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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 49 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to continue its study of the reports of the federal electoral boundaries commissions.

In the first hour, we will hear from our colleagues opposed to the Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Saskatchewan.

In the second hour, our colleagues opposed to the Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Manitoba will have their turn to speak.

[*English*]

Usually, we go through the chair, but since we're among colleagues, we will have good, respectful dialogue among ourselves. I hope I don't need to interrupt.

I will remind everyone that we have professional interpretation and translation services, so we'll have one person speaking at a time. Please be mindful of the speed at which we speak.

I want to welcome our colleagues today.

We have Mr. Warren Steinley, who is no stranger to this committee, as well as Mr. Andrew Scheer, who we also have serving on this committee, and Mr. Blaikie, who has made a couple of appearances.

It's nice to see the three of you in the hot seat. You will have up to five minutes for your opening comments. We will keep that tight so we can maximize our time for questions.

We will commence with Mr. Daniel Blaikie, followed by Mr. Warren Steinley. Mr. Andrew Scheer will bring it home.

Mr. Blaikie, you have up to five minutes. Welcome.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very happy to be here today to speak to the proposals for the boundary redistribution in the province of Saskatchewan.

I figure I might as well start off by acknowledging that I am a Manitoba MP. I'm not here to pretend to be a subject matter expert on the province of Saskatchewan, but this is a process for MPs, and

only MPs get to provide feedback at this stage in the process. As members around this table will know, there are MPs from only one political party in Saskatchewan. Some people feel more comfortable giving their feedback to members of other parties, so we have indeed received feedback from folks in Saskatchewan who felt it was important to have their views represented at this table. That's what I'm here to do today.

I will be focusing my remarks particularly on the proposal for the city of Saskatoon. The boundary commission's original proposal proposed three ridings for the city of Saskatoon, including the new riding of "Saskatoon Centre". I think many folks in Saskatoon are excited at that prospect. Over the course of a number of boundary redistribution hearings, some folks in Saskatoon have argued that there's a significant community of interest among folks who live in the urban centre of Saskatoon, which has traditionally been carved out and then included in ridings that extend beyond the city borders into parts of rural Saskatchewan.

I'm here to ask the committee to consider looking at the original proposal by the boundary commission, which created one urban riding in the centre of Saskatoon, because I think there's an important principle. I think all of us are familiar with the very real divides that can exist from time to time between urban Canada and rural Canada, which indeed can sometimes be exacerbated by politics. I think that's an important divide to try to overcome.

However, one of the questions is whether it's best overcome by creating ridings where one representative has to try to represent those concerns at the same time, or whether it makes sense to have representatives who are able to speak to properly urban concerns and properly rural concerns and then try to mediate that. That's as opposed to having an election and perhaps having rural folks feel that the person who truly speaks to rural concerns didn't get elected and so they don't have a voice, or, alternatively, having urban folks in an urban-rural split riding, where a more rural representative was elected, feeling that their concerns aren't getting the kind of representation they would like to see.

I think there's an important principle there that's recognized in the guidelines. Of course, there are many guidelines that boundary redistribution commissions have to consider. One of them, and I think it's quite important and stands to reason, is that where they can, they should try to create ridings where that kind of significant community of interest that exists between urban areas and rural areas is well respected. I'll be speaking to that more general point again in the Manitoba section of this meeting.

That's really what I'm here to argue today. In fact, the commission itself recognized many of these arguments in its original submission. It recognized that significant communities of interest belong together inside the city of Saskatoon. That's why its original proposal included those things. I know the commission heard from folks who disagree, but it also heard from folks who thought the original proposal was a very good idea.

I'm here to communicate on behalf of those who felt that finally having a properly urban riding in the city of Saskatoon was a good idea, continues to be a good idea, and is something that the boundary redistribution commission should follow through on.

I'm happy to answer to the best of my ability any questions that committee members may have.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We appreciate the one minute and 10 seconds that you gave back to the committee. Thank you so much.

Go ahead, Mr. Steinley.

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here in front of my colleagues to discuss the boundaries commission.

What I see is a simple change, to make sure we have people who have been historically in two ridings stay in those ridings. I sent a paper with my presentation.

The section of the guidelines that this affects is subparagraph 15(1)(b)(i):

the community of interest or community identity in or the historical pattern of an electoral district in the province

This is what I'm basing my objection on. We should take into account some of the historical context. This is not a domino effect. This presentation and this appeal affect only the ridings of Regina—Lewvan and Regina—Qu'Appelle. Quite frankly, it moves about 5,500 people from Lewvan to Qu'Appelle and then those 5,500 people back from Regina—Lewvan into Qu'Appelle.

You're basically having 11,000 people staying in the ridings they have been in—in some cases, like Regina—Qu'Appelle, since 1993. These people have voted in this riding. They've been in this riding. They live in the riding. Really, I think it might be one thing that the committee just overlooked.

I believe it doesn't affect the spirit of the boundaries commission in what the intention is. As MPs, we get to know our constituents quite well. If we have the ability, as the PROC committee, to put forward a recommendation to ensure that people can maintain and

stay in those ridings, I think it's something we should look upon favourably.

I'm going to answer the questions that were laid out for me.

I have talked to my colleagues about this, and my colleagues in Saskatchewan have looked favourably upon this objection. They are all in favour of it.

This objection wasn't made at the boundaries commission because it's based on the second map. The first time we've had an opportunity to bring this forward is as MPs at the PROC committee. Obviously it is a new map, and there were changes made from the original commission's submission before that.

As I said earlier, there is no domino effect on every other riding, which I think is very important to take into consideration. This does not make more work for the boundaries commission in Saskatchewan. It is a simple trade between Regina—Lewvan and Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Does the objection have the support of the community? Yes. I've lived in the community. I know the people in these communities. If you're from Regina, you know that there is a difference between NOD, which is north of Dewdney and...south of Dewdney. It's a big thing in Regina. A lot of people in the area who would come back to Regina—Lewvan are actually.... It's called Lakeridge and Lakeridge Addition. They shop in the same areas. They go for coffee in the same areas. Their kids would go to school in the same areas as well. They're part of the same community associations.

The same is true of the people who would go back into Regina—Qu'Appelle. They'd be part of the same community associations and their kids would go to the same school. As I mentioned earlier, there is a historical reference. People have voted in that riding since 1993.

Finally, the rationale is that it's easier for people to vote where they've voted before. It's basically an objective place where you're making the lines. It's about six city blocks where people live that we're asking to be changed. I think it's something that can be done quite easily.

I very much look forward to answering any questions that committee members may have. I believe it's a common-sense solution to a problem and people will feel comfortable voting where they have voted before.

Thank you very much. I look forward to the questions.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You've provided us with a minute back.

Mr. Scheer, we'll go over to you.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC):** Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

I want to address three topics. First, I'd like to spend a few moments to provide a counterpoint to what my colleague has laid out for the committee in terms of blended urban and rural seats.

I want to flag that in Saskatchewan this has been a matter of debate in the last three electoral boundary processes. I would note that in the 2013 process, Saskatchewan was the only province that had a dissenting report from the boundaries commission, precisely because many voices felt that the move away from the blended urban-rural ridings into urban-only ridings actually wasn't reflective of the nature of the province.

In the case of Regina—Qu'Appelle, on the last rural-urban blended riding in the province, I just want to talk about those linkages between communities, which are so important.

In terms of the changes Mr. Steinley has just laid out, I want to signal my support for his proposal.

If you look at the two maps I've distributed, the first page is the proposal that the commission has tabled with the House of Commons. The back page is as they exist right now.

If you look at the bottom left-hand corner of my riding of Regina—Qu'Appelle, right around Saskatchewan Drive and Elphinstone Street, the commissioner is proposing to put that into Regina—Lewvan. Just a few blocks to the west is a major north-south road called Lewvan Drive. That really is a community divider. It's three lanes in each direction. It's a high-traffic road. All the community and neighbourhood associations are split by that road. There is no spillover from one to another.

In that southwestern corner of my riding is an area of Regina called North Central Regina. It is very uniform in that area. The construction of homes was all around the same era, and there are very similar demographics from one street to the next in terms of who lives there. Just across the street in the Lewvan riding, it's a completely different neighbourhood. It's a completely different demographic and a completely different price point in terms of the homes you would see.

It really doesn't make sense to take that little corner part of North Central out of Regina—Qu'Appelle. North Central is bigger than the area they're putting in, so they're dividing North Central up and splitting it between my riding and Warren's riding.

As Warren mentioned, this community has been in the same riding for well over 30 years. It's very cohesive, too. There are several schools in the area that co-operate with each other and support each other. There are indigenous organizations that provide a lot of outreach and services in that area. If you walked around the area, it would never be obvious that you were moving from one community to another, but under the proposal, in fact you would be moving from Regina—Qu'Appelle into Regina—Lewvan, whereas when the divider is the Lewvan, it's very clear. If you cross Lewvan Drive on Dewdney, it's very obvious that you're leaving one neighbourhood and moving into another neighbourhood.

In terms of voters being in the riding that they have historically been in for many years, it doesn't make sense to give Regina—Qu'Appelle more of Regina—Lewvan in the north and then to offset that by giving Regina—Lewvan some of Regina—Qu'Appelle in the south. It would make far more sense to leave that corner of North Central in Regina—Qu'Appelle and move fewer voters from Regina—Lewvan to Regina—Qu'Appelle. That would cause the least amount of disruption.

The proposal that the commission has made has the effect of more people being moved from one riding to the other. I can't emphasize enough the fact that they would, under this proposal, really divide a very distinct community in Regina into two different ridings, when there is a much more natural divider just a few blocks to the west.

If I can draw your attention to the second set of maps in the rural area, this is the proposal for Regina—Qu'Appelle's rural component. As you can see on the first page, the communities of Wynyard and Ituna have been excluded from Regina—Qu'Appelle.

When we were at the boundary commission hearings, all the submissions were aimed at including Wynyard and Ituna in the same riding as Fort Qu'Appelle. Fort Qu'Appelle really acts as a hub in the rural part of my riding. It is the largest centre outside of Regina itself, and it has everything—grocery stores, doctors' offices and things like that.

• (1115)

I'll wrap up there. If members want to have me dive a bit more into the rural component, I'd appreciate the opportunity to do that.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that, Mr. Scheer.

We are going to start with six-minute rounds, beginning with Mr. Redekopp.

Welcome to PROC.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank PROC for the work that it's doing on this. It's an important piece of the boundary redistribution puzzle, so thank you for your work here.

I also want to thank the Saskatchewan commission. They did a lot of hard work, and I just want to make sure they get a shout-out for everything they've done.

It's quite normal for a Winnipegger to have an opinion about the Saskatchewan Roughriders and possibly even tell us everything that's wrong with our team, but I really was quite surprised to find someone from nine hours away who thought they knew best how to organize our riding boundaries.

I'm grateful for your concern for my constituents and our constituents. I have some questions for you, but first I want to clarify a couple of things.

For your benefit and for all of our benefit, I want to talk about the process for a minute.

Mr. Blaikie, you mentioned in your letter a lengthy public consultation process that occurred before the first report was done. I want to clarify that, because it's actually not true. Before the first report was done, it was really just special interest groups and insiders who knew about the process who were able to submit before that first report was done. I was one of them. We submitted as MPs, so we knew about the process, but I would not call that consultation.

Of course, the commission in Saskatchewan was faced with a big problem. The population of Regina and Saskatoon had grown quite significantly compared to the rural area of the city, so the first proposal did include a major redrawing of the Saskatchewan map. Every riding was affected, some in a very big way. Saskatoon was significantly changed. Changing Saskatoon actually caused every other riding in the province to be affected because of our large rural ridings that are so interconnected and intertwined.

At this point came the very lengthy public consultation process that you mentioned, so that was after the first report. It was very well done. There were 15 meetings that were vigorously advertised. They were all across the province. They were very well attended, with a wide variety of witnesses.

I want to point out that in Saskatoon, there were 24 presentations, I believe.

Four of them were in favour of Saskatoon centre, as you indicated. One was from a former provincial NDP candidate. One was from some NDP EDA president. One was from an NDP nomination candidate. The fourth one was from the NDP candidate who ran against me in the last election. There's a bit of theme there, if you can tell.

The other 20 presentations made in Saskatoon argued against Saskatoon centre, and they came from a wide variety of people: a community association president; members of the immigrant communities; business leaders; community and downtown development organizations; the chief of the Saskatoon Tribal Council, who represents seven local first nations; religious leaders; MPs and others. I'll briefly explain a bit of their logic.

First, based on all the information received, a major redo of the map was undertaken by the commission. Again, every riding was touched. It mostly reverted back to the initial starting point, actually, but it took a lot of work to get there because of the changing population bases.

The process was lengthy and detailed, as you said, but the result was an overwhelming rejection of Saskatoon centre and all the domino effects required to make that happen.

Finally, Mr. Blaikie, I don't believe you were part of the lengthy consultation process in Saskatchewan, so I would like to provide some insights—again, for all of us here—into why the commission decided the way it did.

I don't presume to know why they did what they did. I wasn't a part of the commission, obviously, but I was intimately involved in the hearings, and I understand Saskatchewan intimately. I've lived there my whole life.

The first area I believe they looked at was community of interest, so I'm glad you mentioned that in your opening remarks. People from Manitoba and outside Saskatoon probably don't understand. I don't know if you have a copy of this map. There is one that I've given to the clerks to hand out, if they wouldn't mind doing that. It's very simple to see how Saskatoon is divided by the river down the middle. It creates an east side and a west side. That's a real, major label that people use to describe themselves—you're either from the

east side or the west side. It's completely ingrained into our identity in Saskatoon.

The river, right down the middle as you can see, is a natural barrier. It restricts travel, except for major artery roads and highways. It's also a major social, economic and demographic barrier, with significantly different histories on either side. That is why, in 2012, the commission, when faced with the same question, rejected the idea of crossing the river. It didn't match the way the city was.

The other strange thing about this, when you look at this map, is that it allowed.... What was left over was part of the riding. It went together with this part down in the south, and it went together with this part in the east, a very strange collection of leftover bits and pieces caused.... It was one of the effects of having the centre riding, so a very strange thing.

The second area they considered was the testimony from the tribal chief, Mark Arcand, and others. He said that the majority of Indian and Métis people live on the west side of the river.

• (1120)

They presented census data that proved that point. He said that Saskatoon centre would dilute indigenous representation, as the indigenous population is mostly on the west side. I'll paraphrase what he said: Most people who live on the east side haven't spent time on the west side, so how can they speak for indigenous people? The boundary that they've proposed cuts right through the centre of that indigenous population.

Finally, I believe they looked at the at-risk population, which, again, is centred on the west side of the city. It has services for that population on both sides of the boundary that was proposed, so it really didn't make sense.

I hope that helps everybody understand a bit better the process that happened in Saskatoon.

How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Blaikie, part of the issue here is to consult with colleagues in Saskatchewan. Did you consult with colleagues? If so, I'd be curious to know if they agreed with you.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** First of all, I appreciate the question. In the future, I would appreciate time to give an answer.

No, I've not engaged in an extensive consultation in the way that the commission did.

I think I'm out of time, or I might have more to say.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

With that, we will go to Mrs. Romanado for up to six minutes.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'd like to thank my colleagues for being here with us today and for presenting.

As an MP from Quebec, it's always helpful for me when my colleagues who are from Saskatchewan explain a bit how this affects folks in their ridings. I really appreciate that.

I want to follow up a bit on what my colleague, Brad, was just talking about with you, Mr. Blaikie. He asked you if you had any consultation with other colleagues in Saskatchewan. I also want to know if you have reached out to people from these ridings. You were mentioning specifically the creation of a potential Saskatchewan centre, or Saskatoon centre—my apologies.

**An hon. member:** There's a big difference.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** There's a big difference, absolutely.

Has there been any outreach in terms of...? Have you received feedback specifically? You didn't provide it in a briefing note to us, so we'd just like to know what kind of feedback you received. Did you receive letters, or did you receive emails? What was it that you received that is prompting your presentation today? Could you elaborate, please?

• (1125)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Sure. The reason I'm here today is that we received feedback as a party. There were folks who reached out to the federal office who were concerned when they saw the revision of the initial proposal by the boundaries redistribution commission. As I say, that's a natural thing for folks to do. Some folks don't feel they can reach out to their own local MP to talk about those things, for various reasons, so they reach out to people in the political universe who they are more comfortable talking to. They reached out to the federal office of the NDP to explain their concerns, and I'm here to relay those to the committee.

You can even use some of the boundaries commission's own arguments to mitigate in favour of the idea of having a Saskatoon centre riding. For instance, in its own report, the boundaries redistribution commission said—

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I don't want to cut you off, Mr. Blaikie, but I have read the report, so I am versed on it. I just wanted to see, with respect to your specific objection....

I also want to ask my colleagues, Warren and Andrew, the same question. Did you also receive any feedback with respect to the possible creation of Saskatoon centre? Could you let me know if you heard anything about that?

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** In terms of Saskatoon, no, not me personally. I was involved in and present at the hearings for Regina, so I didn't have the opportunity to weigh in on that.

In terms of the proposal I've put forward, this is reflective of the testimony that was made at the hearing. I'm quite confident that what I'm advocating for today would be reflective of what the people who attended those hearings in Regina and in the rural part of my riding were asking for.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Mr. Steinley, it sounds a bit like it's not a simple swap in terms of numbers. It seems like there were areas that could have been chosen to move versus others. In terms of the math, you provided us with a little information with respect to how many people would be affected and so on. In terms of support,

I'm assuming, as Mr. Scheer has said, that you've received support for the argument to favour what you're proposing.

Could you provide us with any additional information? Have you talked to mayors or citizens' groups that have also supported this recommendation that both you and Mr. Scheer are providing to us?

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** Yes. We had contact from people in the north part of Regina—Lewvan, who were questioning why they wouldn't have the same MP they had before, but also the same MP as neighbours across the street.

As Mr. Scheer said, Regina—Lewvan is a big dividing line in Regina. Being part of the same community associations, part of the same school groups and part of the same SCCs—school community councils—they didn't understand, then, because they are so tightly knit, why they would vote for a different MP, especially, as I said, because part of the community here is Lakeridge 1 and Lakeridge 2, and the demographics are very similar.

As Mr. Scheer said, to move people and cut North Central in half.... We just want to put a lens on that for the commission, which they may not have thought of because they were focusing on the numbers. It keeps the numbers very tight. Mr. Scheer gets 5,275 voters back and I get 5,771, and they would be very close together for the total amount within the ridings as a whole.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Okay. I'm not sure if any of my colleagues here also have some follow-up comments. I don't want to hog all the first round. Let me look at the room. No?

With respect to Mr. Redekopp's proposal regarding the river, again, I have not had the chance to visit all of.... I am going to have to come and visit you. We should maybe have a trip.

With respect to the river you were mentioning, Mr. Scheer, you were also mentioning a bit about the road that's near the airport, which you said is like a boundary. Am I understanding correctly the map that you provided? Is there is a street called Lewvan Drive?

• (1130)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Lewvan Drive, yes.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Could you elaborate a bit about its being a natural boundary? Is that correct?

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** It is. I'm trying to think of an equivalent. It's like Bronson Avenue, maybe, or the Airport Parkway. It is the biggest north-south arterial road. The speed limit in some places.... I usually go a bit faster, but I think it's 70 kilometres an hour most of the way, and in a few spots it might even be a bit higher. It slows down in some of the residential areas.

The reason I talk about speed limits is that it's not just like a regular road, with traffic lights every couple of hundred metres. There are lots of streets that don't cross Lewvan, because it's such a major artery. It really does act as a separator. Basically, when my colleagues are talking about the river in Saskatoon, it makes a lot of sense that it would have the same effect there.

**The Chair:** That's excellent. Thank you so much. I look forward to a trip to Saskatchewan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, will make a point of going to see it in person.

I'd like to thank our colleagues for their presentations. A lot of points have been raised. The key elements we're concerned about are social cohesion, the electoral quotient and demographic shifts. We need to ask ourselves several questions here to help shed light on your testimony.

I'd like to take this a little further, and I will start with Mr. Blaikie.

People have talked about an urban/rural dividing line. That's a reality in Quebec and even in Ontario. What would be the advantage of respecting the electoral quotient, among other things? You told us that your constituents had brought these issues to your attention.

I'd like you to provide a little more detail on what you're proposing.

[*English*]

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you very much. I'm happy to provide an answer to that question.

In fact, I am going to quote briefly from the commission's own report, which said:

In general terms, the presenters who were in favour of a Saskatoon Centre riding argued that it would recognize a community of interest that is, to some extent, particular to this central urban area. As indicated in the Proposal, these interests include unique concerns relating to infrastructure for transportation, the development of the downtown core, issues faced by at-risk populations and distinct issues faced by Indigenous people, whose population in Saskatoon is concentrated in the neighbourhoods inside Circle Drive.

That's from the commission itself, which also recognized that there are unique challenges faced in the urban core, including challenges with respect to transit, housing, homelessness and things of that nature, which are similar to the challenges for folks who are living in the core.

I come from Winnipeg. Two rivers run through the city, so I'm very familiar with how rivers can be important boundaries—political boundaries and psychological boundaries—and can help organize behaviour. I also know that sometimes, when you're talking about the nature of political representation, although folks don't think of themselves necessarily as having a community of interest because of a divide, like a river, the kinds of issues they face are nevertheless very similar. Therefore, the work that a political representative would do would have more coherence straddling that divide, because they would be speaking to similar issues, even if folks perceived them in a slightly different way.

Again, this is part of the balancing act that commissions have to do. Sometimes those things, like a river, are going to be a really significant boundary, and other times, some of those other concerns are going to weigh into that.

I appreciate the difficult work the commission has to do. Clearly, its members didn't initially think that the river was such an important boundary that it couldn't be crossed. It was their proposal, after all, to have a Saskatoon centre riding.

I'm here today to speak on behalf of folks who simply think that the commission should stick to its original proposal for the reason I mentioned, which is that the needs are similar enough that the kinds of political work and representation an elected member would engage in would pair well.

That's what I'm here to say.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you very much.

I've heard other colleagues talk about historical element, which has an impact in terms of communities of interest, for example.

Mr. Steinley and that Mr. Scheer, it seems that you don't agree that the ridings should be butchered. You see a difference between the northern and southern parts of Regina. Could you tell us a bit more so that the commissions watching us are aware of everything?

[*English*]

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Yes, I'm a NOD for life. There is definitely a division in Regina between north and south. Those are the main groupings of neighbourhoods. Obviously there are subgroups within that, but there's a distinctive character in the north end versus in the south end. There's a friendly rivalry between sports leagues and between schools and things like that. There is definitely a distinction there.

In terms of the historical voting pattern—and this might relate a little to Saskatoon as well—in 2013, the electoral maps in Regina and Saskatoon were changed dramatically and became massively different. It went from blended urban-rural ridings into urban-only ridings. Many people had to discover that they were in a different riding altogether. There was a different name to it. Some of the communities that had historically been part of that were no longer part of that.

To have another round of massive changes just one cycle later, when there really hasn't been that justification in terms of demographic growth or shifting, doesn't make a lot of sense. It really seems as though every 10 years they're going to have these massive changes.

That's why I think it's important to look at the Saskatchewan situation as a bit of a continuation between the last time and this time. The maps that the commission has tabled contain more modest changes with regard to Saskatoon.

In Regina, we still have the challenge that we're outlining. I'll let Warren speak to that.



[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** In closing, I see that we obviously want to spark interest among voters and up voter turnout. In that case, why try to change some things from the past?

The same reasoning applies everywhere, in all ridings. If the criteria are being met, why change the ridings?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

I thank the folks who are here today to present to us. We always learn a lot from this. As we go across the country, we certainly learn a lot more. I think we always have to appreciate the knowledge people have of their own regions. I appreciate that.

I'll come first to Mr. Blaikie and ask a few clarifying questions.

It sounds like the concern here—and I think we've heard this from other folks at the table—is that figuring out how to have a riding that really reflects the needs of the constituents is always a challenge, especially when you're looking at urban versus rural.

I represent a fairly large riding. I wouldn't say any of my communities is extensively huge. They don't have that huge urban sprawl, but there is a distinct nature to each of those communities.

In my region, for example, when folks talk about the riding being called North Island, my constituents in the real North Island are always very clear to indicate that where they are is the true north and that the other parts of the riding are not, in fact, the true north, so it's generous of them to include those parts in that title. I think we see that all the time, and we have to respect those voices and the intricacies.

I really appreciate Mr. Scheer's comments earlier about having an identity between rural and urban areas and wanting to keep those together so you can showcase that it is the true sense of your region.

It sounds like there are voices from people who feel they are not heard. When you are in a place where you don't have that representation, obviously you're going to speak out and want to have your voice heard. That's what I hear you doing today.

I wonder if you could talk a little about whose those voices are and what some of their concerns might be. Why is being part of an urban riding something that they feel is particularly important for them moving forward, in terms of their political and regional identity?

• (1140)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Again, I'm not here to be the subject matter expert in respect to Saskatchewan but just to relay concerns we've been hearing. I don't know that a full stakeholder consultation list has been published by the commission to date in terms of what they heard from folks after their initial proposal was made. I understand that we're aware of over 20 people who made submissions in support of Saskatoon centre.

My understanding is that the feeling there really is that there are.... When you're talking about an urban core, there are particular kinds of challenges and struggles, and infrastructure is required in order to address those things that is simply not the kind of infrastructure or challenge that you would experience in rural communities.

People know each other. People who live on the outskirts of the city or just outside of the city travel into the city and things of that nature. What they're looking for in terms of improvements to the community around their home is going to be very different if they live in a community just outside the city rather than in the city core.

The gist of those representations is that people who live in an urban core want to be able to have representation that doesn't feel divided between having to represent very different communities of interest with very different infrastructure needs. They would rather have the opportunity, in a Saskatchewan context, to have an urban representative able to focus and specialize on the kinds of issues that you experience in an urban core. I think that's really the main thrust of what people are concerned about.

Without getting into the full history of it—some members around this table know it better than I do—that's not something that has largely been true, because of the way ridings have been created in Saskatchewan over some period of time.

Saskatoon's population has been growing, and I think folks feel that the city is at a point now where it doesn't make sense to deny Saskatoon a properly urban riding. It's maybe not going to cover all of the city, although there are proposals that would see Saskatoon divided into three ridings pretty neatly without extending very far into rural areas.

I appreciate that because of the historical fact that you've had urban-rural split ridings in Saskatchewan, creating three ridings for the city of Saskatoon would require a significant rejigging of the electoral map, which is why that happened in the commission's initial proposal. You can't do that without making some significant change.

The idea that a growing Saskatoon means that the time has come for there to be a properly urban riding is certainly the view we're hearing from a number of folks in Saskatoon who made representations to the commission.

While Mr. Redekopp may well be right that, in the initial round, there were only four people, I think he'll find, when more detail is published on the public consultation process that took place after the commission's initial proposal, that there were, in fact, substantially more people who submitted in support of a Saskatoon centre riding. That's certainly what we've been hearing.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you. Since I have about eight seconds, I will give that time back to the committee.

**The Chair:** Your generosity.... Thank you. We appreciate every second we can get.

You have up to five minutes, Mr. Redekopp.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to pick up on something that I'm sensing is a bit confusing. I want to clarify this.

Mr. Blaikie, in your initial opening remarks, you talked about blended rural-urban ridings. There's been some talk back and forth about that. I want to make sure that everybody understands that in 2012, when the commission made its changes, at that point, the ridings were blended rural-urban ridings. In fact, the riding I represent now, which was represented by my colleague sitting right beside me, included a whole swath of rural areas beside it.

Part of the big change that happened—and it was first contested in the 2015 election—was having only urban ridings in Saskatoon. There were three urban ridings. One of the ridings has a tiny bit of rural. It's about 5%. It's a little piece. For the most part, though, there are three purely urban ridings. That happened in the last go-around of this. Of course, the NDP won the Saskatoon West seat. Voters changed their mind four years later.

My question is this: Are you aware of that? Are you aware that there are no blended rural-urban ridings in Saskatoon today?

• (1145)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** As I say, I'm not a Saskatchewan subject matter expert, but I was aware of that. I enjoyed my time sitting around a caucus table with Sheri Benson. I thought she did an excellent job at representing folks there. Of course, I respect the choices that voters make.

What we're talking about today is going one further and trying to talk about the kinds of issues that present in an urban core, and then trying to create representation around that.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** One thing I want to mention is that the proposal for Saskatoon centre would create a fourth riding in Saskatoon called Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, which would be a blended rural-urban riding. We would go from having three urban-only ridings to having three urban ridings plus one blended riding, which is going in the opposite direction of what you're saying.

I wanted to clarify that, because there's a little inconsistency there.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That's why you'll find we've submitted our own proposal for how the lines might be drawn in Saskatoon to create three properly urban seats in Saskatoon, or to maintain three properly urban seats, while having a Saskatoon centre riding.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** That would have been very helpful during the consultation process.

I want to switch to Mr. Scheer. I'm a little confused. You talked about Ituna. I know you got cut off, but I was confused about what you were talking about.

Could you pick that up and enlighten us?

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Yes. Thanks very much for giving me the opportunity to do that.

The commission heard from several community leaders in the communities of Wynyard and Ituna. In the original proposal that people were reacting to during that process, the proposal was to move most of the rural part of Regina—Qu'Appelle into Yorkton—Melville. The commissioners heard from reeves, RM councillors and other community leaders that their trading pattern and their traffic pattern—where they work and where they put their kids into activities—were all north-south into Regina and into Fort Qu'Appelle. The commission has put most of the rural part back into Regina—Qu'Appelle, but it has left Wynyard and Ituna, and the areas around them, in Yorkton—Melville.

What I'm here today to highlight is that this is not reflective of what the commissioners would have heard. They would have heard from people from those communities telling them that they feel more aligned with Regina or Fort Qu'Appelle, depending on whether they're talking about Ituna or Wynyard. The reality on the ground is that those are the communities of interest.

Going back to the historical pattern, Kelliher and Ituna are just down the highway. They've been in the same riding, I think, since the sixties. For Wynyard and Raymore, it's the same thing. Those are communities that are very closely linked.

While this proposal has put most of the rural back, I think it fell short of where the line needs to be.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** I think we have about 40 or 50 seconds left.

Have you spoken with your colleagues about that change? I guess it would be Cathay Wagantall in Yorkton—Melville.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Yes, I have.

It has a very minimal impact on Yorkton—Melville. If they put those communities back into Regina—Qu'Appelle, there would be about 2,700 electors from Yorkton—Melville into Regina—Qu'Appelle, out of 76,000. It's a minor change. I don't think it would upset the balance.

Again, we have to keep in mind that the commission has given itself massive latitude as it relates to northern Saskatchewan, in terms of veering from the quotient. We're talking.... I think it's well within the acceptable...it certainly keeps the difference between Yorkton—Melville and Regina—Qu'Appelle well below the 25% threshold that's in the act.

I can't stress enough the historical pattern in terms of the urban part of Regina, which Warren and I were also talking about. That community of North Central has been in Regina—Qu'Appelle for decades. To split it up into two different ridings....

Warren reminded me that his riding is called Regina—Lewvan for a reason. The Lewvan is such a major geographic divider in our city.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, you have up to five minutes.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

You know, you make a good point. Constituents should be able to identify themselves in their ridings. The name should make sense to the riding. We heard that previously from many members. We also heard arguments, even in the Nova Scotia presentation, regarding rural representation versus urban representation and members having the ability to focus their advocacy here in Parliament regarding their ridings. I can understand that rural communities may have not just one or two things that may be different but many, many things. Infrastructure and so many things could be different.

Today we also heard arguments from Mr. Scheer around big homes versus small homes. I'm not sure where we draw the line. Should we have diverse communities where MPs are also able to then maybe better understand the difficulties that low-income households may have versus wealthier households, or that rural people and urban people may have? I guess I have a larger question here as to what this committee's role would be. I know that the commission in large part really focused in on population, and that created a lot of these issues for many of us, but when I hear things like big homes versus small homes, I don't know whether that's something we should be looking at.

Mr. Scheer, I'll allow you to clarify first and then anyone else who'd like to comment.

• (1150)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Those are great points. Of course, when you're creating electoral boundaries you need to have some kind of guidelines to determine where to draw a line. Geographic features are obvious, and sometimes municipal boundaries, but when you're within a city it's a bit trickier: Why should this part of Regina be with that part of Regina?

Regina—Qu'Appelle under both proposals has a great deal of diversity in terms of income levels, quality of housing and all kinds of things like that. What I was trying to say by talking about moving from one neighbourhood to the other was the cohesion within a community itself. As we all know, in the communities we represent.... Yes, there's Regina, but then there's north of Dewdney, and then within that there's Coronation Park and Argyle Park. Even within that sometimes you can have little clusters or areas that maybe were developed around the same time when people moved in.

North Central is very distinct. It is very easily identifiable. It has...not natural boundaries but roads that act as boundaries. Lewvan is the biggest one. The train tracks that run south are the south-

ern boundary. There are only a few places where you can cross from the north into the south, because of the way the train tracks cut across the city.

My point is not that all one type of house should be in one riding and all in another. It's just that in that particular area, if you're walking west, say, along 3rd Avenue, it's all one neighbourhood. Under the current map, at one point you'd be crossing from Regina—Qu'Appelle into Regina—Lewvan, and there's no natural reason or no obvious reason on the ground for that to be the case, whereas Lewvan is very clearly the separator. It's just a distinct neighbourhood on either side of the Lewvan. You would know that you're obviously moving from one part of Regina to another. There's just different social cohesion and community cohesion on either side of that.

That's what I was basing my proposal on.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Are there any other comments?

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** I'd be happy to offer some comments.

When it comes to Regina, I would also mention that the city wards don't cross either. In Regina—Lewvan right now, going straight down to Lewvan, five MLAs represent that area, and none of those provincial boundaries cross either. It's the same for the city councillors. Those areas don't cross the Lewvan either.

So it kind of falls in line and makes sense that way as well. That's why we're talking about it as such a distinct barrier for the city of Regina.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I would simply add this. I respect that we're talking about Saskatoon and about Saskatchewan, but one thing the Manitoba boundaries commission recognized in some alterations to Winnipeg Centre.... They're moving that riding to go north of the CPR tracks, which is a pretty significant divider within the city of Winnipeg. They're doing that because they recognize that Point Douglas is a core area, downtown Winnipeg, and that the core of city centres tend to have issues in common and face similar challenges.

One of the value-adds that the procedure and House affairs committee can offer this process.... I mean, the boundary commissions very rightly start from population. It's a clear metric. It's something you can really kind of carve up, but here we can add our thoughts about the nature of political representation, how to advocate for certain kinds of issues, and how that cashes out in this place. When you have the kind of core area that Saskatoon centre could be as a riding, that's something for this committee to reflect on in terms of the nature of political representation and how to make that a more cohesive or coherent job for the person chosen by voters to represent them in this place.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is our second meeting for this study and I'm enjoying it. I'd like to thank you. Your comments are very constructive and relevant.

Based on everything that's been presented, I have a question that won't be easy to answer.

Of course, we can agree on the logic that there should be consistency between federal and provincial, and that we should maintain an easy-to-understand structure to avoid voter confusion, because sometimes they get confused.

I have only one question. Given the arguments that you've just made, can you quickly tell me what the commission's reasons were for butchering the electoral districts or changing the boundaries in ways that, according to you, don't seem to make sense?

• (1155)

[*English*]

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** It's tough to guess what their motivation was. I think the massive change they made with northern Saskatchewan had an effect on the other ridings in the south, because of the massive disparity now...with what they've drawn in the northern map. I think they were trying to get awfully close to voter parity, after making such a monumental change and departure from long-established principles in the northern riding. I wish I could develop that thought at great length.

Honestly, when I saw the proposal, I was baffled. Giving Regina-Lewvan that little corner of Regina-Qu'Appelle.... I don't think anybody saw that coming. Nobody even discussed it at the hearings. Nobody would have thought it would even be on the table. I don't want to speculate on why they did it. I can tell you only that it caught everybody by surprise.

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** Sometimes I think it was just an oversight. I think they tried to keep the numbers close. They drew a line on the map, saw how the numbers were closer that way, and didn't think about removing people from a riding they'd been in, historically, for 30 years.

That's why this is such a good process: When we look at the map, those things come to our attention right away. We can then bring those objections forward. I think the commission can look at

that and say, "That makes common sense." Why wouldn't you try to leave as many people in their ridings as possible?

I'm hoping they accept that.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** There's been a lot of rightful fuss or even conflict over how people draw lines on the map over the years. I think, when you're looking at population numbers, specifically.... It's easy to look at the map and say, "If we just jut out here, we'll get a better sense of numbers."

That's why this committee has something to offer. It's not because commissions don't take other things into account. I think this is a point in the process where there's an opportunity for folks to look at what came out of it and see whether, in some cases, that desire to even the numbers out might have trespassed against other important principles.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll ask this question of all the panellists, starting with you, Mr. Steinley, since you're to my left.

I'm curious about whether you can speak a bit on the work you've done, in terms of looking at these lines and talking with indigenous communities, in order to see how they feel about that representation and whether it matches the boundaries they see in their communities.

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** For the indigenous communities, that would be the north-central part, which Mr. Sheer has elaborated on quite succinctly. Where you split north-central in half is one of the largest indigenous communities in Regina. I believe he would be able to answer that better. However, splitting that distinct community in half, in our opinion, doesn't make sense. That's why we brought this forward today.

I'll let Andrew elaborate on that a bit more.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Linking back to the tail end of my last comment, I don't think anybody saw this proposal to split north-central coming. There wasn't a lot of communication on it. I think most people in that area who were at all aware changes were coming probably just assumed that north-central would be kept whole, whether it was within Regina-Qu'Appelle or Regina-Lewvan. To be honest, nobody was floating the idea of moving it to Regina-Lewvan, until these maps were tabled.

As Warren indicated.... I don't want to repeat it. Perhaps I'll just stress that the urban services offered in indigenous communities are all centred around north-central. The Indian Métis Christian Fellowship is there. They have the alternative measures program, all kinds of housing initiatives, urban reserves and the North Central Family Centre. These are all institutions and organizations that provide outreach and services. They're within that very distinct area. Therefore, there would be a natural inclination to want to keep that whole.

• (1200)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Again, it's no secret to anyone around the table that I'm not from Saskatchewan. I'm not trying to tell folks in Saskatchewan how their lines should be drawn. What I'm here to do is to relay a message from many people in Saskatchewan, and indeed Saskatoon, who made representations to the commission. I think they deserve a voice in this process. They clearly didn't find another MP or a local MP who was willing to carry their message to this committee. I'm here to carry that message on their behalf, because I think that notwithstanding the fact that local MPs may be comfortable with the commission's second round, folks who live in the area who nevertheless don't like the second version ought to have a voice in this process. I'm just here to pass on in good faith what we've been hearing from people in Saskatoon who believe that there should be a Saskatoon centre riding that's organized around the idea of political representation for an urban core.

**The Chair:** That was a great spot to end on, so thank you for that.

On behalf of PROC members, I would like to thank Mr. Scheer, Mr. Steinley and Mr. Blaikie for your time. Just as a reminder, anything you provide to this committee will be reported back to the House, and then all of the supporting documents will go back to the commission.

With that, I hope you have a great day.

We're going to suspend and bring on the next panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Welcome back to our second session today.

I would like to welcome the colleagues who are joining us today to address the "Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Manitoba". You will each have up to five minutes for your opening comments. The committee would welcome back any minutes that you do not want to use.

We have Mr. Bezan joining us, as well as Mr. Blaikie.

We will start with Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Daniel, why don't you go first? That gives Niki some time to get back online. I have her presentation. If she has difficulty, I can read it.

**The Chair:** That does make sense. Because we actually have two objections, Mr. Blaikie would be given five minutes, and Mr. Bezan, sharing with Ms. Ashton, would be given five minutes. Let's try that.

Mr. Blaikie, you have up to five minutes. Welcome.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you very much.

Hello again to committee members, who may remember me from the last hour, when we were discussing the Saskatchewan redistribution.

I'm going to make a similar argument, which is about the idea of trying, as much as possible, to have fewer urban-rural split ridings. That is not to say there would be none. However, I think it is a reasonable goal of the redistribution process to try to have urban ridings and rural ridings, without the split, where possible. I think that's a significant division when it comes to communities of interest.

The second proposal for Elmwood—Transcona from the Manitoba redistribution is to go beyond the Perimeter Highway—in Winnipeg, there's a highway that encircles the entire city—and to take in the communities of Dugald...and not quite Oakbank, but going north almost up to Oakbank.

We already have an urban-rural split riding in northeast Winnipeg. It's the riding of Kildonan—St. Paul. There are adjustments being made to the riding of Kildonan—St. Paul in this redistribution as well, and the riding of Provencher, all of which are adjacent.

My simple point is that I think it would make more sense to extend the northern boundary in Elmwood—Transcona somewhat along the river in order to capture a similar amount of population, but within the city limits, and then to take the area outside of the city that the commission is proposing to put into Elmwood—Transcona and assign it instead to Kildonan—St. Paul. Because there is so much population...and you go up street by street on the northern boundary of Elmwood—Transcona and the border between Elmwood—Transcona and Kildonan—St. Paul, I think it would mean very little in terms of population numbers. You can readily move the northern boundary of Elmwood—Transcona to a point that's commensurate with the amount of population that the commission has proposed outside of the city limits.

It would mean that the riding of Kildonan—St. Paul would continue to be an urban-rural split riding. There are certainly similarities between some of the rural communities that are already in Kildonan—St. Paul and the communities just outside the city of Winnipeg that the commission is proposing to include in Elmwood—Transcona. I think it's a pretty clean solution. Instead of having two urban-rural split ridings, you would continue to have one urban-rural split riding and one fully urban riding, which I think makes a lot of sense.

Prior to the riding of Elmwood—Transcona being created, and its predecessor Winnipeg—Transcona, Transcona was included in a riding by the name of Winnipeg—Birtle. When Winnipeg—Birtle was decommissioned, if you will, as a riding, in favour of Winnipeg—Transcona and what now is largely Kildonan—St. Paul, I think that was a very intentional decision by the boundary redistribution commission at that time. It was to recognize that there were significant communities of interest within northeast Winnipeg that were deserving of their own urban representation. To the extent that there would continue to be a rural-urban split riding—because the rest of northeast Winnipeg didn't have enough population to create an urban-only riding—you would try to have one urban riding representing a significant portion of northeast Winnipeg, and then beyond that, have one urban-rural split riding.

I think this is moving away from that decision. I don't see a lot of virtue in creating more urban-rural ridings when there is no need for that. I think the solution here is rather simple.

If there is time remaining, Madam Chair, I'm happy to give that back to the committee.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** We thank you for your generosity. That is very kind.

I am going to do a quick sound check with Ms. Ashton.

Are you there?

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Yes, I am.

**The Chair:** We have an objection that was provided to the committee jointly by Niki Ashton and James Bezan.

I will pass the floor over to you, Ms. Ashton. Combined, you will have up to five minutes.

Welcome.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you very much. My apologies for the delays. We have extremely cold weather here in our region today, and that slowed everything down this morning. Thank you to IT for their help.

Hello members of PROC, fellow colleagues. I am pleased to be joining you today, along with my colleague, MP James Bezan, to present our objection to one part of the proposal made by the Manitoba Electoral Boundaries Commission, namely, the need to reinstate the Little Saskatchewan First Nation and the part of Lake St. Martin First Nation that was removed from the Churchill—Keewatinook Aski riding.

I want to begin by thanking the Manitoba Electoral Boundaries Commission for its hard and thorough work, evident in the report. I also want to note that we appreciate the boundaries commission's overall decision to not expand the Churchill—Keewatinook Aski riding. This was clearly a response to the serious concerns raised and the unanimous opposition of northern, indigenous and rural Manitobans regarding the proposal.

As you may already know, our riding is the fourth largest in the country. It includes 71 communities and is a riding with many challenges in terms of transportation, infrastructure, etc. The boundaries commission report decision to not move forward with its initial pro-

posal reflected an understanding of the realities of first nations in northern and rural communities.

While the overall decision was one that made sense, the boundaries commission went ahead and proposed a problematic change to our riding that had nothing to do with the original proposal. It proposed removing one first nation in its entirety—Little Saskatchewan First Nation—and dividing and removing part of another—Lake St. Martin First Nation—and placing them into the Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman riding.

We object to this proposal on a number of grounds. First, this change was not part of the initial proposal. Therefore, Little Saskatchewan First Nation and Lake St. Martin never had the chance to be consulted on the specifics of this proposal, since it was never on the table. This is in opposition to the central importance of consultation with first nations.

Second, this change will cause confusion and likely lead to disenfranchisement. We must note that Little Saskatchewan First Nation and Lake St. Martin First Nation were part of the Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman riding prior to 2015, but so was the entire Interlake region. In 2015, all seven first nations in eastern Interlake became part of the Churchill—Keewatinook Aski riding. For seven years, much work has been done to inform and enfranchise citizens as to which constituency they are part of, where constituency offices and services are located, etc. Changing that for two of the first nations will contribute to confusion and even mistrust, given that they were not aware that this was even a proposal on the table.

It is problematic that Lake St. Martin First Nation is being divided, according to this proposal. This is a small community that has dealt with major upheaval in the last two decades, namely, the floods that led to the relocation of the community. Most people have moved back only since 2015. To then split up the community as part of this boundary redistribution would be to the detriment of the significant effort made by the community to restore stability and continuity.

Removing Little Saskatchewan First Nation does not make any sense either. Their three neighbour first nations, Pinaymootang First Nation, Dauphin River First Nation and Lake St. Martin First Nation, remain in Churchill—Keewatinook Aski. Reinstating Little Saskatchewan and part of Lake St. Martin into Churchill—Keewatinook Aski would also live up to one of the boundaries commission's guiding values of keeping communities of interest together.

Many people in Little Saskatchewan and Lake St. Martin have close family in their neighbouring communities that remain in Churchill—Keewatinook Aski. The first nations are part of the same overarching regional Interlake Reserves Tribal Council for both Little Saskatchewan and Lake St. Martin. Pinaymootang First Nation, which is the largest first nation in their area, is part of Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, and it is a hub for shopping, medical services, education, etc.

Finally, it is important to note that reinstating Little Saskatchewan First Nation and the part of Lake St. Martin that was removed from Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, if it were to be returned, would ensure that the population in our riding would still be under the limit.

As is evident from our joint presentation and joint objection, this is not a partisan issue. This is about respecting first nations. This is a gesture in the spirit of reconciliation. It is in line with the values of the boundaries commission. It is about enfranchisement, and it ensures that constituents, particularly those who are indigenous, who live in northern and rural communities, are treated with the respect they deserve.

We hope this change will be reversed, and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Thank you.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's indeed a pleasure to be joining everybody here at PROC today.

I'm pleased to make this joint submission objection with my colleague Niki Ashton. I just want to make sure everyone is aware that Niki and I worked on this together. We've also circulated it to Conservative and NDP Manitoba caucuses and had a brief conversation with Kevin just now. I've also talked to Terry Duguid about the changes, and I didn't hear any objections.

This does come down to.... Pardon me, Madam Chair?

• (1225)

**The Chair:** We look forward to hearing more from you during the question round.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Am I out of time already?

**The Chair:** Yes. You had 15 seconds when your partner passed it over to you.

I will just say that we have to remember to speak a little more slowly, because interpretation is being provided, but that was good, because we haven't done this for a while. I'm sure they're going to ask you lots of great questions.

With that, welcome to the committee, Mr. Maguire. Up to six minutes go to you.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thank you.

I would be glad to give Mr. Bezan a bit more time, but I agree with his presentation and that of Ms. Ashton, and I have a few questions for Mr. Blaikie, I guess, in regard to his proposal.

We have a number of other ridings in Canada, particularly even in Manitoba, that are already urban-rural. I noted in the report tabled by the electoral boundaries commission that Elmwood—Transcona and Kildonan—St. Paul would be virtually within 100 votes of each other with regard to the population, based on the present report.

You said in your presentation, Mr. Blaikie—and I understand it—that Transcona is growing. Can you give us some idea of what the overall increase in population in Elmwood—Transcona has been in the last 10 years?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It has been significant. I don't have the numbers in terms of how much it's grown, but I think some of the rejigging of the electoral map in Manitoba has to do with the fact that there's been significant population growth across the province. Of course, there has been a fair bit of population growth in Steinbach, which is why the boundaries commission has been looking at trying to rejig Provencher.

I think the changes to Elmwood—Transcona have more to do with trying to cut some population out of the riding of Provencher, due to exceptional population growth relative to some other parts of the province, than they do with population growth in Elmwood—Transcona.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** I would agree that there's population growth in Provencher and that they had to do something, so that's a part of the proposal.

Did you speak with any of the neighbouring members, such as the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, or even the member for Provencher, where you were saying that the population would have to decrease?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I haven't, no, but I am aware that Mr. Falk made a submission to the boundaries commission proposing what the commission has done, so I suspect that he's not disappointed with the proposal.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Did you have any other members of Parliament from Manitoba or the NDP sign your objection?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Not from Manitoba, no.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** I noted that you didn't.

You're proposing that all the neighbourhoods that in the commission's report are being moved from Elmwood—Transcona into Kildonan—St. Paul remain in Elmwood—Transcona, and that the part of the RM of Springfield being put into Elmwood—Transcona be put instead into Kildonan—St. Paul. Is that what you're proposing?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That is what I'm proposing, and that the northern border of Elmwood—Transcona would be adjusted accordingly, so that it's a population-neutral move. What that would do is that it would retain Elmwood—Transcona as an urban-only riding, and it would maintain Kildonan—St. Paul as an urban-rural split riding, instead of....

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** How many people would be moved, then, from the north part of Elmwood—Transcona into Kildonan—St. Paul?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Well, it's not that folks in the north part of Transcona would go into Kildonan—St. Paul.

Here's what I'm proposing. Currently, Elmwood—Transcona doesn't extend past the perimeter, and what the commission is proposing is that a chunk of territory outside the perimeter would be added to Elmwood—Transcona.

What I'm suggesting is that it would make more sense to take that area, which has to come out of Provencher for population reasons, add it to Kildonan—St. Paul, and then adjust the northern boundary of Elmwood—Transcona or, alternatively, the southern boundary of Kildonan—St. Paul, in order to make up that difference in population, so that it's not strictly adding to Kildonan—St. Paul. It's just shifting between Elmwood—Transcona and Kildonan—St. Paul in order to keep one urban riding and one urban-rural split riding.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Are you suggesting that the population counts would be the same in each riding in regard to the change, or have you calculated what the new population counts would be in each riding?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I think there's a way to do it in a population-neutral way. My suggestion to the commission is just to extend the northern boundary of Elmwood—Transcona as much as would be necessary in order to have the same number of people in that area as are represented currently in the proposal to add population outside the city limits.

• (1230)

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** It's something between the two proposals that have been on the table so far.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That's right. All I'm suggesting is that the proposal to include territory outside of the city of Winnipeg stop, and that the territory instead be included in Kildonan—St. Paul, because I recognize something has to come out of Provencher. Then just simply move up by however many streets are required to equal the amount of population in the area outside of the city that they're currently suggesting would be added to Elmwood—Transcona.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Have you had any written presentations or had people speak to you from the RM of Springfield who told you they don't want to be part of Elmwood—Transcona?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** No, I haven't had people say they don't. If you think about the nature of representing the riding currently for what is a relatively small number of folks who would be added to Elmwood—Transcona, you're talking about establishing a relationship with a whole new council for Springfield. You're talking about another regional health authority. You're talking about having relationships with rural MLAs who currently aren't part of the riding. It is a significant change in the kind of work that the MP for Elmwood—Transcona would do, who they would liaise with and the issues that might come up.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** It is a natural sitting [*Inaudible—Editor*] area, so a) between Springfield and Transcona because they—

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It's an issue about which reasonable people can disagree. I think that on balance it's better to maintain one urban riding and one urban-rural split riding, and that there's a way to do that without offending any of the other principles the commission is rightly concerned about.

**The Chair:** That's excellent.

That was a very good exchange. I enjoyed it—the bit of overlap in between perhaps less so, but otherwise I feel like I know your communities better.

We have a special appearance today. I would like to welcome Mr. Kevin Lamoureux to committee.

You have six minutes.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As has been suggested, maybe I could stand for my presentation.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Chair, I have a few questions. Maybe I will just continue along the line of the questions my colleague, Mr. Maguire, was asking of Mr. Blaikie.

That was, have you had any discussions at all with the member from Kildonan and gotten her thoughts on what you're suggesting?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I haven't, no. As I said, Mr. Falk made a submission to the boundary commission, suggesting the very thing that it has undertaken in its proposal. My feeling was that it was likely Ms. Dancho would agree with Mr. Falk on that. I haven't had a conversation with her about it.

As I say, I'm here mostly to speak to the principle of maintaining an urban riding and an urban-rural riding. As I say, this is something about which reasonable people can disagree, but I think it makes sense to try to have cohesive urban ridings and cohesive rural ridings where that's possible. This is a case where it certainly is possible. There's no kind of major redrawing of lines that has to occur in order for what I'm proposing to be population-neutral. I just think on balance it's an argument about the principle of whether—

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** I'm just concerned about the amount of time I have, which is only six minutes. In regard to Mr. Falk, has he indicated any support for your suggestion, and have you or your party made representation in regard to the boundaries and the concerns you have?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** The initial proposal for Elmwood—Transcona that the boundary commission came out with—which is not the one we're discussing today—was also one of significant change. It was going to include some of the Island Lakes area in Elmwood—Transcona. There were a number of community representations about that. The commission chose not to include that area. That had been certainly my focus and the focus of a number of community members in that round of public consultation.



This now is something that the commission came up with in order to try to offer a different suggestion. There were representations made at the time to simply say that the best way to expand Elmwood—Transcona would be to move the northern boundary up along the river. To the extent that's what I'm proposing as a solution to this iteration of the boundary commission's proposal, we have seen representations in favour of that idea. That makes sense when we're talking about East Kildonan.

• (1235)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** I guess the concern I have is...it turns out Mr. Falk and the member from Kildonan—St. Paul are not on-side with you regarding your proposal.

I'm not a hundred per cent clear. Did you have an opportunity where you or someone representing you, your office or your party presented the types of concerns you're presenting today with PROC?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Are you asking whether we presented to the boundary commission?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Yes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Yes.

I'm saying that there were community members who suggested the best way to alter Elmwood—Transcona would be to move up the northern boundary along the river. That is an argument....

I'm not here to make new arguments. Some of those arguments prevailed in respect of Island Lakes. We heard from community members at Island Lakes who didn't think it made sense for them to be lumped in with Elmwood—Transcona, but to remain part of Saint Boniface—Saint Vital.

Punching the riding out past the city limit is a product of this second round, but the solution is the same. Community members advised the commission that they thought it would make the most sense to focus on the northern boundary by the river.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** With the population growth that's taking place in the capital region, it's quite significant. We have to balance that in terms of the rural component. It sounds as if the commission took that into consideration.

The issue for me, as it is for you, is the idea of urban-rural ridings. We've had debate inside the Manitoba legislature, too, in terms of 31 versus 26. It seems to me that this discussion has also taken place. I'm a bit reluctant to suggest that we make changes if so many people appear to be relatively comfortable with what's being proposed.

I want to go to Niki Ashton.

When we talk about reconciliation, I'm very sensitive to that point. Were there any discussions with the Manitoba assembly of first nations? Are they aware of the presentation and what you and Mr. Bezan would like to do?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Our office has been in touch with both first nations. We deal directly with the—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Can you just lift your mike up, please?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Yes. I'm sorry.

Our communication has been at that level. AMC obviously is one of the main advocacy organizations, but in terms of the boundaries, we're always in touch with the first nations directly.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** You have two indigenous communities specifically. It's important that you would have not only touched base with them, but that they're comfortable with what you're suggesting.

Second, given the role that the Manitoba assembly of first nations plays, I think it's also imperative that they be consulted in some fashion because, as you have pointed out in your presentation, we want to make sure there is that whole sense of reconciliation and they're comfortable with the suggestion. At one time, at least two of those reserves, I understand, were part of the Interlake riding.

James.

**Mr. James Bezan:** To respond, Madam Chair, we're really starting to feel that if you keep bouncing communities back and forth between ridings, they will become disenfranchised. They'll become very, I guess, not trusting in how this is unfolding and how their electoral considerations are being taken under advisement.

They were not consulted. Originally, they were going to stay within the Churchill—Keewatinook Aski riding. Then, for whatever reason, no presentations were made and they didn't consult with either Little Saskatchewan First Nation or Lake St. Martin First Nation about changing the boundaries.

There was a presentation that came from the Municipality of Grahamdale, based upon the first draft. I circulated our detailed proposal, along with the new drawings of the map showing the properties in the Municipality of Grahamdale, along with the maps of the boundary commission itself, which I circulated this morning.

If you look at the proposal—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to do this, but I was generous. I just can't be more—

**Mr. James Bezan:** You keep cutting me off.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We can talk about that after.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My colleagues will have the opportunity to answer my questions.

We've just received a number of new details and it's true that things are much clearer to us.

I'm going to ask some more general questions again.

We just realized that one issue continues to evolve. We need to take two things into account: we're hearing about demographic shifts and we're also seeing an expansion of geographical territory. I'd like to hear your thoughts on those two things.

MPs often wonder how they could be more available to people in their constituency if they have too many constituents. That's the first thing.

Secondly, how can MPs be available to their constituents when their riding covers a large area? I'm thinking of certain constituencies in Manitoba, for example. In Quebec, I'm thinking of ridings like Manicouagan and Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. MPs aren't more available just because they have fewer constituents in their riding.

Where does that leave us? Things are not done changing. We have to ask ourselves an important question, because many provinces are directly affected.

Do you believe that, in the end, we will have to reassess the formula? Yes, we have to take territorial expansion into account, which sometimes leads us to split ridings. Furthermore, some cities become very populated due to demographic shifts.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

• (1240)

[English]

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** For me, when you look at the riding of Elmwood—Transcona and at the riding of Kildonan—St. Paul, which is really what I'm here to talk about today, you see they're not those really large ridings. I'm sure Mr. Bezan and Ms. Ashton will have more to say in response to your question there.

For me, I don't think that's the challenge in respect to the ridings that I'm here to talk about. I think you can add a bit more of the rural area to Kildonan—St. Paul. Northeast Winnipeg is certainly large, and it's growing, so I think the question is whether we want to have a trajectory for northeast Winnipeg as it continues to grow that will see two ridings potentially stretch out, or whether we want to have a trajectory whereby there will be a northeast Winnipeg riding within the Winnipeg city limits, which continues to grow as the population grows. Then we would have another riding that captures more of that section of northeast Winnipeg and indeed sometimes a bit on the other side of the river, and have the rural area that it has now, perhaps less, perhaps more, depending on the rate of population growth.

To me, I'm really here on the principle and the trajectory of representation in northeast Winnipeg, and I think Mr. Bezan and Ms. Ashton are better placed to answer.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I'll address it from a rural Manitoba MP standpoint. I can actually say that we had rural Manitoba MPs of all political stripes work together after the first report came out, because the boundary commission in Manitoba was very tied to the principle that there needs to be recognition that populations stay within a 10% variance. That way, every riding is equal in the vote in the House.

We made the presentation that they should go beyond that variance, knowing that the act allows up to 25%, recognizing the fact

that Ms. Ashton has a riding that is already 70%, geographically, of the province of Manitoba—or in excess of that, 72.5%.

We were prepared to balance that off and work with Ms. Ashton to ensure that didn't happen. The boundary commission took that under advisement.

However, what was surprising after we saw it—and this was the reason we made our submission—was the splitting of one first nation and the removal of the other first nation that was, for the last number of years, in Ms. Ashton's riding and should be returned. The big issue here is reconciliation and disenfranchisement, and to make sure that those individuals feel some continuity every time we do the boundary readjustment.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Since you brought it up I like to come back to it because I didn't get all the answers to the questions I asked. Maybe it's because of the interpretation.

You talked about Indigenous communities and consultations. I want to be sure I understand you correctly. You say they were not consulted. Is that because there were no consultations on their lands or because they were unable to provide any information to the commission? Is there any difference?

[English]

**Mr. James Bezan:** I believe that, because of the first draft that came out from the boundaries commission, they were still in the Churchill riding, and the boundaries commission had actually proposed something similar to what I drew out. The RM of Grahamdale took exception to it, because it split the village of Gypsumville in half, so they made a suggestion to redraw that line. Unfortunately, when they redraw that boundary, they decided to put Little Saskatchewan back in and split Lake St. Martin in half. That was unfortunate. There was no consultation. The first nations then felt like they needed to make a presentation to the RM of Grahamdale; they thought they had to because of the split of the town of Gypsumville.

• (1245)

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I understand.

My final question is about territory and it's for Ms. Ashton.

If they end up expanding the territory in 10 years, will the proportion of individuals represented go down? What do people have to say about all that?

**The Chair:** Your time is up. Would you like to use your two minutes from the next round right now?

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Yes. I'll skip my turn next time.

I will repeat my question.

Due to demographic shifts, the ridings will have to be expanded if we consider the number of constituents. Some MPs will have to fly or spend a lot of time on the road to do their work, while other MPs who will have a lot of work to do will be able to get around on a bicycle.

How do you see this situation playing out? I'd like to hear your thoughts.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I think we would need a lot more than two minutes to discuss this issue.

I'm grateful that you mentioned the northern regions of Quebec, like Abitibi and James Bay. Many parallels can be made with the northern regions of Canada.

It's crucial that Parliament and the federal electoral boundaries commissions consider the challenges facing MPs who must represent regions like ours that are so huge and diverse.

It must also be recognized that Statistics Canada data doesn't reflect the actual population in some regions. This poses major problems, especially for Indigenous communities.

As you said, MPs who represent remote areas spent a lot of time in the air. In fact, that's why I was late this morning. Living conditions in those regions are very different. I'm thinking of the extreme cold, for example. When we do our work as MPs, certain factors are much harder for us, whereas they are taken for granted in other regions. For example, our offices are far away and we and our staff often need to travel. That's why it's so important that we can work virtually. It makes it possible for us to always stay in touch with our communities.

Lastly, it boils down to saying that we don't want two types of MPs: those whose offices are located close to the people they represent and those who, along with their staff, run themselves ragged to provide services to which all constituents are entitled.

So it's a matter of fairness, and I thank you for bringing this up, Ms. Gaudreau.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank everyone for their presentations today. I'm going to go to Ms. Ashton and then follow up with you, Mr. Bezan, on this very concerning process. I'm really glad to hear you're here doing the important work that you need to do, especially around indigenous communities.

My first question for Ms. Ashton is around the work she's done to consult with the indigenous communities that are currently within her riding. It sounds very clear to me that there was one process put forward. The nations felt comfortable with that, and then suddenly there was a new map provided by the commission. It really

confused everyone and has brought up issues that could not have been foretold.

One of the things that really concern me through this process is that we should be a country that is working actively to encourage indigenous communities to participate in the federal election process. The best way you can do that is by making sure their voices are heard.

I would like to hear from you, Ms. Ashton, on what work you've done with those communities to amplify their voices.

The second part of this question is about what the commission could potentially do better in the future to include indigenous voices and make sure they are heard.

As a B.C. MP, I think if the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs said anything about a nation without consulting with it first or amplifying its voice, that would be a huge concern in my riding. I think it's really important that we recognize that this is a nation-to-nation process and that we have to honour indigenous communities and not undermine their voices in any way.

I leave that to you.

• (1250)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Yes. Thank you for that recognition. That is at the crux of the work we do. I also want to acknowledge the work James Bezan has done for many years representing first nations. I think both of us, if James will allow me to share, feel that this particular change is unfair and disrespectful to these two first nations—deeply disrespectful—and, as noted, will contribute to disenfranchisement, which, as you pointed out, Ms. Blaney, is a huge issue that we've all said we need to contend with.

One way of contending with that is acting on this objection and reinstating these two first nations into Churchill—Keewatinook Aski. We've spent seven years building relationships. I don't mean this in a political sense; I mean it in terms of service and communities. In fact, one of our three offices is in Peguis First Nation, which is the biggest hub in the Interlake region. Essentially, we'd be cutting off two first nations that are relatively close to Peguis from being able to access constituency services, which I think we can all agree is not acceptable.

As was pointed out, again, these were two first nations that this proposal was never on the table to remove from the constituency. They didn't have the opportunity to voice anything. We hope the commission will take into account that it's not the way to do things. I think there were real efforts made in terms of the big picture and respecting first nations, but this is a particular indication that there is work to be done on that front, and a way of fixing that or correcting that wrong is by reinstating the entirety of Little Saskatchewan First Nation and the other half of Lake St. Martin back into Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Yes, I was going to come right to you, Mr. Bezan. I really appreciate it, and, before you start, I want to acknowledge how great it is to see non-partisan effort to have people come together and say that this is the right thing to do.

Please go ahead.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Niki and I worked many times on issues that affect both our areas and neighbouring ridings. It's important that we do that and advocate for our constituents.

I'll just say this. Why this change? If you look at the map, Pinaymootang, which is Fairford first nation, is still staying in the Churchill—Keewatinook Aski riding in the current proposal. Then, Little Saskatchewan is now returning back to Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. I've represented them in the past, and they are a great community. Then you have, right next door.... These three first nations are attached. Then you have the split first nation, Lake St. Martin First Nation, which Niki and I will both be servicing if we stick with the current proposal. We should just keep the boundary.

I go back to the principles that were laid out by the Manitoba boundary commission. One is to respect historical patterns and the continuity of previous riding boundaries. They also want to respect communities of interest or identity, for example, communities based around language, shared culture and history. Those are the principles that they worked on, yet, for whatever reason, without the consultation nation to nation, they are now.... I fear, as Niki does, the disenfranchisement and the potential lack of participation in the next federal election going forward. We can't just keep bouncing them back and forth.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that. I really appreciate the importance of the nations' knowing which riding, not necessarily which politician, they belong with.

One of the things I've picked up in this conversation is the interaction between the different nations that are potentially going to be split apart.

Maybe I'll start with you first, Ms. Ashton, to talk about the impact if those folks were.... I'll leave that with you. Thank you.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Absolutely. I know, Ms. Blaney, you know how life is for indigenous communities. James has just talked about how physically close these communities are geographically, so as one can imagine, families are split up between these communities. The husband will be from one community and the wife will be from the other, so they are constantly back and forth.

Also, very importantly, people attend very similar celebrations. In fact, Lake St. Martin had its first powwow in recent history this past summer, which brought that entire region together. Communi-

ties are connected in terms of culture and tradition, and then day-to-day living.

Pinaymootang, which is in Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, is the central hub for shopping, for medical services and for education, so this idea—and if you looked at the map, this makes no sense—of literally carving them out because they are separate communities is just not on. These are deeply connected communities. In fact, to get to Little Saskatchewan, you have to drive through Pinaymootang. You would drive through Churchill—Keewatinook Aski to get out of it and then, as James pointed out, in the case of Lake St. Martin, part of the community would literally be in his riding and the other part....

We're not talking about two sides of a big boulevard in a big city, where people know they are part of different constituencies. That is not something we have here in our communities, and we shouldn't have it. Our community in Lake St. Martin is smaller but, like I said, it is a community that has worked hard to bring about unity as part of its relocation plan, and this destabilizes that.

Again, we don't want fewer people exercising their vote and engaging in Canadian democracy. Acting on this objection and reinstating the communities would be a critical piece to voter engagement.

• (1255)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

We're going to come to the top of the hour by giving a couple of minutes to Mr. Maguire, followed by Ms. Romanado.

Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Quickly, I was going back, Mr. Blaikie, and looking at the first question I asked. I asked, over the last 10 years, what the population increase was in Elmwood—Transcona. You weren't sure what it was, but in your letter, you said that the population has drastically increased in those areas.

I wondered if that's a contradiction you can overcome for me.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I don't think it's a contradiction. All you have to do is look around Elmwood—Transcona. There has been a ton more housing built in the last 10 years. There are whole tracts of land that were fields 10 years ago and have subsequently been filled in with developments. It's no secret that the population is growing.

I don't think it's a contradiction to say I know that the population has grown considerably, but I don't have the exact figures with me today. I would say further—

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** That's good.

Are you aware that there were submissions that all of Springfield go into Elmwood—Transcona?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I am aware, but I respectfully disagree with the submissions.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** I don't like that idea either.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** One of the things to keep in mind is what I'm proposing. If you think about moving the northern boundary of Elmwood—Transcona up to, say, Edison Avenue or Springfield Road, or even Chief Peguis Trail or anywhere along there...however many are required in order to make up for the population that the commission is currently—

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** For a balanced split.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** —relying on the arm of Springfield for, those folks are just a few blocks over from other folks who already live in East Kildonan. There's a clear affinity of interest versus folks for whom highway driving is a regular part of their life—at least, proportionately more—because they drive into the city a fair bit for work, shopping and other things. There are folks whose kids are under a rural school division as opposed to a Winnipeg school division. There are folks who pay taxes in a completely different municipality.

There are some.... If you think of people living on Edison Avenue versus people living in Dugald, one is clearly already a lot more—

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Thanks.

I'm going to have to ask Mr. Bezan if he wants to expand on the words he didn't get a chance to say earlier.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Certainly. To reiterate, if I have a couple of seconds, I think most of the questions we have already answered, making sure that we respect what the commission's priorities were, but this was a surprise when the report came out.

It's different from what most of the municipality had asked for. When there was no consultation with first nations in that area.... I think we want to make sure this is reflected in the final report.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have a couple of minutes, Ms. Romanado.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you so much.

Building on what you said, Mr. Bezan, this isn't the first report we have looked at that seems a bit like a hoodwink. The initial proposal was one thing. Consultations were held, and then when the final report came out, it was nowhere near what was initially put forward.

I wanted to check something with you, Ms. Ashton. You mentioned that the two reserves that are affected by this change were not consulted. I know that in previous submissions of objections to this committee, members of Parliament were able to obtain letters of support, whether they be from the Manitoba assembly of first nations or the two reserves that are affected.

Would that be something you could obtain for us to include in the package, so that we could also have that support to submit? Could you let us know?

• (1300)

**Mr. James Bezan:** I'll let Niki Ashton answer the question on whether the two affected first nations were able to get letters to us. I know she has reached out to them.

I included in the packs we'll circulate to you the letter from the Municipality of Grahamdale, which accepts the new boundary I've drafted and encapsulates....

I think the problem was in trying to get around the village of Gypsumville. There are all these new lands that Little Saskatchewan and Lake St. Martin acquired within the municipality boundaries, which are already part of the reserve land as treaty land entitlement or compensation for all the flood damage that has happened along Lake St. Martin over the last 15 years, or are about to be converted over to reserve land. I think the boundaries commission just said, "Okay, we'll put them all in, one way or the other," but they split Lake St. Martin, which made no sense at all.

With the boundaries I'm providing to you.... If you look at the property map, it clearly delineates and shows that we've been able to get all the property the first nations have in the RM of Grahamdale within the new boundary we're proposing.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I will quickly add that we have been in touch with the leadership of both first nations. Certainly, we've offered them the opportunity to write a letter of support.

However, I don't think the onus, frankly, should be on them. These are communities dealing with crises on a daily basis. As I said, both communities have been deeply impacted by floods and recently relocated in the last few years. They are literally—our offices deal with them—dealing with crises on a daily basis. Now we're asking them to do the work of saying they were never consulted by the boundaries commission.

I guess what I'm saying is, I hope we receive the letters. We'll see—

**The Chair:** I appreciate that answer. I'm sorry, but I have to cut it off, because we're already over time. I think the technical issues are good reminders that some of those steps need to be taken sooner.

On behalf of PROC members, I want to thank Ms. Ashton, Mr. Bezan and Mr. Blaikie. I will remind all members that anything you provide to this committee will be submitted to the House, then will go to the commission.

With that, I wish you a good day.

Quickly, for PROC committee members: Stay tuned. The subcommittee has conversed about next week's agenda, so we'll get it over to you. You'll see two invitations we received for people to come visit PROC. They are both informal. One will be during committee time. One will be just after committee time. I hope we can make sure someone will be there for those informal conversations.

Yesterday, the Quebec report was distributed to all members, so the objection period will end on March 3. We'll then work on our next steps forward.

**A voice:** Alberta [*Inaudible—Editor*].

**The Chair:** Alberta was distributed today. It gets even more exciting. There are just a couple more to come.

Keep well and safe, and I wish you the best. We'll see you next week.

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