



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission  
Public Hearings

Virtual

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1:27 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

**Electoral Boundaries Commission**

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## **Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Virtual**

### **Public Participants**

Bill Cocks, Councillor, City of Medicine Hat  
Devin Dreeshen, MLA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake  
Kevin Ferguson, Mayor, Town of Ponoka  
Kim Harris, Mayor, Town of Crossfield  
Kevin Henderson  
Helen Holder  
Sean Krausert, Mayor, Town of Canmore  
Penni Lougheed, Trustee, Wild Rose School Division  
Heather Spearman, Mayor, City of Airdrie  
Alison Van Dyke  
Justin Wright, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat



1:27 p.m.

Friday, January 16, 2026

[Justice Miller in the chair]

**The Chair:** Well, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to our final public hearing session for this week. This is our first week of the second round of public hearings for the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. As everyone is probably no doubt aware, we are an independent commission established by the Legislature of Alberta. The commission members are listed on the following slide, and you can check out our biographies on the website.

The task of the commission is to deal with two main issues; that is, the impact of expanding the Legislature of Alberta from 87 electoral divisions to 89. Of course, we all know that voters who reside inside an electoral division are the ones that choose the member of the Legislature. The current map provides for 87 members in the Legislature. Changes to the legislation over a year ago have brought in two more ridings, so it's 89 electoral divisions that we are dealing with and planning to apportion throughout the province. That's the one issue that we must deal with as a commission.

The second one is the vast increase in population that Alberta has experienced. Nine years ago was the last Electoral Boundaries Commission, headed up by Justice Bielby, and that commission dealt with a population of slightly over 4 million Albertans. Since that time the population has increased such that it is well over 4.88 million in population. So how we apportion those 89 ridings given the fact that the population has increased so significantly is our task.

Now to give you some perspective at the local level. The 2017 Bielby report, as I said, had just over 4 million people, and dividing that between 87 electoral divisions gave an average of 46,697 per electoral division. That is not the target for the commission. The target, rather, is the population range of below and above that average amount, so that population target gives us a range of 35,000 to just over 58,000. That was the 2017 commission.

This time around, as you can see, the formula is 4.88 million over 89 constituencies, that reveals an average population per electoral division of 54,929. Again, that's not the target for our commission. The target population range per electoral division is minus 25 per cent of that average to plus 25 per cent. As long as we're in that range, we meet the requirement of effective representation, and that's just over 41,000 to 68,000.

The task of this commission is not to apportion the ridings according to the formula of one person, one vote. We do not have a rep-by-pop principle in Canada or in Alberta, and we never have. No Canadian jurisdiction has ever had a strict one person, one vote formula. That is a U.S. concept, and they have adopted that and utilized that, but that is not a Canadian concept. The Canadian concept, rather, is effective representation, and it's based on several things. First of all, Canada's history, Supreme Court and appellate court jurisprudence, and legislation. So the marching orders for our commission are to come up with a map that provides effective representation for all Albertans given the fact that we have increased the ridings from 87 to 89 and we have a mass influx of new Albertans.

Our commission was appointed in early April, and since that time we've been busy doing several things that give rise to our sitting this week and next week. First of all, we met and we dealt with the issue of population. We came up with an agreed-upon population standard that is based on the last decennial census of 2021, a federal census, which is updated and corrected regularly by the Office of Statistics and Information of the Alberta Treasury Board. The rationale and the way we approach the population can be seen, I

believe, on pages 15 to 17 of our interim report if you want more background information on that.

Once we decided on basic ground rules such as population, we then started receiving public input and suggestions to our task leading up to our interim report. We reviewed all those submissions, and we then started, in late May, conducting public hearings throughout the province. We started in Pincher Creek, went as far up as Fort McMurray, went over to Grande Prairie, Peace River, and back down to Medicine Hat and Brooks and several days in between at Calgary and Edmonton. We heard from a broad cross-section of Albertans, and we had the privilege of being in many of the great communities that we're going to hear from today and next week.

After we completed those public hearings, we worked with Elections Alberta personnel who provided us with incredible assistance in terms of maps, population allocation, and all the technical tools that we needed to come up with a report. According to the legislated schedule we then issued our interim report, and on October 27 we provided the interim report to the Speaker of the Legislature, and he tabled it and provided each member of the Legislature with a copy almost immediately.

In completing our interim report, we considered the many factors in the legislation. I won't go through them, but you can review them if you so wish. You may already have. They're inside the introduction of our report. That's an interim report, and our goal not only in the interim but in the long-term, permanent report is to provide boundaries and electoral divisions that give Albertans effective representation and boundaries that are understandable and clear to the public.

1:35

After our interim report was tabled, we opened a portal on our website to receive public feedback to our report, and we heard public feedback. We have over 1,100 written submissions. I'm told it's one of the most responded-to reports of any legislative committee. We're pleased to know that the public has been engaged and very interested in what we had to say. We closed the portal for public input just before Christmas.

This week and next week we are dedicated to hearing further from members of the public specifically in response to our report. Our report contains several changes. Very few of the electoral divisions remain the same, and we're looking for input on specific changes and specific ridings that we've dealt with.

We as a commission have very few tools available to us in terms of what we can do to allocate boundaries. One is outside of our control, and that is the number of seats that we can use. We were just directed that we have two more seats, so we're limited to 89. We have to work with the legislated mandate of only two new seats. The second thing that we have at our disposal in order to meet the goal of effective representation is we can take ridings out of the rural areas and provide them into the more populous metropolitan cities, Calgary and Edmonton. The third option and the third tool that we have is to use hybrid ridings, and hybrid ridings are very simply those ridings that contain part rural areas and part urban areas. Alberta has had hybrid ridings for decades, and we are only now starting to – there has been some strong opposition to use of hybrids, but they are a valid legislated tool that we can use, and we have expanded their use in this report.

We look forward to feedback. We've got a fairly long list of presenters this afternoon, this Friday afternoon of a long week. I'm going to turn it over – I see our first presenter is present – to Mr. Sean Krausert. Please identify yourself and tell us what riding you are from and what riding you wish to comment on.

**Mr. Krausert:** Great. Thank you very much. I'm Mayor Sean Krausert of the town of Canmore. Therefore, I'm currently located in the Banff-Kananaskis riding, and I'm commenting on proposed electoral division 53, which has been called Banff-Jasper. I want to thank you for the opportunity to present today and thank you for that summary. You've definitely got a huge workload ahead of you and that you've already accomplished so far, and it's really important. It's the foundation of our electoral system, and I thank you for that work.

I want to speak today on two issues: one, support for the new boundaries, and two, concern with the described naming protocol not being followed in this case. First of all, turning to my support for the boundaries, I very much support the inclusion of Jasper along with Banff and Canmore and some of the foothills. Canmore is connected so very deeply with Banff and Jasper already. We meet together as councils. We meet together when we go to AB Munis socially. We have similar issues and similar contexts.

Canmore and Banff in particular are really two municipalities but one community in many ways. We work together on transit, seniors' lodging, waste management, wildfire mitigation, emergency preparedness, human-wildlife coexistence, and much, much more. This isn't just, you know, one admin contacting the other to see what they're up to. This is formal. Our Bow Valley Regional Transit Services Commission is the third-largest transit system per capita in the province. We just passed 3 million riders here in the Bow Valley. The Bow Valley Regional Housing, the Bow Valley Waste Management Commission: these are all formal things that we're connected to each other on, so it's such a good idea to have us connected as the three mountain communities.

I have heard that there is a suggestion that was presented from a mayoral colleague of mine in Sundre to include Sundre with Banff and Jasper and perhaps place Canmore elsewhere, perhaps with Crowsnest Pass. While I'm sure this is well intentioned, I suggest that it's impractical to separate Canmore from Banff and Jasper, and it's not a good idea to loop us in with the beautiful Crowsnest Pass as there is a very different sentiment there with respect to tourism. In fact, there is a sentiment that they don't want to be another Canmore, so I see a future MLA having a very difficult time reconciling either end of a riding that wants different things. So that's my support for the new boundaries.

My second issue is a concern with the proposed name. I recognize that the changing of names was done very sparingly for historical purposes, but where there is – am I being asked to tum something off here?

**The Chair :** Keep going.

**Mr. Krausert:** Okay.

Where there is a change, a new name is justified, and in this particular case, a change of name was suggested of Banff-Jasper as opposed to the old name, Banff-Kananaskis. Since there is a change of riding sufficient enough to change the name and a new name is proposed, I very much recommend following the naming protocol that you've described on page 39 of the draft report. Canmore is the largest municipality within this proposed new riding by far. It would contain about one third of the population, and Canmore is larger than Banff and Jasper combined. So I suggest a new name could be Canmore-Banff-Jasper, or some other combination with Canmore as the largest municipality in the name and positioned first.

With that I want to thank you for listening today in my support for the boundaries and my concern about the name, and I would be pleased to answer any questions as best as I can.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your succinct submission.

Mr. Evans, any questions or comments?

**Mr. Evans:** Yes.

Thank you for your submissions. I have a question about the formal municipal agreements that you referenced. Can you tell me what formal municipal agreements exist between the three parties, Jasper, Banff, and Canmore?

**Mr. Krausert:** We don't have a formal agreement between the three. Jasper, Banff, and Canmore have worked together on a lot of advocacy with regard to mountain communities and especially with the very unique circumstances that we face that, really, nobody else in the province does, being tourist destinations and tight footprints and a massive amount of tourism infrastructure that has to be funded on the backs of our ratepayers. So we've worked together in that regard.

The formal agreements are mostly with Banff and Canmore, as well as some of them including also the MD of Bighorn. We are the partners for the Bow Valley Regional Transit Services Commission. We are the partners for the Bow Valley Regional Housing. We are partners for Bow Valley Waste Management Commission.

**Mr. Evans:** This is all Banff and Canmore?

**Mr. Krausert:** Yeah. All Banff and Canmore.

**Mr. Evans:** That's what you're listing off right now?

**Mr. Krausert:** Yes. All Banff and Canmore, and many of them also include the municipal district of Bighorn. We sit on the human-wildlife coexistence round table. That is our body. We also are part of a Bow Valley Corridor Alliance with regard to mass transit. There are a number of others that are just evading me right now, but we try to take advantage of the fact that we have similar needs and we're in close proximity, so we do a lot together in order to create efficiencies for our communities.

**Mr. Evans:** Thank you.

1:45

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for your presentation. Most interesting. We heard a lot about the Banff-Jasper new riding, and we heard some comments, more than one, from West Yellowhead who want to keep Jasper out because they have such a close alliance, probably similar to what you have with Banff. Can you speak to that and just offer us your opinion?

**Mr. Krausert:** Well, I can certainly understand that because just as I think that it would be a real travesty to have Banff and Canmore in a different riding, I can understand if that is also the case with those in proximity to Jasper. Our connections with Jasper are more about similar context and past advocacy, but we don't have the formal arrangements like we do with Banff.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much, and I very much appreciate, Mr. Mayor, you joining us. It's always good to hear from elected officials in your communities who have a good, broad view of what's happening in your communities and then neighbouring as well.

I have a couple of quick questions. Picking up on your earlier statements, you talked about the connection of Canmore to Banff but also to Jasper. Whether it's sort of formal agreements or not, what sort of work do you do with Jasper?

**Mr. Krausert:** Well there's, you know, informal sharing of best practices. Our three CAOs meet, the mayors and I meet at regular intervals to share what's going on in our communities. Of course, we're all very popular Rocky Mountain destinations. We have very similar issues to deal with, so while those are more formal and much more extensive between Canmore and Banff, we do share a lot in common with Jasper.

You know, I like the idea of Jasper being part of the boundaries. I understand if they weren't, but I think that the real travesty was the suggestion that Canmore and Banff be in a different riding.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. That's great. Do you have similar relationships with Crowsnest? You referenced that it's sort of a different, you know, kind of feel, a different sort of place. Can you maybe just expand a little bit on your earlier comments?

**Mr. Krausert:** We have no contact whatsoever with Crowsnest. I have heard through provincial representation that there is a strong resistance to the developing of a tourism-based community in Crowsnest, and I can understand where that comes from. Certainly, within Canmore we've had such resistance in our past. The thing is that, you know, specifically, they don't want to be another Canmore, so I would just hate to be the MLA that represents Canmore and the community that doesn't want to be Canmore. You know? It's a tough position to be put in.

**Mr. Clark:** Who wouldn't want to be Canmore?

**Mr. Krausert:** That's what I said.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate it.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you, Mayor. I wanted to ask you about the linkages with Kananaskis country. I mean, immediately surrounding you and certainly south of you: wow, eight or nine provincial parks and wilderness parks. I take it that in your community, the tourism industry at the very minimum faces into Kananaskis country heavily as well as into the national park. I wonder if you could describe the management of relationships with the provincial park organizations?

**Mr. Krausert:** Yeah. Absolutely. We have good relationships in all of those areas that you just described. From a tourism perspective we share a destination management organization, Tourism Canmore Kananaskis, and they represent Canmore and Kananaskis, with about 80 per cent of the tourism spend being in Canmore and 20 per cent being in Kananaskis. Now, that's not visitation; that's visitor spend. Obviously, Kananaskis gets a lot of day trippers and hikers and whatnot.

We sit together on a Bow Valley leaders' caucus with the KID group. Now, they're a little bit of a different animal than us. This is the Kananaskis improvement district. They only control a portion of their operations. A lot of it is directly from the province. But we also work well with Alberta Parks and the national parks. We sit together on the human-wildlife coexistence round-table, that aims to ensure that we have good connectivity of wildlife rates throughout the Bow Valley. Obviously, you know, with Kananaskis, the Nordic Centre is in Kananaskis Country, and that is a huge element of life in Canmore as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mayor Krausert. If I could maybe wade in a little bit, when the idea first came before us of one electoral division, I was quite enamored with it and maybe for – it's almost like the English Lake District. Why would you want to break up the English Lake District? I mean, it's got a bit of romanticism to it and beautiful symmetry. However, we've received some pretty

significant push-back for the idea of the one electoral division. I can think of an earlier presentation today and one about two or three days ago in Calgary, and these were from individuals who are intimately involved with the national parks. For example, the one a few days ago expressed the need to have strong provincial interface with whoever is representing the federal parks. Your presentation really has solidified the Kananaskis, Banff, and Canmore connection. But is it fair to say that you could take it or leave it whether Jasper is in the riding? Then I have a follow-up question.

**Mr. Krausert:** Pretty close. Fair to say that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Krausert:** I'd rather go with the status quo in that regard, of them remaining separate, although I am supportive of them being together. I don't want to misrepresent that.

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Mr. Krausert:** But the big thing is that I really truly believe Banff and Canmore have to stay connected.

**The Chair:** Oh, yes. Yeah. Okay.

Now, let me take you to what we heard this morning.

**Mr. Krausert:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Well, I haven't driven through Hinton – well, I guess we did on our tour. But, you know, 30 years ago I used to drive through Hinton a lot, and predominantly now it's always been Canmore or Banff. I used to live in Canmore. I had a place in Canmore for a few years. There was a presenter this morning that indicated that Hinton was aspiring to be like Canmore. In other words, Hinton should be Jasper's version of Canmore. I have to say that, you know, maybe that's where Canmore was 60 years ago or 50 years ago. There's some merit to that. The push-back that we've received has not been just idealistic or romantic; it's been discussing a real connection going east from the national parks.

**Mr. Krausert:** Yeah, and I expect that that connection has only gotten stronger since the tragedy that struck Jasper, especially since Hinton served such a huge role in providing housing for a lot of employees and a base for operations. I can totally see that, and I think that would be something that you should really take into account.

**The Chair:** Okay. Not to stretch the analogy of siblings, but you would be viewed as Hinton's big sister.

**Mr. Krausert:** There you go. Well, I've always liked the people of Hinton. If they want to be like Canmore, it just endears them to me even more.

1:55

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, thank you so much for presenting. Like I believe one of my colleagues said, we always value municipal leaders who step up to the plate and give us their perspective.

**Mr. Krausert:** Thank you very much for listening. I do want to underscore that while I dealt with it second, actually, my primary thing is about the naming. I want to make sure that that's been heard and that you'll give that some consideration.

**The Chair:** Yes. Okay. Thank you so much, and please remain to hear the other presenters. It's always instructive for presenters to hear each other's comments. If you're able, please remain.

**Mr. Krausert:** I will stay for a while. I'll just turn off my camera and mic. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That now takes us to our second presenter, Mr. Bill Cocks. Please turn on your mic and tell us what ridings you wish to comment on, Mr. Cocks.

**Mr. Cocks:** Thank you, Justice Miller. I am a city councillor for the city of Medicine Hat, and I make these representations on behalf of city council. I've consulted with my colleagues on council, given them a summary of the things that I discussed with the mayor that we wanted to bring up in this representation, and I'm actually joined this afternoon by two of my fellow councillors. Councillor Dan Reynish and Councillor Brian Varga are here with me.

We are of course representing the city of Medicine Hat. The two current ridings are Brooks-Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat, which you propose basically to leave in their current configuration but change the name so that Medicine Hat comes first in the naming. They will both be Medicine Hat ridings with one Medicine Hat-Brooks, one Medicine Hat-Cypress. I make these submissions on our behalf to urge you to consider creating one main riding that would represent the urban population of Medicine Hat.

Our feeling is that sort of the north side and the south side of the river have more in common with each other and deserve an MLA who represents the urban core of the city of Medicine Hat as opposed to dividing the city almost in two and creating two hybrid ridings, as you called them earlier, rural-urban ridings with Cypress and Medicine Hat. We would like to see that originally – well, I don't know about originally. Before the current iteration Medicine Hat was its own riding, and Cypress-Medicine Hat was a riding that was comprised mostly of the county of Cypress and the southern portion of the city of Medicine Hat with the boundary more or less running along Carry Drive. I'm not quite sure where it deviated there, but basically there was a section of the city in the southeast that went with the rural riding of Cypress, and the rest of Medicine Hat was a significantly urban-centred riding. We would like to see a return to that.

I make a couple of points here. One, I think we have more in common with Cypress than we do with Brooks. Cypress is, of course, the riding in the far southeast corner of the province. That is our service area. That is an area that aligns with our recreational and business and economic development interests. Brooks is, of course, a city of its own, and to combine two cities in one riding I think is perhaps creating a divided loyalties scenario, the possibility for that.

Medicine Hat is probably the oldest urban centre in the province. Settlement and colonization, if you will, reached Medicine Hat before it reached Calgary certainly in a significant way. We've been a city since about 1912, I believe. We were incorporated as a municipality shortly after the province was created in 1905. We're an old city. We have a strong urban identity, and I think that history and our sense of unity as an urban centre serving the southeast corner of Alberta augur in favour of creating such a riding.

I note that the purposes of the municipality are outlined in section 3 of the Municipal Government Act. They include a number of points. One of them is to provide for "economic development of the municipality." Another is to "provide services, facilities or other things that . . . are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality." We believe these urban issues deserve to be presented fairly and effectively by a single MLA whose responsibility is primarily to the city of Medicine Hat, which he or she represents.

It would not be deemed appropriate, I think, although there may be arguments that will be made, for significant portions of Calgary or Edmonton to be divided out of the city and included with significant rural populations. I think Medicine Hat deserves the same respect for its urban identity. The interests of Medicine Hat south of the river and Medicine Hat north of the river have much more in common with each other than they do with the rural components of either riding.

There is, of course, the numerical balance and equitable representation, and that is a major consideration which must be borne in mind by this commission, but my argument would be that while the numbers need to remain relatively equal from riding to riding, the alignment of interest, the alignment of the population, the coalition of interests between urban and rural is a more important distinguishing factor than creating the numbers that would be more or less equal.

I think those are my basic points. I'm certainly prepared to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, actually, your presentation is timely because we had one if not two presentations this morning on Medicine Hat or a couple yesterday. We had three or four in the last day or so.

I'm going to open it up for the commission to ask questions. Mr. Clark, any questions of this presenter?

**Mr. Clark:** Yeah. Thank you.

You know, quantity is not always the only indicator of what we should be taking into account, but I just think it's noteworthy that I think we've had, between the written and verbal submissions, so far perhaps two or three in support of the current configuration in the first round and, I would say, maybe two or three in the second round between written and verbal submissions so far in support of the way Medicine Hat has been drawn and substantially more than that in opposition to that. That's just an interesting point.

I'll also say the same thing to you as I said to Mayor Krausert. We really appreciate when municipal officials come and tell us the lay of the land in their community, so I want to say thank you for that as well.

You referenced the Municipal Government Act in your presentation. Would you mind reiterating that and just expanding a bit on, you know, the role of municipalities and how you feel that bears on our decision?

**Mr. Cocks:** Well, certainly, when I was reviewing the direction I wanted to take with my submissions, I consulted the Municipal Government Act.

There are a number of items, subsections in section 3 of the Municipal Government Act. I think to promote the economic development of the municipality, there's not much to link Medicine Hat and Brooks, for instance, in terms of economic development. We're 100 kilometres apart. We have very different strengths, different weaknesses, and we've got our own interests there, which I think deserve to be appropriately represented, and I think having an MLA who can speak for the urban centre of Medicine Hat, the city of Medicine Hat, does create some strength there for economic development.

**2:05**

I think, too, that the services that we provide as a city, while they're similar to what needs to be provided in a rural setting, are provided for in very different ways. We have a long history here in Medicine Hat of owning all of our own city utilities, so not just, you know, the sanitary utilities but also our own gas and electric, so we

think that that's a significant consideration that sets us apart from Brooks and from our rural neighbours.

Then, certainly, the other kinds of things that a city is called upon to provide – in terms of recreational opportunity, we have Medicine Hat College here, which we try to work closely with and keep in touch with so that our interests and our advocacy on behalf of one another can proceed jointly. I think those are the things that I would consider. I don't have the Municipal Government Act right in front of me at this point, but I would commend perhaps your reviewing the terms of section 3.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

**Mr. Evans:** Good afternoon, Mr. Cocks. I happen to have the Municipal Government Act in front of me. Surprise, surprise. I don't know that it really helps your argument given that it outlines the responsibilities of the municipality and doesn't deal with what the MLA would do. Section 3: yeah, I'm not sure I understand. Section 3 says

The purposes of a municipality are

- (a) to provide good government,
- (a.1) to foster the well-being of the environment,
- (a.2) to foster the economic development of the municipality,
- (b) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality,
- (c) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities, and
- (d) to work collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities to plan, deliver and fund intermunicipal services.

That doesn't really tie in at all with what the MLA does. These are responsibilities that attach to the city council of Medicine Hat and to the municipalities that surround Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Cocks:** If I may, I would challenge that in this regard. An MLA that represents Medicine Hat needs to be able to advocate for the things that the city of Medicine Hat is advocating for. For instance, in safety, with one of the last references you made there: we have our own city police service whereas the rural area is represented by the RCMP. I think that our alignment of our MLA with our city council with regard to policing in Medicine Hat would be something that – there could be interests of the city that the MLA could advance on our behalf. That's but one example that I'm coming up with as I'm addressing your point.

**Mr. Evans:** Are you suggesting that currently the city of Medicine Hat hasn't been represented well by two MLAs and that it would somehow be better represented by one MLA, so you have one voice instead of two?

**Mr. Cocks:** No. I think either way part of Medicine Hat is going to be represented in a hybrid writing, but my argument would be that two ridings that are hybrid dilutes the urban component of what an MLA for Medicine Hat should be bearing in mind.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Two lawyers arguing about legislation is not unheard of in my world.

Mrs. Samson.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for your submission today. For my benefit, because I don't live in Medicine Hat and know it that well: with our interim report we showed the division of the city with the South Saskatchewan River. Would it still be appropriate

to consider that if we looked at one urban and one southern hybrid?

**Mr. Cocks:** I think it would become difficult to create, say, a mainly urban riding. The bulk of the population would be south of the river.

**Mrs. Samson:** Oh, I see. I got it backwards.

**Mr. Cocks:** I don't think that that would align. The boundary actually goes up 3rd Street or Gershaw Drive, at least to a certain extent, from the city centre, and that's what becomes highway 3. So anything to the north of 3rd Street, basically 3rd Street southeast-southwest, is in Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mrs. Samson:** Right.

**Mr. Cocks:** What we're suggesting is a return to the Carry Drive alignment that would take a portion of the south side of the city, place it in a hybrid riding with Cypress. Medicine Hat proper: the downtown core, the most significant part of the populated part of the city on both sides of the river, would be the urban riding of Medicine Hat. Brooks would entail the city of Brooks and obviously some rural components as well.

**Mr. Evans:** Mr. Cocks, what's your proposal for Redcliff?

**Mr. Cocks:** I think Redcliff and Medicine Hat are quite aligned. Now, numbers-wise, I don't know just what that might do to it, but I would argue for the inclusion of Redcliff with the city of Medicine Hat. We supply the utilities. At one point we supplied their policing. They're now RCMP policed. We're contiguous. Redcliff I don't think wants to be part of Medicine Hat, and we're quite happy to have them remain their own municipality, but someday there may be a pressure to join those two. Our interests in terms of economic development and identity are very closely linked.

**Mr. Evans:** You have the Carry Drive boundary. Are you including Redcliff in that?

**Mr. Cocks:** That's to the northwest of Medicine Hat, so I would be including Redcliff with the city of Medicine Hat. Otherwise, if you needed to balance the numbers, it could be aligned with Brooks, but I don't think they'd be that pleased about that either. They would certainly recognize Medicine Hat as a core part of their identity, even if they love their own small-town way of life and their own history and so forth. I think they feel quite conjoined with the city in many ways.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.  
Anything else, Susan?

**Mrs. Samson:** No. I'm good. Thank you.

**The Chair:** No questions from Dr. Martin.

Mr. Cocks, there are several – well, first of all, I want to be sure everyone's aware that this configuration of Medicine Hat-Brooks and Medicine Hat-Cypress was not this electoral boundary commission's idea.

**Mr. Cocks:** I certainly appreciate that, and I'm aware of that, but nonetheless that's the position. As I say, this is something that I've consulted my city council on and unanimously received support for the idea of creating one significant urban riding out of Medicine Hat that would represent first and foremost the city.

2:15

**The Chair:** Yeah. But there are cascading issues whenever we make these decisions. I can imagine how the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission arrived at this configuration.

Having some experience, you know – you didn't mention it, but others have mentioned Medicine Hat being the forgotten corner. I suspect that they left that corner last, but I'm not sure, and then they just kind of shoehorned this arrangement in. We've had kind of three-part or three-layer submissions on Medicine Hat from someone yesterday, and they said: at the very least – at the very least – make the river the boundary between the two. I know we looked at it, and we have to go back as to why we didn't, but would you be content with at least a minor change making the river consistently the boundary to overcome confusion in that area that you've identified?

**Mr. Cocks:** It might be preferable. The river is a natural dividing line but only geographically. It is not a natural dividing line when it comes to economic development, when it comes to the provision of services to this area, and when it comes to identity as a community.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, thank you very much and thanks for bringing that perspective of the city leaders.

**Mr. Cocks:** I'm wondering, if I might. I did not get a written submission file primarily because I wanted to consult with council. We reserved the time to speak to you, but I didn't have time to get an endorsed submission in writing ready to present. I'm wondering if you would be open to accepting a summary of the points I've made this afternoon in written form.

**The Chair:** Certainly. If you can get that to us by – we've got it in *Hansard* now, but as soon as you can get it to us, make sure it goes to Mr. Aaron Roth, and it'll be distributed. That would be helpful.

But I hope you appreciate, and we often tell people this, that every decision has cascading effects. We've got a Brooks problem then, which leads to a Drumheller problem, which leads to another problem. It's not as easy as taking a marker out and redrawing the lines. But it's very helpful to know this. Like I said, we've had other submissions from Medicine Hatters, some very similar, some endorsing the current status quo. Please submit something in writing, and we will review it.

**Mr. Cocks:** Thank you very much. I do appreciate the difficulty of your work, and I appreciate the objective manner in which you're conducting these proceedings and making your recommendations to the Legislature.

**The Chair:** Please remain in the meeting if you can to hear other presenters.

After Mr. Cocks is Megan Stewart, our next presenter.

**Ms Spearman:** Good afternoon. Hello, everybody. This is Megan Stewart's camera, but I'm actually Mayor Heather Spearman from the city of Airdrie. It is my pleasure to be here today. Happy Friday to all of you. With me today, like we said, is Megan Stewart and our intergovernmental liaison, Leona Esau. We're simply here to ...

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Could you identify yourself again? I missed your name.

**Ms Spearman:** Yeah. My pleasure. It's Heather Spearman, mayor of Airdrie.

**The Chair:** Oh, okay. Great. Thank you.

**Ms Spearman:** Of course.

We're here today to just let you know that we are very supportive of the proposed ridings in the report. We do recognize all of the very hard work you've been doing in order to pull this off, with lots of opinions, of course, so thank you very much for doing this.

I think it's no secret that Airdrie is experiencing astonishing growth, and the commission has truly recognized that, so we very much appreciate it. We do feel like this representation of the Airdrie area within the two ridings, which are Airdrie-East and Airdrie-West, simply is the right choice for right now in terms of our growth because you have essentially looked to have a goal of 54,929 population per riding. We are thrilled that this reflects what is happening in Airdrie. Essentially, with our growth, we're adding a town of Crossfield every year, and even with the market softening, that doesn't seem to be projected to be going away for Airdrie. We are just simply a hot spot for growth. We have a very affordable living realm here, so we anticipate this to continue, and we'll talk about those numbers in just a moment.

We do feel like the Airdrie representation is technically underrepresented today as it stands, but with these amendments to the areas for our ridings we're confident that this will reflect in 2027 exactly where our growth is projected to go and that it will create fair and equal representation, which leads me to my next point. We believe that the choice of the commission for these ridings truly does represent voter parity for us, ensures that every single vote across the province has the opportunity to have equal and effective representation. That's certainly true for Airdrie.

If you pop to our second and final slide, I just want to talk a little bit about the actual population that we're seeing here in Airdrie and what our projected growth tends to look like. Today the city of Airdrie population – and just for your information, we do a census every single year to ensure that we are staying up on our growth. As of today we're actually a bit over 90,000 in terms of population. By 2027 we expect the city of Airdrie to get 98,490. When we're looking at Airdrie-West today, as that represented riding stands, we're looking at about 48,145, and Airdrie-East is reflecting 53,952 people. Of course, this is reflecting the areas around us.

If we look forward to the blue numbers on the page there, you can see that the city of Airdrie's population, as I mentioned, is going to be well over 98,000. For Airdrie-West that means a projected population just in Airdrie of 52,214. On the Airdrie-East side of things we're looking at 54,450, and that is only reflecting the growth within the city of Airdrie limits. That is not reflecting the growth that is projected for Crossfield, Irricana, some of those smaller villages, or any of the rurals in that area. Just want to share those volumes with you because I think it's important to recognize that.

We can't confidently project the growth for 2035 for the broader area, but for Airdrie we expect to be at over 141,000 residents within the city of Airdrie boundaries by 2035, which, as you know, is likely going to be the next time for a review of these electoral boundaries. That being said, because we add roughly 5,000 people per year to the city of Airdrie, we do feel like this current riding layout that reflects Airdrie's population is going to be very effective for us in terms of a very equal representation. While currently Airdrie-West may start a little bit below the provincial average, we are confident that by the time we hit, we will be right in the sweet spot, if you will, and certainly by 2035 we will be well beyond it.

We do feel like this is forward-thinking design. We do feel that everything you've considered here is an exact reflection of the projected growth for Airdrie. It does ensure that there is equal representation, that there is sufficient room for growth in terms of

even the rural capacity around us. We know that Crossfield is also a going concern in terms of their growth projection as well. Even though we don't have the data to reflect that, we are seeing a lot of the developers moving towards Crossfield and north from there.

That's really it in a nutshell. Grateful for your time, grateful for your consideration. Airdrie is the fastest-growing city in Alberta, so this is a great layout for us, and we're very appreciative of everything that you've done for that. We are open to taking any questions or clarifications from you.

2:25

**The Chair:** Well, thank very much, Mayor Spearman. Much appreciated.

Dr. Martin, any questions?

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

Mayor Spearman, I just want to congratulate you and commiserate on the burdens of having such a fast-growing city. I want to say as well that in your first round of presentation your colleagues made a splendid presentation. It was right on the mark on all its points. I think you've got a strong team to help manage the growth that is tumbling in at you all the time.

**Ms Spearman:** I agree. We have excellent staff here.

**Dr. Martin:** I wanted merely to ask about the rural components of the current interim configurations. Do you feel that they are sort of truly rural, or are they suburban?

**Ms Spearman:** I mean, I'll speculate. I'll say that as sweetly as possible. It is Friday, after all. There are truly rural aspects to the surrounding communities around Airdrie. Anecdotally, there is a lot of farming. There's a lot of ranching. Even when you are on the city limits of Airdrie, you're seeing livestock. We truly are surrounded by an agricultural and rural landscape, and that extends in every direction save for maybe southbound. That's where Balzac and the broader Rocky View county are growing, so that's a little bit different. Then, of course, just south of that is a very, very different demographic within the northern boundaries of Calgary and really not representative of what our interests and growth challenges are.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for your presentation, and thank you for liking both electoral districts. It makes our job a little bit easier. Thank you.

**Ms Spearman:** I'm sure.

**The Chair:** Mr. Evans, any questions or comments?

**Mr. Evans:** No, but thank you very much for your submissions. Appreciate them.

**Mr. Clark:** I can vouch first-hand for Airdrie city staff, so congratulations and, yes, thank you for the kind words. You know, in all seriousness we really appreciate hearing from elected officials generally, and we especially like when potential solutions are provided for us. Your initial submission of providing multiple options was incredibly helpful as we worked to draw the boundaries. So just a thank you to you, Mayor, and to your staff in particular for putting this submission together.

**Ms Spearman:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mayor Spearman and staff. I just have a couple of clarification questions. Partly it's poor

eyesight. I couldn't see the actual, according to your numbers, current population of Airdrie, of this entire city.

**Ms Spearman:** Yeah. Thank you for asking. We would have seen the census done in March of 2025, and at that time our population was a reflection of 90,040 people. But as previously mentioned, we see about 5,000 folks added to our population each year. That would have been the first three months of 2025, so you can imagine we've probably added about 3,500 people since then.

**The Chair:** Okay, then in 10 years you expect over 141,000. That's the other figure I was looking for.

**Ms Spearman:** Yes. That is correct. Yeah, and those are conservative numbers.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay. Good. Thank you very much. I'll excuse you now, but please remain in the virtual room if you wish to hear other presenters.

**Ms Spearman:** Thank you very much for your time, everybody. It's been a pleasure. Best wishes with this whole process.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Okay. Our next presenter is Alison Van Dyke.

**Ms Van Dyke:** Yes. Thank you. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to speak. I'm going to read into the record the letter that I submitted. It's very brief. Then I'm happy to answer questions and expand on any of the information included in that letter.

Okay. I grew up just over the line from Cypress county on a farm north of Whittle, in the county of Forty Mile, but have spent all but eight years of my adult life in the city of Medicine Hat. I had the privilege of spending the last four years of that time, from 2021 to 2025, as a Medicine Hat city councillor. I am keenly aware of the concerns of the city's urban residents while still having a contemporary understanding of rural issues. My parents and brothers still live and work on the family farm, which received the Alberta century farm and ranch award in 2009.

The city of Medicine Hat shares regional concerns with the surrounding area. However, the issues facing rural and urban constituents are not the same. Representing both effectively requires a breadth of knowledge and ongoing compromise by an urban and rural MLA, which can dilute the impact of their advocacy within caucus and in the Legislature. While strong provincial services benefit both rural and urban residents, the delivery of those services can vary wildly between the two environments and can look significantly different in rural and urban settings.

Given the complexity and uniqueness of the city of Medicine Hat, it is a disservice to constituents to have the attention of their MLA divided between often disparate urban and rural concerns, particularly if the best interests of one are in opposition to or come at the expense of the other. Medicine Hat deserves the same level of focus from its elected MLAs as other mid-size cities receive and the courtesy of at least one fully urban riding, as is afforded to other mid-size cities such as Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and St. Albert, communities frequently used as comparators in decision-making and service provision.

I'm happy to elaborate on any of those points or answer any questions. I would like to say that while the overarching themes are consistent between urban and rural residents, the issues and their solutions can be quite different. Some examples of this might be, like, public health care, public education, safety, and water issues, but under those things the concerns are significantly different. For example, in the country issues around water are irrigation

expansion and sufficient water for livestock, whereas in the city the concerns might be around industrial use and water quality.

In educational settings I know that some of the issues facing my family are: how long are their kids, little children, going to be riding on the bus, and are their rural schools going to have the same opportunities afforded to the students as in an urban setting? Whereas in an urban setting we're seeing crowded classrooms and other issues that are completely different than what they're having in rural school settings.

In public health care, for example, towns like Bow Island are not even able to have their emergency rooms open and doctor access at times, and, of course, if you asked an urban resident if it would be to their benefit to close a rural health centre and move all of those resources to the urban setting, they will say yes, but that is not in the best interests of rural residents.

So while I speak actually as an urban resident on behalf of other urban residents, from a rural perspective I think it's also to the detriment of those constituents as well.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Ms Van Dyke. We are happy to engage in conversation.

Mr. Clark, any questions or conversation with this presenter?

**Mr. Clark:** Maybe you could just tell me a little bit about your time as a councillor and, you know, what some of those issues are. Presumably you would work with other councillors from the surrounding municipalities and counties. Maybe in just a very brief minute or so: what were the differences in the issues you dealt with as an urban councillor versus what you saw your colleagues dealing with in rural areas?

**Ms Van Dyke:** Well, the city of Medicine Hat is very unique in how it operates as well. The city runs a lot of business units that other municipalities don't, so there's a significant learning curve and a requirement of knowing extensive information about a lot of areas that wouldn't occur in a rural setting, in rural municipalities. Just that level of focus is slightly different. Like, the example I gave, irrigation, I think is a good one. Residents in the city don't think about water in the same way, I guess. From a leadership perspective the concerns are around having adequate water for economic growth, so bringing in industry, whereas in a rural setting a lot of the focus on water is on irrigation, like I said, and then drought-related issues. There's a more significant agricultural focus in rural areas than there would be in the city of Medicine Hat even though we are based in an agricultural kind of area.

2:35

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Evans, any questions?

**Mr. Evans:** No. No questions.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Samson.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for your presentation, but I don't have any questions.

**Ms Van Dyke:** Thank you. I just want to apologize. My Internet is not great, so my video wasn't on because I was scared of losing you in the middle of presenting.

**The Chair:** Dr. Martin.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

Thank you for being here today. We've heard quite a few presenters on several issues relating to Medicine Hat, and I wanted to press you on a relatively small matter, but that's where the boundary might lie between the two electoral districts. There's some sentimental and psychological value of having it just uniformly at the river. What do you say to that opinion?

**Ms Van Dyke:** I did catch a little bit of Bill Cocks' presentation when he was near the end there, and I think it's a natural boundary, like he has mentioned, but because service delivery – like, we don't have two hospitals. We don't have really clear services on both sides of the river, so I don't know that you could just say that that's the urban division of the city.

I'm not sure what the answer is. I think it would be less complicated for constituents. I think right now people are often very confused about which constituency they're in because it doesn't follow a natural boundary. It veers off. Even within a single neighbourhood it divides a neighbourhood. I think there does need to be a more natural boundary if there is one, but I strongly believe that there needs to be at least one solely urban riding.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm not sure if you were in the morning session, but we had a similar presentation from Mr. Wanner. The conundrum we have is that the city itself, the urban population is just outside our target population, so it's too big for one and too small for two. That's why I presume the previous Electoral Boundaries Commission came up with this configuration. I want to be clear that that was not our idea. Are you suggesting we revert to the boundaries that were in place prior to 2017?

**Ms Van Dyke:** I'm not clear on all of the numbers. I'm not a statistician or a geographical whoever that does all this stuff. I'm not, and I don't have a clear solution for you. I haven't looked at that. I'm here just, like, representing what my experience has been as a person who grew up in a rural area, lives in the city, has represented the people in the city. I think to me there are a few things that don't make sense to me at all in the current boundaries, and I'm not sure if the answer is to go back to the way it was before. I'm not sure what percentage – I don't know if you have that in front of you – the population would be over the recommended amount if you went back to the previous boundaries. I don't know if anyone knows that.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Well, it's a bit complicated because Brooks is now in this situation and, you know, we didn't put it there.

**Ms Van Dyke:** Right.

**The Chair:** My understanding is that Medicine Hat's population right now is right around 68,000 to 69,000. The upper limit for us for one riding is 68,000, but then that doesn't solve the problem for us because we've got all the surrounding area.

Anyways, I appreciate your comments. It's not unlike several other presenters from Medicine Hat, but we had a desperate plea from someone presenting from Edmonton saying: at the very least use the river as the boundary because it doesn't make sense. So we'll look at that. For sure we'll look at that.

**Ms Van Dyke:** Thank you. Yeah. I think it is very confusing to people.

One thing that I would say is that the boundaries, the way they currently are, definitely don't align with my life experience of kind of like natural catchment areas for this area. If it was following that,

Bow Island would be part of one of these ridings and not Bassano. It doesn't adhere to our regional health care system, our regional economic development programs, our watersheds, our irrigation systems, any of those things.

**The Chair:** Refresh my memory: is Bow Island in county of Forty Mile or Cypress?

**Ms Van Dyke:** It's in the county of Forty Mile.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay. That's why it's not in there, then.

Thank you very much, Ms Van Dyck. Much appreciated. Please remain because there is going to be another Medicine Hat presenter coming up later this afternoon.

**Ms Van Dyke:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Our next presenter is Devin Dreeshen.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, commissioners. Can you hear and see me?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Great. Well, thank you very much. I'm not sure if there have been many MLAs that have presented to you yet, but I have the great honour and privilege of serving as the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Since this whole process I've had many constituents writing in and calling in to my office wanting to participate. Obviously, the gravity of the work that you guys are doing is well recognized across the province. I just want to thank all commissioners for your hard work to date.

I would say that there are some concerns that I've been hearing from a central Alberta standpoint. I guess the first issue is the loss of a rural MLA in central Alberta; that is very concerning to not just municipal elected leaders but to constituents as well. There seems to be a trend of one less rural MLA in northern Alberta and then one less rural MLA in southern Alberta.

Just a little plug for rural MLAs, that I hope isn't lost in this kind of race to 55,000 people or squares for 89 different MLAs or constituencies across the province. A rural MLA is a lot different than an Edmonton, Calgary urban MLA. You will have one MLA – for my example, I have seven mayors that I have to engage with. I have 40 councillors that I have to engage with. I have hundreds of kilometres of provincial road networks that have to be maintained and countless calls from constituents that drive on those provincial road networks, to make sure that the roads are clear and they can get to work safely from where they live. So a rural MLA has a lot of engagement with municipalities and people that live out in rural Alberta.

Conversely, compare that to an Edmonton MLA: well, they all share one mayor. You would have 30 or 40 MLAs sharing just one mayor, not multiple, and also it's the opposite when it comes to a city councillor where they would, again, share one city councillor with four or five MLAs in a larger urban setting. Also, you could have an Edmontonian that within a 15-minute radius of where they live would not actually use any provincial assets, wouldn't go to a provincial park, wouldn't go to provincial Crown land, wouldn't go on a provincial road at all in their daily life.

The importance of having rural MLAs in the Legislature just due to their basic daily life is very important so that there's great engagement of an MLA with people that actually use provincial assets and use things that are in the provincial purview on a daily basis. Obviously, there's education, there's health care, but for

regular folks that maybe don't have any kids or they're not in the hospital setting, it's daily life to use provincial road networks.

Obviously, the changes that I'd like to see from the proposed Sylvan Lake-Innisfail constituency – and it has been reiterated by a lot of municipal leaders and mayors and councillors that have already submitted applications or suggestions to really prioritize economic corridors or highways. Obviously, highway 2 running up and down the riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake or Sylvan Lake-Innisfail: the communities along there, not just the history of being CP towns, that had to have a certain amount of distance so that the steam trains could be able to operate, but how they've been developed over the years and the types of people that live there are very similar when it comes to Red Deer being that hub. You have communities like Blackfalds, which are very similar to Penhold and Innisfail, that – you know, Blackfalds and Innisfail have lots of industrial. There are lots of oil and gas businesses that are in and around those communities, and it's also a bedroom community to Red Deer.

2:45

The proposal that I would have is that the Innisfail riding, essentially, would include Blackfalds and Innisfail and Penhold of that highway 2 corridor. Obviously, 54,000 is the target. Where I think you can make up that population gain is with a swap, with Blackfalds for Sylvan Lake. Then, obviously, to the north from Lacombe, it could be able to gain that population going into Sylvan Lake. It does actually have a nice highway 20 connection of Gull Lake, Sylvan Lake. Sylvan Lake would then be under one MLA instead of three MLAs, and you would have a much better connection with that lake country in the northwestern part of the province. And, obviously, whether it's ranchers or forestry workers that are in that Eckville, Caroline area going out to Rocky Mountain House, they're much better connected to that Sylvan Lake area versus, say, the highway 2 corridor. It's not just that it rains more there, but it does have more connections with communities that grew up and built along highway 2.

Then looking farther east, the Red Deer River to Drumheller-Stettler, obviously the population concerns that Drumheller-Stettler has of just being a large land mass but not having a lot of population: it's hard to expand any farther east beyond the river. On highway 21, again, a north-south highway: Delburne, Elnora, Huxley, Trochu. That's on the CN line. The CP line obviously going along highway 2. The CN line going along highway 21. Very similar story of those towns and communities having spaced out over a certain area so that the trains could operate, as well as just the local communities working together, whether it's through seniors facilities or just the agricultural nature of having grain elevators along that corridor, and that large catchment area being very similar.

Those would be my – I hear the buzzer – amendments to the proposed Sylvan Lake-Innisfail riding. Very happy to field any questions from you, commissioners. Thank you again for your time.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you. Sorry. I was slightly distracted when you were making your first point about adding Blackfalds into your riding. Were there any other communities to be added, from your perspective, before we get to the eastern boundary?

**Mr. Dreeshen:** I would say a switch from Blackfalds to Sylvan Lake. Again, you get that highway 2 corridor for Blackfalds, but the population that would go to Sylvan would go farther north and then into Kneehill county, into that Trochu area down south. Are we hitting 54,000? I think we're still maybe a little shy, but there are some areas along the city of Red Deer, Westerner Park for example,

that are near Gasoline Alley in the development in the south side of Red Deer. There could be some population gained there by the Westerner Park, which is a large ag society that is probably better represented by a rural MLA.

**The Chair:** Okay. But only as far south as Trochu, not Three Hills?

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Correct. I think that just the population numbers – you had mentioned before, the cascading effects. I think that makes that old riding that much harder to get population as well when you get into that southeastern part of the province.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I just needed that for clarification.

Mr. Evans, any questions?

**Mr. Evans:** In terms of the addition of a portion of south Red Deer, can you give me an idea of where the cut-off would be on that?

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Yeah. The southern part of Red Deer would be essentially south of 19th Street in Red Deer and highway 595, or the Delburne highway, the Coal Trail. That area to the south of there is – a lot of people think that Gasoline Alley is part of the city of Red Deer, but it's actually the county of Red Deer and within the actual Innisfail-Sylvan Lake riding. There are some industrial areas along the south side and some communities near the ag society, the Westerner Park, that could be included into a central Innisfail riding. I always say that Innisfail-Sylvan Lake made a protective moat around the city of Red Deer, but I think, obviously, if there is some addition into Red Deer just for population gain, I think it would be on the south and the east side that you could go into some of those communities.

**Mr. Evans:** Sorry; you said south of what?

**Mr. Dreeshen:** South of 19th Street.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you, Minister Dreeshen, for coming out today. I appreciate your comments. Of course, this is going to be no surprise to you: I'd like to focus some questions to you on Sylvan Lake. When I think about Sylvan Lake and its economic focus on tourism, are you suggesting that because it's tourism focused as opposed to ag focused that it doesn't fit nicely in there? And then I have a follow-up question.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Yes would be the short answer to that. Sylvan Lake always wants to expand their tourism, not just during the summer but also in the winter. And you look at that lake country to the west – Gull Lake, Sylvan Lake, highway 20, Bentley, and Rimbey – they have car shows over the summer where lots of people from Sylvan Lake are travelling up and down highway 20. Yes, it is beautiful in kind of the beginning of the foothills. That area is very distinct, just in geography and the types of people that live there and recreate there. It's a lot different than when you go farther east, closer to highway 2.

**Mrs. Samson:** Just a follow-up, along the same lines. It's difficult when a community like Sylvan Lake and its size sits so close to Red Deer on a twinned highway – well, actually two well-functioning highways, 11A and 11, but 11 being twinned and going to continue to be twinned past us – and the historic connections, to suggest that it's not a good fit with Red Deer.

Just another point in reply to your tourism. The tourism that Sylvan Lake is focusing on and its pursuit of possible city status and its pursuit of an urgent care facility and those kinds of things,

does not create the same kind of linkage with Gull Lake, which has no services around it or points beyond into the north. I'd like your comment on that.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, I agree, and obviously Sylvan Lake is looking to achieve that city status, as you said. It's obviously important, highway 11 and the twinning project that's halfway complete going out to Rocky, and the ultimate goal of hopefully getting across to the Howse Pass into B.C. as another major way to get to the Pacific through Alberta and through B.C. Obviously, highway 11 is very important, not just because I'm the transportation minister and got over \$200 million to twin highway 11 – put in a shameless plug for myself – but it is a very important corridor.

I do think, though, that that Sylvan Lake area is very similar to Gull Lake, and the people and the industries and the tourism and even the agriculture is a little different. You do have a lot more of boutique-type agriculture, direct on-farm sales individuals that are in that Lacombe, Sylvan Lake area. You don't get that same type of agricultural mix when you go farther east to highway 2 or east of highway 2.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you very much, and thanks for being here, Minister Dreeshen. I can tell that you've well embraced your portfolio with Transportation and Economic Corridors since that really is a core focus of your presentation to us today.

I want to address a couple of issues that derive from that, but first I should mention that population balancing, so to speak, is not really a primary factor for us. We're much more concerned, I think, with community cohesions and economic linkages and the like. So I come back to asking you about the economic corridors theme, particularly with respect to, in the first instance, Blackfalds, and you assert the economic linkages with many of the other communities in your electoral district. And then I have a similar query with respect to Trochu.

Thank you.

2:55

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Yeah. I would say for Blackfalds, again, the highway 2 corridor is, obviously, so important, and that's why I see so many similarities with Innisfail as well as with Red Deer county. Junction 42 right by the Red Deer Regional Airport, near Penhold, actually is something that has major trucking logistics. There are lots of trucking companies in Blackfalds as well. The focus on oil and gas as well as transportation logistics along that highway 2 corridor: there's so much that is very similar.

I think when there's, obviously, the economic side but even the social side of things on the health side – there's actually a doctor that has a clinic in Blackfalds and in Delburne, the same doctor that organizes in both areas. He'd tell you that there are, obviously, very similar individuals and folks and needs in both the Delburne area as well as Blackfalds. So there are obviously economic connections but social connections as well.

In your question about Trochu and Elnora and Delburne: I know the Elnora mayor presented last night to you folks saying how they work with Kneehill county. So many people in Elnora work in Kneehill or in Trochu. The agriculture businesses that are in Trochu as well as the grain elevators along that highway 21 corridor – pretty much everywhere in the middle of that riding is hauling their grain to either the CN line or to the CP line, but there's more on that CN line going to highway 21 and to Trochu and Huxley.

Those are, you know, obviously, the economic ties and linkages as well as even to the north of the Red Deer River to Joffre. There are so many people that live in the Pine Lake area, kind of in the

middle of that map, that drive north going into Joffre as well as from Blackfalds going into Joffrey, so there is a lot of manufacturing and logistics in that central region around Red Deer.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much, Minister Dreeschen. You're more than welcome to stay or – oh, Mr. Clark. Sorry. I didn't have you ask any questions.

**Mr. Clark:** No worries at all.

Minister, thank you so much. You know, I just wanted to sort of make a quick comment. I've been looking at the map here, what your Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was previously and the changes that were proposed. One of the principles is clear and understandable boundaries and also almost, if I could borrow a phrase, first do no harm. So if we don't need to change something, we're going to try hard not to. I think in your case, in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, really, we've just encompassed all of Sylvan Lake instead of slicing it in half and just nudged things a little bit west. My arithmetic says it's give or take about 1,500 extra people. That is just so you kind of have some insight into what we're trying to do. When we can, we try not to change things if we can avoid it. That's sort of part of the rationale anyway.

I want to come back to some of the first comments you made about the challenges of being rural MLA, which are many. It's a different thing than being an urban MLA. Urban MLAs, I'm sure you know from your colleagues, have their own challenges. They may not be geographic. There are many different languages spoken, different social complexities, transit, all sorts of different kinds of challenges.

I guess what I wanted to ask you about is that when you talk with your colleagues who are in the far north and you compare notes on what it's like to be an MLA in rural central Alberta, where, you know, I presume, in most of your area you've got decent cell service, you've got roads that are reasonably passable most of the year round and probably plowed compared to some of the stuff the folks up north go through, I guess I'm just curious because this is what we're struggling with a bit. There are complexities and challenges everywhere in the province, regardless of what part of the province we're talking about. You know, yesterday we were talking about the north, and I just wonder if we've got that right. Maybe if you can comment a little bit on some of the challenges that are similar and some that might be different with the folks in the far north.

**Mr. Dreeschen:** Sure. I think the biggest issue is that it's not so much a north-south difference as well as an urban-rural difference. The point I was trying to get across is that we have 25 highway maintenance contracts across the entire province, and those are obviously all in rural areas. If you were in Edmonton and you wanted to get your street or your road plowed, you'd call the city of Edmonton and they, well, hopefully, should be clearing your streets, where in a rural setting you have these provincial highways. You're calling your MLA's office to make sure that you can get to work on time. Obviously, yes, the distances, the highway lengths are longer. The commute times are longer. That's all true, but you as a citizen, if you're going to pick up the phone and ask or demand better public services, you're calling your rural MLA, not an urban councillor.

I think it's not so much a north-south but an urban-rural difference, and that's just comparing notes with MLAs to know that they're getting calls about the highways being blocked or closed or not being able to get to work where Calgary, Edmonton MLAs: that's just not the same issue for their constituents.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much, Minister Dreeschen. I'm the clock watcher. I am going to restrain asking any questions. I'm going to excuse you, but please remain in the room to hear other presentations. It's always helpful to hear people from other perspectives.

**Mr. Dreeschen:** I will. Thank you so much. Just a quick question: if I have constituents that are writing into my office, should I continue to send them into the commission?

**The Chair:** Send them but without any promises. We don't have a lot of spots next week. In fact, we have no spots, I'm told.

**Mr. Dreeschen:** Perfect. Well, thank you so much. Appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Is Kim Harris in the room, or have we dealt with her when we heard from the Airdrie mayor? Okay. Going once; twice. No Kim Harris.

Penni Lougheed, Rocky Mountain House.

By the way, commissioners, I'm barging through without a break. Is that okay? One speaker at a time. Okay. We'll discuss it after the next presentation.

Ms Lougheed?

**Ms Lougheed:** Sorry. Yes. I'm here.

**The Chair:** Oh, good. Thank you. Please identify yourself and tell us where you're ...

**Ms Lougheed:** I'm going to leave my camera off, though.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's fine.

**Ms Lougheed:** Yes. I'm going to leave my camera off because of rural Wi-Fi. I'm hopeful that you can hear me through this whole presentation.

**The Chair:** We can hear you well.

**Ms Lougheed:** My name is Penni Lougheed, and I – pardon?

**The Chair:** Yeah. Sorry. We can hear you well. Thank you.

**Ms Lougheed:** Oh, good. Okay.

My name is Penni Lougheed, and I'm from Condor, Alberta, but I am here today representing Wild Rose school division. I'm one of the trustees on that board, and I really thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We are here to respectfully request that the current electoral boundaries affecting Clearwater county remain as they are. Our concern is not simply about the lines on the map but how communities function and how services are delivered and how residents are effectively represented.

Clearwater county operates as a single connected community. Families live, work, attend school, and access services across the county every day. The existing boundaries reflect these shared patterns and respect the community of interest that already exists. Dividing the county would separate people who rely on the same systems and networks.

Transportation corridors play a significant role in daily life in our region. Highways such as 11 and 22 connect our communities and are used daily by residents, students, and workers. To propose boundary changes divides these corridors, creating artificial separations that do not reflect how people move through and rely on the region.

From an education perspective school catchment areas extend across the county and serve both urban and rural families. Students frequently attend school outside of their immediate community. Splitting Clearwater county into multiple constituencies would result in families being represented by MLAs who may not represent the communities where their children attend school. Effective representation is another key concern. Under the current boundaries community leaders and school boards can clearly and directly advocate to a single MLA. This clarity strengthens communication and accountability. Dividing the county would require engagement with multiple MLAs, which dilutes advocacy and makes it more difficult to effectively represent the needs of residents.

There's also a risk that rural voices will be diminished. When rural communities are split across multiple constituencies, particularly those with more urban centres, their unique needs such as transportation, education, access, and infrastructure can be overlooked. Keeping Clearwater county intact helps ensure rural concerns remain visible and heard.

Finally, stability matters. Residents understand the current boundaries and have built relationships and systems around them. Unnecessary changes create confusion and can weaken public trust, particularly when the existing boundaries are already functioning effectively. Clearwater county is geographically large but socially and economically interconnected. Maintaining it as a single constituency best reflects the realities of the region and supports fair, effective representation.

3:05

I do appreciate what Minister Dreeshen has been saying about the twinning of highway 11, and we do anticipate that at some point our population will rise because of the highway being twinned and the west country being more accessible. We do have proposals from communities in the west for more schools. Yeah. It's not growing quickly, but we're hoping that our population does get a boost.

That's all I have to say. Are there any questions?

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, ma'am. You were quite right about your Internet connection. Your voice was garbled the last couple of sentences.

Okay. Just so I can encapsulate your position, ma'am, you would like a return to the Rocky . . .

**Ms Lougheed:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** Yeah. You would like a return to the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre riding. Is that what you're saying?

Hello?

**Ms Lougheed:** The Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Yeah.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay.

I'm going to open it up for questions from the panel.

**Ms Lougheed:** Yes, please. So that Clearwater county itself can – yes? Sorry. Hello?

**The Chair:** I think we have to talk slow because of technology.

**Ms Lougheed:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clark, do you have questions of this presenter?

**Mr. Clark:** No, I don't. Just thanks, and know that we have heard similar feedback from others. Thank you.

**Mr. Evans:** One question about the boundaries of WRSD. What are those boundaries like, and are they all contained within the Clearwater county?

**Ms Lougheed:** Well, I know that we had sent a letter previously, but we were heard.

The Wild Rose school division?

**Mr. Evans:** Yes.

**Ms Lougheed:** Our school division goes into Brazeau county and Clearwater county, so we are quite a wide, big county. It's 100 kilometres. Currently work has been very active. We were able to get representation when most rural school divisions were not. That means that we were able to be more student effective, and we would like to continue those relationships.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mrs. Samson:** Ms Lougheed, for today I have no questions. Thank you.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you, and thank you for your presentation. I, too, have no further questions. No, I guess I do. Highway 11: tell me about the twinning. What are your anticipated effects of the twinning of highway 11?

**Ms Lougheed:** Well, so far we've been able to move a high school off highway 11. David Thompson high school was located along that highway, and with the twinning of that highway the land that the high school is set on will actually be part of that.

The other effects we are thinking will happen is the way our transportation and buses use that highway. That is something that our transportation department is working on all the time, the way that the highway is used. When it's twinned, it will be revisited, and a plan is also being developed, I'm sure, by them right now.

**Dr. Martin:** I'm being mischievous, but I think you should ask your MLA for some fibre-optic cable.

**Ms Lougheed:** Actually, Clearwater county has been blessed by the provincial government giving funding for some of that to happen. So we're hoping, yes, that the fibre-optic cables will go in. They are being put in different areas along highway 11 now.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms Lougheed. Thank you for your presentation and for the object lesson of some of the challenges in the rural area. You are excused.

**Ms Lougheed:** Yeah. Being a rural trustee is much different than urban. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Yeah. I'll excuse you, but please remain in the virtual rooms to hear other presenters if you could.

Okay. It's 3:15 p.m. Quick word to the commissioners. Do you want to break, or do you want to soldier on through on a Friday afternoon? Keep going? Okay.

Kim Harris. Yeah, please introduce yourself and tell us what ridings you're referencing.

**Ms Harris:** Kim Harris, mayor of Crossfield. I'm referencing Three Hills riding and Airdrie-East.

**The Chair:** Okay. Please proceed.

**Ms Harris:** Great. Thank you.

The city of Airdrie submitted a response during the second round of public engagement on the proposed electoral boundaries. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the commission's preliminary report, particularly in the recognition of Airdrie's exceptional growth and its commitment to effective representation.

We support the proposed Airdrie-West and Airdrie-East electoral divisions. The city of Airdrie strongly supports the commission's proposed creation of Airdrie-West and Airdrie-East electoral divisions, including the incorporation of the town of Crossfield within Airdrie-East. These proposed boundaries align closely with our initial submission and reflect a forward-thinking approach to electoral representation that accounts for both current population realities and anticipated future growth. We appreciate that the commission recognized what it described as the astonishing growth that Airdrie has experienced since 2017.

Our comments are intended to support, reflecting our shared regional reality. Crossfield's submission has three clear purposes: first, to formally support the commission's proposed redistribution scenarios; second, to reinforce the importance of equitable representation in a region experiencing sustained and accelerated growth; and, third, to explain why alignment with Airdrie-focused electoral divisions best reflects Crossfield's community interest and lived experience.

Crossfield and Airdrie are deeply interconnected communities. Our residents regularly commute to Airdrie for employment, education, health care, and commercial services, and those connections continue to strengthen as both communities grow. In return, Airdrie residents commute to Crossfield's strong industrial area for work and consistently use our arena for recreation.

Crossfield's growth rate for the last 10 years has been 4.43 per cent between 2014 and 2024. From Crossfield's perspective we are part of a shared regional system, and electoral boundaries should reflect that reality rather than treating our communities as isolated. For that reason, Crossfield supports redistribution scenarios that are centred on Airdrie and include Crossfield, with an Airdrie-aligned electoral division. This approach aligns with real-world travel patterns, economic relationships, and community identity. It also improves residents' access to representation that is aligned with their daily lives and regional affiliations.

3:15

Like Airdrie, Crossfield has experienced sustained residential and commercial growth. We appreciate the commission's recognition of both current population levels and projected growth across our region. We also recognize that existing electoral divisions in this region significantly exceed the provincial population average, which undermines equitable democratic participation. Redistribution is necessary to ensure that representation keeps pace with growth and that residents' votes maintain meaningful weight over the electoral cycle.

From Crossfield's perspective, the commission's submission is thoughtful, data driven, and future orientated. It strikes an appropriate balance between population equity and community cohesion. Importantly, it offers a sustainable approach that can accommodate continued growth within required repeated boundary adjustments. The town of Crossfield strongly encourages the commission to consider the commission's proposed redistribution scenarios for Airdrie-East and Airdrie-West. These proposals support voter parity, effective representation, and reflect the lived reality of a rapidly growing, increasingly integrated region.

We thank the commission for its careful work and consideration and commitment to effective representation and voter parity, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide our perspective.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mayor Harris. Thank you so much. Any questions, Dr. Martin?

**Dr. Martin:** Yes.

Thank you very much, Mayor Harris. I very much appreciate the fact that you liked what we did. We may not be as clever as you suggest we are because we seem to make mistakes all over the place, but I'm glad to hear that this one meets the approval of you and your colleagues on the council.

I wanted to ask you in particular to expand upon the economic character of Crossfield such that there are, as you say, very strong social and economic linkages with Airdrie. I mean, many small towns get jealous living in the shadow of a very large and growing town even though, as you say, yours has been growing very large as well. Do you see the strategic future for Crossfield as being linked, not merely socially but economically, with the more dynamic town immediately to your south?

**Ms Harris:** That's a great question, and I think the simple answer to that is yes. We are so close, we're only 17 kilometres away, and that gap is closing very quickly for us. The QE II corridor, as you know, is very important to any town that is along there, and to have shared resources and shared jobs and that growth within both of our communities is going to be very important to us in the future. Right now Crossfield has about a 70-30 per cent split in industry to residential, and I know a lot of municipalities would be jealous of that as well. But if Crossfield and Airdrie can continue down that path on commercial and the industrial side of economics, I think that we will have great synergies in the future.

**Dr. Martin:** If I may follow up, Mayor, you know, Crossfield is more industrial, you suggested, than one might loosely expect. It's not rural and agricultural industry, but it's something beyond that.

**Ms Harris:** We have some of the rural farming community here as well, but right within Crossfield's boundaries we have a vast industrial area.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

**Ms Harris:** You're welcome.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Mr. Evans, any questions?

**Mr. Evans:** No. Thank you so much for your submissions.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Sampson.

**Mrs. Samson:** No. Thank you for joining us today. It was most informative.

**Mr. Clark:** Beyond a word of thanks, Mayor, it is always, frankly, helpful, I mean, when we receive feedback from the folks who represent those who live in those communities, and it's nice to know you're working so well with your neighbours and, also, that you feel we've got the boundaries correct. That is actually more helpful than you know. So thank you so much.

**Ms Harris:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mayor Harris. I'll excuse you. We've got four more presenters. But please remain in the room to hear other presenters. It's always helpful.

Our next presenter is Kevin Henderson.

**Mr. Henderson:** Good afternoon. I'm going to leave my camera off as well. I'm not too sure of my Internet here. Can you hear me okay?

**The Chair:** A little louder. You're fairly faint.

**Mr. Henderson:** Okay. Sorry, I'll talk up a little bit here.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Henderson:** My name is Kevin Henderson, and I specifically wish to speak about the riding changes proposed to the West Yellowhead riding. I'm not here as a representative from any agency or organization. I'm just here as a resident. I'm a resident of the town of Jasper. I've lived in Jasper now for over 20 years. We raised our two children here, both of whom still live in the riding, one of them in Jasper, the other in Hinton. Prior to Jasper I also lived in Hinton, and I also lived on the Dunster side of the B.C. border, so I've been living on the Yellowhead highway for quite a few years.

I'd like to express my opposition to removing the town of Jasper from the West Yellowhead electoral district. With all due respect to our neighbours in Banff and Canmore, the travel patterns, trading, shopping routes, et cetera, run east-west in this area. We in Jasper go to Hinton, for example, for our medical appointments. Our children are born in Hinton as they're not born here in town. By going to a Costco, Superstore, or Walmart, we mean we're heading east. We're not heading south. When someone talks here of going to the city, they mean Edmonton. There are a number of individuals who live in Jasper and work in Hinton and vice versa. This is especially true since the fires of 2024, but it's always been the case. It's been the case for the last 20-plus years. It's to such an extent now that there is scheduled transit service running – that's very recent – between the two communities multiple times per day.

Aligning Jasper with Banff and Canmore, for example, would mean having them connected by one single roadway, and that's highway 93 that runs from Lake Louise to Jasper. This highway has a couple of differences from, say, highways 1, 2, or 16 in the sense that there are weight restrictions on it year-round. Large trucks are not permitted to be driving on it. There are, of course, no rail lines or scheduled air services connecting the communities, which means there's no direct access for goods and services to travel between Banff and Jasper on a large scale. The highway as well multiple times a year becomes impassible due to heavy snow, avalanche control, and it also falls down the list of priorities when it comes to snow plowing. This was shown last December, this recent December, when the highway was closed for 10 days straight. Since New Year's Day it's been closed twice more, and we're only halfway through January. It's a fairly regular occurrence that happens during winter months, and by winter in this area it means late October until early May, so it accounts for over half of the year.

What it means also, though, is that our elected representatives would face more challenges and more time commitments trying to visit a significant portion of his or her constituency. Not being able to use that one highway at certain times, that connects not just Jasper but also parts of Edson, Hinton, et cetera, directly with, say, Banff or Canmore, means a much longer journey, adding four or five hours of travel time in the winter. One of my concerns is that this will inevitably lead to less direct contact with our elected representative, be they from the north or from the south, and

conceivably less awareness on their part as to the issues and challenges faced by some of us that are living in the given riding. It's to be noted that the world has changed and that, of course, you can use Teams or Zoom meetings, but virtual meetings, reading briefs or newspaper articles just doesn't provide the same deep roots that can be developed in having in-person discussions, direct contact, and direct observation as to what is going on in a riding, especially for some of us that are more remote. At least, in my opinion it shouldn't be a substitute for political leaders meeting constituents face to face.

We in Jasper have a very recent exact example of this occurring federally. The federal Yellowhead riding was changed in some ways similar to what's being proposed here. Jasper as of the last federal election is now part of the riding, where a majority of the population is south of highway 93, and it's also where our new Member of Parliament lives. I'm certainly not taking anything away from him, his duties, or responsibilities, but the sheer geography coupled with the highway closures has meant that he has not visited our community anywhere near the number of times that his predecessor did, who did live along highway 16.

3:25

With respect to the proposed alignment, it's also easy to assume that Jasper and Banff are very similar and should be aligned. Yes, they're both located within national parks, and the federal jurisdiction and Parks Canada are at the fore of a lot of our daily lives. However, it should be noted that Banff and Jasper are separate national parks and have their own superintendent and that different regulations exist for our communities. For example, the town of Banff has authority over land-use planning, but the municipality of Jasper does not. That is in the works of changing, but it isn't completed yet. Jasper and Banff also have tourism as a main economic driver.

I personally don't believe that economies should be a base reason for changing or reassigning political boundaries. If they did, you'd be assigning Medicine Hat in with Fort McMurray in one long, eastern border riding, for example. Economies change, as do economic drivers. It wasn't long ago that Jasper was thought and referred to as a rail town, and many that still live here still refer to it as such. Those lines run east-west, not north-south. The recent decision from CN Rail to keep their station and employees in Jasper is evidence of the importance of this reality.

There are some that argue that Jasper and Banff having a unified voice provincially would be a good thing, that that voice would be louder and stronger. I'm sorry, but as someone who lives in Jasper, I have to disagree with that. I believe that having two individuals speaking on an issue would be a louder voice than only one. Also, Jasper and Banff are not the same community. We have different challenges, different issues, and are very different communities, each with our own strengths and issues, but we're not the same.

Calgary is an hour from Banff. Canmore is 10 minutes. Edmonton is four hours away, and the airport is considerably farther. Our tourist economies are different, and I should say that I do work in the tourism industry, and I've seen the ebbs and flows. Banff has the Calgary International Airport close by. We have Via Rail that comes through here year-round, that Banff does not. Jasper relies on the northern Alberta economy when it comes to skiing. Banff has much more of an international clientele. Overall, even though our tourism boards work together, we are different.

I stated earlier that both personal and business trips go east-west as opposed to north-south. As a long-time resident I really don't see that changing. In order to keep the political continuity sort of

aligned with what the social and economic realities are, I really think it should be kept the same.

Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Henderson. We realize you're on a late Friday afternoon, but you've delivered your presentation with lots of verve and spunk, and we appreciate that.

Time for questions. Mr. Clark.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you. I'll try to meet that energy as best I can.

Thank you so much for your input, and we've heard, really, a range of perspectives on this question. Hearing from folks who live in those communities is really very helpful.

I am just curious. We did receive a written submission from the town of Jasper supporting the concept of a Banff-Jasper constituency. You may not have any insight into that and are not required necessarily to develop any if you don't have any, but I'm just curious if you had any thoughts as to – you know, they felt there was value in being connected with another of the major national parks. Canmore as well was part of what they felt was kind of a common interest. I wondered if you had any thoughts on that.

**Mr. Henderson:** I do. I'll get in trouble for this because a number of my friends are on council. It's my own opinion – again, this is just my opinion – that they're being a bit short sighted. They have a common interest along with Canmore and Banff on the financial side of things and looking at changes to the Municipal Government Act to look at taxation being allowed, et cetera. I think that they think they'll have a stronger say if they're sort of combined together. Again, I understand where they're coming from, but I think there are larger concerns and more important concerns to the people and those of us that live here.

**Mr. Clark:** That's great. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Evans.

**Mr. Evans:** No. Mr. Clark took my question, and I got the answer. Yeah. Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Henderson. I would like your comment on the thought that Jasper could learn or share or discuss challenges that are totally unique to mountain communities in Alberta. It's completely different from anywhere else, and that guidance, experience, exchange, that kind of thing: can you comment on that?

**Mr. Henderson:** Do you mean that would be increased if we were . . .

**Mrs. Samson:** Well, that would be valuable to Jasper and its future growth and development, being able to share the same common concerns and learn by being tied closely to Banff-Canmore.

**Mr. Henderson:** I'm sorry. I respectfully disagree. We already have a voice, and we have it through MLAs that we've had over the years. Again, I think that Banff having a voice and an MLA from up here having a voice gives stronger presence than just having one person sort of giving that same message from both communities.

**Mrs. Samson:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Dr. Martin.

**Dr. Martin:** No questions. Thank you very much for your presentation.

**Mr. Henderson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I have a few questions, but I'm going to not pose them because of the hour, but thank you for your presentation, Mr. Henderson.

**Mr. Henderson:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Our next presenter is Kevin Ferguson.

**Mr. Ferguson:** Thank you very much. I'm mayor of Ponoka, so our electoral division would be Lacombe-Ponoka.

I'm assuming that you can all hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Ferguson:** Okay. Thank you.

I would say this. I know that what's going to happen to us is that we'll be lopped off and put in with Wetaskiwin and Maskwacis, and we can make that work. My issue, though, is that we can make that work, but right now I have a very good rural MLA that I work with quite a bit. I also know that the MLA out of Wetaskiwin is somebody we can work with as well. My concern is, and I guess I'm going to push this envelope here a little bit: I started listening today about how your mandate is effective representation, and I do want to address that because I do have my concerns.

When I look at my electoral division and I look at the surrounding ones, there are six and they're going to be reconfigured into five, my concern as a rural mayor – and I'm going to read here in a minute – is that Minister Dreesen is correct. From my perspective, when dealing with the provincial government, I would far prefer to deal with as many rural MLAs as possible not because city MLAs are bad or that I don't trust them or anything along those lines; it's just that what happens when we mayors, especially rural mayors, are trying to get across our points, our concerns, our needs: I find that if I end up meeting with a cabinet minister and I have 25 minutes, I'd far prefer to meet with a rural one because I can get going right off the hop, whereas usually it takes me about 15, 20 minutes just to clarify the problem. There just is a difference in terms of lived experience in between both the urban and the rural environment. I would put this out to you as well that, most definitely, if I were sitting, say, as a cabinet minister and urban mayors came to me, I think I would be challenged as well.

I'm just going to read this here. I understand that electoral boundaries are heavily influenced by population, but by not giving full weight to other factors such as economic indicators, I think we're going to lead ourselves into bigger problems. For instance, I know that Alberta has other, very dynamic things going on in our economy, but from our perspective it's energy and agriculture. Of course, this is the big player for us along in Ponoka and throughout our community as well.

My concern is that disproportionately – and here's what I mean by this. Back in my day, when my grandparents farmed, they farmed a section, and so did all their neighbours, and there were a whole lot more folks out there. Now you're probably looking between 12 and 15 sections to farm, so that means that disproportionately we have less people contributing to agriculture. We have less people doing these contributions to Alberta's GDP. However, disproportionately I don't feel like they're being equally represented. What I see is this disproportionate representation, not seeing the benefits of their contributions through commensurate services and amenities that urban centres receive.

3:35

For instance, consider Ponoka as a microhub for those that work in the energy and agriculture sectors around here. Those people live around the town, and they rightfully should be expecting access to doctors, nurses, hospitals, arenas, swimming pools, schools, and on and on. But for a rural mayor it is all economy of scale. I have a much smaller tax base, by far smaller than a city. When I look to the province for help, I am now competing for resources with other towns, other cities, and now it appears two more seats that will be urban ridings, and then it looks through configuration a loss of three.

The problem here is this. If I have to build a new arena, the new arena costs just as much in Ponoka as it does in Calgary, yet I do not have the access to the funds to go that route. Then, as well, I'm also looking at an uphill climb in terms of being able to lobby, which is my job to of course look for more funds to go along that route. I am a little bit concerned about seeing 89 seats, two of them going urban and then, of course, three, you know, through reconfiguration being lost.

I'm just going to finish by saying this, kind of the bigger picture that I see. I feel in terms of elections in Alberta that there's always been an existing scenario where you could have a governing party where they only field urban MLAs. I think what happens here when I read through what's happening here with our boundaries, that possibility is being increased. Now, I'm not saying it's going to be totally bad, but from, you know – yeah. I'm done. Thank you. It's a long afternoon. I think you guys get my point. You've heard it from other rural as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mayor Ferguson. This is mayors week, I think. We've had many mayors, not Calgary's, not Edmonton's, but many mayors present this week.

Dr. Martin, any questions?

**Dr. Martin:** No. I've got nothing to ask.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for your presentation. You started out by saying that the proposed riding of Wetaskiwin-Maskwacis-Ponoka, you could live with if you had to. That wasn't your first preference, but you could live with it.

**Mr. Ferguson:** You know, that's us in the rural communities, right? Like, I don't think in the end I have a choice. I'm going to have to make it work. I do know the MLA in Wetaskiwin, and I can work with them as well.

My concern, once again, is that I feel like I'm seeing rural MLAs decreasing and urban ones going up. Like I say, I've got nothing against urban MLAs. It's just that we feel that at our level, simply because as a mayor of a rural town, a small town: we're about 7,500 people. It's tough being a mayor of a rural town and finding a way to fix things, buy things, and so on and so forth. We don't have the same advantages that cities have. I watched Airdrie, and good for them. I'm glad for Airdrie. I kind of wish I had some of their problems, but I don't, and therein lies my problem here. I want to play nice and I want to get along with everybody because I think we live in a great province, but I also think, too, that we have to start understanding that the rural small towns and rural Alberta are really, really kind of treading water hard on this one.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Evans.

**Mr. Evans:** No, but thank you so much for your presentation and helping me remember what it was like to sit on a municipal town council.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clark, any questions or comments?

**Mr. Clark:** Mrs. Samson beat me to the punch and asked my question, but thank you so much.

**Mr. Ferguson:** Thank you so much. I know you guys have a tough go here.

**Mr. Clark:** No, we appreciate your input, especially as a mayor. It does make a big difference, so thank you.

**The Chair:** Mayor Ferguson, your concern about the decline of rural is noted, and if you look at appendix D, it's been happening since 1960. So there's not much we can – well, we'll do what we can. Put it that way.

**Mr. Ferguson:** Okay. Thank you very much. I'm just glad it's noted.

**The Chair:** Okay. That leaves us with two more presenters.  
Justin Wright.

**Mr. Wright:** Well, hello, everyone.

**The Chair:** Good afternoon.

**Mr. Wright:** Everything coming through okay on my end?

**The Chair:** Yeah, we can hear you.

**Mr. Wright:** Perfect. Well, it's so great to see each and every one of you again. I know we had an opportunity to speak during the summer rotation and shortly thereafter, where I was able to make a presentation. I appreciate the information you put into your decision on the first round of drafts for the boundaries, and I was just jumping online to speak again to it.

I did some reflection on Mr. Clark's questions in regard to what he had presented in regard to some of the Forty Mile county and/or Bow Island moving into Cypress-Medicine Hat. I just put the same submission in as what I did during the summer with a little added piece of, you know, should you as the commission feel that Forty Mile county and Bow Island were to move into the Cypress-Medicine Hat constituency, that you look at keeping it as a whole piece and not split that up. When I looked at the population density and where Forty Mile's majority of their population comes from, it's predominantly the Bow Island area and Burdett, and at about 3,800 people total for that area and county, it just makes sense to keep the municipal governments together.

Ladies and gentlemen of the commission, I thank you for your time and for the important work that you are undertaking. I submitted this report in strong belief of maintaining the current electoral boundaries within the Cypress-Medicine Hat and Brooks-Medicine Hat constituencies. This submission reflects not only the practical argument but also a principled one that representation should reflect real regional cohesion, not just population numbers on a map. Medicine Hat and its surrounding communities have become increasingly integrated across economic, educational, cultural, and service lines. The current rural model, as I joked in our last presentation, part rural, part urban, is not only functional but also foundational to how representation is delivered in this part of Alberta.

If you'll remember in the previous presentation, I did comment that I as the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat represent approximately 60 to 65 per cent of Medicine Hat's overall population. Blended ridings such as Cypress-Medicine Hat and Brooks-Medicine Hat are more than just geographical compromises. They representationally

provide a robust approach to the region. As the MLA representing both urban and rural communities, it enriches the legislative process as you're able to bring forward the concerns you hear from both those living in urban environments but also those who are feeling the pressures of rural communities, as we heard from Mayor Ferguson as well.

When we really take a look at understanding the diverse needs of Alberta as a whole, blended ridings give a better representation of understanding the blend of both Alberta's economy as well as urban and rural settings. Urban settings often drive economic growth, while rural areas supply resource, cultural backbone, as well as new and innovative ideas coming from rural ridings. Together they form a cohesive constituency that is greater than the sum of its parts. This blend ensures better governance where urban priorities such as infrastructure, health care, and innovations are harmonized with rural concerns such as agriculture, transportation, and land use. It also provides more versatility and grounded legislators.

3:45

On to the next point that I have. Two MLAs representing the area as a regional approach is a necessity, not just a luxury. In a time where regional voices risk dilution, maintaining two constituencies anchored in the Medicine Hat region is not just a luxury; it's necessary. When you look at the voice and advocacy, having two representatives with equal or similar representation numbers in regard to the split of Medicine Hat's population doubles the advocacy, gives better accessibility to constituents, and makes for more resiliency in pushing local priorities forward, whether it is represented by two members of the same party or a split between one of the government side and one of the opposition side.

Considering the challenges of the region, and our region specifically is actively managing urgent care investments, postsecondary innovations, major infrastructure upgrades, school expansions, and energy diversification, these files are complex and demand more than just what a single MLA can reasonably manage across the vast and diverse region.

Medicine Hat has been the anchor for southeastern Alberta and acts not just as a capital for services but also as a major economic hub and capital. It's the only major centre between Regina and Calgary. From its industrial base to its health care services and cultural institutions, it reaches as far away as north and west of Bassano and into Saskatchewan all the way to Swift Current. It provides critical infrastructure and leadership as it engages this large geographic area. Health care region: we look at . . .

**The Chair:** If you could wrap it up, Mr. Wright.

**Mr. Wright:** Sorry.

In conclusion, the long and the short of it is that it's not just a political issue; it's a matter of effective and equitable representation. Blended ridings serve our communities well because our communities themselves are blended in practice.

With that, I will turn it over to the great members of the boundary commission.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Clark, any questions of Mr. Wright?

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much. Yeah.

Thanks again for your submissions, both written and verbal. It was good seeing you in Medicine Hat when we were there in the first round, and thanks for coming again here.

You know, one of the things we're – I've asked this of others, and it's interesting. We've received a lot of feedback on, well, really, constituencies throughout the province, but a fair bit around

Medicine Hat, and almost all of it, like 10 to 1, is saying: we really want an urban Medicine Hat constituency, including the city of Medicine Hat. We had a councillor earlier today, we've had former councillors, we've had lots of former Speakers – as you well know, you're very well set in that part of the province with former Speakers of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta – and ordinary Albertans and citizens of Medicine Hat as well.

I'm curious what you make of that. You know, their argument being: listen, there's an urban element to Medicine Hat and issues that are unique and specific to Medicine Hat – housing and homelessness, transit issues, unique education issues, transport-type issues that are specific – and then there are issues that are really more rural. People live in Medicine Hat because they live in Medicine Hat; people live outside because they don't live in Medicine Hat. So I just am curious on your perspective as someone from that part of the province on why you think that might be.

**Mr. Wright:** Well, you know what? I understand where some of the conversation comes from. I had an opportunity over the last week to be very fortunate to connect with a number of city councillors. There's quite a divide on this piece.

You know, when we take a look at the urban representation, as I mentioned before in my opening remarks there, I have 65 per cent of Medicine Hat's urban population already. This is the urban riding that represents Medicine Hat, and the lion's share of my attention does certainly go there. When we look at how it is currently split, we are certainly gaining better advocacy and better representation from the perspective of that we have two equally invested MLAs. If you were to take it down to an urban riding that has, let's say, 90 per cent of Medicine Hat's population, and you have one other riding, let's say it's the rural only, with 10 per cent of Medicine Hat's population, you are going to get a vastly different representation model as there's only really one elected representative who will have vested interest in meeting with the constituency base that they represent.

Should this type of model be moved forward with, where, let's say, the urban setting is in opposition and the rural member, who's only got about 10 per cent of the population, goes into the government side, you lose the voice at the table by not having equal or near equal voice in the voter base of the riding. What I mean by that is right now the way the split is, at about 35 to 45 in Brooks-Medicine Hat of the per cent of the population and 60 to 65 per cent in my riding, there is a vested interest for both parties to be advocating for the needs of Medicine Hat in near equity from both of those members.

By having a larger piece of the pie, Medicine Hat itself as an urban setting benefits from the representation splits that the Lethbridges of the world, the Red Deers, the Airdries do, which are these much larger population centres where they have only two representatives representing, you know, 90,000 to 120,000 people in those splits. It gives Medicine Hat a bit of a representational advantage over others, as we have the same say with a smaller population than what some of the other ridings across the province have. So I think it's a strategic disadvantage for us to go that route, as you'll have much less advocacy power in a split similar to that.

**Mr. Clark:** Just another very quick question. We've proposed to make the names by size of community as opposed to alphabetical. Do you have a strong opinion one way or the other over Medicine Hat-Cypress or Cypress-Medicine Hat?

**Mr. Wright:** I kind of do, and it's strictly from a cost to the taxpayer perspective. If we're swapping names for the sake of swapping names, I think that that's fiscally irresponsible, but I

would defer to the council. My preference would very much be to leave it as is, as any of the literature, whether it's through Elections Alberta or whatnot: just to change a name seems like we're fundamentally doing away with fiscal restraint on that.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Evans, any questions?

**Mr. Evans:** Yeah.

MLA Wright, thanks for presenting. You're doing something that we've heard time and time again is the impossible. How can you possibly represent urban and rural? How is that humanly possible? What are you doing different that all the naysayers say can't happen with a hybrid riding?

**Mr. Wright:** Well, you know what? Simply put, it's about time management. When we look at the southeast corner, we are really very much focused on the regional representation, whether that is the trimunicipal agreements between Redcliff, Cypress county, or the city of Medicine Hat, whether that is down to the social side of things with the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta. The chamber of commerce is no longer the Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce; it's the chamber of commerce of southeastern Alberta.

The reach of Medicine Hat, mainly due to its isolation from other major centres, really forces its fingers to go out and represent and influence all surrounding areas. So it's more cultural than just the impact of one MLA. It is very much the sum of its parts, the collective municipal education, health care parts all fitting together in that regional approach that makes that representation of both the urban priorities as well as the rural pieces. Everybody has a part to play.

Whether you live in Dunmore, Alberta, which is about 15-ish minutes away from my place here out in Cypress county, or Walsh, you're doing all your shopping in Medicine Hat. You're doing your doctor's appointments. You're doing all of those pieces in here. Your kids are going to play sports: they're in Medicine Hat. It is very much a piece where we win collectively as the region, and that's very much been the mindset of both our previous council, our current council, as well as the social and economic organizations and how they impact.

3:55

Another key piece I would look at is how well we've been able to as a community work with the economic partnerships, whether it's Paliser Economic Partnership or whether it is APEX. It's always looking from that regional focus, and that's how we've been able to really advocate appropriately for both the needs of the urban folks but also the rural folks. It impacts in both directions here.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Wright.

**Mr. Evans:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Samson:** Thank you for coming out today. I appreciate your insight again, and it's good seeing you for a second time, but I have no further questions at this time.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Dr. Martin.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you.

Mr. Wright, you had mentioned in your broad survey of the riding that Medicine Hat and the rural parts are increasingly linked, and

you just immediately a few moments ago gave some illustrations of that. Would you say that that is not just because of the various governance and planning structures that you just alluded to but also because of the habits of the people who live in the penumbra, if I can call it that, immediately south of Medicine Hat's town boundaries? Are you seeing the development of a suburban ring around the south of the town?

**Mr. Wright:** Yeah. You know what? That's a great point. Yes, we are. If you were to take a look at South Boundary Road, you will see an increase in Cypress county development along that. In fact, one of what I would call the suburbs, if you will, of Medicine Hat is called Desert Blume, and that is having one of the largest growth areas in that growth around the ring.

You know, we can continue further to the east with Dunmore, which I talked about earlier. We can even push a little bit further west, where we're seeing significant investment on highway 3. Within that five- to 10-minute drive from city boundaries, we're seeing an exponential number of houses being built in that area compared to the last 20 years, so there is certainly that suburban approach that's already happening within the Medicine Hat region.

**Dr. Martin:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wright. I do have one question.

**Mr. Wright:** Yes, sir.

**The Chair:** We have a lot of complaints about the boundary between the two ridings, and several people, even those who wanted to create a strictly urban riding, said: at the very least, if you don't do that, use the river as the boundary. Now, I know we looked at that quite closely as a commission, and I don't have my notes as to why we didn't do that. My recollection is that if we would have taken that region that is in your riding that is south – no. Let me think. Sorry. The portion of Brooks-Medicine Hat that is south of the river and put into your riding: do you have a sense of how many people that would be?

**Mr. Wright:** Yeah. I believe when we talked during the summer and when I looked at the data beforehand, it was because Brooks-Medicine Hat wouldn't have the population necessary for that riding, and that's why that carve-out was given.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Okay. So you would have way too many people then.

**Mr. Wright:** From my understanding, yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. Yeah. Well, we'll look into that. Thank you very much for your presentation and for staying late; you are excused.

**Mr. Wright:** Well, thank you very much. Have a good rest of your day, everyone.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

It is now 4 o'clock, and our last presenter on my list is Helen Holder.

**Ms Holder:** Yes. Hi, there. Thanks so much. I will try to keep it brief since we're right at the end of the day here.

Good afternoon. My name is Helen Holder, and I'm here today as a resident of the Highwood constituency, a mother, a neighbour, and someone who has taken leadership roles in my community. I speak for myself, my family, and for the many Highwood residents who asked me to be their voice today in this hearing. I have served

as a director on the Davisburg Community Hall board, and last year in Foothills county I ran several school board trustee campaigns as a campaign coach and actively supported several other municipal campaigns. I speak to residents of Highwood every day, and I have spent months listening to their concerns.

I have reviewed the interim report on the proposed electoral boundary changes, and while I do support much of the commission's thoughtful work, I have come to a clear and unavoidable conclusion. The primary proposal before us is not in the best interests of Highwood residents nor Albertans in general, so today I am here to strongly support the secondary proposed boundary, Okotoks-Diamond Valley, found in appendix H of the report. This alternative protects the integrity of our rural communities and respects the will of the people.

Some changes that I do fully support in the proposed commission boundary include the decision to add Millarville into Highwood. Millarville shares our rural character, our community rhythms, and our land-based priorities. Its residents shop, volunteer, worship, and build community all within the same networks as the rest of Highwood, so their inclusion strengthens the unity of our rural region.

Just as Millarville is a natural fit for Highwood, Diamond Valley must remain with us as well. Diamond Valley and Okotoks are deeply intertwined communities. Okotoks may be urban, but they are very much connected to their rural neighbours. Their families share schools, recreation, health services, sports, cultural programs, and day-to-day life. These towns are connected economically, socially, and historically, and their residents see themselves as part of the same community fabric. Removing Diamond Valley would fracture a decades-old community of interest and artificially divide a region that functions as one. Keeping Okotoks, Diamond Valley, Millarville, and the surrounding rural areas together is not only logical; it reflects how people actually live day to day.

Highwood has always been a rural constituency at its heart. The land stretching from Calgary's southern edge to the long-standing Highwood boundary at 434th Ave has for generations been defined by rural life, by agriculture, ranching, open land, and communities built on stewardship and shared values.

Highwood residents have been crystal clear about the future that they want. In the 2025 municipal election they voted decisively for responsible development. Every councillor who campaigned on slowing down growth kept their seat. Every councillor who failed to prioritize responsible development was not re-elected. Even Okotoks, despite rapid population growth, chose a council committed to a more measured pace of development. The message from the people could not be clearer. They want responsible growth, they want their rural identity protected, and they want their voices to matter. Dissolving Highwood into a Calgary-Okotoks urban riding does the opposite of that. It disregards the choices our residents have already made and blends rural communities into an urban system where their voices become overshadowed.

This isn't hypothetical. We know what happens when rural and urban communities are merged into the same riding. Number one, we get unequal representation, dense urban populations, unintentionally overshadowed rural voices. Rural residents lose access, visibility, and priority.

Number two, misaligned policies. Urban-focused policies like transit, density, and rapid development don't fit rural realities and often can harm agricultural and land-based communities when applied broadly.

Number three, conflicting land-use priorities. Urban expansion causes pressures that clash with rural stewardship and property

rights. This creates direct competition for the same MLA's attention and makes it difficult for rural to be represented.

Number four, public safety differences. Rural emergency response, volunteer fire, RCMP, policing, wildfire, and flood preparedness require unique advocacy that gets lost in mixed ridings. As we've seen with other presentations today, that seems to be a common thread.

Number five, economic divergence. Highwood's economy is built on agriculture, small businesses, and land-based industry. Southwest Calgary's economy is urban, service driven, and density focused. One MLA cannot advocate effectively for both.

Number six, loss of community of interest. Highwood's communities are connected east, west, and south, not north into Calgary's urban core, so combining us with Calgary breaks long-standing relationships and weakens civic engagement. It also takes away our identity by removing the name Highwood. Let's keep the name, save costs, and preserve Highwood pride.

#### 4:05

At the heart of all of this is the simple truth that rural residents are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for appropriate representation or effective representation, as your mandate stipulates. They want boundaries that reflect their identity, their priorities, and the communities that are undeniably part of Okotoks: Diamond Valley, Millarville, and the rural areas surrounding Okotoks may be urban, but Okotokians are very much connected to their rural neighbours.

However, for Calgarians removing the communities of Silverado from other ridings will also weaken Calgarian residents' voices and is not representative of Calgary either. As someone who grew up in the far southwest corner of Calgary, I can tell you there is not much in common between southwest Calgary residents and those in rural Foothills county. They live in different worlds, so the division boundaries in Calgary should be reconsidered as well.

As leaders, as stewards of our democratic system we have a responsibility to protect that representation. Today on behalf of the people who entrusted me to speak for them, I respectfully urge the commission to adopt the boundary option that preserves rural communities of interest, keeps our interconnected towns together, and ensures that Highwood continues to have strong, effective, dedicated rural representation.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms Holder. Tell me again: where do you live? Do you live in Okotoks?

**Ms Holder:** No. I live rurally between Calgary and Okotoks, further east in the county in the constituency and closer to the eastern boundary.

**The Chair:** And you make a pitch for reverting to the old name, Highwood. Well, what's the history of Highwood there?

**Ms Holder:** Yeah. Highwood had previously – I mean, it has changed boundaries a few times, but the Highwood River is really the historic significance. Highwood River is closer to the eastern boundary of the constituency. Previously we did include High River as well in the Highwood constituency, and High River does have a lot of connection with the area as well, almost as much as Diamond Valley does, actually. We understand that we can't have it all. You know, that is a loss that I think is reasonable. We've been without High River for some time now already, so that's understandable, but there is a lot of deep connection in the area, and I think it's worth preserving.

I mean, really, it's just from a cost perspective, right? You know, we'll have to change a whole lot of naming, and there are just some costs associated with that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Martin, any questions?

**Dr. Martin:** No.

Thank you for coming. We've had several letters – more than several – and several presenters as well on very similar themes. I'm glad to hear you reinforce them. Thank you.

**Ms Holder:** You're welcome.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Samson.

**Mrs. Samson:** Yes. Thank you for coming out tonight. Exactly that. We laid this out with an A and B scenario in hopes that we could get the feedback and you could feel like part of the process. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Evans.

**Mr. Evans:** No. Nothing.

Thank you so much for your submissions.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clark.

**Mr. Clark:** Not so much a question. You know, you've given us a new bit of information today, which I didn't know. I think you may have been on for most of this afternoon's presentations, and there's been a lot of back and forth on this question of rural-urban hybrids, some in favour, some not in favour. Part of what we're trying to do is establish a community of interest, quote, unquote.

I think you've effectively made that case for the Highwood area specifically, but the one example you used that I found really compelling was the results of this most recent municipal election, that the folks who were opposed to growth in that area won the election. The folks who were pushing for growth were turfed, and that just says a lot, I think. We're looking for demonstrable evidence of: how do we define this community of interest, and what evidence do we have of what a community of interest is? That really struck me as one of those examples.

I don't have a question beyond just to say thank you very much for bringing that to our attention, and thanks for your presentation today.

**Ms Holder:** Oh, you're very welcome. Thanks for having me.

**The Chair:** Yes. Thanks for finishing off our day, Ms Holder.

We will reconvene on Monday, 9 o'clock, for in-person presentations in Edmonton.

Thank you so much, everyone. Have a good weekend.

[The hearing adjourned at 4:11 p.m.]







