that exist in the north of highway 16 like the multi-purpose recreation facility anchored by the Sherwood Park Crusaders, not the Fort Saskatchewan Crusaders, and The Pointe Agricultural Events Centre and the Warren Thomas Josephburg Aerodrome are all in Strathcona county and should be looped provincially into Sherwood Park. The other thing I'll mention is that the airport in the north of highway 16 area is operated by Strathcona county, but the name for it, if you look, is Josephburg, which is really interesting.

So, yes, because the residents pay property taxes in there, they vote, and they're inside of the Strathcona county, I think it makes sense for that area to be under one.

In terms of why I'm here, again, Kara Birns is somebody who submitted a submission to make this amendment to have Strathcona county included into Sherwood Park. She's a shift worker and a nurse and can't be here today. There's Ron and Nadine, Lisa and Claudio, Daniel Laschet.* I'm good friends with the Duggans, who have an acreage in the Strathcona county area and have a whole bunch of cows. They also have six kids, so it's harder for them to be here today. If you look at all of the proposals, there are a lot of people who live north of highway 16, and for the purpose of them communicating with their MLA who they have for representing them in Strathcona county, I think there are a lot of projects in that north of highway 16 corridor where Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has something like 20 different places to represent in it. It absolutely makes sense that Sherwood Park should go under two, and that could be done. Even if you look at Strathcona-Sherwood Park, the eastern part, right now it's looped to go all the way down to Beaumont. I mean, if we can keep those two places with the municipalities under two provincial ridings, I think it just makes for a better ladder of communicating and representation.

That's it on the local side. I'll just say, on a broader level, that I just went to Saskatoon for a week after Christmas for a wood-carving thing just to take a little bit of a break before going back to work, and it was five and a half hours of driving from Edmonton to Saskatoon. I'm 21 years old. My back is sore from doing that. So I'll just add, on an overall level, that I know two people who live in farther rural ridings, and one of them likes their MLA a lot and says that he or she – I'll keep it anonymous – is really good at being present in the riding. The amount of driving that's, you know, done to be able to say that they're present like that: I just can't imagine their poor backs from all that driving.

I do think that if there's the 15 per cent variant rule, absolutely, that should serve to help the rural ridings that have a really long driving distance. I mean, the northern riding right now, Mackenzie, is a total of seven hours to drive from one end of the riding to the other, and if you're expecting your MLA to be present and to do that, we need to keep those in mind.

I'll just add that I've lived in the city my entire life in Sherwood Park, Calgary, and Edmonton. I've kind of been in all three of those for my lifetime. One of my favourite things to do in my free time is to try to connect to people who have farms and volunteer to do some work with fences or to get to observe and see how they milk cows and manage and have relationships with the livestock. There's just something to be said about precious rural common sense. Yeah, I think it's important that if that 15 per cent variant rule is there, we need to make sure to preserve rural Alberta voices in our democracy as much as possible. They do have unique needs.

I mean, on another note, I know rural people who just have given up complaining about rural crime because it's hard to reach their MLAs and they don't see that as a possibility, and they take matters – it's just different. That's a broader level.

So that's it. If you guys have any questions, I'm happy to take them.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carpay. You are familiar with the saying: a picture is worth a thousand words. Have you prepared a draft map of what you just described, or has someone in your group done that and submitted it to us?

11:45

Mr. Carpay: Yeah. I could send you an e-mail right after with one.

The Chair: Okay. Please do it.

Mr. Carpay: I'll do that. I'll talk to Aaron. I would have had it; it was just . . .

The Chair: Okay. Please do it.

Mr. Carpay: You got it.

The Chair: Questions on this side?

Mr. Evans: No questions for me.

Mrs. Samson: No questions. Thank you for the presentation.

Mr. Carpay: You're welcome.

Dr. Martin: Your arguments are equally applicable with respect to north of the Yellowhead, adding that large parcel of the county to the riding Strathcona-Sherwood Park, as they are applicable to adding them to the mighty hamlet of Sherwood Park riding. Which would you prefer?

Mr. Carpay: Between – sorry – the hamlet and . . .

Dr. Martin: Well, you prefaced your remarks about the whole area up, including Josephburg, as appropriate, you reckon, to go into the Sherwood Park riding whereas it's equally applicable, it seems to me, on the same argument for adding them to the Strathcona county and Sherwood Park riding.

Mr. Carpay: I see. Okay. Yes, that's a good point. Well, I think there's something beautiful to be said about an urban riding like Sherwood Park just outside of Edmonton having a rural contingent. I mean, it makes for a good balance of interests. They're still a part of the same municipality. In terms of whether you could loop it into Strathcona-Sherwood Park, I mean, I'm not sure what a revision for that would look like. I know the current map adds a little bit of Beaumont into the eastern side, right?

I mean, what I'll have to do is I'll have to send you guys a nice, beautiful, clear image with the proposal, and I can even CC the many people north of highway 16 who want to be under Sherwood Park. I'm primarily here today because there are a lot of people who want to present and it's hard to come somewhere in person. It's a delight to. A good opportunity to practise public speaking, you know?

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carpay. Much appreciated.

Mr. Carpay: You're welcome.

The Chair: We have one more presenter this morning which we've tacked on, Sandra Houston. Good morning.

Ms Houston: Good morning.

The Chair: Have a seat.

Ms Houston: Thank you.

The Chair: Make yourself comfortable, and tell us where you're from and which riding you want to comment on.

Ms Houston: I am a resident of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I more want to comment on Edmonton as a whole. I'd like to start by thanking you for the work that you're doing and the work that you will continue to do. I know that this is a super challenging project, to try and get the balance and also to address all of the concerns that many people are bringing to you.

I am concerned, however, about the growth in the inner city. That's not to say that I am against growth. In fact, I am a big proponent of greater density, and I really don't like to see the big urban sprawl that is happening. But, you know, in my own neighbourhood across the street from me there was a tiny, little bungalow that was torn down and replaced by a couple of huge, skinny houses, both of which have room for two bedroom suites in the basement. Down the street from me another little cottagelike house was replaced by two skinny houses. An empty lot around the corner from us, where it had been vacant for years, now has a townhouse complex. A lot that had a small store on it has been replaced by an apartment building with several storeys, and they're not all filled just yet.

I think that the density is going to continue. The city, of course, has been encouraging density, and I know that that has resulted, certainly, in my neighbourhood, and I know some friends who live in these cottage – not these. What do they call them? Garden suites. More people are putting basement suites in their homes to help them to pay mortgages, and that is just going to continue as time goes on.

I understand that urban ridings will always have larger populations than rural ridings. I understand the need for some fairness in, as some of the other people have talked about, the driving distance for MLAs who represent rural ridings.

I also think there's a question of fairness to constituents. Constituencies in Edmonton: often the MLA offices are dealing with very complex issues and a lot of casework. I've spoken with a lot of constituency assistants, and I know that there is a lot more casework often in the inner city than there is in rural ridings. That is unfair to citizens when they cannot get the same level of service.

MLAs who represent inner-city ridings don't have a budget that allows them to hire more staff to serve the constituents who live in their constituencies and, of course, there are not more hours in the day for MLAs to be available and accessible to a greater number of constituents who need and want service and assistance.

In particular I'm concerned about the elimination or the proposed elimination of Edmonton-Riverview and splitting that between Edmonton-Glenora, Edmonton-West Henday, and Edmonton-McClung. All three of those constituencies are growing. There are new developments in each of those constituencies; there are infills, there are the garden suites, there are the basement suites. So those constituencies, I believe, will be out of whack in terms of the population that they hold.

I also think that Riverview is a community that, despite the fact that it's on two sides of the river, has a community of interest. It has the University of Alberta in there as well, which probably has some population that has not been captured by the census. It probably has a larger population than we have reported.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you. I hope that my thoughts and those of others will be taken into consideration.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms Houston.
Questions on your side?

Mr. Evans: Yeah. A couple of questions for you. You mentioned casework. I'm not exactly sure that I understand what you mean by that.

Ms Houston: People who have concerns or people who need assistance, need assistance accessing government programs, getting help with a whole variety of things. It's called casework by constituency assistants.

Mr. Evans: Then that bring me to my next question, more of a comment. It seems like what has been going on and has been consistent from all MLAs and people expressing their concerns about being able to do the work the MLA and the constituency office needs to do is really a staffing issue. For example, the casework is going to be, by and large, done by the staff, not the MLA. That's a consistent concern whether it's rural or urban, the staffing issues. It's nothing that we can actually deal with, but it seems that there's been a consistent conflating of the shortage of staff and the needs of staff, and we're transposing that on to: well, this is impacting effective representation by the MLA. I think it's important that we draw a distinction there.

Just one other comment. Over the last three years Edmonton has, by the city's own reporting, had a population increase of 140,000, just to put the growth into context.

11:55

Ms Houston: Yeah. I might add that, yes, you're absolutely correct about the staffing issue, but constituents also want to talk to their MLA. They also want appointments with their MLA, and there are only so many hours in the day, and MLAs have a myriad of responsibilities that they need to attend to, not just meeting their constituents. And, frankly, that's not often understood by constituents.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: No questions. But rest assured that we've heard a number of submissions that make exactly the same case.

I'm just doing a bit of work right now and looking into where some of that growth has happened within Edmonton, that Mr. Evans references. The growth has been substantial. One of our questions is – and I've said this to a number of folks, including outside of Edmonton and Calgary, in rural areas. It's not just a question of absolute growth. I think most places, not all but most places, in Alberta are growing in absolute terms. How are we growing in each area in relative terms to the overall? Alberta has grown 20 per cent in the last seven or eight years. So which areas have grown, and then to your point, which areas will grow into the future? We also, to a degree, to borrow a phrase from a great Edmontonian, skate to

where the puck is going to be to whatever degree we can. That's a little tricky to sort of tease out all of those different pieces, but just rest assured that all of that is in the conversation that we're having here.

Thank you so much.

Ms Houston: I mean, I might add that I looked at what you've done in the southeast of Edmonton, and I thought that was a brilliant way that you had created the new . . .

The Chair: Could you repeat that for the record again?

Mr. Clark: Yes, exactly. That's right.

Ms Houston: I looked at that very carefully because I've worked in that area and worked in the community there, and I thought that that was very forward thinking.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Houston, thanks very much. You made one reference to a term that I think just forces us to clarify our language, when you talked about the casework and you said that it was unfair to citizens. Okay. MLAs represent more than citizens, they represent more than voters, and we all . . .

Ms Houston: You're absolutely correct.

The Chair: And that's not a criticism. It's just to highlight to us to say: there's sloppy language in this whole business.

Ms Houston: Yeah. My apologies.

The Chair: No, no. That was not – it was a highlight. We tend to forget the categories and clarification, so I just highlighted that and thought: okay; in our report we've got to clarify our terminology a bit more because when there's ambiguous or unclear language, it's easy to criticize and it's easy to have arguments over things. So thank you for that.

Ms Houston: Yeah. If I'd heard somebody else say that, heard somebody else say citizens, I would have made the same criticism.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Good.

Ms Houston: So thank you for that. I appreciate you bringing that up. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will close our morning session and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:58 a.m.]

