



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Virtual

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Virtual

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Jason Javos, Deputy Reeve, County of Northern Sunrise

Terry Ungarian, Reeve, County of Northern Lights

Ken Vanderwell, Vice-president, Lesser Slave Lake United Conservative Constituency Association

Glenn van Dijken, MLA, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock

Bob Willing, Reeve, Municipal District of Peace

Brenda Yasinski, Councillor, County of Northern Lights

9:02 a.m.

Thursday, January 15, 2026

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen and everyone that is already tapped in to the online hearings of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. This is our fourth day of hearings in the province, our first day for online presentations.

Of course, the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission was established by way of the statute of the Legislature of Alberta, and we were all appointed back in April of this last year. You can see from the names on the screen that your commission is before you. There are five of us, and you can check out everyone's biography on the website.

Our task as a commission was to do two things. The first one was to provide a proposal for a reorganization of the electoral boundaries to the Legislature by way of moving from 87 electoral divisions to 89. The Legislature gave us only two new seats to work with, and, as you probably have read in the interim report, those seats are justified and laid out in that report. Of course, in Alberta residents or eligible voters in each electoral division elect the actual MLA to sit in the Legislature.

The second aspect of our task is to deal with the increased population of Alberta, and the increase is substantial. From the last electoral boundaries report in 2017 Alberta has grown significantly in approximate numbers of over 800,000 residents. To give some perspective in terms of where we were in 2017, fast-forwarding to this year, in 2017 the population was just over 4 million people. If you take the quotient of the total population divided by the number of electoral divisions at that time, 87, it brings you to an average of 46,697 voters. However, the average is not the target for each electoral division. The target is the range of population of below the average down to 25 per cent and plus 25 per cent. That range is 35,000 to 58,000 for 2017.

For this Electoral Boundaries Commission the population is 4.8 million divided by 89 electoral divisions; that yields an average of just under 55,000. You'll see it on the screen: 54,929. Again, the target population range reaches from 41,000 to almost 69,000. That's our target for the purpose of reaching the goal of effective representation in Alberta.

We've heard a lot of submissions and comments about the need for one person, one vote. However, that is not a Canadian concept. That is not a parliamentary concept. That is a concept from our neighbours to the south. We do not operate on one person, one vote. Rather, we work towards effective representation. That's our task as a commission, to come up with a boundary map that includes 89 electoral divisions that provide effective representation to Albertans.

To give you some background as to what we have done since we've been appointed, first of all, we met, starting in April and May of this past year. We came to an agreement as to the population source for Alberta. By way of background we relied on the most recent decennial census, which was conducted by the federal government in 2021. That census is then updated regularly and routinely by the Office of Statistics and Information of the Alberta Treasury Board. We settled on a figure for population that had a cut-off of July 2024.

In addition, from April on we reviewed hundreds of submissions that were presented to the commission. We went on the road and travelled across the province and listened to hundreds of presentations across Alberta all the way from Peace River, Grande Prairie, down to Medicine Hat and from Lethbridge up to Fort McMurray. Then after we conducted that road trip, we met with the mapping people at Elections Alberta. We worked throughout

August and September and October, and we came up with our interim report. That interim report was provided to the Speaker of the Legislature in late October. It is an interim report. It is issued for the purposes of public comment and provided to the public.

By way of background we truly did follow the legislative criteria in terms of coming up with the boundaries. Our ultimate goal was to provide understandable and clear boundaries for Albertans with the goal of effective representation for each and every electoral division.

We also opened it up for public submissions and comments in written format. In early November to just before Christmas we opened a portal on our website for those submissions. Over 1,100 submissions have come in, and we appreciate the interest and the uptake that our report has had in the province.

Now we head into our final stage as a commission. Again, the five of us are conducting public hearings, starting on Monday of this week. We spent two and a half days in Calgary. Today and tomorrow we are dealing with online submissions. We're not going out into the communities outside of Calgary and Edmonton because of the winter, and technology provides us with this opportunity to conduct virtual hearings. Next week we'll be doing in-person hearings in Edmonton, and we look forward to hearing from all those that have signed up. We had very fruitful and lively discussion in Calgary, and we look forward to the same online and in Edmonton.

I want to note that we're interested in feedback to our interim report. If you've read the philosophy or the background, the first 40 pages of the report, we have basically outlined our legal basis and the approach that we're taking. If you are concerned that we don't have enough electoral divisions – sorry – we can't do anything about that. We're limited to the 89. We don't need to hear a lot about whether 89 is the appropriate number. Plus, we are looking very specifically for comments and suggestions and corrections that you think need to be made in the interim report. If we can liken it to a hockey season, we're past the regular season. This is the playoffs, and we need to focus on the actual report that we've issued.

9:10

With that, I know we're starting maybe a little earlier than our projected time, but some of the presenters are already here, so I'm going to call – and the time limit. Sorry. Per presenter we will operate fairly strictly on the time limit, about six to seven minutes, of which we will then allow two or three minutes of questions from the panellists, so a maximum of 10 minutes. I have not been the best timekeeper so far this week, so sometimes we may veer off and allow people to go on. If we have some flexibility in the schedule, I don't think that's a problem.

Our first presenter is here early, so we're starting five minutes early. Mr. Glenn van Dijken, MLA from Barrhead.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you. I am pleased to present. I have a brief presentation. I'm actually not in the country at this time – I'm in Mexico – but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the commission with regard to the proposed boundaries report.

I must say that I am happy that the commission took into consideration, in a way, from my standpoint in the riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, that the number of municipalities that are encompassed in any one constituency can have a significant role in challenging the MLA to provide effective representation. Under the proposed report, my riding would change significantly based off the fact that the Lesser Slave Lake riding was being eliminated.

I guess I have grave concern with regard to the fact that we are reducing representation in northern Alberta. Fellow MLAs and

myself did a written submission. All commission members have been able to have access to that. I believe the public has access to that as well. The concern we have is that we're representing a very large geographical area. By reducing the number of constituencies in northern Alberta, we're reducing the ability for each of those representatives to engage with their constituents effectively.

Right now the geographical centre of Alberta is a little bit west of the middle of my riding. Probably two-thirds of the geographical area of the province is in northern Alberta, yet we have currently, I believe, nine representatives representing that entire area, all the municipalities within that area and industry within that area. To dilute that by losing a northern riding would be catastrophic, I believe. I believe it goes against what the commission is trying to accomplish with regard to achieving effective representation throughout the province.

The legislation is clear. It does give the commission the opportunity to adjust the number of citizens that each MLA will be charged with representing. As you've mentioned, Your Honour, that range can be within the guidelines anywhere from 41,000 to 69,000, and I do believe that geography has a huge impact on the ability to effectively represent constituents in northern Alberta.

I also want to highlight – and I mentioned this when I did my presentation in person in Westlock – the amount of eligible voters. Currently in the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock constituency if we look at the 2023 election list, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has more eligible voters than about half of the constituencies in Edmonton, and also more than many of the constituencies in Calgary as well. While eligible voters is not a criteria that is outlined in the legislation, I do believe that the commission needs to have some consideration towards that.

For effective representation of our citizens, each MLA probably has more of a duty of effective representation to a citizen than to those that are not citizens as of this time, so it is a consideration, I believe, that needs to be looked at in the future. It could be considered at this time but not made decisions on, so I implore the commission to recognize that losing a riding in northern Alberta just puts that much more load on the leftover MLAs, the ones that are remaining, and that becomes quite problematic as it's already been very challenging to effectively represent the people within the constituency of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

That's what I would like to highlight, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken, congratulations on coming in on time on your presentation.

I have two quick comments or questions I'd like you to respond to. Number one, oil wells don't vote, and you've got all this technology. Why can't you adapt to the technology and represent your people with fewer MLAs given the fact that, you know, those tools are available to you?

Mr. van Dijken: Well, you're correct. Oil wells do not vote, trees do not vote, wheat does not vote, cows do not vote, but the people that take care of them and maintain them and provide the opportunity for this province to thrive do, and they deserve the representation that allows them to be effectively representative. Now, sure, we have technology that allows me to take a lot of my constituent meetings virtually, but it's never the same as driving out to a site and meeting one on one with the reeve of a county, with the councillors of the county, with a town mayor, one on one with an industry representative, whether that's an aggregate removal industry, forestry industry, energy industry, meeting with them with concerns that they have on site in the constituency.

I don't know if it's truly understood how much on-site representation a rural MLA is charged with. You know, even when we take a look at the water projects, which is a big part of the file that transportation does with rural municipalities, each of my counties will have two or three high-priority waterline projects. For me to understand what the need is, I do have to go to the site to have a good understanding of what they're looking for. Currently, one of my municipalities is trucking water into a hamlet, and they would like to put a waterline in there, and then, you know, we have to learn the dynamics around that and the pros and cons to doing that.

9:20

There are always a lot of decisions that have to be made based off of the limitations that we have within provincial funding. In order for me to have an accurate interpretation of what's going on in the field, being there is important.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions knowing that we've got only probably about a minute left? Starting with you, Mr. Evans.

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

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: I just wanted to echo my thanks. We read your submission on October 29 with the combination of the other MLAs from the north. Well written, and I understand your concerns. Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you for your time. Thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, any questions?

Mr. Clark: I do, yes.

Hello, MLA van Dijken. Good to see you again.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Good to see you.

Mr. Clark: You know, I just want to echo Susan's comments. We really struggle with the way we have drawn the north, and we have tremendous empathy for just the vast distances. I guess I'm curious, and maybe just to Justice Miller's question, I mean: how often are you doing Zoom meetings? You're obviously not in Alberta at the moment by the looks of it, as you said. Are you doing work right now, like, where you take a call if a constituent calls? I mean, MLA is a 24/7 kind of job.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. To give you an idea of yesterday's activity, we had caucus meetings in the morning, all virtual. Well, some were in person, of course, but I was able to do that. I had phone calls. One of the phone calls was with regard to the automotive apprenticeship program and some of the concerns around that. Then I contact the minister with the concerns that I've been hearing, and we'll present a file to him when I arrive back home. Yeah. We're able to do some of the work while we're away, but that doesn't mean that all of the work is able to be done virtually. Otherwise, why do we even have representation out in the rural areas, then, if we can all do it virtually? We could all live in Edmonton or Calgary, I guess.

But the reality is that I believe strongly in being there as a rural representative, being able to meet quite often with municipal representatives or industry representatives on site so that we have a good understanding of what's needed and are able to go to the

minister's office and present the concerns and the ideas that are coming forward to our office.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. I appreciate that very much. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Martin, anything on this?

Dr. Martin: Yes. Just a comment.

Mr. van Dijken, your submission to us in the spring dwelled as you did today on the complexities presented to you by the huge footprint of your riding. You outlined then and in your letter to us more recently the difficulties of effective representation in such a large riding with so many complexities of counties, mayors, Reeves, and the like. I take that point very seriously, and I take it that Justice Miller's point about technology is very apt because I agree that many decisions are best done face to face or seeing the site that's under question. Again, I thank you for reinforcing these points for us today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. van Dijken. We always appreciate people that knock on the doors and seek the support of electors. They know better than anyone what effective representation is, and we've heard from several throughout this week. Thank you so much for presenting.

I have to comment that the letter that came in was pretty prompt. Within – what? – 72 hours we had that very detailed letter, and it was impressive.

Thank you very much.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: We'll now move to the next presenter.

Our next presenter is Jackie Clayton.

Ms Clayton: Good morning. Forgive me. I couldn't turn my camera on.

The Chair: Good morning. Please identify yourself and tell us which electoral division you're speaking to.

Ms Clayton: For sure. All right. Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Jackie Clayton, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. I'm the mayor of the city of Grande Prairie, and I'm here today to clearly state our position on the proposed electoral boundary changes.

To begin, we support maintaining the status quo for Grande Prairie. The commission's interim report recognizes that Grande Prairie and the current boundaries logically work and that preserving them supports effective representation, and we agree with that conclusion. Where we have serious concern is with the broader recommendation to reduce northern representation.

Grande Prairie is the largest municipality in northern Alberta. With that, we are a regional service, economic, health care hub for a vast geographic area. The communities that are around us rely on Grande Prairie for specialized medical and hospital services, postsecondary education, employment, transportation, retail, recreation, and government services. The reality must be reflected in how representation is structured. For that reason, our position is very clear. This region deserves two dedicated MLAs. This is not a preference; it's a necessity.

Representation in northern Alberta is fundamentally different than representation in urban or larger centres. Our challenge is not necessarily density; it's the distance, the geography, and the sheer land mass. Northern ridings already cover enormous territory. Some take eight hours or more to drive from end to end, and

reducing representation would create constituencies so large that a single MLA could not reasonably maintain access, visibility, or responsiveness across the region. At a certain point, representation becomes physically impractical. Effective representation requires more than a seat count based on population. It requires the ability to be present in person, to travel to communities, to meet constituents, and to understand regional realities on the ground. With fewer MLAs covering more land, that standard simply cannot be met.

Grande Prairie's region also supports significant shadow populations that are tied to industry, resource development, and major infrastructure, activity that is not always captured in census data but places that have real and ongoing demands of representation and service co-ordination.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act recognizes that effective representation is not based on population alone, and in section 15 it allows flexibility to account for geography, access, and communities of interest, particularly in regions with large land areas and dispersed population. Northern Alberta clearly meets those thresholds. Applying those variance tools is not an exception to the rule; it is exactly what they were designed for.

Looking specifically at the Grande Prairie-Wapiti riding, this is an example of how communities of interest are shaped by how the region functions day to day. Surrounding communities within that riding rely on the city of Grande Prairie and Grande Prairie proper for labour mobility, health care, education, service delivery, and economic co-ordination. These connections are essential to effective representation. Historically, our boundaries have been reflected in how the community functions on the ground. Electoral lines have been followed by practical divisions while preserving strong, coherent representation. The principle that remains relevant today is that boundaries must reflect lived reality, not just mathematical balance.

Our request is straightforward and grounded in practicality: maintain the status quo for Grande Prairie, preserve two dedicated MLAs for this region, do not reduce northern representation in a way that undermines access and effectiveness. Northern Alberta plays a critical role in this province's economy and infrastructure. Its residents deserve representation that is realistic, accessible, and workable in practicality, not just on paper.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share our perspective, and I look forward to continued dialogue as this process continues.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms Clayton.

Mrs. Sampson, any questions or comments with this presenter?

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your time today and your comments. We've heard very clearly from across Alberta that the changes to the north are challenging, so thank you for your input today.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: No questions. Thank you very much for your presentation, Mayor.

The Chair: By the way, did you provide a written presentation as well? You did, didn't you?

Ms Clayton: Yes, we did.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Martin, any questions?

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

Mayor Clayton, thank you for your remarks that highlight the complexity of the relationships that are a necessary part of not only your work but those of the MLAs in order to ensure effective and probably decisive representation. I wanted to ask you a question about your anticipated growth in and around the city of Grande Prairie. What is your current understanding of the forward growth probabilities?

9:30

Ms Clayton: In the city proper we're approximately about a 4 per cent growth increase over the last few years, but in the rural municipalities – the city of Grande Prairie services about 300,000 people from northeastern British Columbia and northwestern Alberta. That growth in the rural areas is even at a greater increase. With large-scale projects on the horizon in this region it's hard to get an exact anticipated number, but the growth in the county of Grande Prairie, the MD of Greenview, other specific areas that surround and use Grande Prairie as a service hub are greater than that 4 per cent. I think that it's realistic. We've seen growth rates between 4 and 10 per cent over the last 15 years, and there's no reason to think that that is reducing.

Right now in my city we have about a zero per cent vacancy rate in multifamily, so there are significant projects in the ground right now, which we know has been a little bit of a hindrance on growth. With that availability of multifamily being such a significant increase in the next few years, we know that our growth will probably be greater than it's been over the last three years.

Dr. Martin: Impressive. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you very much.
Mayor Clayton, good to see you again.

Ms Clayton: Nice to see you.

Mr. Clark: I've loved every single minute I've ever spent in Grande Prairie. It's a beautiful part of the world. A couple of questions. Grande Prairie is interesting. It has an urban constituency, and then it has a rural hybrid. Do you feel it's valuable to have that urban Grande Prairie only portion? Tell me about that.

Ms Clayton: Actually, no. The current model is great. The model that was prior to that was actually my preferred one, where we had two MLAs and it was split down the middle of the urban city, but I think that the reality is that although we're the urban proper centre, many industries have their offices here while they work in the rural, where their projects per se are in the rural areas. The average resident or company doesn't see the boundaries per se, and with that come unique issues.

There are times that I work with my MLAs on very specific urban concerns, homelessness, mental health, addictions, while there are times that I'm working with my MLAs because an industry proponent may call me and say: we have these significant concerns with land use in a rural area. So to not have access to MLAs that represent both urban and rural when we're the centre for those types of industries, those types of employees would be a miss. To have an urban-focused MLA strictly I think would be a miss because of the fact that that MLA would never get calls from rural areas, and then it wouldn't integrate between the health care and postsecondary. Right now both of our MLAs are very versed on

urban issues and rural issues, and that kind of works well for us because they're very blended together on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. You'd mentioned the sort of status quo from 2017. The effective representation kind of mix that we're sort of working to – interestingly, this draft map for the 10 constituencies in the north, including Grande Prairie, actually has a greater variance. It's about 10 per cent below the provincial averages. I'm sure you know, and as you've seen, Grande Prairie has really experienced these growth pressures. The number of people who moved to Alberta in the last eight years – you know, largely, not exclusively, a lot of those people ended up in Grande Prairie, but most of that population growth is Calgary and Edmonton. The difference between the 10 northern constituencies in 2017 was about 8.4 below the average. In our interim report it's actually 10 per cent below the average, so it's actually a little more kind of effective, I guess, if you put it that way.

I guess I just wanted to ask your kind of thoughts on – do you feel like that's sort of an appropriate balance? I know it's difficult when the growth is concentrated and the issues are different, but I guess I wanted to ask you about that. If it worked well in 2017 and it's actually better now, I guess I'm wondering if you feel like that's a fair balance.

Ms Clayton: Yeah. I think there are a few realities there. There are times when we're represented from an MLA on various issues. The collaboration within this region is very unique, and we're very proud of it in the sense that we're very integrated in our service delivery. We're integrated in many things, so in that MLA piece I think it serves well. Historically our MLAs have always worked well together and provide context to conversations and legislation that is diverse.

In the growth piece history shows that growth happens primarily first in the urban centres, Edmonton and Calgary, and then over time as people get located in the province, get used to what the offerings are, they realize that maybe Edmonton and Calgary aren't for them, and they tend to move to the mid-sized cities. That could be for various reasons. It could be for recreational offerings. It could be for the price of housing. It could be for job opportunities. That flux of people movement in our province is historically very notable, and I think that when you see people land in, say, Edmonton and maybe move to St. Albert or move to Red Deer and then realize, "You know what? There's an opportunity," they come to Grande Prairie.

We have a statistic that shows that it takes about 2.4 times for you to visit Grande Prairie before you'll move here. You know, maybe you've come for a recreation opportunity or to meet somebody, and you're quite impressed with what this region has to offer. As you mentioned, it's a great place to live, work, and play. When you get that movement of people within our intraprovincial movement, you really note that people have lived in more than one location quite often in our province, so those numbers move quite often.

I think that to think that an MLA could serve more people is possible, but to Mr. van Dijken's comments earlier, I think you have to recognize that when an MLA comes home on a Friday from a work week to meet with their constituents, there's a lineup of people that want to see them because they don't have the opportunity to run into them at the hockey rink or the grocery store. So when that MLA comes home and they have so much work to do on that Friday, Saturday, Sunday before they head back to Edmonton, it's not about getting 30 people on a Zoom.

The people that want to meet with you can be volunteers who actually want to see face to face and deserve that time with their elected official. There are people that have organizations that base

their work week around waiting for the MLA to get home. To jump on a Zoom isn't conducive to good conversations. As you know, Mr. Clark, this region is very warm and welcoming, and with that they want to see people in person. So if you were to increase those areas, it'd be very hard for an MLA to honestly say that they were aware of the issues in their constituency.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thanks for that. I concur, having been up there. Like, the north is something, as I think all the commissioners have indicated a couple of times, where, you know, frankly we're not sure we got right. I'll be completely frank on that.

Ms Clayton: Yeah. You know, it was mentioned by the chair earlier on that you've been given the number of 89, and I appreciate that. I just would say that the growth can't be at the expense of the north. To increase those seats: it can't be at the expense of the north.

Mr. Clark: Thank you so, so much. Appreciate it.

The Chair: Mayor Clayton, a lot of criticism has been levelled at the concept of hybrid ridings in that members of the Legislature can't handle representing two different groups; i.e., a rural, agricultural, nonurban and an urban group. What's the experience from your perspective as mayor watching two MLAs represent your region historically?

Ms Clayton: Well, actually, I think that's a great bonus for us in the sense that the MLAs are very versed in both urban issues and rural issues. Take the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, who lives in a rural area but literally day-to-day operates in the urban area. When you are from this region, as I mentioned, you don't see the boundaries. You may live in a rural situation and work in an urban, so with that inherently you just are aware of the realities of both. It's not like you would have an MLA that is very versed in urban issues and one that's very versed in rural because the integration is so evident. It's just naturally inherited as a skill.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Your presentation is most appreciated. We value municipal leaders presenting to us. Thank you for the warning, 2.4 visits. I've only been to Grande Prairie twice, so I have to realize my third visit: it may be . . .

9:40

Ms Clayton: Next time you come, I'll take you straight to a realty agent.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you so much.

Ms Clayton: Thanks so much.

The Chair: Please remain in to hear the other presenters if you're able.

Our next presenter is Mr. Kenneth Vanderwell. It's a little early. You're only scheduled to be at 9:50, but if you're here, we're happy to hear you.

Mr. Vanderwell: Great. Can you hear me okay, Your Honour?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Vanderwell: Great. Okay. Yes. I'm a little bit early, but that's fine.

As mentioned, my name is Ken Vanderwell. I'm a long-time resident of Slave Lake, and I'm also the vice-president of the Lesser Slave Lake United Conservative Party association. The commission may recall that I was the only individual that made an in-person submission to the commission when you were in Slave Lake back

on June 18. In attendance with me was president of our association, Mr. Mike Skrynyk.

As the only presenter Mike and myself did have a fairly lengthy discussion with the commission on the topic of required population representation options for the Lesser Slave Lake electoral division. At that time the commission – I believe that you had indicated we are about 209 or 210 people shy of being able to be considered a special electoral division under the act. Then we did speak about adding some of the smaller communities along highway 88 within the municipal district of Lesser Slave River such as Chisholm, Tieland, and Flatbush, but you know, to be honest, Commission, the population of those areas was quite sparse and would not likely reach the required population numbers.

The day after our meeting with the commission it occurred to President Skrynyk that the addition of the town of Swan Hills – in 2024 the population of Swan Hills was estimated at 1,366 people. The addition of that would allow the Lesser Slave Lake electoral division to meet the minimum population requirement. Skrynyk did contact the commission and ask that this possible solution be made aware to Chairperson Justice Miller. Subsequently, President Skrynyk was in conversation with the mayor of Swan Hills – that's Mr. Craig Wilson – on this development, and there was a development with the town of Swan Hills actually supporting the addition of their town into the Lesser Slave Lake electoral division. The town of Swan Hills is actually already part of the municipality of Big Lakes county, which is the High Prairie end of the lake, so to include it into the electoral division would actually be a great solution.

My submission today to the commission is in support of modifying the existing boundaries of the Lesser Slave Lake electoral division with one change to add population to our division and to enable us to continue to be considered as one of the four special electoral divisions under the act. That change is to expand the electoral boundary to the south to include the town of Swan Hills.

Aaron, if you can put up the map that I had there. I did submit a map. I don't know if you can see it or not.

The Chair: Just for clarity purposes, sir, when you say the existing, you mean the 2017 map, the map that you're living under now, not our proposed . . .

Mr. Vanderwell: That's right, Your Honour. Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah. I took that off your own website there.

This is the existing Slave Lake electoral division map. I outlined in yellow at the very bottom: that includes the town of Swan Hills. That is really what my submission is. The impact of moving that population of 1,366 to Lesser Slave Lake would decrease the deviation from a negative 50.04 per cent to 47.55. Of course, there would be an impact on the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock electoral division, and that would increase their deviation from 14.83 to 17.32. However, I would submit that the town of Swan Hills should be part of the Lesser Slave Lake electoral division. This one change was proposed to the commission after our in-person meeting in Slave Lake, and again it was submitted by the constituency association in our online submission in December 2025.

Why would this work? It's continued effective representation by the MLA. It's a serviceable geographical size and takes into consideration the geographical properties, municipal boundaries of our area; understandable clear boundaries; addresses existing business integration, transportation across and within the area; recognizes our large, growing Indigenous population, the Treaty 8 trading and traditional areas.

I'm sure the commission is aware that Alberta's Indigenous population is actually expanding at double the rate of non-Indigenous populations, a trend expected to continue due to the inherently younger age structure. There are 11 communities within the existing Lesser Slave Lake electoral division.

And, of course, as many others have said, it maintains the voice and interests of rural electoral divisions within the government of Alberta.

In closing, I would submit that the existing Lesser Slave Lake electoral division be modified to include the town of Swan Hills. This would increase the population to allow it to be considered one of the four exempt electoral divisions under the act and continue as a rural electoral division due to the five reasons that I outlined above.

Thank you very much.

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

We're less pressured for time than I expected, but I'll turn it over to Dr. Martin for any questions or comments.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Vanderwell. I do recall when we were in Slave Lake and you presented; I learned an awful lot about the forestry industry. I wanted to press that point a little further here with your present suggestions about adding the Swan Hills area. Are they presently involved in the orbit of the forestry industry?

Mr. Vanderwell: Absolutely, they are. Yeah. They were quite severely impacted by the forest fires between Slave Lake and Swan Hills. The timber at that elevation, a large portion of it, is lodgepole pine. That will flow through to Whitecourt, flow down towards Blue Ridge Lumber, the facilities, Alberta Newsprint, the old Millar Western facilities that are in Whitecourt. That wood basket: actually, even though we're here in Slave Lake, we do have the rights to a portion of that. That whole boreal forest area coming out of Swan Hills right through to north of Slave Lake is all part of a wood basket, and lots of trucks and timber move every day amongst the local highways here.

Dr. Martin: Am I right to infer, thereby, that you need an MLA who is sensitive to the needs of that industry and the people who work in it?

Mr. Vanderwell: Yes. That's always helpful. Of course, you know, Slave Lake and the area here around the lake in the electoral division is pretty fortunate. We really do kind of run on three cylinders. We have oil and gas, we have forestry, and we have tourism. All three of those have really helped our area perhaps not see some downturns that would occur if one industry is doing worse than other industries.

Dr. Martin: I have one follow-up, and that's about population. The town of Slave Lake has been badly damaged twice by fires, and I take it that is one of the reasons why the population growth has flattened or stunted, so to speak. Do you anticipate a recovery in residents coming to the town of Slave Lake?

Mr. Vanderwell: Well, it's been, you know, coming up over 10 years now since the devastating fires in Slave Lake. I think that the building that's occurred is – more people perhaps are not going to move back. I think the greater opportunities for the town of Slave Lake and the whole electoral division are the continued development of the resource sector, oil and gas in particular, which would bring people to High Prairie, Slave Lake, the Wabasca area,

and the native communities north of the Lake, where I see the biggest growth occurring.

The town of Slave Lake itself: I mean, since I've lived there for many, many years, I'd love to think that it's going to grow, but we didn't see that. We had I think about a thousand people leave after the fires, and they didn't come back.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Clark, any questions or comments?

Mr. Clark: Sorry; just getting off mute there. Yeah. Thank you so much. I genuinely appreciate both your first presentation in person and now here online.

Just thinking a bit about growth. Justice Miller won't love this. Saskatchewan and northern Ontario have actual legislative carve-outs, and they say that parts of the province are just different than others. I'm only saying that not because it's anywhere in our direct control; it is just something we've talked a bit about as a commission. You know, maybe future boundaries commissions could look at something like that, that says specifically that we acknowledge and recognize that it's just different in the north, and we'll maybe add some specific seats that are dedicated to that. But that's a different issue for another day.

I don't really have a question beyond just saying what I've said to the others, which is that we have tremendous empathy and try our best to understand what it means to be in the north. It is different.

Mr. Vanderwell: Yeah.

Mr. Clark: It is different. I think that's a conversation we've had, and, without making any promises for specifics, you know, it's something we're thinking deeply about. Your presentation and the others really do have a big impact, so thank you.

Mr. Vanderwell: I appreciate that.

Just to follow up on your comment, I did do a personal submission to the commission as well, and I said: what's the long-term solution to what we're going to face every eight years as rural electoral districts not only in northern Alberta but southern Alberta? I think it's time for the government of Alberta to really look at some more permanent electoral divisions outside of the rural areas. I know it's outside the scope of the commission, but I do not personally see any other solution to maintain the voice of the rural areas in the province of Alberta going forward. Otherwise, we're going to face this every eight years.

I presented in 2017. It's a different story now and going forward as the population grows. I don't see any other way of really dealing with this appropriately. I appreciate your comments on that.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: Just for interest, the MLA for your region will be presenting next week, Mr. Vanderwell, so we look forward to hearing from him.

Mr. Vanderwell: Oh, okay. Yeah. Mr. Sinclair. That's great.

The Chair: Yes.

What's that noise? Oh, okay. Maybe if you could mute, Mr. Vanderwell, until you speak. There's a bit of feedback, so if you could mute, that might help. Good.

Okay. I'm going to turn it over to Mrs. Samson.

Just indicate that you can hear us still, though. Yeah. Okay. Good.

Mrs. Samson: I think what we were hearing were the sawmills going in the background there.

Thank you again. It's a pleasure to see you and interact. I want to thank you for two things. I like the suggestion of Swan Hills. Thank you for going out and doing the leg work to get their approval of that inclusion into the north. As you know, when the final report comes out, we don't get a chance to interact again. And we know that that one is already approved.

I do agree with your last suggestion about permanent boundaries in the north. We see that in other provinces like Saskatchewan. So at least when electoral boundaries come, they know that that's untouchable. I really do believe that we have to quit having these conversations every time. It is completely different from the rest of the province.

Thank you so much for your input today. I really appreciate it and enjoyed seeing you again.

Mr. Vanderwell: Thank you very much. I agree with you, too. But, again, I think not only the north; you know, all the southern rural areas certainly need to be included in any changes that would be coming forward.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

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

Mr. Evans: Mr. Vanderwell, thank you for your tireless efforts in doing what you've done. It's been very helpful for us as a commission. I have one concern with respect to fixed permanent boundaries in electoral districts in the north. I say that only because there are two areas in the north that I think will have significant growth potential, and that might actually end up as a limiting factor on effective representation in the north. That would be Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie and the regions surrounding both of those, not to exclude other significant growth opportunities in the north as well. Although, it seems to me that I think we should be cautious with that. It may be a short-term solution and cause us a long-term problem.

If every eight or 10 years we have to wrestle with this fact and, you know, following our historical success we continue that into the future, I don't know that we need to necessarily be concerned that five individuals have to struggle through this and gain a little more grey hair or lose some hair. It's worth doing it just to get it right. Thank you very much for all that you've done. Appreciate it.

Mr. Vanderwell: Okay. Thank you. I much appreciate that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We are actually on time. Our next presenter is Mr. Scott Cyr.

Thank you, Mr. Vanderwell. I appreciate it. Please stay on if you can.

Mr. Scott Cyr.

Mr. Cyr: Well, hello there, Commission. I am thankful that you've given me the opportunity to be able to speak before the commission. Now, I just want to reinforce to the commission that I'm very thankful that you heard loud and clear my June presentation before you. You took all of the recommendations from my proposal seriously and clearly brought that into the current draft that we're looking at. So thank you for that. I'm very thankful that the commission was reactive to my constituents and myself that had brought those forward.

I will say that I'd like to make a correction. I think that there are three constituencies that are looking at rapid growth and that Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul would be one of those with rapid

growth as well. So it's not just Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, but my area is looking at the F-35 program that's going to be bringing in some pretty big growth here. Plus, the Pathways project is looking like that's going to be moving forward. Plus, we've got a remarkable amount of resource development happening in my backyard. So, again, thank you for that.

Now, again, my constituency is just above the provincial average at 1.6 per cent over. Clearly, that is one of those things that is going to be a challenge for any MLA, including myself, for the size and the number of individuals. I want to build off what MLA van Dijken said, that it is a different walk that we've got as rural MLAs. I've got 18 high schools or outreach programs in my constituency. I've got four hospitals, several seniors' lodges. When you start adding all of that up, that's a lot of advocacy that you need to do.

One of the things that was brought forward in the 2017 commission – I sat before that commission – was that we lost the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills constituency up in the northeast. That one there was catastrophic at the time, and in the end we all were able to absorb the extra region that we were taking on. But what I will say is that this seems to be a recipe that the boundaries commission continues to utilize. In the last one, the 2017, the northeast lost a seat, and now we're looking at central, looking like they're going to lose a seat. This is a very troubling trend, especially for what MLA van Dijken was mentioning: almost two-thirds of our land masses to the north.

One of the things that had come up with the 2017, and I heard this loud and clear earlier during MLA van Dijken's speech, was: do you know what videoconferencing is? I will say that that came up in 2017. I actually had a direct question from the commission: do you know what Skype is? I wish it was that simple.

MLA van Dijken, again, building off what he was saying, and Mr. Vanderwell: what happens is that our local farmers, ranchers, oil fields expect me to be out on-site. It is difficult for me to be able to not go and see the issues at hand. One of the concerns that was brought forward was – it seems like culverts are the bane of my existence, but it is an important part of my job.

When it comes down to our Edmonton and Calgary constituencies, I don't think they have the same level of infrastructure that we've got in rural, and I'm going to use highway 28 as a good example. When it comes down to the weather that northeast had, we had freezing rain and then a freeze, and then almost all of my provincial highways went into ballistic mode for all of my local constituents saying: we need to be dealt with. That is not something that a typical Edmonton and Calgary MLA would need to deal with, but those are an example of how rural MLAs are working closely with our local constituents to address some of these concerns.

10:00

Now, again, I'm very pleased with the draft that the commission had brought forward, but I'm very concerned that Lesser Slave Lake is going to be, I guess, removed from the northern constituencies. As a man that was born and raised in Lesser Slave Lake, I can tell you that, when it comes down to it, that MLA has always been something they can access. I don't know how an MLA is going to be able to meet the needs of that area, especially with the fact that a lot of it is First Nations and Métis in the area, which usually has very specific representation getting in front of local concerns there. My constituency also has significant rural First Nations and Métis presences here, too, so working with those groups is important as well as my MPs.

I have done a lot of the presentation already for you in June. The last thing I'd like to mention is that I just want to reinforce that the Cold Lake air weapons range: I would hope that would never be considered to be removed out of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

That is something that I hope that you saw in my letter, reinforcing the importance of maintaining that. It's within the MD of Bonnyville, and maintaining the entire MD plus the county of St. Paul was always the goal of the commission, so I would hope that you would take that into consideration.

I'm at six minutes. I'm open to taking any questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Well, thank you. Mr. Cyr, I'm very grateful for your presentation in the spring, your letter more recently, and your reiteration of the main points in your current presentation. You had stressed, and continue to stress, the rapid growth in your electoral district, and you sound excited and happy that it's happening. Like so many of your colleagues in northern ridings, we have heard the argument about ensuring a strong northern voice, if I may encapsulate the general motivation behind those letters that way, and I'm sure that you fully participate in that opinion of matters. As my colleague Mr. Clark had mentioned to an earlier presenter, we're very seriously looking at those letters and expressions of dismay about our interim report.

I wanted to press you again on the relationship that you just mentioned between Cold Lake proper and the air weapons base. As I dimly recall, in your most recent submission you say that the commander – would that be the correct rank? – would be the person who allows or doesn't allow permits for natural resource exploitation in that area. Is that correct?

Mr. Cyr: I believe that that's still within the province's mandate to be able to do that, but access to the range is controlled by the base commander, so if you want to get onto the range or off of the range, you need to get permission from the range control.

Dr. Martin: And range control is in Cold Lake itself?

Mr. Cyr: Well, the base is. It definitely is, yeah, but, again, they do have facilities at the entrance of the range where they do a lot of that, so it's not done on the air force base. They do it outside, but it's the air force that does take the leadership role in this process, yes.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your presentation. You've put a lot of effort into it by talking to us numerous times. I also want to let you know that former Mayor Copeland wrote a very detailed letter about the relationship of the Cold Lake air weapons range and its importance to Cold Lake, which I found to be very valuable. Coming from Sylvan Lake, I did not know a lot of the information he presented. Can you tell me with a yes or no: do you like the expansion that added on to your riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul? I see we've added more on the bottom. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Cyr: Well, yes, if you're going to limit me to yes or no. I will say, though, that if it means to save the Lesser Slave Lake constituency that we have to carve into my western side of my constituency to be able to make up populations, I believe that Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul would accept that simply because we don't want to lose another voice in the north. So if there needs to be a population moved from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul with the newest draft that you're doing simply because you're trying to get populations, say, shifting over, I believe that is something that we would consider. While I'd be disappointed to see that, I do

recognize the importance of continuing that Lesser Slave Lake constituency.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Evans, any comments or questions?

Mr. Evans: Yes, thank you. I didn't forget about you specifically with respect to the growth, and that's why I phrased it the way that I did. I was actually thinking about you because I remembered your presentation in person and how compelling it was. Especially, I think it was you and MLA van Dijken that mentioned the percentage of GDP of the province that actually came out of your area. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was 85 per cent or something, 80 per cent.

Mr. Cyr: Again, when it comes to the oil and gas industry, the northeast definitely plays a large part in all that. I will say that the northwest is definitely ramping up as they open up more of it. It is exciting to see, say, the connection between Peace River and Fort McMurray, the highway that Minister Jean and Minister Loewen are working towards to connecting those two, and once that kind of happens, that opens up a lot of opportunity for both the town and the city, but also it opens up opportunities for our First Nations partners up in that area as well.

Mr. Evans: The other part that I'd like to hear your comments on: if you recall, MLA van Dijken made some comments with respect to eligible voters and whether or not that is, you know, a factor, a characteristic that we should be taking into consideration when we're assessing electoral districts and effective representation. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Cyr: Well, again, when I presented the first time, I was talking about shadow population, and it actually is noted on page 61 of your report that it is estimated that my constituency is about 75,000 with shadow population involved.

This is the struggle that rural north has got when it comes to this. We still have to deliver justice. We still have to deliver health care. We still have to deliver a lot of education in these situations, and that seems to get ignored when it moves forward. And it's not your fault. I recognize that the shadow population isn't a consideration within the legislation, but I do believe that is an important part.

I also would like to say that, when it comes to the 2017 boundary commission, they had said, "Well, you know what? Because we're expanding your constituencies, we're going to recommend that we give you guys a whole lot more money," and I heard that last time as well, and that never seems to follow. Again, from my constituency because it's so spread out – and I only imagine my colleagues to the north – how do you deal with that with one office within a constituency as large as mine and one and a half staff? It is difficult to manage that, especially with the number of eligible voters and the shadow population.

10:10

Going back to that shadow population, when we had that ice storm, I was getting all kinds of people e-mailing my office saying: you need to talk to Emcon to get this. Again, some of them were from all over the province that were driving up to my area just to get into the camps. That's where the thing is. We still do need to hear and be able to be reactive to the shadow populations and be able to work through their concerns just as much as the citizens and eligible voters in my area.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. I wanted to build on that. Two things. Just your last point about money, I don't know if you said "on Members' Services," but it has come up before. I agree with you completely. I look back at the past reports, and it's report after report after report, and eventually – it's not the only solution. I completely acknowledge the north is a vast territory. Being an MLA is about being in the community. It's not a replacement. I agree with you on that. But increasingly, even different from 2017, the fact that we're doing this presentation on Zoom instead of coming out to the communities because of the weather, I think is telling. It's possible to do some of the work, not all, and it's not a replacement. I do agree with you on that.

I wanted to build on what Mr. Evans was asking on the shadow population and eligible voters. You seem to spend a lot of time, I imagine – or do you? – with people who can't vote for you and never would, but they count as part of your population. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Cyr: Absolutely. Especially with the upgrades that are coming into, say, the Cold Lake air force base with the hangars. We're looking at in 2027-2028 an additional 2,000 trades workers coming into my constituency just in Cold Lake alone. Likely they're going to bring families, but some of them are going to be living in hotels and stuff like that.

Again, that's the big concern here. When we ramp up, all my hotels go full. Plus people start sleeping on couches and renting rooms within households. That's what happens when my area starts to get hot, and they still need to have some level of ability to be able to get, I guess, advocacy through the province. Fortunately, when they spend a lot of their time up here, that means talking with me. They don't go back to their Edmonton or Calgary MLA to talk about a Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul problem, which is where they're at.

Mr. Clark: Great. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Just following up on that, Mr. Cyr, I hope you appreciate that, well, we got good representation to the commission from the north since our interim report, but almost every problem manifests itself in different ways in different parts of the province. I'm very sympathetic to the shadow population problem. In fact, we jokingly coined that the "representation without taxation" problem. But there are similar problems in the big cities, too, with noneligible voters that put a tremendous strain on the representatives. Your problems are unique, yet they're not unique. I guess I just want to remind you that we've got a whole province to deal with, and it's a challenge.

Mr. Cyr: I am hearing you loud and clear, but I would, I guess, push back a little bit on that by saying that when you're looking at Edmonton and Calgary, you're looking at – what? – 25 MLAs that are all carrying the load together. For a lot of these MLAs they might have a hospital. They might have a large school. They might have some provincial infrastructure possibly in their constituency. I have it in almost every municipality, and it's spread out significantly throughout the region. All of those pieces of provincial infrastructure have need for advocacy. When that advocacy happens for our area, it's through me whereas for Edmonton and Calgary you've probably got three or four or even five MLAs carrying that load, and that's the difference in my opinion.

The Chair: You reminded me of something else that I've been wanting to raise with northern presenters. It seems to me that when MLAs like yourself describe the work that you do and having to be on the ground, having to be in the riding, that you in a sense do some of the work that is performed by municipalities in the big cities like Calgary and Edmonton that MLAs there would not have to deal with. I'm not diminishing or criticizing your counties or municipalities, but it seems that you've got more of a provincial investment or concern. Respond to that for me.

Mr. Cyr: Yeah. Let's talk about my municipalities just with health care alone. In Cold Lake my emergency rooms are overflowing, and that's affecting Bonnyville, St. Paul, Elk Point, and even Glendon because they can't get care here. Now, we've got the urgent care centre that I'm very thankful was announced, and that's coming. Long-term care is a big problem in Bonnyville, so I've got seniors going from Bonnyville over to Cold Lake, Elk Point, and St. Paul and Lac La Biche and Two Hills and even up to Grande Prairie because they just can't find spaces.

When it comes to mental health in St. Paul, I've got a huge homeless issue there. Every one of my councils has got a very specific advocacy they're looking for, and each one of those advocacies is important to get through to the government. Again, when it comes to the Edmonton and Calgary MLAs, they all know they want a hospital in, say, northeast or southeast, and they all jump on there and they all write and meet with the ministers. That is not an option that we have in rural. It's me with the municipality.

We're going in and seeing the ministers. A lot of times I'll even see a minister with municipalities a couple of times in a week. Transportation is a good example, with Minister Dreeshen. I'm very thankful for him. What happens is that I could be with Minister Dreeshen with two or three municipalities in that time frame for advocacy for what their needs are. You don't have that same level of, in my opinion, advocacy when it comes to Edmonton and Calgary.

I'm not suggesting in any way that they're not working hard. I'm not hoping that you come out of that with this message. They work in a different way. I'm just saying that when it comes to rural Alberta, we have different challenges that need to be recognized, and continuing to add more and more onto our shoulders is very problematic.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Cyr. Your presentation is very helpful. Thank you. Please remain to hear the other presentations if you're able.

We'll now move to, I believe, Brenda Yasinski. Brenda, are you present?

Ms Yasinski: Yes, I am. I wasn't expecting to be speaking today.

The Chair: Oh, we've got you in at 10:10. Sorry.

Ms Yasinski: Okay. Sorry. Yeah. I wasn't aware of speaking today. I know our reeve, Terry Ungarian, was planning on speaking for our municipality.

The Chair: He's coming up soon.

Ms Yasinski: I just want to reiterate what was said already. I think most of the main points that we were trying to make have been covered, but I will let our reeve speak for us.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Just to confirm, ma'am, you're from the county of Northern Lights, correct?

Ms Yasinski: Yes.

The Chair: Did you present last time when we were up in that part of the world?

Ms Yasinski: No. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay. When you say that you wanted to reiterate what was said, can you be a bit more specific? Has it to do with the need to put one more riding back in the north? Is that the essence of it?

Ms Yasinski: Yes. We want to keep the current representation right now. We believe that, yeah, definitely dilutes the voices of rural and remote communities, including the Indigenous communities. It's harder for elected representatives to travel within their ridings. Right now our representative, Dan Williams, has a huge, huge geographical area and is always on the road. You know, I feel it just splits up regions and communities that currently share common economic and social interests, for example the forestry towns, oil and gas industry, pubs, et cetera. And then what MLA Cyr was just saying about: how will they meet the needs when these geographical areas are even so much larger?

10:20

The Chair: Any questions? Any dialogue?

Seeing as I've called you out, Ms Yasinski, I'm going to ask the commission if they have any comments or conversation with you. Yeah.

Mr. Evans: Brenda, thank you for surprisingly being part of this. I'm interested to, you know, get your experience in terms of using Zoom and et cetera to connect with your MLA. Have you experienced that, and if you have, can you tell me what your experience was like or if you know of others that have experienced it and if they've shared to you what their experience was like?

Ms Yasinski: As far as using Zoom or any videoconferencing software, whatever, it's worked very well. Like, if we can't see him in person, I think that's the next best thing, of course. As far as we've experienced, I think it's worked pretty well as long as our Internet connection stays stable.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Susan.

Mrs. Samson: No questions. Thank you.

Ms Yasinski: You're welcome. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. Greg, any comments?

Mr. Clark: No, beyond a thank you for being here and being willing to talk with us even though that wasn't plan A for you for today. Thank you.

Ms Yasinski: No problem. Thanks.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Yes. As Mr. Clark said – and we'll wait to talk to your reeve since that was the general aim you had – again, I'm glad you're on the line, and again thank you for participating.

The Chair: Okay. Well, that takes us, fortuitously, to Terry Ungarian. Is Mr. Ungarian present?

Mr. Ungarian: Yes. Good morning.

The Chair: Okay. Good morning. Now, I'm calling you up a little sooner. Are you able to present now?

Mr. Ungarian: Yeah, I am. Sorry for the confusion. We weren't really sure that we were all presenting. Our deputy reeve is also online as well, so we just don't want to be overlapping each other. I can speak on behalf of our council.

Yeah. My name is Terry Ungarian. I'm a reeve of the . . .

The Chair: Sorry, sir. Who's your deputy reeve? Can you identify him?

Mr. Ungarian: Kayln Schug.

The Chair: Okay. He's not on the list. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Ungarian: Yeah. Okay.

Yeah. Lifelong resident of our municipality. I won't give my age away, but you can maybe guess by the lack of hair, and what's left is kind of turning grey, that I've been here a long time. I've been through many Premiers and ministers in my lifetime in our province.

I guess one thing about being one of the later speakers is that I've already listened to MLAs van Dijken and Cyr and Mayor Clayton, and they've kind of sent the same message that our municipality feels. We're not in favour of these proposed boundary changes in our region. We're a large geographical region, huge geographical region. Our municipality alone, county of Northern Lights, could fit Edmonton and Calgary both inside our boundaries and have room left over, but we don't have people. I mean, our municipality is, you know, 3,600 people.

As Councillor Yasinski just stated, we're represented by MLA Minister Williams. He has a huge area to look after. To divide that up and make a new boundary change that he would not be representing us anymore, that we would now have Minister Loewen as our MLA representing from Fox Creek to Spirit River up to Paddle Prairie Métis settlement and all points in between: it makes no sense, right?

I mean, we talk about technology has advanced. I certainly agree. We're able to have this meeting today by technology. I'm fortunate; I actually have decent Internet connection. There are places in our municipality that have zero Internet connection. I mean, with the advancement of Starlink and some of these other services that is changing, but technology is no replacement for an MLA's role. These are very important people within our government. A meeting like this – don't get me wrong. I attend several meetings virtually and it's great. A lot of meetings require minimum of an hour. A lot of times it's three, four hours of travel time to attend a meeting that may last one hour, so you're spending six hours on the road to have a one-hour meeting. If there happens to be a freezing rainstorm or a snowstorm, it's kind of nice to sit in the comfort of your home and do that. But I don't think that we're ready for that with a legislative representative.

Now, there's nothing that can replace – I mean, I'll go back to an example. Dan Williams attended our local parade in one of our communities. I had an old '53 car that I put in the parade. He jumped in with me, hung his signs on the door, and away we went. We had a great conversation while he was throwing out candy for the spectators. You don't get that same connection if you try to do it through a keyboard.

You know, I look at Alberta's kind of ongoing – and I know this isn't a political organization or commission of the government. Alberta seems to have an ongoing dispute with Ottawa over a lot of things, whether it's pipelines, whether it's equalization payments.

There's a whole list of things. One of them that we always hear is that we don't have a strong voice in the west. Federal elections are decided by the time the votes are counted at the Manitoba-Ontario border because we just don't have enough representation. Well, I can kind of see the same model echoing for rural northern Alberta, that if we lose another seat or two, then we're going to be underrepresented more.

I get it. You mentioned at the beginning of this presentation that the population has increased by 800,000 people over the last 10 years or whatever the time frame was, and that's great. I mean, that shows good things for our province, that this is a place to do business and work. So we need maybe more representation. The population seems to be increasing in the urban centres more so than in the rural, remote areas. We've been pretty static on our population growth. But you can drive across Edmonton or Calgary and cover, you know, four or five constituency boundaries within an hour if the traffic isn't too heavy. Here in the north, I mean, you'd have a good, long day to cover that many ridings of an equal amount just because of our huge geographical area. That's understandable. That's the nature of urban versus rural. That's where the people are. But we can't use that as the only matrix for defining these boundaries.

It's been pointed out by the previous speakers that the GDP of the province is – a lot of it comes out of the north. NADC has prepared a report kind of outlining where the revenues for the province come from. In fact, the NADC report even has a recommendation that we should have a minister of northern Alberta that would, you know, be a boots-on-the-ground minister that would represent the north, understand the needs of the north. What happens in Pincher Creek or Milk River or Airdrie isn't necessarily the same as what happens in High Level or Fairview or Bonnyville. We have some different needs. So to expand boundaries and even narrow that down to within a proposed boundary: what happens in Fox Creek may not be the same as what happens in Peace River. I just think that we're asking a lot for MLAs to try to balance everything when they have such big ridings already, and to increase them or change them: we don't agree with that. Our municipality has submitted comments to the commission, and you've probably seen them.

10:30

I mean, centralization has hurt us. It's been, you know, a slow death of centralizing services in rural remote areas right from health care to postsecondary institutions, government services – we have provincial buildings now that have vacant offices in them – victim services. A lot of these things that we all had in our communities at one time are slowly fading away. This just seems like another move towards calling a region northern Alberta, and eventually, I mean, we could just have one representative working out of an office in Edmonton and not have local MLAs. I mean, that's kind of overstating it, but that's kind of the trajectory I see.

Respectfully, I disagree that permanent boundaries would be beneficial. I mean, the only thing that's certain in politics is change, right? We don't know what those changes may be for our children or our grandchildren, so to draw permanent boundaries would not probably be – it would be a great thing to try reversals in the future. Having these reviews periodically, you know, if you do them once every 10 years or whatever, and maybe make some adjustments if they're necessary would be a better solution.

We talk about economic growth or population growth in the north. I know Mayor Clayton personally. We see what's going on in Grande Prairie. It's our closest large centre. We get a lot of services out of there for our region, and there is a boom going on there, I'll call it. I mean, it's not hard to recognize. Go to any Tim Hortons in the city and see the lineup of service vehicles that are

going to work every morning in Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray area. I mean, that's what's been driving the province, been driving the whole country, really, economically, and that's still booming.

In our region we're kind of a three-pronged economy. We have forestry, which, honestly – and maybe Mr. Vanderwell would agree. They're under some tough times now economically with our neighbours to the south putting tariffs on top of duties and then just with everything that's going on. We know there are, really, challenges there, so to have a MLA not connected to those, trying to represent those industries, would not be fair to them. I think that those face-to-face conversations are important.

Our other pillar of economics is agriculture. We're kind of founded on agriculture. I mean, it's grown in economy, but it's diminished in people. The old 600-acre farm that we had . . .

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Ungarian. I'm going to stop you there. Can you just wrap up with the third issue? I want some time for the commission to be able to dialogue with you, and you've run over your time. So agriculture, energy, and what was the third industry? Forestry.

Mr. Ungarian: Forestry. Yeah. Three pillars.

I want to just make mention, that nobody has mentioned yet – and I'm not sure if anybody is aware; I know some are – that we do have probably the largest capital project that is being proposed in our municipality as we speak, a nuclear energy plant, and I'm not talking about a small modular reactor. I'm talking about a full-scale reactor plant that is being proposed and will have a huge economic ripple throughout our region, throughout the province, throughout the country. This is not a small – this would surpass anything that was happening in Fort McMurray individually. I mean, combined all the projects in Fort McMurray are huge – I recognize that – and in Cold Lake as well, but this would be a single project that would impact municipalities, obviously, near the project but within the greater radius of the project as well.

So we can't be underrepresented when these types of projects are being proposed. We need somebody to step up and support us. We've had great representation in the Legislature in my lifetime, and we want to continue to see that and not have it watered down.

Yeah. I don't know if I've used up my time or not.

The Chair: Yeah. You have, actually, but it's partly my fault.

I want to open it up for some dialogue. I'm going to ask Mr. Clark if he has any questions or comments of Mr. Ungarian.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Just to thank you very much for being here. We really appreciate the input. I mean, we've heard a lot about – and I think it's entirely justified – the unique challenges of representing the north, and it is different, I think, given the vast geography and a lot of the issues you've raised. Then we have different issues and challenges in, say, central Alberta and some of the rural areas. Grande Prairie has its challenges.

I guess I'm just reflecting a bit on some submissions we heard from some urban MLAs, some big-city MLAs about some of the challenges they have. They're different challenges. The geography is small, but they have people in their constituencies who speak eight, nine, 10 different languages in that one area. It may be a small area, but they've got all the challenges that come with those sorts of things, so their MLA is constantly stretched in different directions on those sorts of issues. It's a very different kind of challenge than you have in the north, but it is still a challenge and those folks need representation, too. Any thoughts on how we balance out all of these different competing challenges?

Mr. Ungarian: Well, that is a challenge. You're right. I mean, the challenges or what MLAs have to deal with in a large urban area are certainly different than in a rural, remote area. I don't think there is an easy answer to how you balance that, but certainly the MLAs are familiar with their ridings and their constituents, and that's why they stepped up to put their name forward to represent those areas, so they would be aware of those challenges, and they would have to deal – I wouldn't expect an MLA from, you know, somewhere in central Calgary to understand the challenges of the Peace River constituency or vice versa although our MLA now being Municipal Affairs has obviously dipped into the whole province's municipalities.

Yeah. I think that the MLAs need to be people with local knowledge, and that local knowledge will drive their agenda and what they represent. I mean, I know that caucus meets as a group and makes group decisions, no different than municipal councils, but they certainly have to be more in tune with their region than what they would be somewhere else in the province if that makes any sense.

Mr. Clark: Yeah, that's great. Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Evans.

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

The Chair: Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you again for your submission and the importance of the north. I think that we heard loud and clear from across the province, not just people who live in your region, about the concerns of the north not having a voice. Again, thank you for your time. It is certainly high on our list of things to look at in the next coming weeks.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: No questions, but thank you for your presentation. You have reiterated many of the themes we've heard again and again in our public-faced meetings of the last several days as well as in the, well, hundreds of letters we've received from residents of the north about the importance of keeping a strong northern voice, so thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Ungarian, sorry I had to kind of cut you off, but your presentation is very appreciated. Especially, we love it when people who are actually governing in the regions step up and tell us what it's like to work with MLAs and the challenges that they have in their regions, so thank you so much for presenting. Yeah. Much appreciated.

Mr. Ungarian: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to have a break now, I believe, for 10 minutes, so we'll reconvene at 10 minutes to 11.

[The hearing adjourned from 10:39 a.m. to 10:51 a.m.]

The Chair: Okay. We're going to start the second half of this morning's presentations, and our first presenter is Mr. Robert Willing from Peace River. Mr. Willing, you're on the screen.

Mr. Willing: Good morning. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present to the commission. My name is Bob Willing. I'm the reeve for the municipal district of Peace, not Peace River, just municipal district of Peace. I've got a few comments, and I'll just go through them quickly. I know the time is short. As a

municipality we are not in favour of the changes that have been made for numerous reasons, some of them which you've already heard from some of the other representatives.

You know, we've looked at the report and read it, and your own report acknowledges that travel distances in the rural areas are a problem. I know from talking to the northern MLAs past and present that they typically travel approximately 80 days a year to service their ridings. I mean, this kind of equates to about 20 per cent of their time, so it's not really a fair comparison to their southern colleagues. The new proposed riding for Minister Williams also has a driving time of about 10-plus hours from north to south, and I don't know how he's even going to be able to cover his own riding given those kinds of distances.

We don't feel that the flexibility was fully used in the determination here. Population and variance exceptions are allowed under section 15(2), and only one exemption was used despite northern Alberta clearly meeting multiple criteria.

We're also concerned about loss of community cohesion in the Peace region. Changing these boundaries also changes the myriad of connections that these MLAs have collected over the years. Changing the boundaries will make them have to establish these new relationships and take away yet more time from their valuable time, so we're concerned about that.

I mean, we feel that northern Alberta shouldn't lose a seat, you know, when its issues are the most acute. Now, I know we've heard that and I know that every municipality has issues that they feel are more acute than everybody else, so that can be taken with a grain of salt as well. We understand that, but we have extreme distances, limited transportation options, sparse populations, intermittent Internet service, some areas having none whatsoever. We feel that for northern Alberta to lose a seat while Calgary and Edmonton gain representation: they're gaining at our loss.

We also have concerns with the hybrid ridings. Urban issues are completely different from rural. There are some carryovers, obviously, but while these hybrid ridings appear to solve the population issues, priorities tend to go to the most and loudest voices. Unless there's a balance of population, the rural voice is going to be lost. You kind of lose your ability to look at options in the area.

The Chair: Can you specifically point to a hybrid riding that's problematic for you in the north?

Mr. Willing: Yes. I mean, our municipality, actually. I'm quite blessed because I actually have two MLAs because our municipality straddles Minister Loewen's and Minister Williams's ridings. We do have the opportunity to contact one or the other, but at the same time when issues are extreme, we have to contact both. So we have to kind of do double the work. It's kind of a two-edged sword there.

We're also a little concerned that the commissioners did not make it up here first-hand other than the chartered flight that you took. I understand, you know, travel concerns being what they are, but our municipality and our MLAs have to work with that on a daily basis. It would be really nice if in future boundary revisions maybe the commission should have to drive up to High Level and see how far it actually is.

That's pretty well all of my comments. I know that some of these other presenters have also echoed these and others. There were some very good comments. I especially liked Mr. Cyr's comments about multiple MLAs being able to work on problems where we only have one, and in our case I guess we have two.

That's it. If there are any questions, I'm certainly happy to answer.

The Chair: Okay. I've got a couple of clarification questions. When you say that we didn't come up "here," where's here for you?

Mr. Willing: Oh, sorry. The municipal district of Peace is just outside of the town of Peace River. I do understand that you did come up here for the hearings in the summer, but it was a charter flight. I think that, you know, you're asking MLAs – I mean, MLAs have to drive. They cannot fly. We don't have scheduled service into Peace River, so there's no flight ability there anyway. So it would have been nice for the commissioners to drive up.

The Chair: I think we made a comment in the report to that effect. Yeah. Your point is well made. I think it was commented on when we were up there, "How did you get here?" We said, "Oh, we flew." "Oh, that's too bad," was the response. It would have been an object lesson for us. I know that.

I want to push you back on the hybrids. Which hybrid don't you like?

Mr. Willing: Well, it's just the concept of hybrids. I feel that the rural voice is getting diluted by mixing it with urban. I know we're all Albertans and we're all supposed to be represented by our MLAs, but I just feel that when you split up ridings or try to balance out the population – and I understand the logistics behind that – it becomes difficult. It's just the concept of hybrid ridings, where the rural voice gets diluted by the urban voice.

The Chair: Okay. It's a bit of a hobby horse for me, so I'm going to respond to that and tell you what I said to a presenter in Calgary who criticized hybrids as well. We only have three tools in our tool box for changing the boundaries based on population. One of them is to add a lot more representatives so that we can have a large Legislature so everybody has a local MLA. That's one. Unfortunately, we were only given two more seats, from 87 to 89, so we don't have a lot of room to play with on that option. The second one is to face reality and realize that the areas outside of the major metropolitan cities, Calgary and Edmonton, are sparsely populated and we take ridings away from the rural areas. Our third option is hybrids, and it's the only option we have short of taking away more nonmetropolitan seats.

I hear what you say, but I felt I had to make this explanation because I approached and addressed somebody else who criticized them from the other perspective yesterday.

Mr. Willing: I understand your task is a very difficult one. I get it, you know, numbers being what they are and trying to balance out equal representation. My task as a representative of my population is to try to push forward the rural voice as best I can.

11:00

The Chair: I want to open it up for questions and comments of the commission to have a dialogue with you.

Mr. Evans: You were asked to provide an example of a specific hybrid that you had a concern with so that we could really dive into that. You didn't do that, and I think Justice Miller asked you again. I'm going to ask you a third time: is there a specific hybrid riding that you could point to, and then we could talk about your concerns? Why I say that is – and maybe you didn't hear the mayor from Grande Prairie, but the mayor from Grande Prairie actually said that she preferred the ridings as they exist right now, where there are, in fact, two hybrids.

Mr. Willing: That's fair. I'll reiterate: I don't have one in particular. To me, it's just the concept. Maybe it's because there seems to be a little bit of a split within the province between rural

and urban, and a lot of it has to go around funding for urbans, which is a sore point for rurals. These are political issues that, obviously, the commission doesn't have to worry about, but we feel that the rural voice is just getting diluted by hybrid ridings. In some cases, yes, absolutely, it has to work, and in some communities it probably does work very well. I know Mayor Clayton, and I think it does work very well for them given the makeup of the city and the county of Grande Prairie and the way things work there. It was just a comment on hybrid ridings.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Susan.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you, and thank you for your presentation. We've heard a lot about the north. For me personally I live in Sylvan Lake, so I've learned quite a bit about how unique and how different and how things that I for one might take for granted do not exist there, so I appreciate your comments. We're certainly going to have some more discussion on the changes we made in the north because we've heard loud and clear from more than just your area about how this doesn't work for not just the north but probably for Albertans in general. Again, thank you.

Mr. Willing: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Willing, I do have to interject this as well. I hail from Lethbridge, and since I've started this commission work, I've stopped describing Edmonton as northern Alberta, okay?

Mr. Willing: Thank you.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much, Reeve Willing. I wanted to ask you about growth expectations in your municipal district, both population, obviously, but in terms of the economic growth.

Mr. Willing: Well, I can give you what I hope happens. I know that Reeve Ungarian mentioned the possibility of a nuclear power plant. We are very, very hopeful for that within our area. The area of the province I live in is actually quite depressed economically. There's been no real growth in 20-plus years. People talk about housing crises. We've got lots of houses. There's no problem, housing crisis in our area.

The nuclear power plant, however – we're looking at doubling the population in the Peace River area probably conservatively: the town of Peace River, town of Grimshaw, and the surrounding municipalities. I mean, we're hopeful for that. Economically, oil and gas is still relatively big amongst at least my neighbours, not in my municipality. We're basically an agricultural municipality, so nothing fancy going on. It's just steady farming work, and that's pretty well it for us. The nuclear power plant is a game changer for our area.

Dr. Martin: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: What's the main centre in the Peace Country, and where do you live?

Mr. Willing: I live just outside of the town of Peace River. That would be the main centre with a population of 7,000. Grimshaw is 2,500. Well, it's probably almost equal distance between the two.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Martin: And as for your point about us driving up there, I would welcome it, but you know, I don't write the budget for the commission.

Mr. Willing: Well, give me a call. I'll come down and drive you up and we'll have a nice talk.

The Chair: By the way, I remember fondly. I had never been to Peace up until June of last year, and I was blown away at the sunshine all over. We were there at a great time. I hope you don't take offence that we didn't drive up there this year or this time around for the submissions. Thank you.

Mr. Willing: Yeah. And just to reiterate how big the north is, a member of Mackenzie county put it so very aptly, and if Mayor Clayton is still online, she might understand. There's a conference in Grande Prairie every year called Growing the North. This member from Mackenzie county has to drive six hours south to go to a Growing the North Conference, so it kind of puts it in perspective as to how big we are.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. Thank you so much. Please remain and hear the other presenters as well.

Mr. Willing: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Our next presenter – and we're bang on schedule – is Jason Javos.

Mr. Javos: Good morning. How are you today?

The Chair: Good morning. Please identify yourself and tell us where you live and what ridings or electoral divisions you're commenting on. Unmute if you can.

Mr. Javos: Oh, sorry. Can you hear me now?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Javos: All right. Deputy Reeve Jason Javos with Northern Sunrise county. It's a municipality just south of the town of Peace River, a fairly large county but very sparsely populated. I'll be talking about everything up in the north, I guess. I have a written submission. Do you want me to start?

All right. My name is Jason Javos. I'm the deputy reeve of Northern Sunrise county. I'm here today to express our profound concern and severe discontent with the Electoral Boundaries Commission based on October 27, 2025. The proposed electoral boundary changes, particularly those affecting northern Alberta, reflect a fundamentally urban-centred approach that diminishes the voices and lived realities and democratic representation of the northern residents.

The absorption of ridings such as Lesser Slave Lake into significant larger northern ridings sends a troubling and unmistakable message that northern voices matter less simply because our populations are low. This approach reduces representation to a numeric exercise and ignores the practical, geographical, cultural, and economic realities of the north. The implication is clear: because few people live there, our ability to have meaningful representation is negotiable.

This is deeply ironic. The resources the province has welcomed with open arms – oil, gas, forestry and agriculture, energy and minerals – are predominantly resourced from northern Alberta. The province's economic prosperity has been built in large measure on the contributions of northern communities, yet when it comes to representation, those are the same communities that are repeatedly asked to accept less with less access, less voice, and less advocacy.

Effective representation is not determined by population alone. Geographic distance, infrastructure, travel realities, communities of interest, and the sheer feasibility of constituency service must be

integral considerations. When ridings expand, immense geographic areas encompassing dozens of districts, communities, representation become diluted to the point of ineffectiveness. At that scale, representation risks becoming symbolic rather than functional.

The proposed ridings outlined in the report clearly illustrate this concern, for example the Slave Lake-Athabasca-Westlock proposed riding. While similar in geographical size to the current Lesser Slave Lake riding, this proposal removes the town of Slave Lake, the municipal district of Lesser Slave River, and the Sawridge First Nation from their closest neighbouring communities. These areas share long-standing economic, social, and service relationships. Separating them fractures established communities of interest and disrupts Indigenous and non-Indigenous neighbours who rely on shared infrastructure, governance, co-ordination, and regional collaboration.

11:10

The Peace River-Notley area proposed riding raises the most serious concerns for us. In this proposal Northern Sunrise county is included in the riding, that combines two full existing ridings and a portion of another. The boundary stretches from Paddle Prairie Métis settlement south to Fox Creek and includes Manning, Peace River, High Prairie, Falher, Donnelly, McLennan, and numerous other communities. In effect, this riding encompasses all of Dunvegan, Central Peace-Notley, a significant portion of Peace River, then Manning through Shaver and parts of Grande Prairie-Smoky.

The geographical dimensions of this proposed riding are immense and wholly impractical. For a single MLA to travel between communities would require extraordinary time commitments over poor road conditions and long distances, fundamentally limiting the MLA's availability, responsiveness, and presence. This is not a theoretical concern; it is a daily operational reality in the north.

Mackenzie. The proposed Mackenzie riding is approximately double the size of the current Lesser Slave Lake riding and removes High Prairie and Slave Lake from their surrounding municipalities. Once again, regional hubs are disconnected from the communities that depend on them for service, employment, and co-ordination. These restructurings disregard how northern residents actually live, work, and access services.

In reviewing the transcripts of our previous submissions to the commission, it is particularly striking that these changes were clearly acknowledged by the panel itself. Mr. Clark, a panel participant, noted the vast geography of the Peace River region and emphasized that there is no scheduled air service available. He fully recognized that an MLA simply cannot charter a flight when travel is required. These are not minor inconveniences; they are fundamental barriers to accessibility and effective preparedness in the north. As Mr. Clark aptly stated, proper representation: there is tremendous value to that, in my opinion. Despite this acknowledgement, the commission's proposed boundaries move in the opposite direction, assigning an even larger territory to a single MLA. This contradiction is deeply concerning. If the panel recognizes that geography, travel limitations, and isolation already strain representation, expanding riding sizes furthermore undermines the very principles of effective representation that have commissioned its mandate and project.

At the core of this issue is a simple but critical question: when northern ridings become so large, will our MLAs truly know who we are, what matters to us, and what challenges we face, or will northern residents become distant names on a map competing for limited attention across vast territories?

Rural and northern communities face realities that large urban centres do not. These include limited access to health care specialists and long emergency response times, aging and vulnerable infrastructure, workforce shortages or volunteers for them, vast travel distances, limited public transportation, and fewer social programs. Discussions made in Edmonton often have immediate and disproportionate impacts on the north.

I think I had a timer there.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that presentation, Mr. Javos. Much appreciated. I'm going to turn it over to our panel members to have dialogue and questions with you.

Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much, and thank you for being here today. You very succinctly outline a whole range of issues that many speakers and more than 100 letters recently have pointed out to us. I'm particularly concerned that those historical relationships for decision-making and planning be preserved. We, obviously, take seriously the logistics of providing constituency services over these vast distances and a whole range of small communities. You know, we wish as a commission that we'd had the opportunity to travel further in the north to further impress upon ourselves the scale of the footprint of the existing, let alone the proposed electoral districts and to see the difficulties of travel and communication in the north.

Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your detailed submission. I want you to know that we have been overwhelmed by comments like yours from people who live there who disagree with our first draft of the north. We're going back to the table in a couple of days, and this will certainly be a high priority that we will look at. Thank you again.

Mr. Javos: Thank you.

Mr. Evans: Thank you for your submissions, for taking the time to present to us. Yeah. I echo the comments of my fellow commissioners.

The Chair: Let me maybe give you – this isn't devil's advocate, but we had a presentation by an MLA earlier this week in Calgary who expressed concern for an unreasonably large riding, and he, of course, was meaning population. He had in excess of 60,000 people in his electoral division. So unreasonably large is in the eye of the beholder to some extent. I put to him the unreasonably large problem that we may have created in the north with an electoral division where the southern boundary, I am told, is closer to Montana than it is to Northwest Territories.

Mr. Javos: Correct.

The Chair: I haven't verified that; I've been told that. But it does, you know, put a different perspective on what exactly is unreasonably large. We are cognizant of both of those problems and challenges. Sorry; the population isn't only one thing in a large urban riding. There's a multitude of challenges for representation. But we've heard you. We're hearing voices from the north, and we appreciate the candour and the manner in which the presentations are made. Thank you very much, Mr. Javos. Much appreciated.

Mr. Javos: If I could just say one more thing. You know, population obviously has to play a role in this, but maybe in the matrix we could give some weight to Alberta's GDP, if you understand where I'm coming from.

The Chair: We hear you. Yes. Okay. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Javos: Thank you for the time.

The Chair: Yeah. Please remain online, if you can, to hear further presentations.

Our next up is Mr. Rick Smith.

Mr. Roth: Mr. Chair, the next presenter isn't online, but Mr. Beck is just joining us right now.

The Chair: Oh, so Mr. Smith isn't . . .

Mr. Roth: I don't have him online, no.

The Chair: Okay. I'm not sure I told all the commissioners this, but we've got a late edition this morning. Mr. Todd Beck from Medicine Hat is wanting to present.

Mr. Beck, are you present?

Mr. Beck: Yes. I just signed in. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Please identify yourself and tell us – well, we already know you're from Medicine Hat – what particular ridings you wish to address.

Mr. Beck: Okay. Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen of the commission, my name is Todd Beck. I am a CPA with over 25 years in public practice as a partner in a Medicine Hat public accounting firm with clients located both inside the city of Medicine Hat and the surrounding rural areas. I'm also the vice-chair of the Monarch Group of Companies, which is owned by Bill Yuill, operating as a private equity firm with businesses in transportation, real estate, and sports franchises. I serve on the board of the Bill and Elizabeth Yuill Family Foundation, which is a private foundation that in 2025 committed over \$12 million in funding to health education and youth programs offered within both the city of Medicine Hat and Cypress county.

With all the submission slots for the hearing on Friday covering the south boundaries being full, I appreciate the courtesy of being allowed to present today. Thank you for your time and the important work you are undertaking.

I am presenting today in support of maintaining the current electoral boundaries of the Cypress-Medicine Hat and the Brooks-Medicine Hat constituencies. Medicine Hat and the surrounding communities are often referred to as the forgotten corner of Alberta and have become increasingly integrated across economic, educational, cultural, and service lines. The current rural model, part rural, part urban, is not only functional but foundational to how representation is delivered in this part of Alberta. The current constituency boundaries blend urban and rural communities effectively.

11:20

This model strengthens democratic representation by balancing urban priorities for infrastructure, health care, and innovation with rural concerns of transportation, agriculture, and land use. This model allows for a balanced discussion to occur within the constituent associations, which is a refreshing change from the polarization we see in almost all aspects of our society. This balanced representation then flows up to the candidates nominated for that region, resulting in a consensus level of needs and concerns for that region, a result far superior to that of a more defined and polarized split between urban and rural ridings.

The result of two constituencies each serving rural and urban areas of southeastern Alberta helps to off-set the common but

accurate perception of this being a forgotten corner. It ensures that constituents in the region have voices they need for proper accessibility and advocacy of their complex issues. It is critical for managing regional issues, including economic development and diversification, health care investment, education, infrastructure programs, and energy needs, including diversification.

The city of Medicine Hat is the only major economic service hub between Regina and Calgary. It is the major trading and service area for southeastern Alberta, resulting in a sharing of common issues and needs with the rural areas in the service area. To this end, Medicine Hat provides shared critical regional infrastructure in areas of health care, with a regional hospital and specialists serving southeastern Alberta; education, Medicine Hat College with satellite campus in Brooks; economic leadership, the Southeast Alberta Chamber of Commerce, which was formerly only the Medicine Hat chamber of commerce, which demonstrates the inclusiveness of this region.

The Palliser Economic Partnership is another prime example of success resulting from the combination of rural and urban populations working together to achieve results that meet the needs for everyone. The Palliser Economic Partnership serves the area from Oyen to the U.S. border and the Saskatchewan border to the county of Forty Mile. This footprint matches the current constituency boundaries.

Similarly, the Prairie Rose school division serves nearly the entire rural territory of both constituencies thereby benefiting from representation from two MLAs. Education is one of the most pressing issues constituents face, and redrawing these lines would result in confusing representation, policy fragmentation, and less effective local advocacy.

While it is true the current election boundary lines provide Medicine Hat with more direct representation per capita than other cities like Red Deer, Lethbridge, Airdrie, and Grande Prairie, I feel this is fair considering that Medicine Hat is serving as the regional capital, supporting the needs of numerous rural communities to a greater extent than other cities in Alberta do, and therefore is not isolated from the interests and concerns of those rural communities.

I conclude by restating my position, which is also consistent with the organizations that I represent. We argue the election boundaries should be left status quo as the current boundaries reflect the sharing of interests in economic, education, cultural, and other services across the region. Maintaining two Medicine Hat anchored constituencies ensures effective representation for both urban and rural communities in southern Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beck.

I'm going to allow the commissioners to dialogue and have some questions. Do you want to go first, Susan?

Mrs. Samson: Sure.

Thank you for your presentation today. It interests me greatly because we received over 1,100 submissions after the interim report came out, and Cypress-Medicine Hat, Brooks-Medicine Hat remained unchanged. Well, we did change the name to put Medicine Hat first because it is the largest centre, so there was a change; I should say that. But what I did read in the submissions were people who lived in Medicine Hat who accused or suggested that we were gerrymandering the maps because we would not look at one single electoral division. Just for your information because you're well versed on this, the population, which is one of the overlays we look at, is too large. The city of Medicine Hat, sitting at 68,000, is split to accommodate the rural around you whereas

cities like Red Deer and Lethbridge can be nicely split in half and fall within the target population that we look at.

It is refreshing for me to hear from you that you like the fact that it remained the way it was since the last time it was looked at. I don't know if you have any comments on that.

Mr. Beck: Yeah. Thank you for that. I guess the reason I am presenting is that there had been some rumours or we've heard that the organizations I represent wanted a change. To clarify that on the public record, I felt it important that we make a presentation saying that we would like the boundaries to remain the same. We think it works well. We think the integration between the rural and the urban populations works well the way they're at. It's how we operate economically. It's how we trade. Other organizations are using those same boundaries. We all work together. Yeah. We are requesting that the boundaries stay the same, and that's why I am presenting.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: Yeah.

Mr. Beck, thanks for your presentation. You're a numbers guy, so I want to bring up something that you made reference to in terms of that you've heard or there's been comment that Medicine Hat is overrepresented in the Legislature as compared to other cities like Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Grande Prairie. Would you agree that that's because you are, really, two hybrid ridings and that gives you a bump? And would it not be the case then, you know, by using the numbers, if that was Lethbridge's complaint, that they weren't receiving sufficient representation, that the solution there would be to add hybrid ridings to the city, thereby increasing their representation in the Legislature?

Mr. Beck: I think so. I think what works here is that in our trading areas it's an awfully big rural area with, you know, not much population. It's pretty barren out here. It's a big area, so I think it helps – these people come into Medicine Hat to trade. I think your MLA representing the area can better represent the people that are all trading in the area.

As for Lethbridge, I can't really comment on those areas. But what we have in this society is a lot of polarization, urban versus rural. I think any attempt at the grassroots to get those issues boiled down sooner rather than later will be an assistance in governing the province.

Mr. Evans: You think hybrid ridings are a mechanism to achieve that, to depolarize. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Beck: Yes.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. I'd like to follow along that line of conversation if I might, sir, your remarks, then, about having MLAs that by necessity of their work become very sensitized and aware of the issues of both urban and rural communities of interest. Much of the discussion we have had and continue to have among ourselves about hybrids – you know, we have very large hybrids, as it were, such as the one with Brooks-Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat, and we have relatively small ones that we see in other parts of the province.

11:30

Hybrids can be different. They're not a thing in themselves any more than urban and rural are an adequate description of the forms of life of people in Alberta. There are loads of suburban. There's a whole spectrum of communities, and so, too, with hybrids, I suspect.

I'm most interested in your assertion that even prospective MLA candidates will be pretty much assessed on their sensitivity and awareness of both urban and rural issues. Could you comment more on that particular theme?

Mr. Beck: Well, I think it comes from the constituency associations. They will be made up of people from the rural and from the urban, and they all bring their ideas and their concerns into the constituency association, which then, you know, is a form of information and governance for the MLA, certainly for the nomination process. So I think that's a real benefit, having the input at that level.

Dr. Martin: If we were going to characterize it in our classification scheme, is Redcliff suburban or is it urban? It doesn't feel rural to me. It's one of those in-between sort of communities. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Beck: Yeah. It's part of Medicine Hat. It's viewed as part of Medicine Hat. We have development now that is contiguous. It's not separate at all. It would be no more different than Bowness is different than inside of Calgary, in my opinion.

Dr. Martin: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Beck, you touched on something, and I'm not sure if another presenter ever said this, that is the bridging of a contentious divide that's developed in our society not only in Alberta, not only in Canada. We're all aware of that. You're saying that by having hybrids with city folk and country folk together in an electoral division, that helps bridge the divide. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Beck: I'm saying that in this area it does. It's how we operate our Medicine Hat and district health foundation, how we operate our economic development. So in this area it does. Medicine Hat only has 65,000 population, but it is the major trading area for the entire southeastern corner, so we're all affected. Businesses in Medicine Hat are affected by the rural issues. Rural issues are affected by the infrastructure and other demands of the urban individuals or the urban concerns. So in this area it does. We operate together.

The Chair: Now, I don't know the exact numbers in terms of population. Kind of both electoral divisions are right close to the average, but I don't know the breakdown between urban and country in each riding. But you don't feel that one is drowning out the other? That's not a problem?

Mr. Beck: No, we do not feel that.

The Chair: Okay.

One more. You're the last presenter before lunch, so we have a couple of minutes. Someone actually proposed early on your two ridings as a model for Lethbridge in the south, recognizing that it's very likely we're going to have to take out ridings from the areas outside the metropolitan cities of Calgary and Edmonton. That person said: well, let's look at Lethbridge. If you look at the southern band of the province, you've got Medicine Hat divided into two. Let's take Lethbridge and divide it into four, and we'll have a block of six ridings basically across the south that are exactly on the model that you're endorsing. We got tremendous push-back on that. What do you say to your cousins in Lethbridge on this issue?

Mr. Beck: Well, again, I'm not familiar with their trading and their interaction as much between the rural areas and the urban areas. I think their towns are much larger to the south than we are. You take a look at Elkwater, Irvine, Seven Persons, Schuler. You know, those are small hamlets, and they all come into Medicine Hat as opposed to the communities that surround Lethbridge.

I don't think it's a fair comparison that the model that works here will work there. I wouldn't want to say it would in all instances, but what I do like is that if you have that discussion of local needs in an area that all have a common interest, whether you're rural or urban, if you have that more at the local area and you filter that up through your representative to the government, that can be nothing but good, as opposed to a polarization between urban needs and city needs all chasing funds from the provincial government.

The Chair: Thank you. The way I describe that band of the south: it's amazing what water will do. What a difference water makes; irrigation in the Lethbridge region versus much less so in the southeastern corner.

Mr. Beck: I couldn't agree more, and we're hoping in the near future that there may be some projects that, you know, save us some more water. It's such an important resource. Couldn't agree more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beck, so much for coming in, and we're pleased that we could fit you in on late notice.

Mr. Beck: Thank you very much again for fitting me in. Yes, you know, we had heard that we were being misrepresented, and we really wanted to get this on record. I really appreciate it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

I'll just make a shout-out to see if there's anyone online that was scheduled to present, who I may have neglected to call out. Anyone?

Okay. We will adjourn this morning's proceedings and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon. Thank you.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:38 a.m.]

