



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Virtual

Friday, January 16, 2026
9 a.m.

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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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Richard Nichols
Brent Ramsay, Mayor, County of Red Deer
Jason Reckseidler, Councillor, Village of Delburne
Nathan Schneider
Bob Wanner

9 a.m.

Friday, January 16, 2026

[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Well, good morning, everyone. Welcome to day 5 of our first week of public hearings of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission.

We, of course, are an independent commission established by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. You can see our nameplates in front of us. If you wish to know any background information, you can go to the Alberta electoral boundaries website and get that information.

Our task as an independent commission is basically to deal with two issues. Number one, the increase in the number of seats in the Alberta Legislature. The legislation passed in late 2024 increased the number of seats from 87 to 89, so there are two more electoral divisions in the province. Of course, we all know that within the boundaries of an electoral division the voters in that division elect the member of the Legislature, and that person represents them in the Legislature in Edmonton.

The second issue that we must deal with is the increase in population in Alberta. The last Electoral Boundaries Commission report was issued in 2017, so nine years ago. Since that time Alberta's population has increased roughly over 800,000 people. To put some perspective to the challenge that's before us, the average population in each electoral division at the time of the 2017 report was 46,697 people.

Of course, the average is not the target for our task. Alberta, as all Canadian jurisdictions, operates on the principle of effective representation, not one person, one vote. The average is not the target. Rather, the legislation, the jurisprudence, and Canadian historic practice has provided us with a range of population in order to meet the target of effective representation. That range goes to as low as minus 25 to plus 25. You will see in 2017 that that range started at 35,000, up to just over 58,000.

Now, to give some perspective on the challenges that we have, the increased population certainly has manifested itself notwithstanding the two additional seats. The population of Alberta is 4.88 million for our purposes. We've used the Statistics Canada last decennial census from 2021, which was regularly updated by the Office of Statistics and Information of the Alberta Treasury Board. We have used as our baseline population 4.8 million Albertans. You can see, when that's divided over 89 ridings, the average population per electoral division is 54,929. Again, that's not the target. The target is the range of minus 25 per cent, as low as 41,000, to as high as 68,000. That is the range that empowers the Electoral Boundaries Commission to find effective representation in the various electoral divisions.

Effective representation is, as I said, a Canadian concept. It's not one person, one vote. That's certainly an American concept. Effective representation gives us a tremendous amount of flexibility to ensure Albertans from across this vast province have representation in that target range, and then there are some additional exceptions as well.

The commission was formed in April of last year, and from the time of our formation we have been busy. We started off by dealing, as I said, and coming to terms with the appropriate population figure for Alberta. That was done early on in our life as a commission. We received hundreds of submissions, written submissions, from the beginning. We reviewed those carefully.

Then in late May and June we travelled the province, holding public hearings. We sat in Fort McMurray across to Pincher Creek and from Grande Prairie, Peace River to Medicine Hat and, of course, the two major metropolitan centres in between. We got a

taste for what Albertans wanted to see in a new electoral map. After we conducted those public hearings, we then worked closely with Elections Alberta and their map people to create a proposed electoral map that provided for effective representation across the province. We then finalized that in the form of an interim report. That interim report was submitted to the Speaker of the Legislature in late October, and each member of the Legislature received a copy of that report. Then we opened up a portal for public hearings.

I should advise that in preparing our report, we considered the factors in the legislation. I won't go over them now, but you can certainly review that in the report. Really, we only have three choices when we redesign electoral boundaries in this province. The first choice is out of our control as a commission. It is the number of seats that are allocated. The Legislature has only given us two more seats, so we have very little room to move because the margin is only two seats.

Another tool that we have is to remove seats from less-populated areas. That has been a consistent trend historically in Alberta, and to some degree that's what we have done in this report. We have removed seats from outside of Calgary and Edmonton.

The third option is a very valid and legal and legitimate option, and that is hybrid ridings. We have tried to focus on certain areas of the cities, all cities, Edmonton and Calgary included, to develop hybrid ridings.

We issued that report in late October, and then we opened up a portal on our website to receive written responses. We have received over 1,100 responses, and I'm told that that is one of the highest numbers of responses of any legislative commission, so we have heard loud and clear from Albertans. Our goal in this process was to create understandable and clear boundaries and provide for effective representation for Albertans.

That portal of public submissions was closed just before Christmas, and now we're in the process of hearing from the public directly. We spent two and a half days in Calgary earlier this week. We're conducting two days of online hearings, yesterday and today, and next week we move to Edmonton to hear public submissions. We have provided through the online process an ability for Albertans to submit to us even though we're not in their particular community. The wonders of technology allow us to stay in the big cities during winter, but I have no doubt that the public has had a chance to respond to us from across the province.

That's where we are today. We've got a full day, and we're going to have to limit presentations. I believe all the presenters were advised that you have about a six- to seven-minute window and two or three minutes of interchange with the panel members. We are strictly adhering to the clock, or we're trying to, and I'll open it up now for our first presenter.

Our first presenter is Rob Miyashiro. Please identify yourself, and tell us what riding you wish to comment on.

Mr. Roth: He's not on, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Oh, okay. Who's our next – let me ask. Is Earl Graham present?

Mr. Roth: No.

The Chair: Okay. Bob Wanner, I know you're probably scheduled to be just after 11, but we have a schedule to adhere to. If you're able to present, I welcome you to come forward or open up your mic, I guess. That's what it is. Sorry, Mr. Wanner. Please proceed if you're ready.

I'm not sure if you're frozen, Mr. Wanner, or if you're muted or what, but we can't hear you.

9:10

Mr. Wanner: Let me try that.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Wanner, did you hear my comments?

Mr. Wanner: Yes, I did. You just didn't hear me.

The Chair: Okay. Good. So it's not a technical problem. Thank you.

Please proceed.

Mr. Wanner: First of all, thank you for your service to our province. It's a difficult task that you have. I hope that my comments are received with the intention of the commission's stated goal to ensure effective representation across the province. With the greatest respect I must point out that the interim report identifies several errors, I would submit, and unsubstantiated statements in the rationale for the Medicine Hat-Brooks and Medicine Hat-Cypress constituencies which I would like to address today.

On page 70 the report editorially omits that the former Deputy Premier Jim Horsman and the former Speaker Dr. David Carter along with former minister Renner and myself, a former Speaker, and numerous others all supported one urban and one hybrid constituency for southeastern Alberta.

Secondly, reflecting on your opening comments, Mr. Chairman, the boundaries particularly have some shortcomings with respect to an understandable and clear boundary for those two constituencies. The report on pages 69 and 70 states that many submissions requested that the electoral divisions be kept as is and that the submissions in Medicine Hat were clearly divided. I stand to be corrected, but to the contrary, the numbers clearly, to me, demonstrate that the vast majority oppose carving up Medicine Hat and Cypress county to resolve what we perceive as a population problem in east-central and south-central Alberta. The commission may have heard divided submissions in southwestern Alberta, but from my perspective, they did not hear that in southeastern Alberta.

On page 70 the report states that all of Cypress county is recommended for inclusion in Medicine Hat-Cypress. That statement is not correct. Boundary map 74 illustrates quite clearly that the boundary is not the Cypress county border but township road 132. The rationale for this meandering line is difficult to comprehend.

Furthermore, the Medicine Hat-Brooks boundary is now more than 340 kilometres wide from the Saskatchewan border to the west border of the proposed boundary. If you keep the county together, it is only 130 kilometres north to south, and if you include Forty Mile with Cypress, it is about 160 kilometres wide, about half of the current proposed Medicine Hat-Brooks boundary.

The commission seemed, in my perspective, selective in considering that the only option to the current boundaries proposed was a single electoral division for all of Medicine Hat. The commission seems to have dismissed the submissions, including four former MLAs, who recommended one urban and one hybrid riding respecting the cohesiveness of southeastern Alberta. By ignoring one urban and one hybrid option, the report states that "this has not been the reality since the 1980s." This is simply not correct. Dating back some 40 years the mature portion of the city had one urban and one hybrid with the city south, Cypress county and Forty Mile.

The written submissions of the current MLA, Mr. Wright, recommend that southeastern Alberta has two representatives and that this is a nonpartisan matter. I agree with him on both points. His goal can be achieved with an urban hybrid solution recommended by

the other former MLAs, who represented southeastern Alberta for more than 40 years. The McLachlin ruling states that the one person, one vote principle is not mandated. In fact, it is forbidden, yet from my perspective, appendix E seems to emphasize how successfully the population average target was achieved. I recognize that your opening comments were, Mr. Chair, that that is a target range, but nonetheless.

On page 69 the word "compromised," was used in my perspective to cut and paste Medicine Hat in southeastern Alberta to resolve a population challenge in east and south-central Alberta. Effective representation must be decided equitably. Compromising fairness risks public confidence. Of all the major centres in Alberta with the possible exception of Airdrie, Medicine Hat is essentially a minority of one that does not have at least one urban seat. Lethbridge and Red Deer have two. Grande Prairie has one. Sherwood Park is the dominant urban population in Strathcona county with its municipal boundaries respected. Spruce Grove and Stony Plain share a common urban boundary.

I have re-examined Airdrie more carefully and acknowledge that I was partly in error. As I looked at it more closely, I believe that the Airdrie situation is that it has some similarities to Medicine Hat. It probably deserves one urban seat and one hybrid seat. Their population is too large to be one riding for the entire city, but they, too, deserve one MLA exclusively representing the majority of their city and one representing a portion of their city in a hybrid model.

I also re-examined the Fort McMurray proposed boundaries. I, too, was in error. It is divided. However, Fort McMurray is unique and distinctively different from southeastern Alberta. Its more recent history, its development, its vastly different economy, its population, its transportation network, and its culture ought not to be compared to southeastern Alberta. In fact, in the northern section of that constituency it is air service that largely connects the urban population to the rural north.

A more effective representation solution. Key words: effective representation. The option preferred by some was a single riding exclusively representing Medicine Hat, but the population of Medicine Hat is too high for that to be accepted.

The other recommended solution consisting of one urban and one hybrid is fair and equitable and represents more effective representation for southeastern Alberta is as follows. Do not connect dissimilar and distant Brooks and the central Alberta region to southeastern Alberta. We are different in so many ways. I respectfully submit that it is not effective representation.

Solve the problem of Brooks, county of Newell, Taber, Warner, and possibly Drumheller on a north-south axis. Brooks is closer to Taber than Medicine Hat. The number 36 highway ties the regions together already. The proposed Drumheller riding is nearly 25 per cent below the target average, and Livingstone-MacLeod is some 10 per cent above the target. Please look again.

Revert to a version of the effective representation model for southeastern Alberta that existed for decades prior to 2017 with one urban riding in the mature north and central sections of Medicine Hat, and one urban riding with the south portion of Medicine Hat and all of Cypress county and Forty Mile county. Both fit within the population guidelines. Do not subdivide Cypress county. Leave it intact, and in fact consider moving the Medicine Hat-Cypress county to the Red Deer River. Its population is served by Medicine Hat. Restore Medicine Hat, Forty Mile, and Bow Island to its closest neighbour, partner, and trading centre, Medicine Hat and Cypress county. The distance from its west border, the Saskatchewan border, is about 150 kilometres. Bow Island's distance to Medicine Hat is a travel time of about one half hour, but to the east boundary of the new constituency it is 1.25 hours.

I respectfully submit these comments and hope you reconsider your situation, your recommendations with respect to southeastern Alberta.

9:20

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Wanner.
Mr. Evans, any questions?

Mr. Evans: No.
Thank you for your submissions, though.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your time this morning. I appreciate it. We've had more than just yourself come back to us with that very same suggestion, so we will certainly be having another look at Medicine Hat.

Thank you again for your time.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: No.
I think you have comprehensively, even with page references, laid out the points of vulnerability, so to speak. Thank you for your presentation.

The Chair: Mr. Clark, any questions?

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I genuinely appreciate your continued engagement in affairs of the province and your submissions to us previous round and this round again. I also appreciate that you come to us not just poking holes in what we have proposed but also with proposed potential solutions. So I very much appreciate that.

I guess maybe I'll just ask you to comment on a little bit of population balance. I mean, it's an interesting and, I wonder, maybe persuasive point that Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie are roughly the same size. I think Medicine Hat's population is 68,000 and Grande Prairie's 70,000, yet we've treated them quite differently and historically have not. Up until the 2017 boundary redistribution both had had a fundamentally urban constituency and then one hybrid.

Now, we have different perspectives on that. It's not 100 to zero in the perspective as to whether that's a valuable thing or a challenging thing, but maybe I'll just give you another minute or two to tell me, you know, one more time why you feel, specifically in the Medicine Hat and southeast Alberta region, it's important that there's a community of interest you feel – not to put words in your mouth, but that's certainly what I've taken around Medicine Hat specifically as it relates to its surrounding communities.

Mr. Wanner: Thank you, Greg. By the way, coincidentally, I lived in Grande Prairie when I first moved to Alberta many, many years ago, so I have some sense of northwestern Alberta. I have lived in Medicine Hat since 1972. I even remember crossing paths frequently with the current commission chairman.

Medicine Hat is distinctively, in my view, the heart, if you will, of the Palliser Triangle. We are a zone that's quite distinct and different. I affectionately used to refer to us as the forgotten republic of territory of southeastern Alberta. We have a dependency on ourselves. We've always had to do things that are distinct and different from other sections of the province. In other sections, even in the case of Grande Prairie, there are very many smaller urban centres near Grande Prairie that are of some significant size, whereas down in southeastern Alberta, particularly with Bow Island and the county of Forty Mile and Cypress county, there are smaller urban centres, but they all connect to that magnet of Medicine Hat.

Our economy is different. We have developed differently. We have a distinctive electrical system down here. The partners that have been formed on an economic alliance include everything except Brooks. It's not a part of that economic – it's a new relationship that's been established that includes Bow Island, both counties, as well as the city and Redcliff. I think if you ask the vast majority of Medicine Hatters, would they say that we have a lot of similarities with our good neighbours in Brooks and central Alberta? They would probably say: no; we more have a connection to Cypress county and Forty Mile and the northern sections of Cypress county.

That big boundary, Medicine Hat to Brooks: it's huge. It's almost the size of the ones that are in the far north. You have other solutions, I respectfully suggest, and that is to respect effective representation and speak to the wishes that you've heard. I stand to be corrected on the submissions that I read and heard, but I think, Mr. Chairman, you said that Medicine Hat was one of the best well-represented presentations back in June, more than I think you said was in any of the Calgary submissions. I think that spoke about a distinctive sense of identity and representation that exists in southeastern Alberta.

I don't want to repeat myself, but I hope I've answered your questions on both an economic, cultural, and social relationship.

Mr. Clark: Thanks so much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Wanner, for presenting, and please feel free to remain in the meeting and follow the rest of the presenters.

I believe our first presenter is now here. Rob Miyashiro?

Member Miyashiro: I am.

The Chair: Please identify yourself and, of course, tell us where you're from and what ridings you wish to comment on.

Member Miyashiro: Good morning, everyone. My name is Rob Miyashiro. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West, and I'll be commenting on Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed. We have a six-minute timer, so we'll be trying to watch the clock. We've got a long list today.

Member Miyashiro: For sure.

So I just want to thank the commission first for the attention that you've given to the insights offered by people in various communities and all the experts during that initial stage for Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East. I also want to emphasize, too, that my perspective also reflects my upbringing in the town of Taber, in a rural community. Combined with my experience living, working in Lethbridge and being a city councillor and now the MLA, I think I bring a different kind of perspective than most.

I do maintain, and I heard what Mr. Wanner said as well, that wholly urban constituencies are certainly more representative of the people who live in them than blended urban and rural because – again, and I don't need to go through this because you've heard this about the often competing challenges with urban and rural – MLAs in rural areas frequently address issues related to services while MLAs in urban areas are more likely to manage challenges related to capacity. For example, education access is a major concern in rural communities while capacity pressures in urban centres represents a different and competing reality. I think we can go to the first slide, Aaron. Thank you.

While it's true that Lethbridge-West is growing at a faster rate than north and south, I must say that three of the most established

developments in the west side are pushing up against the county of Lethbridge boundary. I'll talk about that more in a bit. In Lethbridge-East there are also two large area structure plans, or ASPs, that are beginning to be developed or yet to be developed, which are in the southeast and in the Royal View area structure plan.

In looking at the preliminary report for the commission and speaking with many people in Lethbridge, I'd like to suggest some changes. Now, I'm not opposed at all to what the commission has recommended in the preliminary report. All I'm saying is that after speaking with people and taking a better look at what this could look like, I just want to suggest some changes to east and west for the commission's consideration.

If we go to the slide on the Lethbridge – can we go back one? Maybe I'll just try to explain it. Yeah. If you look at that slide, on the left side is Lethbridge-West. You're showing that the little bump out that was added to Lethbridge-East.

9:30

Then if you look at the top part, what I'm suggesting is that if we make the Oldman River – and I know one of the commissioners was talking about using the Oldman River more as a boundary in parts of Lethbridge. This is what I would suggest. Make the Oldman River the western boundary of Lethbridge-East north of Crowsnest Trail or highway 3. You're bringing all of north Lethbridge literally into Lethbridge-East, which isn't a big stretch because most people in north Lethbridge think they're in Lethbridge-East anyway. In fact, most people in Lethbridge think they're in Lethbridge-East. So that would add that piece. Then we would look at south of Crowsnest Trail and we can look at just below that line in the right picture. Anything below the blue line would just stay in Lethbridge-West as it is now.

If we can go to the next slide, please, Aaron. If you look at where it says 034, that is actually part of the county of Lethbridge. There's a little line. You see the vertical line going north-south, and it has a right angle jog right underneath the four. That is 2nd Avenue West and rural route 91. What I would suggest is that we bring in that part of the county of Lethbridge into Lethbridge-West.

I know this is counter to what I just said about rural areas being part of urban, but they're not a true rural community. What they are are acreage communities, and there are a couple of smaller farms in that area. Everything that those people do in order to get to anywhere else: they have to go through west Lethbridge. For those people to vote in a provincial election, they have to drive through west Lethbridge to get to Coalhurst. There's no direct route other than if you want to take a gravel road along the river and up through Coalhurst, which, really, no one wants to do.

What that would mean is that the western boundary – I think the next slide might show it better, Aaron. That's the area. You can see that it's mostly undeveloped. That's county land. There are a couple of small residential communities. You can see towards the middle top and towards the bottom of that circled area. Again, the change moved the acreage communities of Sunset Acres and Mountain Meadows from Cardston-Siksika or, in the new Livingstone-Macleod, to Lethbridge-West.

What we're doing is that we're making the adjustment. It also addresses the fact that the commission said earlier that yes, there's more a factor for growth in west Lethbridge, but then we're adding that part to the east to even out that growth. Like I said, there are some pretty big growth areas as well in Lethbridge-East. I think this would actually bring that more into sync. In that picture the right most vertical line is the county line in that greyed-out space, so you can see that the subdivisions are pushing right up against that already.

The other thing I think I need to say is that . . .

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Miyashiro. Can you wrap it up in the next couple of minutes?

Member Miyashiro: I will wrap it up in 30 seconds.

We also know of the exponential growth in the large urban centres of Calgary and Edmonton, and it's really important, I think, that those communities are represented properly. When we have ridings with 70,000-plus, 80,000-plus, I think it's important to give them the best representation possible and to make sure that the people in the Legislature are there for the people and that land does not vote.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Miyashiro.

Mr. Clark, questions?

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you very much. I was just doing a little bit of drawing with our mapping tools here and determined there are approximately 300 people in that area there you've suggested to take out of Lethbridge county. I guess my question is that that area there – your comments about 13th Street and the more eastern boundary of Lethbridge-West and then using the river as a more logical or natural boundary for Lethbridge-East north of highway 3: one of my only shortcomings is that, I guess, I'm not from Lethbridge, so I don't know it as well, obviously, as you do. A couple of my commission colleagues have an unfair advantage on me in knowledge of Lethbridge, so they probably have some thoughts on this as well. But, I mean, that seems, in terms of our objective of creating understandable boundaries – I guess what I'm interested in is this portion of the county that you're suggesting. Tell me how that's different from the communities around north of that like Coalhurst, for example. What's different about that area than, say, Coalhurst?

Member Miyashiro: They're actually not municipalities for one. They receive most of their – just about everything they do is in the city of Lethbridge. Like I said, for those people to vote – let's just even look at that in terms of voting – they have to drive through Lethbridge to get to Coalhurst in order to vote. Does that mean some don't vote, some aren't interested in voting? I couldn't say, but I wouldn't hesitate to guess that if they were able to vote somewhere closer to them, like five minutes away in Lethbridge or less, then they would tend to vote more, and I think the representation would be a lot easier going that way as well.

Mr. Clark: Do you know: do they share any services with the city of Lethbridge, waste water or water?

Member Miyashiro: At this point I'm not sure about water. Some of them could be on well. I know the city of Lethbridge treated water goes north into Coalhurst and beyond and out towards Picture Butte. I actually don't recall whether they've run water lines to Sunset Acres or Mountain Meadows.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Evans: Thank you for the presentation. I want to ask you some questions on Coalhurst. If I understand your submissions today, you're saying that Coalhurst should not be part of a Lethbridge riding. Is that right?

Member Miyashiro: That's correct. The fact is that there is a separation – and yeah, you're right; if you're not from here, you can't see that – on highway 3. Things north of that are still in the county, just west of Lethbridge. I don't think the people of Coalhurst as well, the ones that I've talked to, feel that they would

be represented well, especially a couple of people that are on Coalhurst town council that didn't think that they want to be lumped in with an MLA from Lethbridge. They think they would be better served by someone that has a more rural bent.

Mr. Evans: You don't think you would have the ability to serve them as an MLA with your rural background?

Member Miyashiro: You know, I'm not always going to be there. I'm sure I could because I do have that background in rural community, but if I get hit by a bus tomorrow and there's someone that's Lethbridge-centric and really isn't knowledgeable about some rural issues, then perhaps that wouldn't work as well.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your comments today. It was a quite detailed submission. I would just ask that you make sure that it comes into us so we can look at it more closely because in your descriptions – I'm not sure. I think I've captured it all, but I'm not positive. So if I could have your submission in front of me when we're looking at Lethbridge again, that would be great.

Member Miyashiro: I think we sent it in the other day. Aaron, is that correct? Was the written text sent in as well?

Mr. Roth: No, not the written text, but *Hansard* will have caught it.

Mrs. Samson: Right. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you, and thank you very much for your presentation. I'm very pleased that you understand the ripple effect of any changes of borders. I'm very pleased to see that you have been very attentive to some of the domino effects that occur.

I wanted to ask you in particular about what you understand to be the growth potential in that far western plot of land that you have suggested may be appropriate to add to your riding. I'm particularly interested – I mean, growth potential can be, if I may say so, airy fairy; it can be very tangible and imminent. I'm much more interested in the latter.

9:40

Member Miyashiro: Well, so there are two ways to look at growth potential. Especially, you know, as someone that's been a former city councillor, I can look at it that the development that's pushing up against the county border in the western part of west Lethbridge is the under the auspices of the city of Lethbridge, obviously. There's nothing to stop the county from approving a residential development west of the county line, right? The fact is that if they do that, then it's more likely that they're going to access city waste-water and treated-water services than have people use wells and septic fields – right? – so then it would, in a sense, start to amalgamate better with the city of Lethbridge.

You can look at that actually in the city of Lethbridge's eastern border, the northeast corner that butts up against the county. The county has developed an industrial park adjacent to Lethbridge's north industrial park. What that has meant is that they're using all of the city's water and waste-water facilities as well as an upgraded intersection to accommodate it, so the growth potential in there depends on the county. However, the city, I don't think, has the ability to annex that land for a number of years, just for the fact that there is some more developable land in west Lethbridge proper as well as in the southeast and as well as the north.

Dr. Martin: Thank you, sir.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Miyashiro, thank you so much for presenting. We always say that we're very grateful to have people who knock on the doors in the constituency and know the riding come and present. And thank you for giving us solutions. That's helpful at this stage as well, so much appreciated. Please remain and listen in on the other presenters if you can.

We'll proceed to the next presenter.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you. Thanks for the time.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Earl Graham.

Mr. Graham: Good morning. My goal today is to express the need for a single west-central Alberta electoral riding which will ensure effective representation of a population that shares common economic ties, networks of transportation, shared history, and communities of interest.

My name is Earl Graham. I'm a lifetime resident of Clearwater county and of the current Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency. Some background on me. I was 13 years as a councillor for Clearwater county and three years as a director on RMA, and I currently serve on two provincial boards, five volunteer boards, and three municipal boards.

The proposed constituency of Mountain View-Kneehill will not work. It divides Clearwater into three separate constituencies. Justification: Clearwater county is tied economically and socially to the west country and the Rocky Mountains' eastern slopes. Industries such as forestry, oil and gas, livestock, agriculture, and tourism are important to the economy of the entire county, whether it's Mountain View or Clearwater. Clearwater is actually a one-town county, and you've currently got it divided into three.

The town of Rocky Mountain House acts as a central hub for commerce and provincially funded services like hospitals, schools, and social services. Strong common ties between Nordegg, Caroline, Rocky, and other rural county residents that are not shared by communities east of Rocky. For example, what does a Rocky resident have in common with someone living in Three Hills, and how would an MLA conceivably represent those distinct interests?

In my judgment, you should connect the west-central Alberta eastern slopes region into one single constituency. The justification for this: it's a common economy, common geography, municipal relationships, culture, and history connecting the people living in west-central Alberta, foothills, and the mountains.

We have a shared geography. West-central Alberta shares the foothills region with western Mountain View county along highway 22 currently. The MD of Bighorn all consider themselves to be mountain, foothills communities with a common geography.

Economic drivers in this region are forest management zones common west of Rocky and Sundre; expanding tourism to the mountains has operation bases in Sundre, west of Rocky; oil and gas; and gravel extraction.

Public land use. Similar pressures from Crown land recreation across the eastern slopes. Combination of public land-use zones, grazing leases, privately owned land, provincial parks, and national park designations across west-central Alberta.

Emergency services. Wildfire management shares common priorities and mutual aid agreements between the municipalities. Search and rescue units are responsible for covering all of Clearwater to the Banff boundary. Policing for Clearwater county

is based out of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre, but their responsibility for all communities in the county goes as far west as the B.C. border.

Transportation networks. Several provincial highways and major transportation corridors run in a north-south fashion, not the east-west corridors that are created by the proposed new boundaries. Rocky Mountain House, Caroline, Sundre are connected by the high-load corridor on highway 22. Nordegg and communities west of Rocky Mountain House connect by highway 11 to the east. The west-central Alberta eastern slopes region is connected by highway 40 between highway 1 in the south and highway 11 in the north. Highway 93 is not a reliable transportation network between Banff and Jasper for any MLA to travel. As you have noted in the very close past, it was closed this winter at least twice that I know of and avalanches during the winter.

Mutual aid agreements between Sundre, Mountain View county, Clearwater county, and the MD of Bighorn for emergency services and infrastructure. Clearwater county and local residents advocate to their MLA and the provincial government for county-wide infrastructure improvements such as broadband, pipelines, and rural electrification.

The history. Rocky Mountain House has been connected to the rest of Clearwater county area since the boundary commission created the Rocky Mountain House electoral division in 1940. Rocky Mountain House and Sundre were both founded as gateways to the west for industry and exploration.

The proposed boundary between Lacombe-Rocky Mountain House and Banff-Jasper would put the town of Rocky in a different riding from the site of the Rocky Mountain House national historic site, the original fort site which is located a few kilometres west of town.

To add to that, you have put the dividing line on the river. There's a fair population west of the river. The way it's currently drawn, they'd be going into the Banff-Jasper area, which is not fair to those residents at all.

Redraw the boundaries to create a single riding encompassing the entirety of Clearwater county, including Rocky Mountain House, O'Chiese First Nation, Sunchild First Nation, western Mountain View county along highway 22. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills do not have anything in common at all, whether it's farming practices, the type of farming, whether it's cattle, grain farming. The town of Sundre and the former village of Caroline, the MD of Bighorn, excluding the town of Canmore and Banff national park, should include the Banff townsite.

9:50

Now, I'm going to give you a little rant. I understand every vote is to be equal, but in reality every vote is not equal in rural areas. In urban areas an MLA can drive 15 minutes and be across his whole constituency to cover his area. Here it is a three- to four-hour drive even currently. This means the larger rural areas will be underserved through no fault of the MLA. I'll give you an example. In the current constituency I believe there are eight Legions. An MLA during his term, if he stays for two terms, will probably not get to all the Legions on Remembrance Day. I don't believe that is fair to rural communities in any stretch.

I want to thank you for my time to voice my opinion. Looking forward to your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graham.
Questions, Dr. Martin?

Dr. Martin: Yeah. Thank you, and thank you, sir. I was really taken by one remark of yours, that this county is a one-town county, and

I want to press on that point a little bit in perhaps unexpected ways. From your experience as an elected official sitting on many boards in and around the county, I wonder if you could comment on what I suspect is the necessity of county representation in Clearwater county; namely, that a representative has to be able to think simultaneously of the town's needs and that of the rest of the county. Is that a fair . . .

Mr. Graham: Yes.

Dr. Martin: Yes. Do you think that it has ever proved difficult for members of the council to juggle both of those things as they come to determinations?

Mr. Graham: Speaking from past experience, two councils will always have varying views, yes.

Dr. Martin: But those are the things that they have to juggle while they come to those varying views, correct?

Mr. Graham: Correct. They do.

Dr. Martin: The reason I ask is that we have an ongoing discussion among ourselves and with all our presenters and their letters as well about hybrids large and small, and it would seem that at the county level they are absolute common events.

Mr. Graham: It is. Speaking for Clearwater county, Rocky is the only urban municipality. Caroline was just dissolved and taken into the county. There are other hamlets within Clearwater boundaries – Leslieville, Alhambra, Withrow, Condor, Caroline – and they all have something in common for sure, with the municipal council governing all of them.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. Again, always great to hear from folks who have had some experience representing their communities because you've got a good sense of the experience on the ground. I'm curious. At Clearwater county you talk about: our proposal would have you split across three different constituencies and therefore three different MLAs. Have you historically only had one MLA for Clearwater county?

Mr. Graham: No. In the past, not the real recent past, we've had two.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Do you find there's some value in having more than one MLA and a couple of different voices up in the Legislature advocating for you?

Mr. Graham: Speaking as a rural councillor, I did not find that advantage.

Mr. Clark: Because you were having to bounce back and forth between two instead of one?

Mr. Graham: Yes. The MLAs between the two of them are representing different people and different needs and wants, and they have to balance it. I wouldn't want to be in their position either.

Mr. Clark: So you're saying that you find that when you blend together too many different areas, it tends to distract them and split their attention.

Mr. Graham: Correct.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: I don't have any questions, but thank you for your time coming out today. I appreciate the information you gave.

Mr. Graham: You're welcome.

Mr. Evans: I don't have any questions. Thank you so much for your presentation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graham.

Mr. Graham: Thank you for allowing me.

The Chair: I invite you to stay because it's our experience that more Albertans should hear each presentation so they understand what we're going through, and there'll be a variance, I'm sure.

Richard Nichols is our next presenter.

Mr. Nichols: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the commission for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Richard Nichols, and I live in Okotoks. I'm here to express my strong support for version 2 of the proposed electoral boundary that includes the town of Okotoks, the version that places Okotoks and Diamond Valley together in the constituency rather than the one that combines Okotoks with Calgary-South.

My preference is grounded in three considerations. First, that Okotoks and Diamond Valley have always been distinct from Calgary in history, culture, and pace of life. Two, that both towns are about to enter a period of accelerated growth with the opening of the new regional water pipeline, and that will require focused representation in the Legislature. And three, through four years of interviewing local families as editor of a local monthly magazine and seven years as a monthly columnist for the local newspaper, the Okotoks *Western Wheel*, I heard repeatedly that people choose Okotoks precisely because it is not the big city. These points all lead to the same conclusion to me. Okotoks and Diamond Valley form a coherent community of interest, and version 2 reflects that reality far better than a riding that merges Okotoks with Calgary-South.

Let me elaborate. First of all, a distinct history, culture, and pace of life. Okotoks and Diamond Valley have long been foothills communities with identities shaped by ranching, local business, and a small-town rhythm that has endured even as both towns have grown. Their histories are intertwined with each other far more than with Calgary.

Residents here have consistently expressed a desire to maintain a distinct community character, one that is neither suburban Calgary nor rural in the traditional sense, but something uniquely in between. That distinction shows up in many ways. It shows up in local governance that emphasizes managed growth, environmental stewardship, and community-driven planning. It shows up in a cultural life built around market programming and recreation that reflects foothills values. It shows up in everyday expectations of shorter commutes, slower pace, and stronger neighbour-to-neighbour connection.

While it is true that many residents of Okotoks and Diamond Valley commute to Calgary, that economic link has never erased the cultural and civic separation between the communities. Okotoks and Diamond Valley have their own priorities, their own rhythms, and their own sense of identity. By contrast, Calgary-South is shaped by dense urban development, metropolitan and large-scale service delivery. By definition it's part of a big city. Now, these are important issues, but they are fundamentally different from the

concerns that dominate civic life in Okotoks and Diamond Valley. A constituency that spans both would inevitably force a representative to balance two very different sets of needs.

Let me give you an example. Say the constituency chosen was the one that combined Calgary-South and Okotoks. What would happen if down the line the city of Calgary makes an application to annex the town of Okotoks? Not beyond the realm of possibility. Which faction would the representative for that constituency represent? You can't do both. You have to choose one or the other. That division of focus would serve neither community well.

10:00

Secondly, growth pressures require focused representation. The opening of the new regional water pipeline marks a turning point for both Okotoks and Diamond Valley. For years water capacity has been the limiting factor in local development. With that constraint lifted, both towns are poised for significant residential and commercial growth. This growth brings opportunities but also challenges that will be specific to the foothills communities.

Infrastructure expansion, including roads, schools, recreational facilities and utilities; environmental management, especially around water stewardship and land conservation; housing pressures and the need to balance affordability with responsible land use; economic diversification as both towns work to attract new businesses while supporting existing local enterprises: these issues require a representative who understands the nuances of small-town growth and who can advocate effectively for the region's needs. They also need a representative who can focus solely on their community's priorities without being distracted by the competing concerns of a large city.

If Okotoks were combined with Calgary-South, the MLA would be responsible for two very different developmental environments. Calgary-South faces its own set of urban challenges, densification, transit planning, and large-scale commercial development. These are not the same issues facing Okotoks and Diamond Valley. Version 2 avoids this conflict by grouping together two communities with shared growth trajectories and similar development pressures. It ensures that the MLA's focus remains on the needs of the foothills region.

Third, for four years I served as editor of *North Okotoks Living*, a family-oriented monthly magazine circulated in the north part of our community. Each issue featured a profile of a local family. Throughout those interviews I gained a deep understanding of why people choose to live in Okotoks and what they value most about the community.

The most common theme expressed again and again was the desire to raise children in a place that feels fundamentally different from the big city. Families spoke to me about the slower, more intentional pace of life, the sense of safety and community connection, the ability to know your neighbours and to participate in local events, the balance between access to amenities and preservation of the small-town character and the foothills landscape surrounding the community and the feeling of being close to nature.

These values are not incidental. They are central to the identity of Okotoks and Diamond Valley, and they shape residents' expectations of local and provincial representation. A constituency that merges Okotoks and Calgary-South would not reflect these lived experiences. It would place families who deliberately chose a small-town environment into a riding dominated by urban concerns that do not align with their priorities.

Version 2, by contrast, respects the reasons people choose to live here and ensures that their voices are represented within a constituency that reflects their community identity. Therefore, my conclusion is that version 2 of the proposed Okotoks constituency

boundary is the configuration that best aligns with the historical, cultural, and practical realities of the region. Okotoks and Diamond Valley share a distinct identity, face similar development pressures, and are home to residents who value a way of life that is different from that of Calgary. Grouping the two towns together ensures coherent representation and respects the community's longstanding desire to maintain its unique character.

It is for these reasons that I strongly support version 2 and respectfully urge the commission to adopt it. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak with you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nichols.

Now we can have some questions. Mr. Evans, any questions or comment?

Mr. Evans: Yeah.

First, I want to say that you have an incredibly soothing voice.

The Chair: It should be on radio.

Mr. Evans: Yeah. It should be on radio. It should be reading books on tape or whatever.

Mr. Nichols: Actually, I do.

Mr. Evans: That doesn't surprise me.

My question for you, Mr. Nichols, is: can you tell me about the connectivity as a community of interest between Okotoks and High River?

Mr. Nichols: Yes. There is the same connectivity of interest as there is with Diamond Valley. You know, they're roughly the same distance apart. The reason I didn't discuss High River was that the combination of High River and Okotoks was not included in either of the two versions that were presented. If I were asked, "Would High River and Okotoks be a good combination?" I would probably say that it's probably as good as Diamond Valley and Okotoks. No better and no worse. They share a lot of the same characteristics.

Mr. Evans: If the three were lumped together, would that even be better from your perspective?

Mr. Nichols: Probably. But I think the population figures would be too high if that were done.

Mr. Evans: Thank you. I appreciate your answers and hearing your soothing voice.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your presentation today. This is exactly what we were looking for, that people gave us feedback on the options, which was new to us. They're tough choices. You've given us stuff to think about. Thank you again.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: No questions. Again, I'd just echo my colleagues. I know that you built your presentation because you wanted to stress a particular option, option B, and you did that, I think, quite successfully. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. Yeah. I'll, you know, echo that as well. The one piece I picked up on, which I thought was really an interesting point that I hadn't quite heard previously in the way you made the

point: just because a significant number of – again, I'm paraphrasing, so please don't let me put words in your mouth. What I heard was: just because a significant portion of people in our community happen to commute to Calgary doesn't make us Calgary.

Mr. Nichols: That's correct.

Mr. Clark: We very much have a culturally distinct identity, which you and your fellow Okotokians could probably describe. I've heard that there are a number of things to do in Okotoks: my favourite ad campaign of all time. I guess, maybe just very briefly, if you wouldn't mind expanding a bit on how you feel about that cultural difference between Okotoks and Calgary notwithstanding the fact that there are lots of folks who would commute between the two communities.

Mr. Nichols: That's right. First of all, it is a policy of our town council to try to maintain the small-town community feel of Okotoks. That is why Okotoks, with a population of over 30,000 people, has never applied to be a city. It wants to still be called a town because it wants to maintain that small-town image. Now, you know, it's going to be harder as the population increases, and the population is going to increase very much over the next 10, 20 years.

There are things that we that happen here in Okotoks that bring the community together. I will just mention two. One is the annual Light Up Okotoks festival, which takes place in the middle of November. It is an occasion where people gather in the town square, which is right in the centre of Okotoks, and there's a big huge pine tree that is planted right in the middle of that square. It's a living tree, and it's covered with Christmas lights, and every November 15, 16, 17, around there, the town gathers in an evening, and they have the lighting of that Christmas tree.

There are booths set up all along the main street, Elizabeth Street here in Okotoks, where people can buy food. Vendors of jewellery and soaps – you know how those markets work – sell their wares there. Local charities have booths set up to explain what their services to the community are and accept donations. That is something that you can't do in a big city. You can attempt it, but you can't do it with the intimacy that you can do in a smaller community. While Okotoks is not necessarily a tiny village anymore, it still is maintaining that feel by maintaining those types of programs through the year.

The other one I want to mention takes place in the summer. Every Thursday evening during the summer in Okotoks in the town square there is a stage set up and there is a concert that people can come to. It's a free concert. People bring their lawn chairs. Businesses that serve ice cream and soft drinks set up booths around the town square, and everybody has a wonderful time listening to some concert. It may be classical music; it may be country; it may be rock, but everybody is there.

10:10

It started last year in 2024, continued last summer in 2025, and it got to the point where the town square was not big enough to accommodate all the people with lawn chairs. They had to actually block off the street that was adjacent to the town square so people could put out their lawn chairs and sit there. Those are the types of things – and there are others – that make a small-town feel, in a community even as large as Okotoks, exist.

Mr. Clark: Right. Thank you so, so much. Appreciate your time and your contribution.

Mr. Nichols: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Nichols, thank you so much. It really helps us make that decision that we threw out to the public in the two options. Please remain to hear the other presenters if you're able.

Our next presenter is Barbara Bodiguel.

Mr. Roth: Not present.

The Chair: Not present. Okay.
Then Cameron Mills.

Mr. Mills: Thank you very much. Am I able to share a PowerPoint presentation?

Mr. Roth: No. If he can send it to me, though.

The Chair: Send it to Aaron, and he'll be able to operate it. Sorry about that.

Mr. Mills: Okay. My apologies. Do you want to maybe skip to the next person, and I'll get that done?

Mr. Roth: Yeah. Genny is here.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. We can.
Genny Mehlhaff.

Ms Mehlhaff: Good morning.

The Chair: Morning.

Ms Mehlhaff: How are you guys this morning?

The Chair: We are great, and we are happy to hear you five minutes earlier than scheduled.

Ms Mehlhaff: Excellent. That means I can get my bulls to the vet a little bit sooner, so it sounds great. Did you want me to start then?

The Chair: Yes, please. Identify where you're from and what ridings you wish to comment on.

Ms Mehlhaff: Excellent. Thank you. My name is Genny Mehlhaff, and I have lived and worked in Clearwater county, which is within the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre constituency, for over 20 years. I am a ranching mom of four and work in emergency services in this community, and I have also had the privilege of serving on the municipal council, so I have a unique understanding of how this community interacts with the provincial government.

I'm here to express the need for a single west-central Alberta electoral riding represented by one MLA, reflecting how our region actually functions economically, geographically, historically, and how it actually operates. Clearwater county must remain whole. It is a one-town county with Rocky Mountain House serving as the regional hub for health care, education, policing, and social services. The residents of Nordegg, Caroline, and rural Clearwater shaped strong economic and social ties rooted in the west country and the Rocky Mountains. These communities have far more in common with each other than the communities east of Rocky Mountain House, and dividing them would weaken their representation.

Allow me to offer an example. My children are 40 minutes from Rocky Mountain House but go to school there. Splitting the riding would separate the representative that I vote for from the one that represents where all of our services are. More broadly, west-central Alberta and the eastern slopes operate as a single community of

interest. We share the same foothills and mountains geography, weather patterns, and access challenges as well as common economic drivers such as forestry, oil and gas, agriculture, construction, and a growing mountain tourism industry.

From an emergency services perspective the value of a single MLA is critical. Wildfire response, search and rescue, policing, and EMS already function across municipal and park boundaries through mutual aid agreements. Search and rescue coverage extends from Clearwater county to the Banff boundary, and policing is based out of Rocky Mountain House, serving communities to the B.C. border. A single MLA provides clear accountability, consistent advocacy, and faster coordination during emergencies rather than splitting responsibilities between multiple MLA offices.

Our transportation corridors reinforce this reality. Highways are the routes used for commerce, emergency response, and MLA travel. Proposed east-west boundaries ignore how people and services move on the ground. For an example, highway 93 in particular is frequently closed in the winter and cannot function as a reliable corridor. In fact, 93 has been the most closed this year out of any other season. Even though the rest of the province isn't seeing the snow, those mountains sure are, which will be great to have a good snowpack and hopefully a good runoff for the waterways.

Historically Rocky Mountain House has been connected to the rest of Clearwater county since the electoral division was created in 1940. Rocky and Sundre were founded as gateways to the west, and separating Rocky Mountain House from the Rocky Mountain historic site undermines both history and identity. The ideal outcome is one west-central Alberta riding, with one MLA representing all of Clearwater county, western Mountain View county, including Sundre and Cremona and the MD of Bighorn, excluding Canmore and Banff national park, including the town of Banff. A single MLA ensures coherent representation, effective emergency advocacy, and a strong voice for communities that truly do belong together.

Thank you so much for your time. I'm happy to take any of your questions.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Ms Mehlhaff. Thank you for taking the time to present since you do not have a lot of time on your hands given your background.

Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much. Yes, you do seem very busy, and I'm really appreciative of you taking time out to speak with us. I'm intrigued by your multiple kinds of perspective: municipal councillor, rancher, nurse. You cover a lot of the functional areas that we hear about, but usually it's only one person representing one of those views.

I'm interested in what you might call the westward-facing sentiment and orientation of services and industries. We've heard quite a lot about this, actually, not least in submissions. Would you also be of the opinion that, roughly speaking, highway 22 divides functional areas as well as agricultural zones?

Ms Mehlhaff: In the sense of travel or just the way that the actual topography exists, just to clarify the question?

Dr. Martin: Well, we've heard that sort of east of 22 it's grain farming, to put it crudely, whereas west of there the agricultural patterns change into ranching and, of course, oil and gas – everybody has got some of that – but also forestry; moreover, that the governance patterns are different.

Ms Mehlhaff: Well, the governance patterns: all of Clearwater county is represented by one council. But absolutely the topography changes when you go west of 22 as opposed to east of 22, with weather patterns and just sheer ruggedness of the land itself. Definitely it's more of a ranch-based environment. With the weather pattern changes there is some mixed-use agriculture there now as well. But definitely a different form of agriculture east of 22 than west of 22.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Samson: In the changes that we put forward, we talked about the consideration of Nordegg tying into the mountain parks. Can you expand on that, your thoughts on that area?

Ms Mehlhaff: Absolutely. In particular, if you ask the communities of Nordegg if they themselves identify with the other mountain parks, they would tell you unequivocally that they do not. They are unique in themselves and actually would not like to see themselves like Banff and Jasper. They prefer to be Nordegg and be identified as such. Highway 93, that would be supposedly connecting them, is closed a lot of the winter months; therefore, an MLA that represented them would actually have to leave their constituency in which to get to a piece of it.

Mrs. Samson: That's correct, yes. Thank you for your thoughts on that.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: Yeah.

Thank you so much for your submissions. I want to ask you about – my colleague was talking about 22, but I want to direct your focus to east and west of highway 2. My understanding is that there's a difference in terms of both oil and gas and agriculture on the east versus the west of highway 2. Would you agree with that?

Ms Mehlhaff: Of highway 2?

Mr. Evans: Highway 2.

Ms Mehlhaff: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Actually, there would be significantly more large-scale grain operations east of highway 2 than there would be even west of highway 2, and then that gets even more on a microscale west of 22, like we were talking about earlier. You're going to see a lot more larger agricultural equipment east of 2 than you will west of 2 for sure. Just the sheer topography changes that.

10:20

Mr. Evans: Thank you. Appreciate the answer to my question.

The Chair: Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

Thank you. No questions from me beyond a word of thanks. Just to let you know, we've received some great submissions from the folks in and around Clearwater county, including yourself and others today and plenty of written submissions as well. I feel like you're punching above your weight, as usual, in Clearwater. Thank you.

Ms Mehlhaff: We're just a little passionate out here about this province and what it means to us.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Well, thank you for your participation. It makes a big difference. Thank you.

Ms Mehlhaff: Thank you so much for having me.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Ms Mehlhaff. You're welcome to stay, but I understand you're a busy person, so feel free to leave if you so desire.

Okay. Now Cameron Mills.

Mr. Mills: Thank you very much. I did have the opportunity to send that along to Aaron. Aaron, if you can get that loaded up.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to the commission. I had the opportunity to speak during the original round of meetings down in Lethbridge. I am a resident of Lethbridge. I'm speaking as a resident of Lethbridge with respect to how the boundaries for this part of southern Alberta should be drawn. Specifically – Aaron, if you can move to the next slide – the presentation here and the letter that I'd submitted respond directly to the commission's request for further analysis on hybrid urban-rural electoral divisions in southern Alberta. In the interim 2025 report the commission rightly identified these divisions as conceptually strong and structurally coherent but noted that additional work was required to demonstrate the integrated economics of the agrifood industry in the region. The purpose of this presentation is to provide that work by showing that what is being proposed electorally by myself already exists economically, institutionally, and operationally.

Next slide. The starting point is a simple but critical reality. Lethbridge is the urban anchor of the largest agrifood corridor in Alberta. This is not a symbolic claim. It is a measurable economic system. The corridor encompasses more than 4 million acres of farmland, including over 900,000 irrigated acres. It supports over 4,400 farms and produces more than 65 specialty crops. In total the system includes more than 11,000 businesses, serves a regional population of roughly 342,000 people, and generates approximately \$8 billion in annual GDP for our province.

Next slide. Unsurprisingly, agriculture and ag-related industries account for nearly 20 per cent of the region's total GDP, making it the single largest economic sector anchored in Lethbridge. This integration is also visible in daily movement patterns. More than 20,000 people commute into Lethbridge each day, increasing the city's daytime working age population by roughly 25 per cent. That figure is in fact increased when you consider the number of folks that commute out of Lethbridge into the surrounding region such as myself.

Postsecondary institutions in Lethbridge are deliberately structured to supply skilled labour for agribusiness while professional services – financial, veterinary, marketing, logistics – are centrally located in the city to serve rural producers. Ask any bank manager in the city to list their most important clients; they're going to list farmers, feedlot operators, farm implement dealers, et cetera. Lethbridge Polytechnic recently received a \$5 million gift from a local cattle producer to establish the southern Alberta agribusiness program to provide specialized training for the next generation of agribusiness professionals. Major transportation routes likewise converge through Lethbridge, making it the indispensable transfer point for both export and domestic markets.

Next slide. Because Lethbridge functions as the urban anchor of the corridor, it already governs regionally in practice. The city routinely enters into regional waste, recycling, utility, fire and rescue and disaster response partnerships with neighbouring municipalities. It has secured significant funding for region-serving infrastructure such as the \$25 million provincial contribution to the Agrifood Hub and Trade Centre. It leads the regional economic initiatives like Canada's premier food corridor, co-ordinates regional physician recruitment. The city of Lethbridge even takes formal policy positions at the council level such as opposition to

coal mining projects that extend hundreds of kilometres beyond the city boundaries. In short, Lethbridge already acts as a regional authority even though its electoral structure does not formally recognize this role, which limits the capacity of the city to effectively represent its interests at the provincial level.

Next slide. This regional role is not only recognized locally; it is consistently, in fact, relied on by the province of Alberta in its governance. If you track provincial capital investment patterns, they clearly already treat Lethbridge as the institutional and infrastructural anchor for southern Alberta. This includes major funding for the Chinook regional hospital, the Agrifood Hub and Trade Centre, the University of Lethbridge's rural medical education training centre, the dialysis modernization upgrades at the regional hospital in 2025, the water treatment infrastructure, which serves the surrounding region, including the value-added agricultural industry, and that list goes on. These are clearly not city-only investments that the province is making; they are regional investments routed through Lethbridge because the province already understands the region as a single, integrated system.

Next slide. Dividing the city of Lethbridge into four urban-rural hybrid electoral divisions would not create a new regional structure; it would simply formalize the one that already governs southern Alberta in practice. In reality, Lethbridge functions as the command centre of a single agrifood system where rural production and urban processing, research, logistics, and export activity operate as one integrated whole. In reality, labour markets, health care, emergency services, and transportation networks already cross municipal boundaries daily, and in reality provincial policy and investment decisions already treat the region as unified. Hybrid electoral divisions, in the case of Lethbridge and southern Alberta specifically, would therefore align representation with reality, bringing du jour structure into line with de facto governance.

Next slide. Thank you for the opportunity to provide the additional analysis, and I welcome any questions and appreciate the commission's careful consideration of how electoral boundaries can best reflect the lived economic and institutional realities of southern Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mills, for that very succinct presentation and for following up on what you presented the first night we held a public hearing.

Mr. Clark, any questions or comments of Mr. Mills?

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

Thank you very much. The timing of your presentation is really good because we just heard from some folks from Clearwater county and earlier today also Clearwater county. Their point is that in rural Alberta it's important to keep like with like. We've got to kind of keep the folks who have similar interests all together, and there's a value in having a single MLA that really focuses in on the issues that are specific to their area. Just curious whether you think that's not the correct perspective.

Mr. Mills: I would suggest that having an MLA provide representation that's specific to the issues is very important, but then I think the question becomes: what are the issues, right? I understand that the hybrid model may not be appropriate for, say, the Okotoks region or certain other areas, but Lethbridge and this particular region is a little bit different. So what are the key issues that are in the news for this region? What are the key issues that affect what the province does in this region?

I would argue that if I've got a kid graduating high school and I live in Picture Butte, my son is attending the University of Lethbridge; he's not attending the university of Picture Butte. We

recognize that Lethbridge is the university for the region, as is Lethbridge Polytechnic on the college side. If I get injured and I need to go to the hospital, I'm going into Chinook regional hospital. It's right in the name, right? It is the hospital for the entire region.

Hospital and health care is the number one issue in Alberta in terms of the overall spend. If you look at the Alberta provincial budget, health is number one. Why wouldn't I want my MLA to have some representation where my health care is delivered, right? I've got transportation corridors. Water is a huge issue down here. Water treatment is all done at the city of Lethbridge, so if I'm living outside the city of Lethbridge and the province is looking at funding water expansion and the ability for me to either access water for my business or access water for my home, it ultimately is routed through the city of Lethbridge, where I have no representation, right? So I would want my local MLA to also have the ability to affect where the investment is happening at the provincial level. If you look at every single issue that the province directly gets involved in in terms of how they spend their money and how they operate, at the end of the day in southern Alberta it all flows through Lethbridge.

10:30

Mr. Clark: I guess I'm curious. You talked about the economy and the economy of the region. By that logic, the economy of Calgary relies significantly on downtown Calgary, or Edmonton or any of the larger cities, but we don't generally draw a wagon wheel where we have multiple constituencies pointing into the inner city of Calgary. We recognize neighbourhoods. Same thing with Red Deer. Red Deer is two constituencies. Would you advocate that we build a wagon wheel in Calgary and we hybridize Red Deer?

Mr. Mills: No. I believe that, you know, Calgary's issue is the difference between someone who is in one riding in Calgary versus another riding in Calgary. There's enough cross-contamination between those two districts that you don't really need to see that sort of wagon wheel approach to recognize that someone who's advocating for a riding in south Calgary obviously has some impact in the downtown as well. It's not like anyone pretends that a hospital in downtown Calgary doesn't somehow serve the rest of Calgary.

Red Deer's issues are, obviously, specific. I don't know everything about the city of Red Deer to say whether or not the hybrid model is appropriate for them.

Okotoks, for example, is very different from Lethbridge in the sense that Okotoks is, you know, a town of 35,000 people. Black Diamond, for example, has its own hospital. The regional hospital program within Okotoks – if I'm in Okotoks and I need to take my kids to the emergency room, I go to Black Diamond, right? There's representation there. We're talking in this very commission meeting about putting those two districts together, so it makes sense.

Southern Alberta is – I mean, the crossing of economic realities exists everywhere. That's obvious. But in Lethbridge it's massively more apparent, right? The entire region is driven on this hub-and-spoke model of centring around Lethbridge. It's all based out of Lethbridge. All of the financial services are in Lethbridge. All of the investment for major infrastructure is in Lethbridge, and all of that spills out to the region.

From my perspective, I would want my representative to have the ability to speak to issues that are regional in level, because I already have local representation, right? As a resident of the city of Lethbridge I have someone to represent my interests that are local, that are specific. That's what my council does, and they do a great job of it. But I do believe that the city of Lethbridge has a very keen interest in, for example, you know, the mining impacting the

waterways that ultimately affect the Oldman River. That's something that's happening outside of Lethbridge that's impacting within Lethbridge at a very significant level, and our local MLA, Mr. Miyashiro, has spoken extensively about that issue, and I'm glad he does. But I also think it would be better if he had some authority or some interest in that area so that he could speak directly to the issue where it's happening, because that connection between the two is so readily apparent down here.

Mr. Clark: Sorry. Apologies to jump in, but I just want to ask one more thing. I want to press you a little bit because what I've heard is intellectually kind of inconsistent, right? On one hand, Picture Butte and Lethbridge should be together because there's a regional interest and a commonality, but on the other hand, well, south Calgary is actually different than downtown Calgary even though they both have an interest in health care. Okotoks is different because, well, that's a little different. But Picture Butte, Coalhurst, Coaldale, Lethbridge county, those places: their interests are the same even though those places don't have transit whereas Lethbridge does. They don't deal with the same kind of, say, homelessness-type issues that Lethbridge does and those sort of larger urban-type city issues. I just want to press you a little bit on that because I'm not sort of hearing a consistency in argument between different parts of the province.

Mr. Mills: Well, I think I am being consistent. Again, my point is that the difference between each individual riding needs to be considered on its own merits. The reality is that the merits of the argument to say that, you know, water distribution in southern Alberta is centred around Lethbridge is specific to Lethbridge, right? Why would we compare that to, you know, south Calgary and downtown Calgary when that's, like, a totally different system? You already have one local representative or one group of local representatives that cover that entire region in terms of the local city council, right? Lethbridge doesn't have that. You're not voting in Picture Butte for someone who manages the Lethbridge water system at the local level. That's where the province, who generally funds oftentimes half these capital projects, can provide that input for those stakeholders.

Mr. Clark: Thanks so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mills: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mrs. Samson, any questions?

Mrs. Samson: Yes, I do.

Thank you for your presentation today and the detail. I want to share with you that we've had lots of input on Lethbridge and both ways, divide it into hybrids or stay as it is. I must say that when you give us your presentation on the successes you've had in the agrifood industry, you are doing exceedingly well with Lethbridge staying historically the same, with two electoral divisions staying in an urban setting. It seems to work really well. So yes, you have a compelling argument. But I say: when we're tasked to provide clear distinct boundaries that residents recognize and follow and it's working well and it's historically well, why would I change it?

Mr. Mills: Right. That ignores the reality that anything could be better, right? To say that something is good so we shouldn't chase great: I don't believe in that at all. I think the province has massively more potential than it is achieving right now, and I think that utilizing the structure of the provincial elected officials and these

ridings would help us reach another level so that we could compete in the agrifood industry with, you know, the Idahos of the world and the other jurisdictions. While we're having success, other jurisdictions are outperforming us, and while it is true that we've had economic growth down here with respect to the agrifood development industry, we are starting to run into concerns.

With respect to that industry specifically – and I mentioned this briefly in my presentation previously – one of the issues we have is that something like 97 per cent of the water rights within this region are held by rural areas, but 100 per cent of the water production capacity is done in the city of Lethbridge. So you've got this balance between water licensing and regulatory requirements and the realities of production capacity where you're talking about \$500 million investments, which obviously small towns and counties aren't able to make. So that's where, you know, we've had some growth, but we're starting to run into those challenges precisely because we've got interjurisdictional issues which the province could do a better job of helping us get over if the MLAs were representing across these local boundary lines.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mills: You're very welcome.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Mills, thank you for your presentation today and your previous presentation. My takeaway from both presentations and the strength that you're talking about is an increase or a constant – I'm going to say an increase in representation of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge region in Edmonton. Is that fair?

Mr. Mills: I mean, I wouldn't say that it's an increase, certainly not from a sense of volume. I think that it's about properly aligning representation in our region relative to the issues. While I understand that there's no single system which is going to work perfectly, if you look at the issues within our region, they are almost exclusively crossjurisdictional, right? They are health care delivery . . .

Mr. Evans: Let me interrupt you for just a minute, Mr. Mills. As it currently sits with two MLAs from Lethbridge, you have two MLAs that are going to be able to represent, for example, Lethbridge interests on a water issue. The surrounding MLAs in the electoral districts around Lethbridge may not be interested in that issue and may not be there in Edmonton representing that issue. In terms of accepting that Lethbridge is an economic anchor and having four MLAs tied to it, you would increase or concentrate your representation strength in Edmonton on a single issue. Is that what you're suggesting?

Mr. Mills: That's potentially true. At the same time, those four MLAs would need to balance their decision-making with the fact that their decisions are going to impact beyond their local borders. While on the one hand it would certainly provide four voices for the city of Lethbridge at the provincial level, it would also ensure that decisions aren't made exclusively for Lethbridge to the detriment of the surrounding regions, which rely on the city of Lethbridge for the delivery of provincial-level services.

10:40

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you very much for answering my question.

The Chair: Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you. Mr. Mills, I was particularly taken by the sweeping number of themes as you survey the economic geography of the entire region.

I want to focus particularly on your mention of commuters because it seems like a large number, 20,700 commuters daily coming in to Lethbridge and going home at night, one presumes. How do you collect that data, if I may be technical about it? Are those short commutes or long commutes? Are they from the north? Are they from the east? From the south? Can you characterize this a bit further?

Mr. Mills: Great. That actually comes from a report published by Economic Development Lethbridge, which is an arm's-length organization operated by the city of Lethbridge in an economic development capacity. I believe those are 2025 numbers. The data that they capture from within the region extends to the west as far as Pincher Creek, to the south down to the border, to the east, I believe, as far as Bow Island as well as to the north. So it is within a region. Now, obviously, a greater number of commuters are going to be within a short – just using logic, I'm sure that there are more people commuting 15 minutes than 50, but generally speaking you do find that broader extension.

The interesting thing is that the number is a 25 per cent increase because you have 105,000 people of working age within Lethbridge during the day compared to 85,000 people living here, so it's a 20,000 person increase, but that also doesn't take into account that in that 85,000 number there are people that leave Lethbridge to work in the surrounding area. I do that, for example. I live in Lethbridge and work in Coaldale. So that number, that 25 per cent increase, is likely conservative in terms of the daily number. That 25 per cent increase could be as high as 30 per cent.

Dr. Martin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mills: You're welcome.

The Chair: Mr. Mills, thank you for following up from your original presentation. As you know, you presented, I recall distinctly, at about a quarter to 10 that evening we were sitting Lethbridge. It was a long evening, and you certainly caught the attention of the commission in your presentation and in the theoretical aspect of it. In your exchange with Mr. Clark – of course, central planning loves one-size-fits-all-type solutions. Effective representation can be an ambiguous term that adjusts for regions, geography, everything. You're recommending wholesale surgery to a challenge that we as a commission have.

Now, let me give you some background. Our concern: we only received two more electoral divisions in our mandate. It's really simple to just say: "Okay. One seat has got to go to Calgary; one seat has got to go to Edmonton because of the vast population increase." But there's more to it. We reluctantly have taken seats – and we knew that this was coming – out of the province outside of Calgary and Edmonton, and that is very controversial for those. You may have heard a presentation or two from Clearwater this morning. That's part of what we did, and we're getting some criticism on that. We took a riding out of the north. We received tremendous push-back for taking a riding out of the north. Our province-wide concern is doing things to avoid eliminating rural ridings.

You didn't comment on what I see as one of the advantages of your proposal. You didn't say it today, but as I recall the last time around, your theory would basically create a southern band of six seriously hybrid ridings whereas now we have seven or seven and maybe a fraction.

Mr. Mills: Yes.

The Chair: But that is drastic surgery.

Mr. Mills: Of course. But if not now, then when, right? I would argue that doing what is easy is not necessarily what is good, right? The mandate of the commission is to attack this issue in a wholesale way and to be analytical and to think about what's best and not rely on what's easy to make that decision.

I think I've made very clear arguments. I haven't heard any significant push-back to the validity of those arguments when I've read, you know, from folks opposing them. Even in the commission's report it seems to me that the reluctance to seriously pursue the model is based on the volume of the people speaking against the issue rather than the calibre of the arguments presented by folks speaking against the proposal, which may be political in nature.

I'm not attacking this from a political basis. I'm not a member of a political party. Like, that's not my issue. My issue is about saying that I want to live in a province that is governed the most effectively possible. I want to achieve the potential of my region. I want to achieve the potential of my province. I want the province of Alberta to be the most successful province in Canada, and I want southern Alberta to be a big part of that. I believe fundamentally that governing the southern Alberta region this way, specific to southern Alberta, is the correct approach. Whether or not this model applies correctly to Calgary or Okotoks or Red Deer really isn't up to me to decide. I'm not an expert in those areas. But I am an expert in what's going on down here, and I believe wholeheartedly that this is the correct way to do that.

The advantage of it is fundamentally that it does free up an additional seat to address some of the significant challenges that the commission has in dealing with population increases in Calgary and Edmonton, and I think that's beneficial. As a Lethbridge resident, obviously, I want my region to be powerful within Edmonton. You could say: well, I have six MLAs instead of seven; that's worse. But I would argue that I would rather have six extraordinarily effective MLAs than seven who have, you know, ridings that extend from the border up to east of Calgary, which is what we have now currently in Livingstone-Macleod, or other issues like that. I'd rather have six folks sitting around the table who understand the region and who can govern the region in a way that is appropriate for the way this region is organized, and I believe fundamentally that the hybrid model is a more effective way of doing that for down here.

The Chair: Okay. But you realize that – I don't know the mileage. I've driven it several times. Lethbridge to the Pass: I mean, you can't be suggesting that a section of Lethbridge be included with the Crownsnest Pass.

Mr. Mills: I can and I do. We already have ridings that extend far in excess of that. We already have a riding that extends from the Canada-U.S. border to east of Strathmore. We're talking about a region that is fundamentally interconnected. We're also talking about a region where people regularly commute that distance. Folks in Crownsnest Pass and Pincher Creek regularly come into Lethbridge. Like, Lethbridge is where they come in to do their shopping. It's where they come to go to the hospital when they need major health care work. It's where they go to university. It's where they go to college. It is all fundamentally connected.

I realize that it is not – I mean, obviously, if there was a single solution which was obviously perfect in every respect, then we wouldn't have to have these conversations. The reality is that no single model of organizing this is going to work perfectly. It is unfortunate that there would be some commuting involved in that, but we already have that commuting. The only difference is that the Lethbridge-specific MLAs don't have to do it.

The Chair: Okay. One of our concerns, you know, not in the legislation but we're certainly sensitive to it of course, next to Lethbridge is one of the largest First Nations in the country. Where do you see the Blood Tribe fitting in this process and having any affinity at all to the city? Have you looked at that? Have you talked to members of the Blood Tribe?

10:50

Mr. Mills: Well, I haven't personally, but, at the same time, I think if you did, I'm certain that the folks at the Blood Tribe would tell you that they have a substantial tie-in to the city of Lethbridge. There are, you know, First Nation service delivery vehicles based out of Lethbridge, which recognize the fact that the populations are fundamentally interconnected between those areas. Again, this is another region where we say that we've got local representation for the Blood Tribe dealing with local issues with respect to the Blood Tribe, just as the city of Lethbridge councillors deal with local issues. But shouldn't the province be able to recognize that there's also interdependence between those communities and have someone at the provincial level that can help act as a bridge between that local representation in order to develop more effective policy and implement more effective solutions to regional problems?

The Chair: One more question, and I think there may be another question. What's been the push-back or the opposition that you received to this proposal?

Mr. Mills: Well, I mean, if you come back to the previous meeting, you know, folks were fundamentally – I was trying to make an argument about multibillion-dollar investments in water capacity and regional health care delivery, and it felt like the counter arguments were: there aren't enough diverse restaurants in small towns relative to what's in Lethbridge. Like, that was brought up at the meeting.

This idea that the people who live in Lethbridge-East or Lethbridge-West are fundamentally different people that are incompatible with their rural neighbours: I think that's a horrible way of looking at the world. I think that we all are people. I believe that everyone in southern Alberta are reasonable people that recognize that what we need our government to do is to lead in terms of issues and facts and policies and programs, and those aren't necessarily local in nature and down here they're very much not local in nature.

It seems like the arguments against this come back to comfort. They come back to ideas of ideology, which I don't think are appropriate for an independent, neutral commission to consider. I think we should be looking at facts and issues and how the government spends its money and how it operates. For me, I haven't seen a lot of effectiveness there. There's been some talk about concerns about how people vote, but again I'm not considering how people vote at all. I don't think that should be the basis of decision-making because voting changes over time. People have the ability to campaign and address people and their issues. I have no political affiliation myself. That's not why I believe in this so strongly. I believe in it because I work in a field where I see the interconnectivity and I deal with this on a daily basis and I know that I can get more effective governance from the province if I have provincial voices speaking on a regional level down here.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. I've kept you longer than I probably should have. Actually, it's prompted one other question from a commissioner.

Mrs. Samson: I just have a follow-up to the thought that we talked about earlier, and that is that you're extremely successful right now

when I think about the agrifood business, and so is the city of Lethbridge. What you're compelling us to think about is that with the hybrid situation we will have MLAs focused collectively on the challenges. Why does that not happen now? Like, you're suggesting that what we have now is not good and if we do it this way, it'll work, but it's not working now. I don't get it. I'm talking about the MLAs now. Are they not working collectively?

Mr. Mills: They are. Like, they're all good people, working effectively within their scope. But working well doesn't mean it can't be done better, right? That's fundamental. That argument basically suggests that any form of change anywhere is inherently bad, right?

Mrs. Samson: I would disagree.

Mr. Mills: This is working fine. It's working well. The MLAs do a reasonable job, but I believe they would all do a better job if their role in terms of how the province is governed aligned with the reality of how the region actually works, which is to say: at a regional level. We don't need to double up on local representation. We have local representation.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. I presume we have your PowerPoint, and if you have some draft maps or proposals please send those in as well, Mr. Mills.

We're going to break now. This concludes the first half of our morning. I believe, according to my schedule, we have three or four presenters left. We're going to break for 10 minutes. Let's come back at 11:10.

[The hearing adjourned from 10:56 a.m. to 11:07 a.m.]

The Chair: Okay. Good morning again. We're returning from the break.

We've got, I believe, three or four presenters remaining for this morning. Is Megan Hanson . . .

Mr. Roth: No.

The Chair: No, she's not present.

Brent Ramsay. Are you present? Brent, could you please identify yourself. Tell us which riding you're living in and which one you wish to comment on.

Mr. Ramsay: Yes. Hello, commission members. I'm Brent Ramsay, the mayor of Red Deer county. I currently reside in the Rimby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre riding, and of course our municipality is split between that and the current Innisfail-Sylvan Lake riding.

The Chair: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Ramsay: Perfect. Well, yeah. Just a quick thank you to the commission members for your continued work and engagement on this.

Upon reviewing the draft, we did have some concern with the loss of the Rimby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre riding and the impact that that could have on rural representation in central Alberta. I would admit, like I say, residing in that riding currently, the current boundaries: I wasn't totally happy with how they cut into Red Deer county and how that was totally working so was excited about kind of a redraft. You know, I understand the commission was looking at trying to put rural municipalities into kind of one riding. I think that was part of the mandate. But what

we noticed in the draft map was that the ridings to the north and south of the new Sylvan Lake-Innisfail riding, in my opinion, are far too large geographically and will not have effective representation based on the corridors in the region.

Even we kind of feel that Red Deer county is almost too large for one MLA. It's a very diverse region. We have six urban municipalities if you don't count the city of Red Deer, so I do feel that there would be some challenges for one MLA to represent the entire Red Deer county. Our feelings are that we would be very open to having two MLAs represent Red Deer county, as has been for the last few years, just to help restore the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre riding in some form. We believe that having two MLAs in the past has given our municipality and region a bigger voice and would certainly benefit our constituents.

We feel the commission should strongly consider returning the riding to the west of Red Deer county. This would allow a restructure of central Alberta to have condensed representation along the highway 2 corridor. We feel that would also benefit the other corridors in the region to the west and east of us. Based on the data, we feel there are a few options that would work and meet the population thresholds. We didn't want to submit anything specific and try and narrow the focus of the commission; however, our GIS team could assist the commission if it would be helpful.

We truly appreciate the work the commission is doing in updating the boundaries, and that is important, especially with the added seats; however, it cannot come at the loss of effective rural representation. Some of the larger proposed geographic ridings will put strain on our MLAs. Rural Alberta takes care of vital infrastructure and drives our economy, and we feel it's important to have good representation. Adding seats should not just benefit our large urban centres but the province as a whole. Again, I would like to thank you for your time and hope you consider kind of reshaping the ridings in central Alberta to better benefit the highway 2 corridor and maintain our current number of ridings to allow for more effective representation.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Evans, any questions or comments?

Mr. Evans: Yes.

Aaron, would you be able to put up the proposed of ED of Sylvan Lake-Innisfail? So 86.

Mr. Ramsay, when that comes up, I just want to understand exactly what you're looking for in terms of Red Deer county. Red Deer county surrounds the city of Red Deer, borders on the Clearwater county, correct?

Mr. Ramsay: Yes.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Can you see that?

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah.

Mr. Evans: Am I to understand that you're not in favour of this proposal or you would like some changes to it? Can you help me out there?

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. In all a hundred per cent honesty, like, having Red Deer county in one riding is not the worst case scenario. But what we see to the north and south of us in their ridings is that they are now extending very far west to kind of pick up the population and make it work with the loss of the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre riding. To me, that's going to create some challenges. In talking to some of our regional partners we really felt that, you know, to try and condense the ridings in the north and

south of us to better fit along the highway 2 corridor, we would be willing to lose part of this riding to maybe the riding north of us, if you took, say, Sylvan Lake out of the picture and put it into the riding north so that they didn't have to extend all the way to Rocky Mountain House. Like I say, I think there are a couple of different variations or options you could look at, but what I wanted to really let the commission know is that we are open to having, you know, our municipality split into two ridings.

Mr. Evans: Just one more question. I think you mentioned the advantage of having two MLAs representing your interest. Did I hear you correctly?

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. For sure. We've noticed that in the past having two MLAs – of course, currently they're both ministers – has given our region a lot bigger voice. I think, you know, like I say, when I saw the draft map, I was like: "Okay. Red Deer county is all in one. That's good." Then when you expand your view a little bit further, you start to see the impact of our region and losing that riding and that voice and the way that those corridors are kind of being impacted on the west side of us. That's where I think that for us we're very open to having that second MLA and second voice. To me, it helps benefit the region as a whole in bringing another rural seat. Also, like I say, you could probably condense the ridings to the north and south of us along the highway 2 corridor a little bit better.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Ramsay, thank you so much for your answers.

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. For sure.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for participating today. That's really important to us. Your concern is that the existing Innisfail-Sylvan Lake electoral division expanded more to the west, and you feel you'd have better ties if you had two MLAs and we went more to the north? Are you suggesting that, like, containing more of those highway 2 corridor communities is a better fit for the county of Red Deer and the county of Red Deer's interests, like the things that are happening in Ponoka, Lacombe, and along that highway 2 corridor?

11:15

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. I would say that, like, looking more locally, when you start to talk about the highway 2 and kind of how our municipality works, we have, you know, Bowden, Innisfail, Red Deer, Blackfalds, Lacombe and then to the south of us we have kind of Olds, and we're all very close. Even once you stretch out east and west, a lot of the people that are living rurally are coming to that corridor to access services and everything like that.

You know, like I say, I think what's proposed kind of works for Red Deer county, but when I look north at Lacombe being in the same riding as Rocky Mountain House, I don't think they're going to have effective representation. Rocky Mountain House is in a totally different corridor along highway 22. To me, we need that riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre in some form to kind of better condense the ridings north and south of Red Deer county along the highway 2 corridor to better benefit the representation of the region.

Mrs. Samson: You're speaking about the west. What are your thoughts on highway 21? Do you still like that connection?

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. You know, I think once you start to look to the east, it gets a little bit more challenging populationwise. Highway 21, you know: it's not as big a corridor, so we still see those folks coming to highway 2. Obviously, some of the municipalities out that way are working on development opportunities, and it would

be great to see that corridor grow, and I think that might change things in the future. The problem is that further east of that you don't have the population, and it becomes challenging. I believe the current riding on the east side of the highway 21 corridor has kind of a special status because of the low population. I think to try and split the east off further would create more challenges because of the population. And, like I say, because that corridor is not as developed at this time, we're still seeing those people rely more on the highway 2. That's where they're commuting.

Mrs. Samson: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin: Thank you, and thank you, Mayor Ramsay, for being here today. I'm quite interested, of course, as we all are, in the significance of the highway 2 corridor. We've just spoken about highway 21 and its future potential, but we've also had a great number of letters and comments about highway 22, which is – I think I'm right – immediately west of your county boundary. It's asserted that there's a significant change in the economy somewhere along that line as you move into different types of agricultural activity and move from, to put it crudely, grain farming to ranching, perhaps those kind of shifts. It leads me back to the thought that: is it true, then, that the bulk of your county is involved in grain farming as a basic industry?

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. As far as agriculture goes, we are quite diverse from the west side to the east side of our county. You know, you look at our west. It's, in my opinion – I have a farmer background – some of the best land we have in the province for arable land and growing grain crops, and that continues a little bit further west of us into Clearwater county as well. Our southern portions in Red Deer county and the east side are more of our grass- and ranchlands there.

But yeah, you're absolutely right. Going into the highway 22 corridor, it becomes a lot different topography, and I would say that you get into a lot more of those natural grasslands and even kind of, you know, foothills, mountainous ranges in some areas. If you go west of Caroline probably about an hour, you're kind of into a smaller mountain range already. So it really changes quite a bit on that highway 22 corridor. I look at the community of Rocky Mountain House: you know, very different from what we're seeing along the highway 2 corridor.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

Thanks very much. It's always great – and I've said it a few times, but I think it's worth saying again – when we have elected representatives here representing your communities join us. You've got a comprehensive view, I guess, of kind of conditions on the ground, if you will, and you've demonstrated that today. Thank you so much.

You've identified, I think, one of the great challenges we have, and that's balancing out the population. You know, I was actually just doing a little bit of back and forth here on our maps and some of the different ideas we had kicked around. What I'm hearing from you and I've heard from others is that the corridor really is north-south along highway 2, broadly speaking, as opposed to east-west. Part of the struggle we have around – of course, as you go further east and west from highway 2, the population really thins up. I mean, that's no big surprise. Anyway, that's more just kind of a

foundational – you've already identified that's what we're wrestling with here.

You said something right at the beginning of your presentation that I wanted to pick up on, that you weren't completely happy with the old 2017 boundaries. Maybe if you wouldn't mind just talking a little bit about what you didn't like. You've talked about a couple of possible solutions. I'm just kind of curious what – I want to make sure we don't step in and kind of make a similar error or miscalculation, in your opinion.

Mr. Ramsay: Yeah. A couple of points there, I guess, speaking to what I didn't like about the current draft. To me this highlights the importance of the highway 2 corridor. You know, if you just look at your guys' draft at Red Deer county, we would be quite happy with that. To me, even going to the west and the east side of Red Deer county, that is a pretty far drive, but that still all funnels to the highway 2 corridor. If I utilize services or sports or anything for my kids, typically we're going Innisfail, Red Deer. I live west of Spruce View, 20 minutes west of Innisfail, so we're always headed towards that corridor.

What happened in the last draft to try and gain population, as you mentioned, is the challenge, for that Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: it kind of cut into Red Deer county. I ended up about a mile into that riding. I don't really feel I relate to – you know, I don't spend a lot of time in Sundre or kind of that highway 22 corridor. To me that's why it emphasizes the need to have representation on that side. That corridor: they have their own travel patterns, same as highway 2. That's what I really didn't like about that redraft. Like I say, the two MLAs from a county perspective was great, but as an individual being kind of cut into that weird corridor that you're not really a part of: it really felt like you weren't represented by your MLA. So that's kind of my thoughts on the previous draft.

I totally hear you on the population challenges. I wanted to submit kind of a map or my thinkings with this to try and give the commission, you know, more data and more to work with, but like I said, I didn't really want to limit the focus or your guys' scope on what you could look at for options. I think there are a variety of ways you can do it. Like I say, on the east side of us we kind of have a specialized status riding because of the population out there. I don't know if that's what it would take on the west side. But I do think, when you start to look at some of the communities like Rocky Mountain House, Sundre, that were already existing, that you could get the populations quite close. Then by doing that for the ridings north and south of us – you know, to me if that north one had to cut in and maybe grab Sylvan Lake, like, they kind of have the highway 20 corridor up there, going north to Rimbey from Sylvan Lake. So if that's where it kind of had to cut in to Red Deer county a little bit to try and make a rejigging work so that you could still maintain the population side on the west.

Yeah, I certainly understand the challenges there. But, like I say, having those ridings extend that far west I really think hurts those folks in those ridings.

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

11:25

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Ramsay. You had a short presentation, but we grilled you for a lot of questions, took up the time.

The next presenter is Jason Reckseidler.

Mr. Reckseidler: Thank you very much. Hello. Good morning, everyone.

The Chair: Mr. Reckseidler, please identify yourself and tell us what riding you're talking about.

Mr. Reckseidler: For sure. My name is Jason Reckseidler. I'm a councillor in Delburne. My father was the mayor there for 35 years. Born in Innisfail, played for the Innisfail Eagles for a lot of years. Giving the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake perspective, Red Deer county perspective, and, in essence, in the argument a little bit of Clearwater county, but I might also offer a different perspective from the life of education and, in my case, a hockey referee for youth and how our travel patterns sort of reflect this shift in central Alberta. As we've seen, there's been a lot of growth in Alberta, and central Alberta is unique in how it's grown. It's been unbalanced. We've talked about east having low population and west being high. I want to kind of jump into that a little bit.

One of the biggest things is that the proposal actually keeping Bowden, Innisfail, Penhold, Delburne, and Elnora: that all works really well in how the county works with the municipal partners. Some of the things that we're starting to see from an agricultural perspective is that our grain now goes to Trochu. Viterra and GrainsConnect both operate at Trochu, and there's a lot more commerce and agriculture down the highway 21 corridor, so Trochu and Delburne municipalities end up working together quite a bit on projects and things, so Kneehill county and Red Deer county actually have that bridge.

The other perspective is that the commercial and now residential areas in Gasoline Alley are actually a lot more population for Red Deer county, and Sylvan Lake has grown to be – well, Sylvan Lake could at some point become a city, in which that skews a lot of how central Alberta has changed. You've got Sylvan Lake as a bigger growth area, east a little bit less. What we're seeing – and I'm giving my youth hockey perspective. When I'm refereeing, I'm called to Blackfalds. We've got ties from Joffre petrochemical plant east. Joffre, Delburne, Blackfalds, and Trochu sort of become this eastern-central bridge area, and we're not going to Sylvan. Hockey teams aren't playing each other. Granted, Stettler is across the river.

Then the other perspective I wanted to bring up is that the highway 21 corridor has sort of three connectors: highway 21, the CN Rail Edmonton-Calgary railroad, and then the watershed of the Red Deer River. When Delburne and Trochu have to co-ordinate on projects, a lot of it is our watershed, how that growth of the province and water in our province will be affected. I don't want to make things more confusing because it's a harder challenge that you guys have, but we're seeing in the east a lot more commerce down the highway 21 corridor with Trochu, Elnora, and Huxley being four miles apart with families connected there and Delburne and Red Deer county working with Blackfalds, I guess, in a lot of ways and Innisfail and Penhold, less so in Sylvan Lake.

Then the other thing is that kids are sending their kids to school in Trochu and Delburne and Innisfail. Back to the agricultural is that all livestock goes to the Innisfail auction market, so we're very well connected with Innisfail and Penhold and less so with Stettler, if the boundary commission tries to put us in the east, which has been proposed many times as well.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on east-central Alberta and the village of Delburne. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Martin, any questions?

Dr. Martin: Yes. Thank you.

As you will have heard, sir, we have been discussing highway 21 most immediately with the last presenter and on and off over the last few meetings. I'm very interested in your description of the

emerging economic links; for example, economic links to Innisfail, particularly for the livestock, and highway 21 south of Trochu for grain movement. You also mentioned Blackfalds, but my pen moved slow, so I didn't catch the particular kind of linkage that connects your area with Blackfalds on a regular basis.

Mr. Reckseidler: Sure. With Blackfalds, we've seen a lot of our younger people who may get jobs in Red Deer actually choose Blackfalds. They don't really choose Penhold so much unless you're Pine Lake, but a lot of residents are moving to Blackfalds, and Blackfalds has a very call it light industrial agricultural focus that it doesn't share with Lacombe as much as it used to as Lacombe's grown bigger.

A lot of Blackfalds residents work in Joffre, a lot of Delburne residents work in Joffre, so when real estate opportunities come, the communication obviously starts around workers at the plant. But Blackfalds and Delburne are starting to build that bridge from a family and personality perspective. So a lot of Delburne residents, younger people, bought homes in Blackfalds because they can't afford Red Deer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reckseidler: Does that make sense?

Dr. Martin: It sure does. Thank you.

Mr. Reckseidler: They don't go to Innisfail.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your time today. I'm glad you brought up Trochu because I could not connect Trochu. We had a few people who said it should belong to the riding, so thank you for that.

I guess I'm struggling with the Sylvan Lake disconnect. I don't really see that. Can you expand on that a bit more?

Mr. Reckseidler: Simply from being born and raised in this area, Sylvan Lake was a town of our size. We were all fairly similar: Sylvan Lake, Innisfail, Blackfalds, Lacombe, Delburne. But Sylvan Lake grew to become so much bigger with different issues than I would even say Innisfail having been born there and being involved with Innisfail Eagles for so long. Sylvan Lake has a tourism-perspective priority that it will always need to have, and is connected to, you know, some of the things in Clearwater county that are more tourism focused. It's different than, say, Innisfail and Penhold, its agricultural grain, part of the highway 2 corridor.

Sylvan Lake, while connected to highway 2 corridor, has become its own thing with its own priorities, and maybe the county can speak more of that. But if you talk to municipal leaders in Sylvan Lake, they have different health care issues than, say, rural Red Deer county. They're going to want bigger services. They're going to want more things. They have grown so much that there is a disconnect now in the priorities in Sylvan Lake compared to Innisfail, Penhold, Blackfalds, as I use that example, up and down the highway 2 corridor.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: Yes.

I was interested in one thing that you said about Blackfalds people. You said that people are buying houses in Blackfalds because they can't afford a house in Red Deer. Am I safe to presume that Blackfalds is a bit of a bedroom community to Red Deer? People are there because they can't afford a house in Red Deer; otherwise they'd be in Red Deer, but they work in Red Deer?

Mr. Reckseidler: Definitely. They work in Red Deer or they work in Joffre petrochemical plant.

Mr. Evans: Okay. And how far is Joffre from Blackfalds?

Mr. Reckseidler: Twelve minutes. Ten

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Reckseidler: I mean, I'll just expand on that. Delburne and Alix always had a strong relationship divided by the river, but there's less and less of that but more so because of Joffre and how it's grown. If you go towards Red Deer, go up the Joffre road across the river, you're involved with people in Joffre and Blackfalds quite a bit economically.

The Chair: Dr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: You've elevated me. I like it.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. I was looking at Julian.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Sorry, I just wanted to ask again about the Trochu connection, and you're proposing that we put those together. Just so I'm clear, because I'm not as familiar with central Alberta and that sort of east side there – I really probably should be – were you proposing to straddle the Red Deer county line there into Kneehill?

Mr. Reckseidler: Yes, definitely. I think the challenge for the committee is Three Hills, obviously, but with Prairie Bible it does have different perspectives than Trochu, and Trochu has always been lumped in with Three Hills. But from a watershed perspective and working with Bob Mills and all the Red Deer River conversations that we have, Trochu municipality and Delburne municipality and Elnora – don't want to forget them – have a lot of conversations in growth and management of water, and Trochu gets forgotten in that. As I'll say again, there are two grain distributors. There's GrainsConnect, and there's Viterra. GrainsConnect is in Huxley, the booming metropolis of Huxley, which we all love, and Viterra is between Trochu and Three Hills at the 27 junction. Grain from Delburne, Elnora, Lousana, Pine Lake all goes to GrainsConnect or Viterra, which is highway 27.

11:35

Mr. Evans: Yeah. Thanks so much. That's really helpful.

The Chair: Interesting. Thank you very much, Mr. Reckseidler. Every presenter brings a new perspective on the province, virtually, and this was most interesting.

Our next and I think our final presenter for the morning is Nathan Schneider.

Mr. Schneider: Are you able to hear me, everyone?

The Chair: We can now, yes. Tell us where you're from and which riding you want to comment on.

Mr. Schneider: You betcha. Again, my name is Nathan Schneider. I am from West Yellowhead number 87. Thank you, Mr. Clark and everybody, for, you know, allowing me this opportunity to speak about our democratic process.

I'm a resident of Hinton. I've been here for more than 25 years, and we've raised our family and with that I spend a lot of my time . . .

The Chair: Sorry. You've frozen.

Mr. Schneider: . . . commerce to my business has operated for 20 years in the West Yellowhead corridor, and I'm here to provide a voice as to why I believe it's a bad idea to remove Jasper from the West Yellowhead electoral district.

The Chair: Okay. Can I stop you there, sir? I think for whatever reason your connection may be prone to freezing. You froze just a little bit, so just be mindful of that. If we can't hear you, I'll make a motion like this, okay?

Mr. Schneider: I can't even really see – oh, that I can see. Would it be better if I turn off my video for you?

The Chair: It might be because of the strength of your connection in Hinton.

Mr. Schneider: Sure.

Okay. Just to pick up here, I was saying that I believe it's a bad idea to remove Jasper from the West Yellowhead electoral district. I believe that point is best made with the comparison that we would never consider removing Canmore from Banff. Those two towns are entwined in very much the same way that Jasper and Hinton is. I believe that Hinton's position is to be the next Canmore.

I'm going to make sure that I can still see you in case you're waving your hands.

This is one of the key points that I want to build on for the next couple of minutes. It's about Jasper and Hinton and, in fact, the whole West Yellowhead area. It functions as one integrated economic region, and the growth opportunities that exist in tourism depend on one representative voice who understands and can advocate for our whole system. Splitting Jasper away from Hinton doesn't just redraw a voting line; it disrupts their working regional partnership that's already producing results and is essential to our future growth

Jasper and Hinton are both integrated in the most practical ways already: our workforce, our transportation corridors, contract services, emergency response, supply chains. People communicate between Jasper and Hinton every day in their daily lives, and highway 16 and the rail corridor are not just abstract lines on the map. These are arteries for our region with an average of 5,600 vehicles a day that travel between the segment. Hinton acts as a service and support hub, and Jasper acts as our tourism anchor. Together our whole region of West Yellowhead, being Grand Cache, Jasper, Hinton, Edson, Whitecourt: this node forms a complete tourism region with something for everyone.

I'm hoping the commission understands that because Jasper is in a national park, it operates under federal oversight and Parks Canada requirements, and that has real consequences for Jasper. Certain kinds of development, servicing, operational flexibility: these are all constrained within the parks in ways that don't apply outside the park boundary. That means that Jasper's ability to thrive as a tourism engine relies heavily on a strong partnership with nearby communities such as mine, Hinton, where provincial and municipal jurisdictions govern how services, supporting businesses, workforce solutions, and enabling infrastructure can be developed and adapted.

To make this practical, tourism growth depends on enabling infrastructure that's often easier to deliver outside the national park boundaries. For example, developing a regional travel hub such as improving the Hinton-Jasper airport to support tourism and regional connectors is more feasible under the provincial side and the municipal districts than it is within the federal park, and that's why that airport is 10 minutes outside of Hinton.

Yellowhead county has recently acquired land outside our park gates that can support visitor services and tourism developments

that are ways that are too difficult to accommodate within the federal park framework, and along the corridor the kind of things that visitors actually use – hotels, staging areas, guided experience like a ATV trips and horseback riding, and any other supporting services that make those experiences work – are typically easier to permit and expand in when you're outside of the federal park boundaries.

So I guess in other words, Jasper needs Hinton not as a rival but as a complementary partner that provides capacity that the park cannot create under federal constraints, so when my region grows, it grows as a whole system. By putting a boundary split into place, that wouldn't change how tourists travel. It only splits the decision-making that happens for my region. This is where I believe that keeping one MLA really matters to us. Tourism growth is more than just visitors; it requires decisions across multiple moving parts. We need workforce mobility. We have housing pressures. We have transportation options, corridor safety, emergency management, wildlife response planning, marketing, destination development.

A split creates two predictable problems: two MLAs with two different priority standards, and two different sets of stakeholders. So instead of one person being accountable for regional outcomes, we risk: that's somebody else's issue. Tourism and infrastructure planning suffer, I believe, when nobody owns that whole picture. With one MLA representing Jasper and Hinton together, we get that single, accountable advocate who can push for corridor-based transportation improvements that align with our provincial supports that help keep the tourism workforce and our service economy growing outside the park. We have co-ordinated emergency preparedness as one region, and we keep long-term tourism strategies coherent over multiple years instead of changing that direction with political boundaries.

This isn't theoretical. The Jasper-Hinton partnership is already operating in the real world. Through years of work in the chamber, we've worked towards building a destination marketing organization and a fund. It was a sustainable funding model for Hinton that we learned from the Jasper DMO, and we applied those lessons. Hinton's DMO is now heading into its second year, and this matters because destination development requires continuity, consistent branding, consistent product development, and consistent alignment between our attractions, our services, and our supporting communities.

We're already seeing practical integrations . . . [A timer sounded]

The Chair: Keep going. It was your time limit, but keep going. Nobody else has paid attention to it.

Mr. Schneider: We're also seeing practical integration through workforce and visitor mobility. There's now a Jasper-Hinton bus initiative that supports our workers. We provide visitor alternatives, another way to enjoy our region. Culturally and economically Jasper is often viewed as locals, and this isn't just a slogan. Because we're integrated as labour and service markets, we're more than just neighbours on a map to each other.

Now, the proposal move Jasper to Banff in a place that's really centred around Banff looks great and tidy on a map, and I understand, because it's part of a park, but Jasper and Banff are separated by 240 kilometres of unpopulated mountains, no intervening communities, no cell service, and frequent road closures. Like, the road closures happen randomly and just whenever it permits, right? It's a toll road, and it's something you require a permit from Parks county to travel on. Grouping them together because they're a park is just a mistake. It's a shared label, but it's not a shared function, and I believe that, more importantly, it creates a representation risk. Jasper becomes structurally second in a district where Banff and Canmore will naturally dominate attention and provincial focus. A boundary split

won't change this; it just makes the decision-making process harder for our communities.

So my request is just straightforward. Please retain Jasper in West Yellowhead. The district configuration reflects how we already function as a region. Having one MLA is the best thing, I think, for integrating our tourists and our service quarters, and I think it protects our long-term investments that are going to help Jasper and Hinton grow, and this is what we all want to see within the province.

Thank you guys for your time.

The Chair: Well thank you, Mr. Schneider. First of all, I'm going to take the lead here. Hinton being the gateway town to Jasper as Canmore is to Banff: I've never thought of it that way, so I'm going to want to know what more concrete steps Hinton is taking and what the future looks like from your perspective. From a travel perspective what you're saying kind of mirrors our own travel experience as a commission. We wanted to meet in Jasper, but for some reason I don't think we could get a hotel, so we went to Hinton. We had our hearing there. That kind of mirrors it. Tell us a little bit more about Hinton. It's been years since I've driven through Hinton because I usually go to Jasper the other way when I go up there. Tell me more about the – is it just your idea, or is it a concentrated plan by the town of Hinton to do more in that area?

11:45

Mr. Schneider: Well, it was our idea as a chamber, you know, when I was sitting on the board and in that direction. The challenge that Hinton always had is that they don't really seem to know what they have available. It's sort of a working community, heavy on the mills, heavy on forestry, and there are a lot of people now that are recognizing and seeing Hinton for the Canmore that it can be. I've been saying Hinton could be a Canmore for 20 years, and it's really tough, sort of, to get that mindset when you have that shift-worker-type, you know, mentality that does happen.

What I've noticed in the last bunch of years is that we've had a lot of investment, people coming from Toronto that were able to sell properties and things there, buying hotels, buying restaurants, buying everything, and they're bringing that tourism mentality because they can see it. Sometimes it's just that complacency of being in an area for so long. Generations of people that are here don't really see that forest through the trees mentality.

The Chair: Pardon the pun.

Mr. Schneider: Exactly.

But we are Canmore, and we have the ability to grow even bigger than Canmore because we're not constrained by any sort of land restrictions around it. Jasper, itself, has always sort of been second fiddle to Banff. Jasper and Banff actually have two different structures with the provincial government in how they handle things, how they handle their pine beetle response, how they handled, you know, even the fire situation that we dealt with.

I believe that with the current council that's in there, they're going to be focused on growing Hinton as a business, as a community. That was what our driving force really needed to be. Our DMO, like I said, is in its second year. We were part of that group to try to get this destination marketing fund going. This is something that all other communities do, yet we didn't see ourselves that way. Again, this is part of that branding problem that comes with Hinton. Once we were able to start saying, "Hey, listen; now we have this fund; we're participating in the same way that everybody else does," now we can start, you know, encouraging events. We can start hosting more things.

You were right. The problem you would have had with Jasper was hotels. With the fires and everything that recently happened, the hotels

themselves are at limited capacity. Hinton is the natural spot for everybody to come to. It's just that we're that sort of hidden, forgotten gem. You take that gem and you go further north on highway 40, you go up in the William Switzer park – a lot of people don't realize how many people are camping along through that region. There's probably a 600-person campground, if I had to guess, and that leads us all the way up to Grand Cache. So, when I say that we're this whole package, we're the hub, and we haven't figured it out yet. I think we're starting to, and I think that the investments are there.

The Chair: Okay. But you didn't acknowledge that you're a couple of generations behind Canmore, and in fairness Canmore was a coal mining town three generations ago. Nobody paid attention to it either.

Mr. Schneider: That's what we were as well, sir.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.
Mr. Clark.

Mr. Clark: No, I don't think I have any questions.
I'm just curious. Now, did you put in a written submission as well?

Mr. Schneider: Yes, I did. Yeah.

Mr. Clark: You mentioned you're with the chamber of commerce?

Mr. Schneider: Yeah.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Perfect. I just want to make sure I have the background there.
Sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Schneider: I mentioned that I'm a past president.

Mr. Clark: Oh, okay. Perfect. That's helpful. No questions, but thank you so much for your submission.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you for your time today. It's quite valuable information. We've had a lot of positive feedback about the connection with Jasper into Banff and Canmore. There's some push-back from Canmore, but Banff and Jasper: it seems like – I'm not going to go into it because you know that as well as I do – there's a natural connection there. What about think outside the box and grab Hinton into the Banff-Jasper mix? Like, I mean if tourism is your schtick and you're building everything on the basis of Jasper. When I think about moving east down highway 16, I remember when we were in Hinton there was a conversation around the disconnect of the other communities along highway 16, that you were a stand-alone tourism-related community tied closely to Jasper. Why don't you speak on that?

Mr. Schneider: Well, I don't actually think that that's true. I mean, our whole network, everything that goes through here, is Edson, Hinton, Jasper. Service has been moving from Hinton a bit to Edson. You know, you see we're in the Edson forestry region, so I think we're all part of that same thing. Jasper itself was just – and you say it's similar to Banff, but it's not in so many different ways, like I said, with the way Parks treats that differently. No, I don't think going in with Banff – I think then Hinton, again, would play sort of a second fiddle if we're tied again to Banff-Canmore. I don't see how that alignment, you know, really helps things out.

Like, I guess what I'm trying to get at is that some of the expansion through the rail lines and everything that has been happening are for the corridor that goes through here to the

mountains down to Vancouver. That artery exists from generations of trails and everything else.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you. I appreciate your answer.

The Chair: Mr. Evans, have you asked a question?

Mr. Evans: No.

Just so I'm clear, Mr. Schneider, you're telling us that there's really not a north-south corridor here; there's an east-west corridor when we're dealing with Jasper, Hinton, Edson, et cetera?

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. Well, like, Hinton's a hub. You know, in Grande Cache that's their northern portion there. They have the option of going, sort of, north or south. A lot of times they would choose whichever road is actually the most open to them. But on highway 16, the traffic that comes from there: when weather is permitting, we have people that will travel from Valemount that'll come all the way through Jasper and come and do their shopping and things in Hinton because we're cheaper than the provincial taxes that they pay in B.C., and we have a few more options and services that are available to them. So, yeah, we're an east-west corridor. It's the easiest way to get to Edmonton. We're two and a half hours that way. I think, you know, tourism and growth-wise, that's the best way to keep us as well.

Mr. Evans: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Schneider.

Dr. Martin: I've got a question.

The Chair: Oh, you didn't ask? Okay. Sorry.

Mrs. Samson: We cut our own off.

Dr. Martin: Yeah. It happens.

Thank you very much for your presentation. I know this area reasonably well, and I think I agree with your general characterizations about Hinton being known for its forestry, about the shift work, and so on, and I agree as well with the huge tourist potential up and down highway 40, for sure. I've gone through many of those parks, both north and south, and good on you for pointing this out to your colleagues in the chamber and no doubt your town council and MLAs as well. I want to commend you for this approach. I would like to see a whole lot more tourist development around the east gate of the park.

I think that I am very much in agreement with you about the connectivity and linkages that historically and currently exist between the town of Jasper and the town of Hinton and also between the park management. I have had some dealings in the past with the superintendent and his colleagues, and the linkage to Hinton is a very important one for them. Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Yeah. Sorry, Dr. Martin.

Thank you, Mr. Schneider. I see your golf shirt. What do you do for a living?

Mr. Schneider: I'm actually an electrician. I own a company called Logic Control. You recognize this says: Travel Alberta.

The Chair: Yeah.

11:55

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. No, I'm not affiliated in any way. Actually the shirt was given to me by a very good friend that is involved with

it. Maybe because I'm such an advocate for this, sort of, tourism and things in the area, he wanted to give me something nice.

The Chair: Well, good. You know, there's a lot of traffic to us in relation to this one, big, national park proposed electoral division. We've heard some interesting countervailing points this week, and your submission gives us lots to think about.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, guys. You guys have a great day.

The Chair: Okay. I think that concludes our morning session, all of our presenters. I believe this afternoon we have got about 13 presenters lined up. Yes. We'll reconvene at 1:30.

Thank you, everyone, and we'll see you this afternoon.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

