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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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•(1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We will go ahead and begin. We have some great witnesses with us today. We are continuing our study of redistribution in Saskatchewan. We have with us four witnesses and we will get right to them.

Members, you have five minutes to give us your report and then we will ask you questions after that. We have another panel later today and then we will try to do some committee business at the end of the day.

Minister Yelich, would you like to go first?

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll get right to it. There are a few things that are unprecedented. At no other time in Saskatchewan's history have so many individuals become engaged in a federal electoral boundaries process, and there has never been a dissenting report from a member of the federal electoral boundaries commissions, as you well know.

It is reported that 75% opposed the commission's proposed boundaries and it will be unfortunate if the opinion of so many is disregarded. I would be disappointed to learn that. In addition to the petitions, I would like to include postcards. As a member of Parliament this is an acceptable form of communication between MPs and constituents who wish to voice their concerns on many issues.

Constituents in communities like my own, Kenaston, less than an hour outside of Saskatoon, did mail-in cards and petitions opposing boundaries. Upon the release of the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, constituents who made presentations to the commission were still very concerned. They felt their voices were not heard and the commission gave no consideration to constituents who did not agree with the commission's urban-only concept. You can read the transcripts to understand why presenters found the commission unwilling to understand the opposition that we proposed to the urban-only concept.

I have with me today letters that I have received from constituents who want to reiterate the concerns that they presented to the commission and I will present them in both official languages at the end of my presentation.

In an April 9, 2013, article in *The Globe and Mail*, Justice Mills refused to speculate about whether early submissions opposed to

urban-only ridings would have changed the commission's initial position to implement urban-only ridings, and he indicated that it was:

...our view of the demographics, the population trends, immigration to Saskatchewan, of the size and growth in the cities, and a whole raft of things that involved communities of interest....

Clearly, communities—

The Chair: The translator is having a little bit of trouble keeping up with you.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Well, I have a little bit of trouble getting this in, in five minutes.

The Chair: I understand that, but if they're not getting the testimony, it won't count for anything.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: If that were the case, you wouldn't have to leave a town like Clavet, less than 20 minutes outside of Saskatoon, head two and a half hours to the city of Moose Jaw to see your member of Parliament.

Historical boundaries were also not taken into consideration because, historically, Saskatchewan has had urban-rural hybrid ridings in Regina and Saskatoon. The manageable geographic size of ridings were not taken into consideration. The riding of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan begins east of Saskatoon, wraps around the southwestern part of the city of Regina, and that can be up to a three- to four-hour drive.

The reality is that Moose Jaw is not the size of Vancouver or Calgary. In larger cities, where there are urban-only ridings in the core of the cities, as you move outward most ridings become a blend of urban and rural. Cities grow, so it makes sense to have hybrid ridings on the outskirts to absorb the growth.

Saskatoon is one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada. The overall growth of Saskatchewan wasn't so great to increase the number of seats. The provincial quotient could easily be attained by adjusting the existing boundaries. Supporters of the new boundaries keep talking about not being represented effectively, but during all of my three or four campaigns—four, maybe five—I have never gone to a door where they told me they were not adequately served. Perhaps the commission does not understand the role of the federal members of Parliament.

The majority of federal issues are not exclusively urban or rural, and I ask the committee to understand that. For example, immigration seems to be considered an urban-only issue, but many rural industries utilize a temporary foreign worker program to address the shortage of skilled workers in Saskatchewan. Using urban versus rural issues, as federal electoral boundaries go, doesn't really make much sense. Many of the urban or rural issues cited by proponents of the boundaries are provincial or.... During the hearings, they did not understand the federal role. The boundaries spoke about provincial-regional issues such as transit. Even one of the students was asked about bus passes.

The report of the commission states in item 3 that they do not accept the argument that the creation of solely urban ridings in Saskatoon and Regina will draw a wedge. I dispute that. The concept of community of interest in some urban settings, particularly in larger cities given the high rate of mobility in their populations, remains problematic.

In closing, I would like to say that the existing boundaries should be respected. The reasons for change for the sake of change should be discouraged. Again, I would like to see the boundaries remain the same. It is the riding of Blackstrap that is hugely affected by the redrawing of the maps. The city lights of Saskatoon will now see the city lights of Regina, and it wraps around Moose Jaw. So it is a very difficult riding to manage.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Vellacott, would you like to go next?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and committee members.

It's a privilege to be here and to present to you today. Hopefully we will get a better, more sane, realignment of boundaries for the province of Saskatchewan. I obviously, as well, in my indication to the committee, oppose the proposed boundaries and I'll lay out some of the reasons here now.

I am very much in support of the historical trading patterns, blended urban-rural, ex-urban kinds of boundaries that we've had in the past. I will indicate the biggest problems that I have with the current proposal.

Right from the get-go, Professor Courtney—I'll go right to this issue, I may have some questions on it later—had a fixed mindset and a determination before even a word of testimony was heard. In fact I had reported to me conversations that occurred at the orientation here in Ottawa before there were any meetings, before there were any witnesses heard at all, where Professor Courtney was talking adamantly of needing the urban-only boundaries in the province of Saskatchewan, particularly in the major cities of Saskatoon and Regina.

To me, that does a great disservice, a disrespect that denigrates the process, when one of the commissioners—a reputable, respected gentleman otherwise—has a mindset and a predetermination of having urban boundaries, and then tries to collect evidence to justify it afterwards. To me that is a disservice. He probably should have recused himself at the point that he realized he had this set, determined mindset from the get-go.

How else can one explain the very humongous ridings, for example, all the way from my boyhood home of Quill Lake, way across, looping around Saskatoon over to Rosetown, a stretch of probably three or four hours or more, depending on how heavy your foot is. How else do you explain that?

How do you explain their comments saying that these ridings, these newly proposed boundaries, are now no larger than the ones that presently exist in Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Souris—Moose Mountain, and the Yorkton—Melville ridings.

If you were to ask those members of Parliament... Then they make the almost asinine statement that those members did not indicate that they were inadequately serving the needs of their constituents. What member of Parliament is going to say that? It's a fairly asinine comment, in my particular view.

You should talk to those MPs, in terms of chasing from one end to the other on weekends, away from Parliament here. Talk to the spouses of those MPs, as I have done, in terms of their having to be at events at opposite or disparate ends of those particular ridings. They talked in terms of using modern communications, which we all do, electronic and so on, but in a high-tech age we should also still use high-touch, that will always be the case.

The younger generation want to talk to you directly, middle-aged older people.... Imagine what it would have been like, if Jack Layton, in his last campaign—where he did remarkably for the NDP—had said, “I'm going to do this by Skype. I'm going to do it by the modern electronic means”. You would not catch the enthusiasm of a Jack Layton. You would not catch the excitement that he brought in that setting, or his charisma. You cannot possibly figure to serve the needs of constituents simply by Skyping and those things, which the House of Commons doesn't allow anyhow.

What would it have been like if Justin Trudeau, instead of travelling extensively to bars and malls and schools, and everywhere across the country, would have said, “I'll do it by Skype”. Of course, he uses all the modern technology, but that is no replacement for direct contact with people, and Justin Trudeau was all across the country. I point out Jack Layton and Justin Trudeau, of late, and how they went across the country, first-hand, meeting people. There's something captured that way that you don't capture electronically.

I have some letters in hand here. There's the one that's maybe been referenced here before, from the mayor of the city of Saskatoon, and Mr. Fougere as well has indicated his opposition. Mr. Atchison, the mayor of Saskatoon, says it makes no sense. It does not promote unity. It doesn't work with the regional kind of thing that we're encouraging in Saskatchewan.

I have a letter here as well, that you have in French and English, from the mayor of Warman, a city just on the edge of Saskatoon, and she opposes it as well. She says that when we think and work regionally now.... Recently there was a water main break in Saskatoon and they were on a boil water advisory in Saskatoon, but also in the cities of Warman and Martensville, because we have a common water system and a common infrastructure tying them together. Now they've cut those communities off from one another. Alan Thomarat, who is the CEO of the Home Builders' Association in Saskatchewan, makes this point well in a piece that was in your package, too.

• (1110)

Lastly, one of the councillors in my riding, Randy Donauer by name, also opposes it. He talks about the need to work together regionally, and more and more we're doing that as the cities and towns in the area close to Saskatoon.

I think it's never too late for these individuals to do the right thing and reverse themselves. I have a proposal of a bare minimum that could be done, but I can come to that later, in the question period.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Trost, would you like five minutes, or less?

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Hopefully more, Mr. Chair.

Thank you ever so much.

Before we start, just for reference, the members should have some of the maps that were distributed. There is one of the city of Saskatoon. Another one shows some changes to Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Humboldt, along with a regional municipality, or RM, map showing some minor changes.

Thank you for listening today. Like many of my colleagues, I have very strong reservations about the major changes that are happening in the Saskatchewan boundaries. While these boundaries are often described as a mixture of rural and urban, I actually think the term “spoke and hub” would be a better description, because in fact the city of Saskatoon and the ridings around there are not predominantly urban under this new drawing. They're a mixture of urban and suburban communities. Saskatoon has urban neighbourhoods, but the majority of its neighbourhoods would be considered suburban: low-density, driveable, car-centred. To me, I think that is the tragedy, the problem, with these boundaries, in that the areas surrounding Saskatoon are also predominantly suburban.

My colleague Mr. Vellacott noted that Martensville and Warman, two cities of 8,000 people, are also very much suburbs of Saskatoon.

While I agree with my two colleagues on the weakness of the new boundaries, I have decided to take a slightly different position in my presentation. I feel and understand that at this point, major boundary changes are not going to happen. We are fundamentally going to be working inside the boundaries, with some minor changes, that have been presented by the commission. What I will be suggesting today, then, are not wholesale changes but minor tweaks to make workable what we have.

My first suggestion is in reference to the city of Saskatoon. On the map you can see one arrow going in a northerly direction and another arrow going in a southerly direction. I am proposing that these areas be moved from the proposed riding of Saskatoon Centre—University and Saskatoon West in the respective directions.

I'm proposing that because the only area of Saskatoon where community of interest and natural community cross the river is the downtown core. Therefore, based on local geography, that community of interest should be brought together. That does, however, necessitate some minor population changes. Up in the north, north of Lenore Drive, that would be best moved over to Saskatoon West. We can go into that with questions later on as we go further here.

The second change I am proposing has to do with the areas of the current Saskatoon-Humboldt constituency that border with the constituency of Prince Albert.

Now, I am supporting the changes my colleague Randy Hoback made in his presentation, numbers one and two in here, and he made very good points about community of interest, including natural trading areas, etc. One point he failed to note, however, and one of the reasons I suggest that these areas be put in with Prince Albert, is that these two communities are predominantly francophone in their history.

Area number one here is the town of St. Louis and the rural municipality of St. Louis. The rural municipality of St. Louis still has about 40% of its population listing French as their mother tongue. One of our colleagues, Mr. Galipeau, has family members buried at the cemetery in St. Brieux, which is also historically a francophone community.

These communities are under two separate ridings under these proposals, and I suggest they be put in with the riding of Prince Albert. These are areas I represent. Why Prince Albert? Because Prince Albert already has francophone communities such as Zenon Park. Again, I can provide more answers in the question period here.

In my final minute, I'd like to make two other quick suggestions. You see a very small, detailed map here of the edge of the city of Saskatoon. What I'm proposing there is that a portion outside the city, about five miles outside—the acreages in that area are very tightly connected to the city—be brought in. That would add about 400 or 500 people to Saskatoon. They all live, work, and have their utilities from Saskatoon. It's just a very small change and very similar to what one of the other Saskatoon ridings also has.

Finally, in my last 30 seconds, I'd like to bring your attention to some letters that each of you have received from the City of Humboldt. They have made a difficult request, but since their council has unanimously asked me to give it, I will give it, and I will support it. They asked that they be moved out of the proposed riding of Kindersley—Warman—Humboldt and put in either the riding of Yorkton—Melville or in the riding of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre.

That has to do with their community of interest and their desire to be connected to other communities that are based around the potash industry. A \$10 billion potash mine is being constructed a half hour away from them, and they would like to be included.

•(1115)

As was noted, their letters should have been sent to you and should have been translated. They should be in your package.

Thank you. I would appreciate questions on all my proposals and recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trost.

Ms. Block, last but not least. I understand you have some voice issues today, so we'll all be quiet while you speak very softly.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you, I'll try to get really close to the mic.

Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. This is going to be more painful for you than for me.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the maps that were tabled by the boundary commission on January 26, 2013. We are here in the interests of the people of Saskatchewan and our constituents, who we are proud to represent and serve every day. I remain strongly committed to my position that the hub-and-spoke model is ideal for Saskatchewan, as it balances all the primary criteria as outlined in section 15 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

I recognize that many of my colleagues from Saskatchewan have already appeared before you. I concur with the strong arguments they have made and will therefore not repeat them. I would like, however, to make a few observations.

I am disappointed with the rationale provided by the commission to support their final submission and would highlight the following. First, as an MP representing both rural and urban communities, I believe that the commission's primary focus on two communities of interest in the province of Saskatchewan, when considering redistribution, is an oversimplification of the complex relationships that exist within our communities and our province as a whole. The rigidity of the commission's position completely ignores the ebb and flow between urban and rural Saskatchewan, and does not contemplate our history or our future.

Second, my colleagues and I simply cannot ignore the unprecedented nature of a dissenting report in the history of boundary redistribution. It is my hope that the commissioners will take the dissenting report as well as the standing committee's recommendations into consideration in their final response.

While my support for the current hub-and-spoke model has been clear, it is apparent that the commissioners had concluded before the consultations began that Saskatchewan, in their opinion, should have some purely urban ridings, with at least two of these in Saskatoon. It would also appear that they have remained deeply committed to their conclusion throughout the consultation and deliberation process.

Therefore I'd like to support my colleague, Mr. Trost, and his proposal to make what I believe are two necessary changes to the boundaries of the Saskatoon West and Saskatoon—University ridings. These simple changes will not affect any other ridings in Saskatchewan and will more closely align communities of interest within the city.

I would like to recommend to the commissioners that they partially return to their original proposal and include the downtown, being the triangle formed by the South Saskatchewan River, the area south of 33rd Street, and east of Idylwyld Drive, in the proposed riding of Saskatoon—University. Put plainly, when folks think of downtown Saskatoon, they think of the downtown area....

Could I have my colleague finish?

•(1120)

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Trost, will you speak for Ms. Block, please?

Mr. Brad Trost: Put plainly, when folks think of downtown Saskatoon, they think of the downtown area on both sides of the river. Downtown Saskatoon is the most natural community of interest that exists within the city and it shouldn't be separated into two electoral districts. The City of Saskatoon recognizes this by having councillors for ward 1 and ward 6 represent constituents of the downtown on both sides of the South Saskatchewan River.

The second change is to add the community of Silverwood Heights back into the riding of Saskatoon West, as in the original proposal. Folks living in Silverwood Heights are cut off from the east side of Saskatoon by the South Saskatchewan River. There are no bridges that connect this community to the east side of Saskatoon, so it makes no sense for them to be part of the Saskatoon—University riding.

Further, Lenore Drive-51st Street, is a major east-west street that connects this community to the west side of Saskatoon and communities such as Hampton Village, Dundonald, Blairmore, and Montgomery. Folks living in Silverwood Heights predominantly work, play, and do their shopping on the west side of Saskatoon, and this would better unite the community of interest that is on the west side of Saskatoon.

These two simple changes would more seamlessly integrate these two communities of interest in Saskatoon and ensure that the populations of both ridings remain similar.

Thank you, and I'm not sure if she would be happy to take your questions. She will if she can.

The Chair: Thank you very much to all of you for being succinct.

Thank you for your valiant effort, Ms. Block.

We go to questions for five minutes each, starting with Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you. I'm going to start by asking Mr. Trost some questions.

I think members of the committee know that I have started carrying along my own copies of the current boundaries, the initial proposal boundaries, and the report boundaries. The report boundaries are the ones that are, in effect, now under question.

Looking at the letter you received from the City of Humboldt, Mr. Trost, I noticed that the city of Humboldt, according to the proposal map—this is not the one that is current, it is the initial proposal made by the commission—it does indeed abut the boundaries of Yorkton—Melville. But on the report map, the boundaries of Yorkton—Melville have been moved eastward by three boundary lines. I'm guessing there are now three intervening rural municipalities, according to this map, between Humboldt and Yorkton—Melville, meaning that I don't think they could be accommodated unless either they were created as an exclave of Yorkton—Melville, not being contiguous to the riding they want to be in, or some other municipality, which has not made a presentation to you, would also be included to provide some kind of corridor.

I may be misunderstanding things. Could you provide some light there?

• (1125)

Mr. Brad Trost: Let me give some more detail. That would be roughly direct. For those of you who have the new map, there's the city of Humboldt, and then there's a little enclave there.

The little enclave represents portions for the entirety of the regional municipality of St. Peter, the town of Muenster, and looking at the map, I believe also the town of Englefeld. You are looking in the neighbourhood of approximately 1,200 to 1,500 people between the town of Humboldt and Yorkton—Melville at that point.

Those communities do tend to be very similar. They are all from the St. Peter's colony German settlement in their history, and they would probably move in fairly similar fashion. If you are going to move the city of Humboldt, then probably the arm of Humboldt would go with the city because it's the surrounding area. You would also have to move about 1,500 people over there to get them into Yorkton—Melville.

That's one of the reasons why, when I spoke to the mayor of Humboldt, I asked if he would be interested in maybe going to Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, because I know this is a fairly large ask that they are asking. They are asking for essentially a 7,000 person move, which is going to be tough to do.

Having said that, they are really stuck in an awkward little corner that really doesn't suit their interests, so even though it would create a massive domino effect, I feel compelled to ask on behalf of a unanimous position of the city council.

Mr. Scott Reid: I also wanted to ask you about the other places you mentioned, St. Louis and—is it St. Brieux?

Mr. Brad Trost: It's pronounced depending on if it's local or actual francophone.

Mr. Scott Reid: They are both in as the boundaries now stand, or as the boundaries will stand following this redistribution, in Humboldt—Warman—Martensville—Rosetown. Is that right?

Mr. Brad Trost: No, that is incorrect.

St. Brieux—which is not the proper historic pronunciation but that's how the locals pronounce it—is the no. 2 area on the map that I have, with Yorkton, Melville, Warman, Rosetown. That is an area that is currently put in with the constituency of Yorkton—Melville. The no. 1 area is the town of the St. Louis and roughly the rural

municipality of St. Louis, which includes communities such as Bellevue and Batoche, which I'm sure everyone is very familiar with, and so forth.

Mr. Scott Reid: The best known francophone area in northern Saskatchewan is Zenon Park. Which riding is that in?

Mr. Brad Trost: That would be in Prince Albert. You have three historically francophone communities tightly grouped together but in three distinct ridings. In fact I think St. Brieux would be the only historically francophone community in Yorkton—Melville, the predominantly ethnically German-Ukrainian riding that I grew up in and my folks still live in.

Mr. Scott Reid: I only have 30 seconds so I'm going to ask this quickly. You are suggesting, I assume, that they all be put into one riding? Which riding?

Mr. Brad Trost: That's correct. They should all be put into Prince Albert because there would be a community of interest based upon historical linguistic ties. They all have other ties that were presented by the member for Prince Albert for geography and natural interest.

Mr. Scott Reid: The last thought is, can you submit in writing—because I don't think you've quite done it here, and municipal boundaries are a little confusing in Saskatchewan—a specific proposal to move this municipality but not that one so that we can have an exact map and exact population figures?

Mr. Brad Trost: I will give you an exact proposal. I will not go totally by pure municipal boundaries because the local election polls tend to be drawn up by where people go to get their mail, rather than by their rural municipality. It generally works better for people in Saskatchewan to vote where they get their mail, not where their municipal boundaries are.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's not for us to dictate what you submit to us, but I'm just asking that you submit—

Mr. Brad Trost: I will submit that, and I can have it to the committee by the end of the week with the population figures proposed.

The Chair: The sooner, the better, we're trying to start that report.

After Mr. Reid, we have Mr. Cullen, for five minutes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

A quick question to you all. When the commission toured Saskatchewan, did any of you testify in front of the commission?

Mr. Brad Trost: I did not.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Vellacott and Ms. Block?

• (1130)

Hon. Lynne Yelich: I have my presentation, if you care to read it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have a question. If I could classify these—and forgive me for the crude classification—Mr. Trost and Ms. Block have accepted the maps, more or less, but want some changes to the maps you see; moving one community here, another community across the river, trying to identify those communities of interest. Is that a fair characterization?

I want to start with the two of you first.

Mr. Brad Trost: I would say that's a fair characterization. I may not like the maps, but I understand that fundamentally this is roughly what the outlines are going to be, so let's work with it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, and I saw Ms. Block nodding, which may, for today, pass for agreement.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let the record show, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Vellacott and Ms. Yelich, I sensed in both of your testimonies not only a fundamental disagreement with the allowance for urban-only ridings, the moving away from only hybrid ridings, but also a fundamental, philosophical disagreement with the way the commission came to its conclusions. You both seem quite impassioned by the process. You talked about a lack of respect for those who testified.

Am I characterizing the two of your testimonies correctly? I don't want to mischaracterize—

Hon. Lynne Yelich: I would like to explain that. If you put up Levvan, the riding of Regina, you will see that there's no way that the boundaries can change to accommodate the riding of Blackstrap, because the Blackstrap riding.... This is why I have presentations today from the Dakota Sioux, the Whitecap, which is less than 20 minutes outside of Saskatoon. Dundurn, which is the fastest-growing regional municipality, is right up to Saskatoon. This now is the urban centre of Moose Jaw, so the boundaries didn't change, and the new boundaries didn't accommodate the urban centre being Moose Jaw. The municipal maps go right around. Way up here is where... [*Inaudible—Editor*]....

The Chair: Ms. Yelich, we can't hear your testimony if you're standing up there.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: It's just impossible to have those boundaries. I would like to see the boundaries, as they did, because there were communities of interest, and that interests me. So, yes, I would like to see the....

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Vellacott, I'm reflecting also on some earlier testimony from some of your colleagues as to the source of your frustration with the process, or the source of your frustration as to the results of the process to this point. You both mentioned the unprecedented nature of having a supplementary report. You suggested bias, I think, in your testimony, that at least one of the commissioners walked into the process with a bias toward the orientation of urban-rural and urban-only ridings.

Am I right on that?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Right, absolutely. I want to correct a slight distinction here because I think my colleagues over here are.... I'm probably more hopeful in some sense that there would still be a change back to tweaking at the edges, and so on, of the current boundaries as they presently are. I, as well, would agree to that as a bare minimum, so I don't think we're differing there.

But you're absolutely right. Mr. Courtney, no less, reputed scholar and so on, is reported to have had conversations around this place at the orientation, before having heard a word of testimony, that he was adamant or dogmatic to do urban-only ridings. That's not on, and it's not supposed to be the way the process is done.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The levelling of bias, and I don't know the source of the bias that you're suggesting, whether it's ideological, or political, I don't know and I'm not impugning it—

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I didn't use the word "bias". I said a mindset, a predetermined approach to this whole thing by way of having urban. So I'm not saying bias so much. It's maybe an academic abstraction that he takes up on this.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Some of your colleagues...Mr. Clarke suggested that some of these ridings were gerrymandered. Do you agree with that statement?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I think there were two individuals. One in particular, Mr. Courtney, had obviously, as was reported at orientation sessions here, wanted to do urban-only, notwithstanding possibly he would change. I'm hopeful that he would. I think he's an honourable man and he can reverse himself. But if he's obstinate and obtuse, then there's a bare minimum that I would suggest, which is Silverwood's coming into Saskatoon West, and the downtown going into Saskatoon—University.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: I'd like to say no to that because I read the transcripts and they believed in urban ridings and they had no—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sorry, Ms. Minister, if I could have it clear, you're saying they didn't gerrymander the ridings.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: They did not gerrymander. By the understanding I have of the definition of "gerrymandering", it's no to your question.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay, do you understand that the levelling of the suggestion or accusation of—I'm sorry, what did you call it?—fixed mindset, or the suggestion of denigrating the process are very strong? We've heard a lot of testimony from a lot of MPs right across the country, of all political persuasions. We've not had those accusations made of any commissioner, much less two commissioners, one of them being a superior court judge.

Do you understand, particularly as a minister, the seriousness of making that type of accusation?

Hon. Lynne Yelich: I said no to gerrymandering.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen, you're well past today.

Mr. Dion, you have five minutes, please.

• (1135)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): *Merci, monsieur le président.* We'll continue with the same difficulty that Mr. Cullen mentioned.

I would like to focus on what Mr. Trost and Madam Block are proposing because it is so similar to what we hear when we have colleagues coming from other provinces, coming from any party. They came and said that they spoke among themselves and they had two or three ridings and they would like to see a change here and there, and this would be an amount of x thousand people, and at the end of the day we would see a greater balance. This is something the committee is accustomed to working with. But when we have colleagues saying the whole map should be put into the garbage and we should start from something completely different, and questioning well-known scholars—one of the best political scientists we have in Canada—on his ability to be a fair commissioner, then the committee is in difficulty, especially because we have heard different views.

You're telling us that Saskatchewan is a distinct society in Canada. That's what you're telling us, and I am accustomed to the distinct society arguments, except that many people from Saskatchewan are supporting this map and questioning the number of 75% that has been given. Mayors and councillors have different views. The association of municipalities is supporting the map. The two main newspapers, the *Leader-Post* and the *StarPhoenix*, are supporting it, so it's very difficult for me to understand why we would try to scrap the whole map instead of focusing on the specifics that some colleagues are asking for, which may make sense if we look at them very carefully.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I would just simply say that if you won't listen to me then you'll listen to Mr. Courtney, who contradicts himself in reporting from one of his very own books. On page 113, he says: An arbitrary statutory provision that mandates the creation of separate rural and urban seats or that prohibits designing hybrid rural-urban seats ignores the fact that social interests are layered in multiple ways and that only one of these is place of residence. Highways and mass transportation have made it easy for some who live in a city to work, seek recreation, or have a social life outside a city. Equally, many who live on the fringes of a city but beyond its actual municipal borders have their place of employment, are entertained, do their shopping, or are educated in the city.

He disagrees with himself and agrees with me by way of this quote, on page 113, from his 2001 book called *Commissioned Ridings: Designing Canada's Electoral Districts*. So I don't back away one bit from saying it is disrespectful. It maligns the process. It's not the way. You should have an open mind—I think, Mr. Dion, you would appreciate that—before you come into the process. All of us here, if you're picking up some slight difference, you're maybe overplaying it because we all oppose the proposed ridings and we'd prefer that it goes back to tweaking the boundaries as they currently exist in some fashion to get the equalization of population.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, but other people in Saskatchewan disagree. To show that the commissioner had views before doesn't mean that he has a closed mind and was unable to listen. That's quite a heavy accusation of a very well-respected person of your province. I know the man, and I'm sure he has an open mind. I know him. I argue with him on many issues and I know he may change his mind if compelling arguments are given to him.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Well, there were no compelling arguments.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: There are many arguments to think that we need, in your province, urban ridings and rural ridings and mixed ridings, because I understand that at the end of the day this is what

we'll have. We'll have six primarily rural ridings, five urban ridings—three in Saskatoon and two in Regina—and three rural-urban blends: Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, Prince Albert, and Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Do you agree with that?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I think some of those you were counting as rural ridings actually have small cities within the various parts of them—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, it's primarily rural.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Percentage-wise they are not primarily rural. They're actually blended urban-rural even at that, so we probably have no ridings. Possibly Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River is a purely rural riding. The others have some small cities within.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Then is it so odd to have five ridings in your province that will be only urban, when all of the cities we know that are of the same size in Canada have only urban ridings? You have the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association supporting it. You have differences between SUMA and SARM. You have the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. Isn't it fair to say that in your province you have health regions, enterprise regions, and school boards that are divided along urban and rural lines?

● (1140)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: None of them are divided on urban-rural lines?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The city of Saskatoon takes in rural as well and those particular health regions, which I served on myself, so I know that quite well. Actually, the greater city planning district is also now sectored or divided, if you will, and some of the greater Saskatoon planning district is cut off from the city of Saskatoon.

I live on an acreage on the edge of the city, and it's part of the greater Saskatoon planning district. It's now cut off from the city of Saskatoon, so I'm not sure if they didn't know of those maps or weren't aware of them, but they did not layer them into their equations here at all.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dion.

We'll go to Mr. Armstrong for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, witnesses, for your presentations.

I'm going to focus on the boundary between Saskatoon West and Saskatoon—University. This follows on what Mr. Trost said and I think it was supported by Mrs. Block specifically.

In the southern change that you're looking to do around the downtown Saskatoon area, you're moving a geographic area from Saskatoon West into Saskatoon—University. Can you describe the transportation challenges there? I see there's a river in that area, is there not? Does that impact upon your proposal?

Mr. Brad Trost: That's part of the—

The Chair: [Technical difficulty—Editor]

Mr. Brad Trost: If Mrs. Block wants to answer, I have a feeling I'll be answering twice.

The Chair: That's what I thought.

Mr. Brad Trost: That comes to the core of the proposal. The city of Saskatoon is naturally divided by the river. The areas that are connected in Saskatoon are the areas where you have transportation links, i.e., bridges. In the north part of Saskatoon, you don't have any bridges. They're planning for 2016 and eventually for 2020, but there's nothing there. There's no community back and forth.

When I sat down and talked with Mrs. Block about how we would make this work and what naturally fits, the downtown corridor is the one area where there is back and forth. You have a considerable number of university students who live in that triangle who walk across to the university on the other side of the river. You have bridges that you can walk or you can drive all in that area. That's the one portion of the city—as was referenced in Mrs. Block's testimony talking about municipal wards—where there's been historic back and forth, the original core of the neighbourhoods of Nutana and Saskatoon. That's why we suggested that be moved into Saskatoon—University, because that is a community of interest.

If you look at where we put the red lines, the sharp lines there, that's a commercial district where no one lives. You end up having a portion of several blocks before you start to get into population again. You have malls and office towers, and you no longer have a population there, and you have a very sharp economic divide on the other side of the red line. That's why that little red triangle naturally fits in moving back into Saskatoon—University. That's why, in the original proposal, I think the commissioners put it in.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: In that triangle, about how many people—

Mr. Brad Trost: Can I check with Mrs. Block to see if she wants to say something?

Mrs. Kelly Block: It also connects the educational facilities or institutions in the city of Saskatoon.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: About how many people actually live in that triangle that we're talking about in the southern part of what's changed?

Mr. Brad Trost: I don't have the exact numbers for that one. I do have the population deviations from the original.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: What are the deviations?

Mr. Brad Trost: On the original proposal, Saskatoon West would be 3.92% over, and Saskatoon Centre—University would be 3.31%. Under the counter proposals, Saskatoon West would be 6.52% over, and Saskatoon—University would be 0.22% over. That is before I make my suggestion of adding another 600 people in the acreages, which would then move Saskatoon—University to slightly more than 2% over. So you'd have 6.5% over the province's deviation and roughly 2% over the province's average for the full province. It

would be well within the boundaries that have been set up by the commission for other ridings in the province.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: By making this move you're not doing what I would call a significant change in population. It's not going to significantly affect the quotients.

Mr. Brad Trost: No. In fact, if you look at both Regina and Prince Albert, you already have wider variations from the quota than the widest variation that I noted. The commission has already established that, if a community of interest is involved, a standard deviation of 5% to 7% is well within the norm they find acceptable.

• (1145)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: In the northern part of the change you're looking at between those two ridings, is that one unified community you're reuniting up there? Can you talk about that?

Mr. Brad Trost: That area, and this goes to some of the arguments my colleagues made, would probably be better tied in with Warman and Martensville. This is the irony of part of the problem of dividing based on city boundaries. That area has effectively no real link to Saskatoon—University. Its links are completely over to Saskatoon West. Between Pinehouse Drive and Lenore Drive, the income demographics start to change. You don't have the same sort of housing and neighbourhoods that you have in the downtown core. The downtown core continues up along the river bank, up along Warman Road, a boundary that the commission suggested and that we're supporting. We're moving when there gets to be a demographic-economic change based on a major roadway.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Scott, Madam Latendresse, together, collectively.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): I would like to go back to what Mr. Dion and Mr. Cullen were mentioning a little earlier.

In the province at the moment, some ridings are exclusively urban and some are exclusively rural, correct?

[English]

Mr. Brad Trost: I can answer that for Saskatchewan. In and around the city of Saskatoon you have exclusively rural and exclusively urban. Both under the current boundaries and the proposed boundaries this would be considered urban and rural. In fact, one of the proposed boundaries, provincially in Saskatoon, starts in Ms. Yelich's riding and wraps up and around into my territory taking in the acreages that I'm talking about and a considerable number of farms. Provincially, if we're going to use the term "rural-urban blended", that happens provincially in Saskatchewan just as it does federally.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: As we read the proposals in the commission's last report, we see that the new element would be in having ridings that are exclusively urban. But there is something else...

[English]

There are still some hub-and-spoke ridings in the new proposal?

Mr. Brad Trost: The proposal as made by the majority of the commission is that you would have seats exclusively inside Saskatoon and Regina. In my presentation I said those aren't really urban; they're a mixture of urban and suburban communities. That tends to be new. In most of our history, probably about 80 years of Saskatchewan's hundred-plus years of history, Saskatoon and Regina have had hub and spoke to some degree. That's been the norm. It's been the exception over the years. That would be the one thing that's distinct.

The riding of Regina—Qu'Appelle continues to take on that nature of hub and spoke. It goes roughly 200 kilometres north of Regina. Frankly, some of the ridings that wrap around Saskatoon have substantive urban-suburban populations in them. You have to understand that 40,000 people live within 15 minutes of Saskatoon. Wrapping around Saskatoon you have effectively 40,000 Saskatonians in the ridings of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre or Humboldt—Warman—Martensville. So 40,000 people who are all effectively Saskatonians have been distributed in two rural ridings.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Let us go back to your specific proposals for the various Saskatoon ridings. I know that this has already been discussed, but do you have an estimate of the number of people who would be affected in the two areas?

[English]

Mr. Brad Trost: I think you're looking at about 5,000 people in one and 3,000 people in another. We can get you those specifics. You're talking about a few thousand people going in each direction, maybe 8,000 or 9,000 at the most. We'll get you those specific numbers well before the end of the week, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): That's great.

I would simply like some clarifications. I do want to thank Mr. Trost and Ms. Block for presenting some concrete tweaks, if you like, which I hope we'll get enough clarity on to be able to reference them.

I do want to give Mr. Vellacott an opportunity to simply clarify whether the words he used are words he continues to want to use. You did refer to Professor Courtney as having a “fixed mindset”, a mindset of “predetermination”, and that he had denigrated the process. You indicate he should've recused himself. You indicate there's no other explanation for the lines than the fact of what you alleged to have been the mindset of Professor Courtney. You may have shied away from using the word “bias” in response to Mr. Cullen's questions, but in the legal world you basically used language to suggest bias, so I simply want to make sure that you want to stand by the language you used.

● (1150)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I don't know what you're suggesting by way of what type of bias; perhaps an academic bias, if you will, or abstractions.

When he, in conversations around this place during the orientation, said we must—this is not my language, this is his language—do urban-only ridings in Saskatoon and Regina, he was using an adamant kind of language, dogmatic language. I don't know how else to interpret the fact, but he had a predetermined mindset from the get-go. Obviously, then, you're going to filter everything else out, or at least when it pertains to Saskatoon and Regina you can only hear what you want to hear in respect to urban. So I would stand by that.

You're quite correct. I used terms like those. I think it is disrespectful to the process when a commissioner is supposed to have an open mindset. I think it does a disservice to the electoral boundary distribution process. It denigrates it. Those are my statements based on his own comment, and actually his own book that he wrote in 2001 as well.

The Chair: Thank you all.

I have no more speakers on my list, so I want to thank this panel. I thank you very much for coming today.

Those of you from Saskatoon, I hope to see you in May when my London Knights are there winning the Memorial Cup.

Other than that, thank you all. We'll suspend for a minute while we go to our next panel.

● (1150)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1155)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We have two new guests from Saskatchewan on our study of Saskatchewan. I believe they are the last two witnesses from the province, Mr. Lukiwski and Mr. Boughen. I believe we are going to have five minutes each.

I think you're going first today, Mr. Boughen. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present my objections to the final report issued by the Saskatchewan boundaries commission.

I come here representing the interests of my constituents, who I am proud to serve today and every day that the House sits. I should note that I am not running for a third term; I'll just leave it there.

It concerns me that the commission was predisposed to dramatically shifting the boundaries from the outset. I reference page 4 of the final report. This commission has indicated that they felt “the time had come” to create a dedicated situation different from the one currently in existence.

This is simply not for the commission to decide. A definite problem arises, since they have steadfastly maintained that position despite resounding opposition. They maintain that position although the community in Saskatchewan has said, “We don't like this.”

The initial draft stated that the commission received over 200 pieces of communication, from brief one-sentence to one-paragraph notes to formal documents, which favoured moving away from the hybrid urban-rural model. They considered these communications, yet disregarded the vast majority of 3,000 letters and public submissions that were in favour of keeping the current model.

It is clear that the commission has taken an inflexible position. The commission received arguments from MPs, mayors, Reeves, city councillors, business leaders, and residents, and rejected all of those arguments. These are people who know the variety of issues facing the many concerns of our province. These are people who know the impact that dramatically shifting boundaries has on people.

I will discuss a few of these rejected arguments, including the one indicating concern because Saskatchewan's two largest cities would be left with three representatives instead of four. This means that there would be fewer seats at the table to advocate for issues and projects within those cities. MPs, city councillors, and business leaders indicated as much in their presentations to the commission.

Furthermore, the commission has this notion that residents of Regina and Saskatoon have unique issues, compared to smaller centres such as Moose Jaw, Yorkton, or Estevan. This is a preposterous notion. I know that residents of my riding are just as concerned about housing, roads, transportation, jobs, and all the other things that are having an impact on urban people.

The Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, known as SUMA, currently does not consider Regina and Saskatoon to be the only municipalities with urban issues. In fact, they define an urban area as one with at least 5,000 people, which means that Saskatchewan has sixteen cities, not two. Melville is considered a city even though the population has fallen under 5,000.

If our son or daughter plays hockey, does it matter if we travel on city streets or a grid road to the arena? I mention these because there seems to be an overabundance of the notion that we can't have what we now have, and that it has to be split off. Do we really think that snow shovels easier in rural Saskatchewan than in urban Saskatchewan? Ladies and gentlemen, these are false notions.

As we contemplate creating divisions in the province along urban and rural lines, we need to consider the life events that do not have boundaries.

Professor John Courtney, a member of this commission, supported this way of thinking when he stated on page 113 of his book, *Commissioned Ridings: Designing Canada's Electoral Districts*, that "designing hybrid rural-urban seats ignores the fact that social interests are layered in multiple ways and that only one of these is place of residence". Professor Courtney went on to write that "many who live on the fringes of a city but beyond its actual municipal [boundaries] have their place of employment, are entertained, do their shopping, or are educated in the city".

It would seem that the professor has changed his position on this. This is a major point, since Professor Courtney has created boundaries contrary to his own viewpoint.

Before I begin to close, I'd like to note that during the federal electoral boundary review in 2002, Dick Proctor, the former NDP

MP for my riding of Palliser, argued in favour of the hub-and-spoke model.

In conclusion, like they did in 2002, Saskatchewan residents have indicated loud and clear that they're opposed to strict boundaries between the largest cities and the rural areas.

• (1200)

Simply put, electoral districts and boundaries should be based upon the reasoning put forward by residents. As mentioned, the commission was predisposed to a dramatic shift and steadfastly maintained that position despite significant opposition. I urge the committee to reject the current proposal put forward by the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Saskatchewan.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boughen.

Mr. Lukiwski, you have five minutes, and you know how tough I am with my clock.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): I do, Chair. Let me say, as a member of the procedure and affairs committee, that the perspective from this end of the table is that you look far more handsome than you do when I sit way down at the corner.

That was my sucking up for the day.

It's good to be here. Let me say at the outset that I am here to raise, as have the majority of my colleagues from Saskatchewan, some objections to the commission's report. But let me first say that I absolutely have the upmost respect for the commissioners and the work they did. It's a very difficult job, and while I disagree with some of their findings, I have no doubt that they put their suggestions forward in what they believe are the best interests of Saskatchewan residents.

I applaud them for their efforts, but I have some very serious objections. The first is that I think the final report, posed by two of the three commissioners—we know that there is a dissenting report by Commissioner Dave Marit—failed to take into consideration the characteristics of the communities immediately surrounding both Regina and Saskatoon. They seem to suggest in their report that there is a clear distinction between Regina and Saskatoon and the rest of the province, which they characterize as rural Saskatchewan.

I want to point out at least one example—there are many, but I don't have enough time to point them all out—in which I think they frankly failed in their approach. That involves the area just outside of Saskatoon. Right now, there are million-dollar-plus homes on large acreages outside of Saskatoon. All of the residents of these moved out of the city of Saskatoon, not because they don't feel that they're residents of the city but because they wanted a larger land mass on which they could build houses. They can see the city of Saskatoon from their doorsteps. They consider themselves to be residents of Saskatoon. If you asked any one of them, they would say so. Those who work continue to work in Saskatoon. If they want to go in for a cultural or sporting event, they travel to Saskatoon.

They absolutely consider themselves to be part of Saskatoon. Their issues are the same as those of Saskatoon residents. Yet in the eyes of the commission, they are rural Saskatchewanians. In the eyes of the commission, apparently these people have more of a community of interest and of identity with the city of Moose Jaw than with the city of Saskatoon.

It's simply ludicrous—notwithstanding that if the people who live on these large acreages want to travel to meet their member of Parliament face to face, as most people do, they would have to travel to Moose Jaw, rather than travelling five minutes into Saskatoon. It just doesn't make any sense.

One of the reasons the hub-and-spoke approach worked so well was that it allowed these smaller communities that have a strong affinity with Regina or Saskatoon to continue to be part and parcel of those cities' riding associations. I believe that two out of the three commissioners were unfortunately misguided in their approach. They felt that this clear distinction between the two major cities and the rest of Saskatchewan is one that would ensure better representation. Frankly, I just don't feel that this is the case.

However, having said all of that, I am also a realist. I firmly believe that the commissioners are steadfast in their resolve to see urban-only seats in Saskatchewan, and that is their right. While I respectfully disagree with their approach, I'm going to make some suggestions based on what I believe the commission's final report will be, which is that they will be creating urban-only seats in Regina and Saskatoon.

I have a suggested change to what is now being called the Regina—Lewvan riding that I think, if we have to go to an urban-only configuration in Regina, would make this riding far more balanced and far stronger.

Do we have a map up on the screens in the room?

Thank you very much, Mr. Dion.

What I'm proposing...I hope you can follow along with this. If I had a laser pointer....

Oh, we have a laser pointer. I love laser pointers.

•(1205)

The Chair: Let the record show that Mr. Reid had a laser pointer.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Great. What I'm suggesting, I'll describe it first, and then I'll try to put it on the screen for you.

I'm proposing that the area east of Lewvan Drive and north of Wascana Creek known as the Cathedral area in Regina be included in the riding of Regina—Qu'Appelle. Wascana River, which I will show you in a moment, is a natural dividing line and this would allow the Cathedral area, which I consider to be a community of interest with a strong community association that is very active in the city of Regina, to maintain its community of interest. We wouldn't be dividing it. We'd simply be shifting it as an entity from one riding into the next.

The reason I'm doing so is that I believe it would improve the population variance. Right now, Regina—Lewvan is overrepresented and Regina—Qu'Appelle is under-represented but what will happen is that this area in here, which would go under Regina—Qu'Appelle,

would make the variance a little closer. It also allows for the possibility of growth. The big part in Regina is in here. Just south of the airport is a subdivision called Harbour Landing. By 2015 it will have over 10,000 residents in it. That population was not included in the 2011 census.

Also, in the northern part of the riding is the second fastest-growing subdivision in Regina. It will have at least an additional 5,000 people by 2015. So this increases the population of that Regina—Lewvan riding. By moving the Cathedral area out it maintains the community of interest. It better reflects the population growth in Regina—Lewvan and I think it would make both those ridings far stronger places if we have to go to an urban-only configuration.

Thank you, Chair.

•(1210)

The Chair: I'd like it to be noted that I gave you considerable extra time because of the sucking up to the chair.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you so much, Chair. That's why I did it to begin with.

The Chair: We'll be going to Mr. Reid, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you. I don't want to spend too much time on my first question, but I just want to be clear.

Did you say I was smart or good-looking?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I said you were smarter and he was better-looking, for the record.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Got it, all right.

My questions relate to your suggestion here. I'm looking at this map, which I assume you gave out?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, I hope it was given out.

Mr. Scott Reid: So just let me get this clear. The transfer causes Regina—Qu'Appelle to go up in population, that's obvious, and Regina—Lewvan to go down. You're making the point, as I understand it, that because of this area south of the airport, which is in Regina—Lewvan, Regina—Lewvan is growing faster and so that will even out over time.

Is that correct?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Absolutely, Scott.

Right now under the current commission proposal, Regina—Lewvan has a deviation of plus 7.82% and Regina—Qu'Appelle has a deviation of minus 1.25%. If we switch just the Cathedral area, not accounting for growth, the deviation would be that Lewvan would go down from plus 7.28% to a minus 0.33% and Regina—Qu'Appelle would go from a minus 1.25% to a plus 6.46%.

Now some might argue that all you're doing is shifting population from one to the other, but what it allows for is that growth component in Regina—Lewvan. There will be at least 15,000 additional residents in Regina—Lewvan come the next election. So if we didn't make a shift, if we didn't take Cathedral or some area of the current riding out, that riding would have probably 20,000 to 25,000 more people in it than the other two Regina ridings, and I just think, frankly, that this is disproportionate.

By moving this Cathedral area it better reflects an average population variance in all three ridings. I should say that it also has the support of MP Scheer. I also make mention that it does not have any impact on Wascana because Mr. Goodale has indicated before this committee that he is satisfied with the commission's report. He didn't want to see any changes to the boundary, so this does not affect Mr. Goodale's riding whatsoever, but it better reflects a population shift in the city of Regina and it allows the community of interest, the Cathedral area, to maintain itself. They are a very strong community association. I've spoken with many of them.

Mr. Scott Reid: Does this proposal split them?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No, it keeps it in its entirety.

Mr. Scott Reid: No, not the proposal you are making. The proposal the commission made. Did it split them?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No. The Cathedral area stays under the commission's proposal in Regina—Lewvan. I'm saying take that Cathedral area and put it into Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Mr. Scott Reid: So it keeps them united.

I was going to ask this question if I could, Mr. Lukiwski. The southern boundary of the Cathedral area, I gather, is Wascana Creek, and that's the boundary between the ridings. Aside from the Lewvan Drive bridge and the Albert Street bridge, are there any other crossings at that point, or is that a firm dividing line?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's what I would call a natural boundary, Wascana Creek.

Mr. Scott Reid: So it's more of a boundary than the roads are is what I'm getting at.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, it basically defines the southern edge of the Cathedral area.

Mr. Scott Reid: The other thing that I wanted to ask about here, because I'm about to run out of time, is Regina—Lewvan. It kind of has the look of.... This happens when they're drawing boundaries, the one that kind of contains the stuff that got left over. I mean, the airport is more or less in the middle, dividing two separate areas where actually, under the boundaries proposal done by the commission, you have to drive essentially out of a suburban area in order to get from one to the other.

I gather the transfer you're making does not really affect.... The awkwardness is already there. It's not really changed what you're proposing.

• (1215)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It really doesn't have any impact, outside of the fact that it addresses the disparity in population. Members of the Cathedral area, even though they would be put into a new riding, would not have to travel any further to get to an MP's office. They wouldn't have to travel any further to get to anywhere in Regina, frankly.

It's just primarily done to keep the Cathedral association as one entity and to address the disparity in population. That's all it's doing. It's a minor change, in my opinion, and everything else remains the same.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I just want to say that you're both smart and good-looking, too, Tom.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, Scott.

The Chair: Very good. I love the camaraderie.

Mr. Cullen, keep it up.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We're just gushing. All right, I will keep it up. We must be in a complimentary mood.

I want to say two things, Mr. Lukiwski, on the record, both with respect to you recusing yourself from this committee, which I thought was correct, and also the incident around the robocalls that went into Saskatchewan. You very clearly and publicly said that they, in your words, were "a screw-up" and that someone should take responsibility. I think of the process, because we're dealing with the process of how we get to these maps, and then the maps themselves, and so I compliment you on those two decisions.

What has left me increasingly worried, particularly with Saskatchewan and uniquely to Saskatchewan, I might add, in the process that we've been hearing as a committee, is that for the first time we've been hearing testimony directly going after not just the process but the commissioners themselves—not as you have chosen to do today—suggesting alterations to the maps that the committee could then report on.

I'm not sure how the committee is going to handle it, frankly, in our report to the commission. We'll have to note it because it was talked about so much. We've heard about accusations of bias, fixed mindset, gerrymandering, and that commissioners denigrated the process.

You know, as someone with your experience, those are very strong accusations to make of an independent, arm's-length body like an electoral boundaries commission. I'm wondering if you've had any reflections on that, or you bring any today, because in your statements you went out of your way to talk about while you disagreed, you also believe that the commissioners had the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan at heart.

I've been not just increasingly worried, but offended actually, if I can be totally frank with you, as to some of the testimony I've been hearing. People can bring passion to this and be frustrated with the maps that have been presented, but the accusations of bias and gerrymandering, and the commissioners denigrating the process, it seems to have crossed the line for me.

I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on that particular aspect of the testimony we've heard so far.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Frankly, Nathan, I'm not going to comment on any of the other interventions or any of the testimony you may have heard.

I will say this, however, I do agree with one of the things one of my colleagues said that you may disagree with. I think there was some predisposition. I think the commissioners had their minds made up before they even heard one piece of evidence. However, having said that, quite frankly, while I strongly disagree with them, there's nothing wrong with that. There really isn't. That's their job.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Having an opinion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, that's their job.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Having some expertise as well.

Mr. Boughen, you said something about the commissioners, that they created boundaries contrary to their own beliefs. This was Commissioner Courtney in particular. If they were contrary to his beliefs, then where do we source this mindset, this predisposition, this bias from? If they're not his beliefs, what would they be?

Mr. Ray Boughen: When he says one thing in his book and says something else in the field, I think it raises the question, which way does the commissioner sit? Is he for it or is he against it? Is he for the maps or against the maps?

By the way, let me just put up the map on what I see happening as far as Palliser is concerned, if we can fire that up.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Just while we're pulling the Palliser map up, I want to be clear on what you're saying. Is it possible that he heard testimony that changed his opinion? If he said one thing prior—

Mr. Ray Boughen: Could well be.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We're trying to source the bias. To make an accusation of a mindset—as Mr. Lukiwski and others have said—of a predisposition that.... What's the source of it? You're suggesting it's not ideological. It's not his actual thinking on the matter. What is the other source available to us? I mean, we're in politics—

Mr. Ray Boughen: It's nothing more or less than what he wrote, and I'm saying that what he wrote.... Is that his position prior to even serving on the commission? You know, the book was published long before he served on the commission. Did his work on the commission change his thought? Maybe, but he's entitled to that like anyone else.

• (1220)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is it possible that his opinion changed based on testimony he heard as a commissioner from people in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Ray Boughen: I would suggest quite possible, sure.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: SUMA has come out in support of this. We've heard about all the different levels of support. My question to both of you is this. There's an aversion towards these ideas of rural versus the urban or urban-only seats for Saskatchewan. But yet we've also heard that this exists in the Saskatchewan legislature. There are provincial seats that are entirely urban and that works well. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Well to be honest, I'm not sure because I don't sit with the legislators in Regina.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: But you know them.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Yes, I know of them and I know many of them personally. Does it work for them? Certainly it seems to work for them. Will it work for us? I don't know. It's not there yet.

But what I'm saying in our submission is that there seems to be an overriding thought that umbrellas the whole commission, that you can't have urban and rural mixed. I'm saying in Saskatchewan, there's no difference. When the kids get out to play hockey and it's 30 below, it's 30 below in Regina and it's 30 below in East Overshoe. I mean, it's cold, but people get their car warmed up and away they

go. Saskatchewan now has a whole different concept in terms of entertainment, in terms of electrical, power, everything.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Lukiwski, you seem to have taken a certain prairie pragmatism to the maps. You've chosen to make suggestions to the maps. You seem to have conceded the idea that this is likely what the maps are going to look like for Saskatchewan and you're suggesting some changes to those maps. Am I—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Dion, you have five minutes please.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you.

Please....

The Chair: I won't take it out of your time. I'll even give it back to Nathan. I'll be really nice.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Tom, you may answer too.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, a couple of things.

First I'll go back to what you were saying before. You asked Mr. Boughen about how Professor Courtney and Justice Mills came up with this urban-only concept. They had it right from the outset and they state so in the commission report. They reiterate this by saying that after they received the first 200 submissions, the indication served to confirm the commission's initial thoughts. They said that they were predisposed. They felt the time had come, similar to the 2002 commission that initially proposed urban-only seats. This commission at the outset felt that the time had come, so that's what their mindset was going in.

Even though I disagree with it, that's their opinion and that's what they were charged with the responsibility of doing.

In answer to your second question, Nathan, about the provincial scene, you have to realize that there are 58—going on to be 63—seats in Saskatchewan provincially as opposed to 14 seats here. So it's quite easy to have urban-only configurations when you have that many ridings.

Here with only 14 representing a million people—slightly over a million people now—for the last hundred years we've had 80 years of hub and spoke that's worked very well for the province. That's why I still think it's the best way. But I do agree with your last statement that I believe the commission is bound and determined to have urban-only seats, and if that's the case, I'm making a suggestion to improve it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll start with Mr. Dion.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Lukiwski is done—

The Chair: We're still going to finish on the bottom of the hour here, folks.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: You said that you want to be realistic and even though you disagree respectfully with the commissioners, you are proposing changes. I would be very pleased to focus only on that, but I cannot be mute about what has been said about this commissioner, which I find very unfair. You have a great political scientist in your province, Professor Courtney, and for someone to change his mind, there's nothing bad in that. We always change our minds.

He wrote this book in 2001. He has been a commissioner. He focused more on the issue than ever before in his life, and he came with a suggestion that it would be good to have five urban-only ridings out of fourteen. If you look around in Canada, it looks like what we have elsewhere. It's not something so odd. You have many people in Saskatchewan supporting it. Many people desiring it, but very few people questioning the honesty of the commissioners.

You have the Regina Public Schools board, the Regina Catholic School Division, the Saskatoon school board. You have the division between the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association and the Saskatoon Association of Rural Municipalities, and councillors and mayors all over the place about this issue. So it's very difficult for this committee to conclude that the commissioners are completely wrong, and that we need to start from nothing and start with a new map.

Now in your proposal, how many ridings exactly are affected?

• (1225)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Two.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Two.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The newly proposed riding of Regina—Lewvan and the existing riding of Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay. Is your colleague in agreement with your proposal?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, he is.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: At the end of the day will the number of people be better distributed?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Of the population, yes. My proposal would see roughly 6,000 people in the Cathedral area moved into Regina—Qu'Appelle. That will alleviate the problem of what's going to happen in Regina—Lewvan because there are going to be around 15,000-plus people, new residents of Regina—Lewvan, by the time the next election rolls around. It was done primarily to try to address the population variance.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: What support for this proposal is there on the ground?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The concern of the people I talked to in the Cathedral area was that they wanted to make sure their association was kept whole because they have a very active association. Right now, as an example, they have a bit of a dispute with the provincial government on a proposed school closure. I understand they're

lobbying the provincial government very hard, so they wouldn't want to see their associated split in any fashion. This maintains their community identity.

All it means is that they would be voting in a different riding, but nothing else changes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay. Is it based on some historic reality or only today's submission?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The reason I'm suggesting the Cathedral area move is that in the first map the commission put out, they recognized there could be a population disparity between Lewvan and Qu'Appelle.

When they tried to carve out a four- or five-block radius in the northwest area of Regina—Lewvan and put it into Qu'Appelle it was arbitrary. It was done I think just for population reasons, but it really would have split up a brand new subdivision. It would have created the unusual situation of one neighbour on one side of the street voting in one riding and another neighbour on the other side of the street voting in another.

They discarded that approach in their second map, but I'm saying I think they would agree they have to address that population variance with the population growth that's going to occur in Regina—Lewvan. I'm suggesting a way that I think works on a whole bunch of different levels. It has a natural boundary, the Cathedral area, so it is a natural dividing point. It addresses the population variance and it keeps the community of identity in the Cathedral area, so those residents can maintain their association and the good work they do.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Will this be the first time the commission will contemplate this proposal?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, it will be, Mr. Dion, and I know one of your questions was whether I raised this at the commission. No, I didn't. At that point frankly I thought our arguments would be persuasive to keep the hub-and-spoke situation the way we've had it for the last 50 years. It wasn't until I saw the second map that I saw what they were proposing, and that's why I'm making the suggestion now. I'm hopeful they will take it under very serious consideration.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

That finishes that round. I think probably we should stop at that point. That will leave us half an hour for committee business today, and I think that will probably work.

Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski and Mr. Boughen, for sharing your information with us today.

We will suspend for two minutes while we go in camera to discuss committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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