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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We'll call our meeting to order. We are still studying the redistribution commission's report for beautiful British Columbia.

Monsieur Sandhu, I don't know what we have done, but you had a panel of four starting the day yesterday, and today it's just you.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): I think they are all afraid of me. That's why they haven't shown up here this morning.

The Chair: We're going to give you five minutes for a presentation to us, and then we'll ask you questions. So I guess you get to go first.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: This actually feels a little different. I've sat at those tables, and being a witness is a little nerve-racking actually.

The Chair: Many members have said the same thing. It's the first time they have had to sit at the end of the table. I think they will all be much more polite to witnesses in the future having done it.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Wonderful.

Let me give you a little bit of a background on Surrey. I've lived in Surrey for 33 years, and I pretty much know every corner 7-Eleven. I've hung out in those places in Surrey.

Surrey has five of town centres of sorts. You have the South Surrey White Rock area; the Newton area; the Whalley area, which is the North Surrey part of it; and you have the Fleetwood—Port Kells area with the Guildford part of it. The other area, the town centre or historic town centre, is Cloverdale towards Langley.

The initial map that was proposed by the commission had split some of the historic communities in Surrey. For example, part of my riding went with Newton—North Delta, which basically had no relevance to Surrey North in the initial boundaries commission map.

The commissioners came out to Surrey, and a number of constituents came out to enlighten the commission about the historic settlement of Surrey with regard to different community centres.

The commission listened very carefully and in fact recognized that they had made a mistake in recognizing historic patterns of settlements in Surrey. They listened to the constituents, and they made changes that reflected the views of the constituents from Surrey who had come out. Not only that, but those also reflected the historic settlement in different parts of Surrey.

I have talked to a number of constituents about the proposed new map. They have told me that this is actually a much better

geographical representation and that it brings together communities of interest.

There was an article published on the *Surrey Leader* opinion page that came out on February 7 after the revised maps were presented. It's one of the newspapers of Frank Bucholtz, who wrote:

The revised proposal for Surrey's new federal ridings makes far more sense than did the initial proposal from the federal Electoral Boundaries Commission....

The five Surrey ridings will be much more representative of Surrey's communities than would have been the case under the commission's first proposal.

I do want to say that the revised boundaries are much more reflective of the boundaries that are present in Surrey.

Having said that, I've seen the representations made by surrounding members, and I do want this committee to know that there are people who came out to the hearings. Their views were heard by the commission. Any changes to surrounding boundaries will have a ripple effect on people who were represented from my community. I want this committee to know that if it is thinking about making any changes based on another MP's input and that of their constituents, please do keep in mind the constituents from my community of Surrey, so that we do not have a ripple effect across different communities.

That is it.

The Chair: Super.

Mr. Lukiwski, would you like to lead us off today, for five minutes?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Sandhu, for being here.

You mentioned that the second map addressed a lot of the concerns you had identified after the first map had been presented, but that there are still, in your opinion at least, some other minor adjustments that could be made or should be made.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: The community made it very clear. There are five different centres in Surrey, and the new map reflects those communities. I don't think we need to make any more changes.

From the opinion piece that appeared in the *Surrey Leader*, and from the constituents I've talked to, they're a lot happier with the new map than they would be if some changes were made. I think right now they feel that their views were heard. If changes are made at this level, I think we would be betraying the very constituents who came out and reflected their views.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I just want to make sure I'm clear on this: you're happy with the map and you're not recommending any other changes to your riding particularly?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Well, I'm not recommending—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: You're suggesting that if the committee hears, or at least has heard, recommendations from other ridings that would affect Surrey, then we should be cognizant of your testimony here today.

Is that right?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Absolutely you should. If a neighbouring riding is changed, that will have a ripple effect on the ridings in Surrey.

I'm asking this committee to keep in mind the views of my constituents, the people who came out to these meetings and who represented themselves to the commission. The commission recognized the different town centres in the community, and I wish to add that this should be reflected.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Just so that you're aware of what this committee has been doing, in our final reports from province to province we've basically just been identifying the testimony we've heard from the members of Parliament. We tend not to editorialize. We basically just try to reflect the accurate testimony that we've heard.

I'm sure, in the final report on British Columbia, your comments will also be quite accurately reflected, inasmuch as you like the new boundaries, but you are expressing some caution that if other recommendations get made, they would have an impact on the riding you have currently and that this would not be well received by your constituents.

• (1110)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Right. I believe the commission took in the concerns of my constituents, and that is reflected in the revised map they especially presented for Surrey. To make changes to those I think would be going against the wishes of the constituents who came out to the hearings.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay.

I'm fine, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Super.

Mr. Cullen, five minutes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I'm not sure I'll need five minutes.

Just checking back, what you're expressing here, Jasbir, is your concern about a domino effect.

As committee members will remember—and I'm not sure how we're going to handle this, Tom, as you say—when we had Mr. Warawa in front of us on Langley, one of the proposals from him was to move west to grab some more of Cloverdale out of Fleetwood—Port Kells. As committee members will also remember, there was a proposal from Mark to move some of that riding from Fleetwood—Port Kells over to....

It was a significant number, Chair, as I recall. It was somewhere in the range of 15,000 to 20,000.

The question was where, if we borrowed that, and Fleetwood—Port Kells then needed to make up some numbers, that would likely

come from? So we get into the Surrey question, because that's the domino. It would be unusual to suggest that you would cross the river and then get into....

So in terms of moving around groups of 15,000 to 20,000 in this part of the world, Mr. Sandhu, is there a natural 15,000 or 20,000 out of your riding that would line up with what you heard in the testimony, or what the commission heard in the testimony?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I've lived in Surrey for 33 years. In most of the area that's part of the Cloverdale—Langley riding, the new one, the people who live in Cloverdale and Clayton Hill actually shop in Langley, because there's a huge shopping mall. They do not come out to Guildford or Port Kells to do their shopping. So that area is more attached to Langley than it is to the Surrey shopping malls.

Having said that, I don't want my constituents to think that their views are lesser than the views of constituents from Langley. It's pretty clear, from the changes the commission made, that the views of my constituents are reflected in the new map.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's the question.

Tom is right: what this committee tries to do is to reflect the testimony we hear. On the suggestion made by Mark Warawa earlier with respect to Langley, one of our questions was, "Where do you make up the numbers for it?" He had some logic with communities of interest extending to this Cloverdale section but then into Fleetwood—Port Kells, and I'm not sure if we're hearing from the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Are we?

The Chair: I can't remember.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Regardless, if it then dominos into Surrey, your suggestion is that the map as described right now is a good reflection and that, having seen the new maps, people are happy; there were some alterations made but nothing significant. You said that you don't want people to feel that they somehow matter less.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Yes, absolutely. Over 25 individuals testified at the commission's hearing. It would be unfair to them. They don't want their views counting less because somebody else now is coming out with some proposals that weren't presented in the initial hearings.

People are very happy. I've talked to many, many constituents in my riding and they are very happy that the community interests were kept together, especially the town centres in the way they are reflected in the new map. That's how Surrey has grown over the last number of years. There are communities of interest: Whalley, which is basically North Surrey; Newton, which is South Surrey; and Fleetwood—Port Kells, with Guildford, and the Cloverdale-Langley area. This is very reflective of how the community has grown over the last 33 years that I've lived there.

• (1115)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Good? Great.

Mr. Dion.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sandhu, I understand that you are very pleased with the new mapping for your riding, but you were very concerned by the former one, the former proposal of the commission.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: The new proposal reflects the views—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, I understand that. You've already said that. Thank you.

You don't want any change, and you are here facing us saying that if a domino effect coming from the requests of other colleagues, other MPs, affects your riding, you would oppose it.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I would oppose it on the condition that these are the conditions wanted by my communities, absolutely.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes.

Now, my question is, from where do you see the concern? Have you heard about changes proposed by some colleagues that may affect your riding in a detrimental way?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I have this House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs document done by the Library of Parliament. It talks about item P with regard to Mark Warawa, MP for Langley. Any riding changes that are going to happen in the surrounding area will have some sort of ripple effect on the ridings surrounding it. I just wanted this committee to know that my constituents were very clear in making sure that community interests were represented—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Excuse me. I understand that. You don't need to repeat this argument. We understood that.

The question I asked is, did you speak with your colleagues when you had a concern about what they proposed? Did you try to understand what they were saying? Is there communication between colleagues in British Columbia? This is my question.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I just became aware of this, actually, this morning.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That's not normal. What is very strange is that I have something here from Madam Jinny Sims from Newton—North Delta, and I understand that she is pleased by the commission, if I understand what I am reading from her, but she is concerned because you are testifying and she wants to make sure that you will not affect her riding.

Why did the two of you not speak to each other? Then you would not have had to come here. You are concerned by each other when both of you want the status quo.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair

The Chair: We don't get that very often here.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, we don't get that very often.

The suggestion by my friend here is that Ms. Sims, in her letter—which I'm reading right now—is worried that Mr. Sandhu's proposal is going to be directly implicated. My friend is suggesting that colleagues in B.C.... I'm not sure that it's Mr. Sandhu's obligation to go and talk to other MPs who are making suggestions on maps that have already been solidified. I would have thought that it would have

been the reverse, which is what the committee has so far been asking MPs who are seeking changes—

An hon. member: That's not a point of order.

The Chair: I don't think we're quite on a point of order, but I will ask Monsieur Dion to—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I don't want to go too far.

If my colleague thinks I went too far, I'm sorry.

The Chair: We have an apology.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I just want to understand why we have a colleague who's pleased by the proposal of the commission—and here I'm pleased that he's pleased.... It's less work for us.

But if, in the future, if I'm right, when I read about Madam Sims—it may not be what she will say, but if it is and she's also pleased and she wants to say that if a colleague wants to move, and one of the potential moves may come from Mr. Sandhu....

It's strange, Mr. Chair, because Albertan colleagues did not have these problems at all. They talked to each other. I'm not saying this is more the fault of Mr. Sandhu than anyone else; I'm just saying that maybe something is happening in B.C. now that is not as good as what we had in Alberta.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: You know, Mr. Dion, you're asking me a question that Jinny should be answering. I don't think I need to answer this question.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: No, no, my question was—

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I'm here to represent the people from my constituency.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, and you are doing that very well.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: They spoke very clearly of what they wanted, and I think the commission reflected that.

There are some changes being proposed by nearby members of Parliament, and I want to make sure that the views of my constituents, the views that showed up at the hearings, are respected if any changes proceed from this committee.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I understand. I fully understand. You have been great here.

Thank you very much.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you both.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you.

Just so I can be clear, Ms. Sims represents right now Newton—North Delta. The majority of that riding, not all of it but the majority of it, will become the new riding of Surrey—Newton.

I think that's right. Yes. Right now she has Newton—North Delta, on the map on the right, and she will, I assume, represent in the future Surrey—Newton.

You represent Surrey North, and it will be changed to Surrey Centre.

The riding boundary between the two currently goes along, from the looks of things, 96th Avenue, starting in the west now; follows 120th Street south; goes east along 88th Avenue; drops south along 128th; and then it turns right and goes east again. The sort of stepped movement that we have now will become a straight line along 88th Avenue.

I think I've just summarized that correctly.

First of all, you are not objecting to that particular change to the boundary. Is that correct?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: No, not at all.

Mr. Scott Reid: You're not?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: No.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

And she's not objecting to that change of the boundary either. Is that correct?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: As far as I know, she's not.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. That answers my question there.

Essentially, as I understand it, unless she says otherwise, there's no dispute over where that particular line should fall. As that's the only line you have between you, that answers my question.

Thank you.

The Chair: It sounds like we've come to a good agreement on that.

Are there any further questions by any member? We've gone a full round, and I'll give one-offs if there are any other questions for Mr. Sandhu.

We're missing some of our witnesses today, so we'll try to adjust our schedule as we go.

Mr. Sandhu, thank you for coming today and sharing with us. I'm sure the committee will take into account your testimony.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee.

I know you have a tough job. Good luck.

The Chair: It's a long, tough job, yes.

Thank you very much.

Before I lose all my committee members, we have two other tasks today. We have another set of witnesses. They will be coming as soon as we can get them here; we've asked them to come earlier. We also have to do some committee business at the end of the meeting today.

If it's all right, we'll suspend for...

Yes, Mr. Scott.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Just for a quick point of clarification, with regard to the documents submitted by those who won't be appearing, are we going to discuss that today, or will that be when we discuss the full report?

The Chair: We're going to give some guidance today to the analysts on the writing of the B.C. report. The documents given in lieu of testimony will be accepted as testimony. It will be their views.

So they'll have them also, but if you wanted to....

Mr. Craig Scott: Okay. I understand our general pattern is not to editorialize but to report—

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Craig Scott: —but there's a clear contradiction between two of them. My point is do we discuss that and draw attention to it, or do we just literally plunk that down in the report?

The Chair: I think we will discuss that as we give guidance to the analysts as to how to write the report. The committee will have to come to an answer on what you've just asked.

Is there anything else at the moment?

Mr. Craig Scott: When will we discuss that, Chair?

The Chair: We're going to get to that at the end.

We'll suspend for a moment.

• (1120)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1140)

The Chair: I'll call us back to order.

Thank you, Mr. Weston and Mr. Strahl, for being here. Some witnesses didn't attend this morning and we were hoping you would come in a little early so we could get started. Thanks to both of you for being here.

We are continuing our study on the redistribution commission's report from British Columbia. We'll have five minutes from each of you and then we'll ask you all some really hard-hitting questions.

Mr. Strahl, would you like to go first?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to share my perspective on some changes that could be made to improve the electoral maps in the Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon area.

First, I would like to congratulate the commission for the changes they made with regard to the community of Chilliwack following the first draft of maps. The first set of maps had unnecessarily divided the community. There was widespread concern across different levels of government, all political parties, and many citizens in Chilliwack. We were all pleased to see that the proposed riding of Chilliwack—Hope now keeps Chilliwack whole. In my opinion, this riding should remain as is, without amendment.

The remainder of my intervention concerns the proposed riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, much of which I currently represent in Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon. The current riding has 29,999 square kilometres and includes many communities that are sparsely populated and remote. The new riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon will share many of the challenges that I currently face in trying to represent a large and diverse riding; however, given the population realities in the Lower Mainland and the Interior, this will always be an issue for these communities and the MP representing them.

It has been a concern of mine since my election that the communities of Pemberton and Whistler have been in separate ridings. Pemberton and Whistler are the definition of communities of interest. Many people who live in Pemberton work in Whistler, and many more rely on Whistler for their economic well-being. I have always stated that Pemberton and Whistler should be united in one riding, even while running in that community in the last election, which presents some messaging challenges, as I'm sure you can appreciate.

I read Mr. Duncan's and Mr. Lunney's submissions to this committee from earlier in this week. I'm in agreement that the community of Powell River should be returned to the riding of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country. As a result of that increased population, I believe that Whistler, Pemberton, and SLRD area C should remain together as communities of interest and be added to the riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

Not only does this keep those communities of interest together, but there is great interest in the community of Lillooet, to the west, in expanding their burgeoning tourism and wine-growing activities, and they are actively working to establish themselves more strongly as a community linked with the Whistler region in order to bring that about. Bringing them together in the same riding will also be a positive for that community. Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon has the room to absorb this population. This would stop the domino effect immediately without affecting other ridings in the Lower Mainland.

Having those communities of Whistler, Pemberton, SLRD area C, and Lillooet together in one riding will allow for a regional service hub, in which an MP from Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon can justify setting up a regional office, which should address some of the issues regarding representation. It is often simply impossible due to population constraints for every community of interest to remain in the same riding, and the challenge for the commission is to ensure that there are regional commonalities. I believe that Whistler, Pemberton, SLRD area C, and Lillooet being brought together as regional communities of interest is a move in the right direction, and so is bringing Powell River back to the Mainland.

I believe that should the commission move to make both of these changes, they would, while not perfect, greatly improve the ridings on Vancouver Island and the Mainland without disrupting the work that the commission has done in Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Weston, please.

We have five minutes for you. I won't read off your riding title because that would take the rest of your time.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was told when I first became MP that I should never use the name of my riding, because I would eat up half of my speaking time. Thank you.

I think this is perhaps the most difficult presentation I've made as a member of Parliament, and maybe you will all identify with this when I say that this really cuts to the core of our role as representatives of our communities and the individuals there. So it's no coincidence that I'm wearing several pins today in representing the various communities and communities of interest in the vast sprawling West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky riding.

My colleague has just said there's no perfect answer, and I would echo those words. I commonly call the area I represent the most beautiful place on earth not just because of the mountains and the waters and the islands but also because of the very innovative, entrepreneurial people who have increasingly identified themselves together. We've come together with annual best practice meetings. Much of what has happened in the riding has spurred my national health and fitness initiative, which is gaining steam. It is an amazing honour to represent this place.

In terms of common identities, I would say that the commission did a very good job in its report in identifying the different communities of interest throughout British Columbia, but also in the riding that I represent. One thing that it did—and I would bolster its conclusion—is to keep the city of West Vancouver whole. It might have been tempting, given the populations, to try to divide that, but it avoided making that mistake. Dividing West Vancouver would have drawn a line between people who share schools and community centres and other things. Keeping West Vancouver whole is something that I would recommend to this committee.

Secondly, we've heard a lot about Powell River and the Sunshine Coast. Powell River and Sunshine Coast have expressed a strong interest to stay together as a community of interest. John Duncan made a very articulate presentation in repeating the words of local leaders who identify as a community of interest. Although it's challenging to represent Powell River—we have four offices, one in Ottawa and three in the riding, and I believe in the 40th session of Parliament there were only three other MPs who had to operate that many offices—I would say that there's a strong community of interest between Powell River and the Sunshine Coast. I agree that there would be a strong preference to bring it back into the riding that I currently represent.

That creates a population issue. My colleague has spoken about Whistler and Sea to Sky. There's also a community of interest there, and my family is perhaps representative, having houses in both places, West Vancouver and Whistler, which is common for people who live in and identify with both places. I would say it would be my preference that Whistler remain, but I can see that we have to make some difficult decisions.

Given the very strong statements that have come from Powell River and that part of the Sunshine Coast, this committee has a difficult decision to make. I can only say that I'm also reluctant to have any part of the community that I presently represent leave, because it is an amazing honour to represent all of them.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lukiwski, will you start, for five minutes?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I will, only because you asked nicely.

Good morning, both Mark and John.

Mark, I have to say right off the top here in the interest of full transparency—but I'm sure this won't be surprising to you—that several of the members of this committee, from both sides of the aisle, I might say, were referring to you as Chuck a day or two ago.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Oh, yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I think we have it figured out now, anyway.

With my first question, I'll start with John, and then, Mark, I want to go over to you.

John, you had mentioned that you agree with some of the presentations made before by Mr. Duncan and Mr. Lunney, who said that Powell River should be back in the Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country riding.

Mark, you mentioned—

Mr. John Weston: In case the recorder doesn't pick up my nod, that was a oui.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay, thank you for that confirmation.

Mark, you had talked primarily about the new riding, Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, and what you thought is needed there in terms of, I guess, two things: population quotient and community of interest. You talked about Pemberton and Whistler being together as a community of interest and perhaps being placed in one riding. You're suggesting Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. I'd like to just get a few more expanded comments from you on that if I could.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Surprisingly, for a riding where it would take me most of the day, if not the whole day, to get to Vancouver Island North, this issue actually starts there. In order to get Powell River back to the Mainland, which is where it wants to be and where it has been, in West Vancouver, there's a need to bring it back to that riding.

Obviously, there are communities of interest all the way along, but if you're bringing Powell River back, which I think everyone who has presented so far has agreed should happen, you have to look at a population shift elsewhere. The most logical population shift when you bring in Powell River is to bring Whistler, Pemberton, and

SLRD area C out into what is currently Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon but would be the new Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon riding, because it maintains those communities of interest.

As the representative there now, I'd say that the problem has been that there is not an adequate population in the area to justify the expense of having an office per se in that area. Bringing into a group those communities of interest up there allows for that. I think, as John said, it's not perfect, but it's the only way to get Powell River back to the Mainland, which I think is the linchpin to this whole thing.

• (1150)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On the population quotient with Pemberton and Whistler, you've identified them as one community of interest, but if they were moved into the new riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon riding, what would that do on in terms of population variance with all of the ridings around it? Would it get a little closer together? Is that also a—

Mr. Mark Strahl: It would. Right now, Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon is well under the target, within a variance that I believe is 7% or so below, and this brings it up closer to the average. I can get you those specific numbers in just a moment.

As well, bringing Powell River into West Vancouver would put it, I think, well over the legislated maximum. So if you brought those out, Mission—Matsqui would have the room to absorb that population, because it was well under, and it would also allow West Vancouver to be within that variance that's been acceptable to the commission.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Last, I'll just make a comment. I normally do this for all those who appear before us. What we have been doing in practice as a committee is just making sure in the final reports that we have an accurate reflection of the comments and the suggestions by the MPs. We tend not to editorialize, but ultimately the final decision is that of the boundaries commission.

I say that only because I think you made some passing reference in your opening comments, Mark, about what this committee could or could not do. We will write a report. Some might have recommendations based on what we have heard from the MPs, but it will ultimately be up to the commissioners to determine whether they accept any of the comments or suggestions made by MPs or reject them outright.

With that, I'm done, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. Yes, your five minutes are up.

We have Mr. Scott for five minutes, please.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to both of you for coming.

My failure yesterday to get your first name correct, Mark, was actually a compliment.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Craig Scott: Part of what the committee has to do is to see whether or not there are clear alternatives proposed that could be put in the report in a way that the boundaries commission could take seriously. At the moment, things are becoming clearer, but we're still not dealing with hard numbers and new lines. I've heard more today from both of you that clears up some confusion from the last time about how to handle this Powell River thing.

John, if Powell River comes into your riding, do you have a number in mind of how many that would actually mean coming into West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, peace and love...?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Weston: The number is usually about 25,000 in the regional district.

Mr. Craig Scott: And then, Mark, in your suggestions about the Pemberton-Whistler thing, are you able to tell us roughly, if those went into Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon...?

• (1155)

Mr. Mark Strahl: I could give you those. John can probably speak to what Whistler is. The Pemberton area including the SLRD area C has about 5,000. Whistler has about 10,000. So you're looking at about 15,000 going the other way.

Mr. Craig Scott: Okay.

Then I just wanted to double-check, John. I fully recognize that being an existing representative of an area—and Whistler's in your riding now, right—

Mr. John Weston: That's correct.

Mr. Craig Scott: —the idea of losing something is not something you'd want to advocate for, but you're willing to see it go? That's the point?

Mr. John Weston: I don't think it's up to me to say I'm willing to see it go. I would ask whether it is in the best interests of the people we as MPs represent. We have to make some difficult decisions.

The Chair: Very well put.

Mr. John Weston: Does anybody want to represent Whistler? Of course. There's a personal interest as well as a political interest in doing so. At the same time, we have a very strong need to make sure that the people in Powell River are properly represented. My preference is to represent both, but we have to make a difficult decision.

Mr. Craig Scott: I'm just looking at your own submission, and I just want to make sure.... It's not just going to be a numbers thing. If they're going to accommodate Powell River, whatever effect that has on Vancouver Island...for example, we know that MP Crowder hasn't been consulted at her end, but you mentioned that the Pemberton region wants to join West Vancouver as it feels it would receive better access to representation.

You're also talking about the linkage to Whistler through West Vancouver. I'm just wondering, from a community of interest perspective, if Pemberton and Whistler easily can go to Mission—Matsqui? Forget about the population thing. Is there really a community of interest going that way?

Mr. John Weston: There's a strong community of interest between Pemberton and Whistler. That's a starting point. Both mayors heartily support that principle. I think Mark put it really well. He has represented Pemberton. He has seen that and has even talked about it. So I think that's the driving force, and then you can always pick other communities of interest, which will be strong positives or negatives. But I think you have to start by putting those two together, and what happens after that is a challenge either way.

Mr. Craig Scott: I guess the only thing I would want to say is that in your letter you did make a pretty good case—and I understand and I also know how active you are, and you probably could represent the entire riding with Powell River and it would be well represented—for why there are linkages between West Vancouver and Whistler and you indicated that Pemberton itself feels an orientation in that direction. So that's part of what we have to wrestle with.

Mr. John Weston: The letter you're referring to is my letter to the boundary commission from October. That's clearly the case, and I mentioned earlier in my remarks that I sit here in front of you as a representative, as somebody who has an orientation between the north shore and Whistler. Our family has houses in both places.

So it's a question of dealing with what we've seen. We've seen a very strong surge of interest from the people of Powell River and the Sunshine Coast to be together as they have been, as well as one from surrounding ridings. In other words, communities of interest that spill beyond the area I represent have expressed the same thing, that it would be good for Powell River to be there.

My preference would be for them to be together in one riding if we had the ability to do that, but that may not be possible given the population issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scott.

Monsieur Dion, you have five minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, it's not possible, but you agree that West Vancouver must remain a single riding?

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston: The residents of West Vancouver have also voiced their opinions through the letter that the West Vancouver mayor gave me last week.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Would you like to keep Powell River?

Mr. John Weston: Yes. The people in Powell River feel it is important to be in the same riding.

• (1200)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: So what will you lose as a result of your proposal? What are you giving to other ridings?

Mr. John Weston: Right now, I represent a part of North Vancouver, which is already in the neighbouring riding. It is true that we will lose part of the population. The question is whether it is possible to keep everything that is there now. Pemberton is now outside that riding. Pemberton and Whistler wish to be together. So it is a Sophie's choice situation.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay.

If we did what was best for you right now, the population quotient would be too high compared to the average of the province, correct?

Mr. John Weston: If we keep everything that is there now...

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Powell River, West Vancouver, everything.

Mr. John Weston: I think my colleague did the math.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl: I believe that if Powell River were added, and Whistler and Pemberton remained in, then West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country would be 27% over the...

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes. And that's not possible.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Right.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: So there's our answer.

[English]

I would like to invite you, dear colleagues, to give us the big picture, by which I mean this.

If we were to do what you are proposing, how many ridings would be affected by the domino effect? Would you say that all MPs affected are on board with what you are proposing? As well, would you say that the gap with the provincial quota would be within the range of 5% to 10%, plus or minus?

Mr. Mark Strahl: It's my understanding that this would affect, as you heard from Mr. Duncan and Mr. Lunney, their ridings. It would obviously affect West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, and it would affect Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. That's where the ripple would stop.

With the proposal that I have presented, Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon would be plus 2% from the provincial target, and West Vancouver would be plus 12%, so it would be within the range of what was proposed certainly by the commission.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: So how is it that found a solution that the commission called “unfeasible”?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Which part was that?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I will quote the commission: Given that the 2011 census population of the lower Sunshine Coast was 28,619, the Commission viewed its inclusion with Powell River as unfeasible.

Mr. John Weston: I think that was due to the overall population of the riding. What Mr. Strahl has proposed reduces the population of the riding so that it would at least be narrowly within the maximum.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: If you did not propose your overall suggestions, colleagues, of yesterday and today, it that because the commission came with its new, somewhat surprising proposal to you?

Mr. Mark Strahl: I think, speaking only of what I've spoken to Mr. Duncan and Mr. Lunney about, certainly having Powell River move back to Vancouver Island from the Mainland was a surprise, and was not accounted for. That's a major shift that affects—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: You did not see that coming.

Mr. Mark Strahl: That's my understanding—certainly not. It had been there in 1993, but certainly it was comfortable on the Sunshine Coast. The first draft included Powell River, I believe....

Oh, had they come across already? Okay.

A voice: The surprise was merely to keep Courtney whole.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Okay.

Sorry, I've—

The Chair: Could you repeat what Mr. Duncan just said?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Strahl: We'll have to maybe get a summary of that.

A voice: I could have explain it yesterday.

Mr. John Weston: Yes. It was in the very extensive response from Mr. Duncan yesterday.

I guess in a perfect world you could express preferences. You could tell the commission, “Here's our preference: if it doesn't fit within your guidelines, then this is our second choice.”

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you very much.

• (1205)

The Chair: We've heard that from other members, Mr. Weston. I thank you for articulating it very well.

There is no part of my riding that I would want to give up, but there are some that make sense. I would never say out loud that I would happily let them go. So thank you very much for putting it that way.

Are there other questions? I have nobody else on my speakers list.

Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston: You started by mentioning the name of the riding.

I would just say that the name has received such celebrity around the world that I would plead that it remain even if the riding boundaries change, because we'll still have part of that highway.

The Chair: So that's a name request also.

Okay, great.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I have copies of what I proposed, if members would like to take a look at that visually. I'll give those to the clerk and she can distribute them.

The Chair: We've been pretty tolerant regarding translation on maps. So if they are maps we're okay. We find the words on the maps get in the way of the actual map. The pictures are better.

Can we colour them? No, never mind.

Mr. Mark Strahl: They are coloured.

The Chair: Is there anything else for our witnesses today? Super.

Then we'll excuse our witnesses and suspend.

Thank you very much.

We'll suspend and go in camera, because we have committee business. *[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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