



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 064**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Thursday, April 20, 2023

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





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Thursday, April 20, 2023

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 64 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to continue its study on the "Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of British Columbia" in the first hour. In the second hour, we will go in camera to consider the draft report for the federal electoral boundaries commission for Alberta.

There is a budget that has been shared with me for this study. I will be asking, once we go in camera, for support of the budget, which we usually get, unless there are no concerns now.

Are we okay to pass the budget for what we need for the electoral boundaries commission for British Columbia? Are there any concerns?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, consider it passed.

The other thing is the extension for the reports. There's been a conversation taking place to make sure, if the House rises, and when the commissions report back, that members have access to those reports right away, rather than having to wait until we return in the fall. We're just getting an answer on that. I'm sure we'll get one sooner rather than later, then we'll find our way forward to officially ask for the extension of the reports, so we can satisfy our work under the act.

For our first hour, we have with us today Ms. Rachel Blaney, MP, North Island—Powell River; Mr. Richard Cannings, MP, South Okanagan—West Kootenay; Ms. Tracy Gray, MP, Kelowna—Lake Country; the Honourable Harjit Sajjan, MP, Vancouver South; and Mr. Patrick Weiler, MP, West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

You will each have up to four minutes for your opening statements, after which we'll proceed to comments. Do not ever feel you have to use all of your time, because I'm sure we can help you use it.

With that, we will go to Ms. Blaney.

Welcome.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Everything will just be from me and not through you, which is a bit unusual for me in this space.

I want to thank everybody for taking the time.

This is a minor change to reflect what is, I think, a better name for the riding I represent. Right now, the North Island component of my riding is very similar to the provincial riding, which is also called "North Island", so that part is fine. It's a good name that makes sense.

On the other side of my riding, of course, is a huge chunk of the mainland. I have a neighbour here with me in committee today, and we share an area in common. That is the Powell River part of my riding—a name reflective of just one community, not the many communities that are represented.

My suggestion to the commission is to change the words "Powell River" to the word "qathet". This is a name the Tla'amin nation gave to the regional district of Powell River. They received it with much graciousness, then changed their regional name—their district—to reflect that name: qathet. If you go to that area now, you'll see that a lot of businesses and organizations have changed their name from "Powell River" to reflect the more regional approach. "qathet" means "working together", and I respect the nation's name and the presentation of that name.

I recommend that the name be "North Island—qathet" and recognize that the nations related to Tla'amin—K'ómoks, Homalco and Klahoose, which have a shared culture and language—have all agreed to this change and respect that. I have had a conversation with the Powell River mayor. He did not express any concerns at the time.

I also want to make sure the committee understands that Powell River was named after Israel Wood Powell. He was the first superintendent for Indian Affairs in British Columbia and the chief architect of colonial policies, including residential schools and the banning of the potlatch. It's my understanding that he never came to the community.

I hope everyone can agree. I know that is the normal practice and thank you for taking some time with me today.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** It has indeed been an honour and a privilege.

Thank you, Ms. Blaney, for sharing that with us and for giving us back a minute and 30.

Mr. Cannings, welcome.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to be here and to present here today.

The recent report of the B.C. Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission proposes major changes to the riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay. In rough terms, the proposal removes about half of the riding on the east and north sides and adds a similar amount of area and population to the west side. As well, the riding is given a new name: Similkameen—West Kootenay.

The areas being removed include Big White Ski Resort and Beaverdell in the Kettle Valley; the town of Nakusp and other villages on the east side of the Arrow Lakes; the Slokan Valley; suburbs of Castlegar; and the suburbs of Trail in the Beaver Valley, including the towns of Montrose and Fruitvale.

The area added is the entire Similkameen Valley.

I'm making this objection on behalf of over 1,100 of my constituents who have contacted me with deep concerns that there should have been a second round of public engagement following these major changes. Some of these changes violate the principles of community of interest, community of identity, and the historical pattern of the electoral district.

I'll say here that I included more detail in my written submission than I'm able to present here in four minutes.

The first draft from the commission made considerable changes to the west side of the riding. Not surprisingly, that proposal generated little or no interest at all in the West Kootenay, as the boundaries remained exactly as they had been for the last 10 years. There was no public interest from the West Kootenay in engaging with the commission then.

The second draft remedied the first draft concerns from the west side of the riding, but it made drastic changes to the east side in doing so. Now there is no public comment process to handle concerns about these latest changes.

First, the Beaver Valley is removed from the riding, and that includes Fruitvale and Montrose. This is easily the most problematic change suggested in the proposal. The Beaver Valley lies immediately adjacent to the eastern boundary of the city of Trail and is essentially a part of Trail in every way. There is a very long history of the connections between these communities, and they've always been included with Trail in federal and provincial electoral boundaries. This one change has generated about 1,000 emails, letters and briefs from local residents, elected officials, unions, businesses and other groups concerned about the impact that this change would have. This must be fixed.

Similarly, the communities immediately north of Castlegar are all essentially suburbs of Castlegar. Some of these have been retained in this riding and others have been removed, creating a situa-

tion where rural neighbours find themselves not in one, not in two, but in three different ridings.

The Slokan Valley is arguably the heart of the West Kootenay, but it is now removed from ridings shared by its West Kootenay neighbours and included in the new Vernon riding.

There is one change that my constituents support, and that is the transfer of the Big White Ski Resort to the Kelowna riding.

To summarize, my constituents are asking—and asking in the strongest possible terms—to retain the Beaver Valley, the suburbs of Castlegar and the Slokan Valley within the riding that is presented called South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

I'll conclude by suggesting that this could be fixed by keeping the Similkameen Valley with West Kelowna and making any further adjustments within greater Kelowna. This would allow communities in the West Kootenay, particularly the Beaver Valley, to remain with their historic communities of interest and identity.

The riding, whatever its final shape, should include the word “Okanagan” in its name as that valley makes up more than half the population of the riding.

Thank you.

• (1110)

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

Now we will proceed with Mrs. Gray.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, colleagues, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today regarding the boundary readjustment report for British Columbia.

I am appearing before you today to raise an objection regarding concerns brought to me by the mayor of the municipal government the district of Lake Country on behalf of residents in that community with regard to the latest report on boundaries. The objection pertains to the name of the electoral district where the district of Lake Country would be included, if this report is adopted.

In the latest proposal, the district of Lake Country will be part of a new proposed constituency named Vernon-Monashee.

The mayor of the district of Lake Country, on behalf of residents, has asked that I express to the committee a proposal to add “Lake Country” to the name of this new constituency. A letter from the mayor making this request was also submitted to the committee when I filed my objections.

If this letter has not been distributed to committee members, I would be happy to table it now.

In the letter, Lake Country Mayor Blair Ireland states, “We have received many comments, letters and emails about the loss of the use of our name”, and he goes on to say that “our citizens are very passionate that we retain an identity in the future riding.”

There are several reasons why including Lake Country in the name of the new electoral district makes sense.

First, according to Statistics Canada, Lake Country is one of the fastest growing communities in British Columbia, with a five-year population growth of 22% reported in the latest census. Latest population estimates have Lake Country at over 17,000 people.

Second, the current electoral district has the name of the two largest municipalities in the name, Kelowna and Lake Country. The new electoral district only has the name of one of the two largest municipalities, Vernon.

Third, previous public drafts of these reports included Lake Country in the electoral district's name.

Lastly, fourth, by adding Lake Country to the Vernon-Monashee riding name, it would refer to three geographic areas, which would not deviate from names of other proposed constituencies in British Columbia, including many in the interior.

I hope that the committee will take this reasonable recommendation into consideration when developing their final report to the commission, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray. I'm very confident that committee members will...

We will proceed with Minister Sajjan.

Welcome.

**Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Vancouver South, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Today, I'm before you to present a significant concern about splitting a very historical community in Vancouver South with the most recent boundary change proposals. The ramifications of this on communities of identity and historical patterns is quite significant. It impacts one of the pioneer Sikh societies in North America and greatly discards their identity and legacy.

I present this not only as a member of Parliament, but as someone who actually grew up there and has a deep personal understanding of the contributions, impact and legacy of the communities in question.

The heart of this objection is rooted in the absence of consultation in making this recommendation, which is a clear departure from paragraph 15(1)(b) of the act. The “community of interest or community of identity” and “historical pattern” in this district and province references the South Asian community, which includes many Punjabis and Sikhs. The diaspora's contribution and history in the neighbourhood is recognized and respected by all three levels of government from all political stripes.

The essence of the commission's recommendation is to split the Sunset neighbourhood in south Vancouver into three different rid-

ings. The westernmost boundary of Vancouver South is currently Cambie Street. Moving it eastward onto Fraser Street without any insight or feedback will separate two key community pillars.

The proposed change would place the Punjabi market into Vancouver Arbutus and leave the Khalsa Diwan Society in the new riding of Vancouver Fraserview—South Burnaby. Additionally, this change will also fracture the Sunset on Fraser business improvement association into three ridings. The northern portion of the riding would be in Vancouver Kingsway.

Please note that the commission's initial proposal made in June 2022 did not remotely indicate any such segregation. In fact, the initial proposal left the western, northern and southern boundaries of Vancouver South untouched, while extending the eastern boundary into South Burnaby, which is not unprecedented and happened for a short duration in the early 2000s when the riding became known as Vancouver South—Burnaby.

When the second boundary proposal was made, organizations like Khalsa Diwan Society and the Punjabi market were completely taken by surprise by this recommendation, which ignores the history of the two entities in south Vancouver and Sunset.

I trust that the commission was simply unaware of what this vital corner of Vancouver South means to the entire community. I know that the commission did not intend to separate the pioneer Sikh society, which was established in 1902, from the Punjabi market. I know that they did not intend to separate the two entities that hosted the first Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan in North America. I know that the commission did not intend to separate two entities that have a long-standing history of advocacy and engagement when they have historically not been welcome or felt at home in other places.

I know this was not intentional. As such, I bring forth the objection with the faith that this will be rectified.

I also do so standing shoulder to shoulder with many of my colleagues and riding neighbours, as well as community leaders from all backgrounds. This includes Chief Wayne Sparrow of the Musqueam nation, who has seen first-hand the neighbourhood's work towards reconciliation. It includes my parliamentary colleagues who are my current riding neighbours, including Members of Parliament Taleeb Noormohamed, Don Davies, Jagmeet Singh, Wilson Miao and Parm Bains. Each one of them understands and agrees that the Sunset should remain united.

The objection also has support provincially and municipally from Vancouver city councillors, commissioners, as well as members of the legislative assembly of all political stripes.

In my objection submission you will see almost 20 letters from organizations and leadership across south Vancouver, and organizations that are not, in some cases, even connected to Sunset—all fighting to keep Sunset united.

Simply put, what we are asking for, with the proposals we have made, is to keep the two historical communities together.

Thank you.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we will go to Mr. Weiler.

Welcome.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, members of PROC, for having me here today.

I am appearing before you today in response to the proposed changes to the boundaries of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country. I am objecting to both the changes of the boundary itself, which divides a clear and long-standing community of interest, and the name change, which would exclude a majority of the population.

My first objection pertains to the proposed eastern boundary changes, which split the key historic neighbourhood of Ambleside Dundarave. Ambleside Dundarave lies at the core of West Vancouver, contains most of the public institutions and amenities of the district, and is home to organizations that represent this cohesive area, such as the Ambleside Dundarave Business Improvement Association and the Ambleside and Dundarave Residents Association. It's relatively flat, densely populated, and clearly demarcated by adjacent neighbourhoods and geographical features.

In my opinion, in severing this community of interest, the commission has run afoul of its mandate under subparagraph 15(1)(b)(i) to consider "the community of interest or community of identity in or the historical pattern of an electoral district in the province".

The commission's public hearing on this name change last June was well attended, and clear opposition was expressed by residents in the affected area. In addition, representative bodies, such as the mayor and council of the district of West Vancouver and the City of North Vancouver, the West Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, the Ambleside and Dundarave Residents Association, and the former Conservative member of Parliament in my riding, John Weston, all opposed this change, and accordingly, made written submissions to the commission.

In response to the concerns raised about the placement of the boundary, the commission amended its proposal to move the boundary from 15th Street to 21st Street. Rather than mitigate the concerns raised, it exacerbated them by further severing the core of the community. To keep the community whole, the boundary should, in fact, have been moved westwards.

Given that the commission has decided that it must split West Vancouver, I am proposing an alternative option that would minimally impair communities of interest within West Vancouver, while aligning the population nearer to the electoral quotient. This proposal represents a new argument to the commission, which has been necessitated by the amendment it made to the initial boundary change.

I propose establishing the eastern boundary at 11th Street, thereby aligning it with the well-known eastern boundary of Ambleside. This would result in a population of 123,717, which would align it with the average population size of the proposed electoral districts on Vancouver Island, which share borders, including my colleague's, and many characteristics to this riding, such as a reliance on ferries.

With the flat population growth in West Vancouver as a whole, only the area east of 11th Street is likely to see any significant population growth. Shifting the boundary to 11th Street could be done without affecting neighbouring electoral districts by ensuring the only area of growth will then join a fast growing North Vancouver district, which would have a slightly lower population at first, with no other changes to the boundaries.

Given that the alternative proposals could create a domino effect on other North Shore districts, I strongly recommend that the commission not make further adjustments to neighbouring districts unless absolutely necessary.

My second objection concerns the proposal for renaming the electoral district to Howe Sound—West Vancouver. This new name excludes references to the Sunshine Coast and the Sea to Sky, which are distinct areas of the district. Only half of the population would be represented by the new name, which could lead to confusion and frustration among residents. Keeping the existing name would better reflect the district's geography and population base. Therefore, I recommend that the commission retain the current name.

I have spoken at length with my colleagues on the proposed changes, and I am grateful for the support of my neighbouring MP for North Vancouver, Jonathan Wilkinson, and from many other fellow B.C. members of Parliament. I am seeking the support of this committee, as well.

I believe that my alternative proposal to set the eastern boundary at 11th Street strikes the right balance between a manageable population size, little impact on neighbouring ridings, keeping long-standing communities of interest intact, and ensuring the clear, quality representation that constituents deserve.

Thank you.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to six-minute rounds for questions and comments. We will commence with Mr. Albas, followed by Mr. Noormohamed, and then Ms. Gaudreau, followed by Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Albas, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all my colleagues for being here today.

Obviously, it's a very difficult position for elected officials to be in. I firmly believe that this should not be the sole premise of elected officials, although we have the task of at least bearing representation, so I appreciate that everyone is here.

With the exception of Mr. Cannings, Conservatives do support, in principle, the idea that a member of Parliament should be able to be accountable to their constituents for a name change. We support Tracy Gray, as well as other members who are here.

The reason I have put a little caveat to Mr. Cannings is that I actually represent the Similkameen area. I was glad to hear him say in his presentation that if the Similkameen is maintained in the current boundaries, he isn't proposing to take that away. That is what I inferred.

Is that correct, that the Similkameen would maintain its identity in whatever happens?

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I've talked to people in the Similkameen, and their one message is that the Similkameen Valley should be maintained whole. In the initial proposal, it was cut in half. They objected to it, so it was—

**Mr. Dan Albas:** I'm just stating.... As you said, the Okanagan is a significant part, and it should have its name in it. I'm also suggesting that the Similkameen should have a name in whichever riding the electoral boundary commission decides to go with.

That's just putting that on the record because I think it's important to be hearing from the person who represents the area.

Mr. Cannings, when it comes to your issue with process, we have heard other members of Parliament saying that there was a radical revision that people weren't able to respond to. The challenge you run into is that, ultimately, the commission has a job to do. Every time it puts out a proposal, I imagine there would be people who say they're against that now. At the end of the day, it has a job to do. If it were to drastically change the boundaries yet again, I'm sure there would be objections to that.

The Keremeos mayor asked—and so did the whole Similkameen—for it to be maintained as a whole. They have been part of that riding from when it was called Southern Interior. As much as I love representing them, they have said that being part of Penticton is their natural trading route. Do you see the problem of separating those kinds of things out as you've chosen here?

• (1125)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Yes, I would agree with everything you've said there.

First of all, I don't like being put in this position where I have to make suggestions on behalf of my constituents. Being an MP, I think there's a flaw in that process. I would rather that MPs not be involved at any stage in this. However, with regard to the Similkameen, as I say, I've talked to people in the Similkameen. Their main thing is that they want to be made whole. What caused the issue on the east side of the riding in the second draft of this proposal was the fact that the commission added the Similkameen to the west half. I love the Similkameen as well. I would agree that it fits with Penticton better, but it has been—I would hope—well represented by yourself for the past—

**Mr. Dan Albas:** I would hope we would agree on that.

Again, though, both Penticton and the Penticton Indian Band did ask the commission to make the change to keep Penticton whole and to keep Penticton Indian Band as part of your riding. That has been seen there.

Again, this is a very challenging job, but I wanted to make sure the point was made that Similkameen wants to keep its name there.

I'll go to Mr. Weiler.

Mr. Weiler, I appreciate that we're all elected officials here. You have said that you're unhappy with the current process, as well as the.... You've made an alternate proposal, but it says very clearly in the report by the commission that it did have.... Outlined on page 17 of the commission's report, a public hearing was held in West Vancouver. The report says, "Many presentations and submissions urged the Commission to maintain the present boundaries of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country."

Again, you run into the fact that the population of this existing electoral district is higher than the provincial quota.

It does say on page 17 that "Aware of the concerns expressed, the Commission concludes that decreasing the population of the district is necessary, and it views dividing West Vancouver as the most advantageous decision, given the limitations of the physical geography and the population distribution of the area." So, they have heard it.

On page 36 of their conclusion, it says they have considered every single submission, and this is what they've come down with.

Why do you think that your proposal is viable given that they have said that they've looked at it and it was found to be wanting, considering the population growth they have to deal with?

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** At the public hearing, the objection that was raised was to keep it whole, which would have actually been a much greater population. Given that they've made this determination that it must be separated in some way, shape or form, this is a better way of separating it because it keeps the communities of interest whole within West Vancouver.

The population would be dropping by about 8,000 in this scenario, but it would be similar to the population sizes of the ridings on Vancouver Island, with which it shares many similarities.

I also think the commission made a misinterpretation of the evidence it received on moving the boundaries from 15th Street to 21st Street. They thought that would be keeping the community of interest whole, but what it actually did was exacerbate the concerns by moving it in that direction, by moving the severing right into the middle.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks, colleagues.

I have a couple of questions for you, Minister Sajjan. There's obviously this discussion, as Mr. Albas has noted, about how we make sure that these changes are going to be made, and about how they've gotten lots of feedback. What is your view on the feedback they would have received had the most recent version of the boundaries that were proposed been received earlier? That's number one.

As part of that, can you take a minute to explain what message this redistribution, as it stands proposed today, says to the community?

• (1130)

**Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan:** Thank you very much for the question.

First of all, if they were asked about the current proposal that's there, you would have a very strong objection. All of the communities that are outlined would be presenting.

I'm just going to give you the historical context of the community. The Punjabi Sikh community in Sunset in 1902 started to flourish. The Khalsa Diwan Society, the oldest Sikh society in North America, was created in 1902. Because of the community, people came in and flocked there, and you now have Punjabi Market. As you know, on Main Street it actually says Punjabi Market on all the signs and is recognized by the city and many others. In terms of the Khalsa Diwan Society and where the Ross Street gurdwara is, the road is also known as Khalsa Diwan Road.

When the original proposal was put forward, we felt they knew the historical significance of this community. People felt, "Why would you object to this?" So it did—I'm being very polite—come as a shock.

By the way, I just want to make it very clear that when I'm talking about support, this is regardless of what party you support. Everybody knows this. Probably the best example of visually representing what I just talked about is the Vaisakhi parade, which happened just last weekend. It starts at the Ross Street gurdwara. Close to 100,000 people show up. The route itself goes through Punjabi Market and through the neighbourhoods and back to Khalsa Diwan Road. You couldn't get a better example than this.

So I think it was just literally an oversight on this, with a ripple effect created when the Marpole portion was put into Richmond. I'm hoping that this will be taken into consideration, putting the community back together, because representation for the community is extremely important.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you.

In 30 seconds, could you explain to and just reassure everyone about the numbers in the populations? How confident are you that the numbers work out in a way that this would not be a major problem?

**Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan:** I appreciate you and other colleagues in working very well together on the proposal we put in place. The numbers actually match up extremely closely. I'm also thankful for Don Davies and his support on this, because everybody knows, as I said, the significance of it. The numbers do match up. I'm not opposing the eastern portion of the riding. Historically, the riding has actually represented Burnaby. What I'm fighting for is keeping the community together.

The numbers do match up based on our proposal.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you.

Mr. Weiler, I have a question for you. As somebody who played hockey at the rec centre in West Van and then would walk the two blocks to the library, I find it bizarre that they would now be proposed to be in two different ridings.

You talked about the western boundary effectively of Dunderave being 28th Street. Can you talk a little bit about what kind of confusion this will cause for people who live on either side of the line of 21st Street being in one riding or the other, particularly the large number of seniors and others that you have who wouldn't necessarily know that they're no longer voting, for example, at the seniors centre? Can you just talk a little bit about the consequences of that?

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you for the question.

You'll see in my submission on page 10 a map that will illustrate this as well. It just shows all of the public amenities that are right in the centre of this area, the area that's going to be on each side of the boundary that's been proposed to be changed.

To your point, there are a lot of seniors who live in this area, and the main advance polling site is actually right on the boundary of where the boundary commission has proposed it being set. This is very concerning, because that is one of the most fundamental times for our democracy. These are folks who may not know which district they're going to be voting in. That concerns me greatly.

It's not a natural boundary, because it is simply a street in the middle of the community, right in the core, which in no other scenario has been separating communities. In terms of where you're going to church and where you're going to your seniors activity centre, the biggest church and the biggest seniors activity centre would be on opposite sides of the boundary. This is likely to cause a lot of confusion. I don't think that's good for democracy. That could have a major impact on voting turnout as well.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** The other thing that has come up though is the question of population and making sure that you don't have bleed and impact on other ridings. You noted this in your submission. When you talked about the North Shore in particular and about making sure that communities' interests are protected and that you also respect the issue related to population, you touched on this.

Can you spend a little more time just reconciling how this would all work in terms of the numbers without impacting ridings to your east?



**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Absolutely. When we're looking at the district of West Vancouver, it's had flat and sometimes negative population growth in recent years. It's not a community that's growing quickly; it's sometimes shrinking. The only areas that are likely to see any growth are the area around Park Royal and the area on Taylor Way, where you're now seeing some apartment buildings that are proposed and some that are actually opening up. That's the area that would be added to the North Vancouver riding, which does share some similarities. The North Vancouver riding would be a bit small at first, but it would quickly make up that population difference.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Welcome, Mr. Champoux.

You have the floor.

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

I'll address you first, Ms. Blaney. I wanted to talk a little bit about the importance that we place on this on behalf of our constituencies. You were here when my colleague from Manicouagan, Ms. Gill, presented her opposition, which is somewhat similar to yours. She said something that I find very interesting: "[...] in the context of reconciliation and the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I believe it is indispensable to include First Nations in the naming process."

That's what you want, isn't it? Do you think the commission is doing enough on reconciliation?

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** That's a very interesting question. Thank you for asking that.

In my role on this committee, we've heard repeatedly that there are concerns that have been brought forward by indigenous communities about the fact that the process may not be as helpful to those communities. One of the things we may want to explore within this country is how those communities are engaged in a more meaningful way.

It is always important for us to look at our structures, because if we talk about discrimination and about the history of colonialism in Canada, it's the structures themselves that have processes intrinsically built into them in which marginalized communities are disenfranchised. Having that meaningful discussion I think is really important, and that's why I'm very happy to bring forward this suggested name change, which I think will really reflect the riding I represent and many of the people who are in it.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** There are many more indigenous communities than can be included in the riding names. Do you think we should do this systematically when it is possible to do so?

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** It really depends on the riding. I have the third-largest riding in British Columbia. I represent over 20 indigenous communities. One of the reasons I was able to offer this is that the territory I represent is broadly represented just in that one area by a nation that's related to other nations that were all comfortable, and they share a language. That made that portion better.

I represent a broader part of the mainland, but that part of the mainland with many other nations, which are just as important as this one, is represented by the North Island, which is the provincial name. The challenge with that of course is that there are many nations, and trying to figure out which names would be used would be hard. I think it's an important conversation to have, because it is the names of the first people of this territory, and it should be recognized in every way that we possibly can. If the members from that region come forward to me with some ideas, it would be very interesting to go through that process. I would be very excited to do that with them.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you.

Mr. Cannings, I'm going to talk to you, even though I'm probably the person who is the most jealous of your riding, which I had the opportunity to visit a few times in my previous life, before I got into politics. You are currently facing some significant challenges in your riding. I know that you have provided the commissioner with some interesting avenues for solutions.

I would like to hear a little bit about the upheaval that all of the proposed changes will bring to the Okanagan Valley region if they come to fruition.

[English]

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Well, the disruptions would more affect the West Kootenay side. Okanagan is retained as it is now, and that's a good thing.

On the Kootenay side, we have, as I said, communities like Beaver Valley, which is a part of Trail. That's the city. If you go out the other way, it's just mountains and forest. It's being taken away from Trail for the first time in electoral history, whether provincial or federal, and put with a riding where the nearest MP's office is over one of the highest mountain passes in the country.

Similarly, we have the suburbs of Castlegar, Brilliant and Thrums. People live there and work in Castlegar—or people in Castlegar work there. Now those suburbs are being taken out and put in that same East Kootenay riding, or they're put in Slocan Valley with Vernon, which is, again, a ferry trip. We don't have many ferry trips in the interior of B.C. There's one ferry that you have to cross and then another major mountain range to get to your MP.

Those are the kinds of disruptions. It's not just the inconvenience; it's the communities of identity. These people identify as West Kootenay residents, and they are being put in by themselves with communities that are not part of West Kootenay. It's for no apparent reason, other than trying to make sure those numbers are right. We've put forward a proposal where the numbers work. Those communities would be kept whole and with their neighbours.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I find what you say interesting. We had a proposal for the Drummond riding, and I made the same arguments in opposition to that suggestion. Those were the elements that went into the decision to keep the riding intact. I find it interesting that you bring the same arguments, but you were not given the same solution or the same answer.

I imagine you have the support of your community, your fellow citizens and your stakeholders in this. Do you feel like everyone has been heard?

How do you feel about the commission's response to your requests?

[*English*]

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Briefly, because I hear the bell ringing, I would say that the people have certainly let me know, but they have had no public process. The public process was about the first draft when Okanagan was split up. Now the Kootenays are split up, and there's no public process. It's an even more concerning change. That's why I'm saying that, in situations where you have such a drastic difference between the two drafts, there should be some public process.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I'd like to direct my first set of questions to Mr. Cannings.

Mr. Cannings, I think you've reinforced very well the extent to which your constituents felt blind-sided by the latest round of changes that were proposed. It's a bit of a similar scenario in our riding, where folks were never given the opportunity to speak to a proposal. They were never made aware of it by the time the boundary commission made the proposal in that second round.

I want to go back to some of the issues that you've raised. You mentioned that you're objecting on behalf of 1,000 constituents. What were their main concerns about the proposed changes to your riding?

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** We've received over 1,100 emails and letters.

As I say, all of the mayors, councils and people in regional districts have all spoken with one voice on this. That's because of these changes that occurred in the second round. They don't have an opportunity to go to a public hearing, as was available in the first round.

I haven't counted up the exact number, but the vast majority of them are about the decision to take Beaver Valley away from Trail, I would say. There's been a huge swell of concern from that area. That's the highest priority.

It's a similar situation in the suburbs of Castlegar. Here we have a community that is surrounded by rural areas, mountains and forests, and its immediate suburbs are taken and put in a different riding.

This includes Brilliant, where the big community centre, the USCC centre, is the main big hall for Castlegar, and it's now in a different riding.

The vast majority of concerns are around the West Kootenay side of things.

In the second round, as I say, Big White was moved into Kelowna. That's a good idea, but they added the community of Beaverdell with that for no reason. It should be kept with the rest of Kettle Valley.

As I say, the people of West Kootenay want to stay in West Kootenay. They want West Kootenay to be retained as whole as possible. Those are the vast majority of messages that I've received.

• (1145)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Yes, there's a very clear message there.

In your objection, you mentioned that it would be logical to keep the population of the city of Kamloops in one riding since it has never been divided in the past. Kamloops is not in your riding. What pushed you to mention Kamloops?

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I was asked by residents of Kamloops to make that proposal. It's a long way from my riding, but I felt obliged to put that in there.

Again, it's these situations where we have a lot of ridings that are mostly rural areas and because of the need to try to get the numbers right, the commission tucked in and took parts of Kamloops and put them with different ridings.

I think in that situation we tried to create maps that would ameliorate that situation. It was very difficult. I felt obliged to put that comment in there to recognize their concerns.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Absolutely.

You mentioned a bit about prioritizing. You just shared some priorities in terms of the changes that you're requesting. I'm also wondering if you can speak to what neighbouring MPs think about these changes.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I've had informal discussions with my neighbours, including Mr. Albas, Mr. Arnold, who represents North Okanagan-Shuswap, and Rob Morrison, who represents East Kootenay. I would say they are all neutral on this. None of them raised any serious objections or support one way or the other. Part of that is because the new riding was placed in the North Okanagan, so that has created a ripple effect that necessitates some change.

Again, I haven't heard of any real objections to what I'm proposing. As I say, they've kind of remained neutral on this, one way or the other.

I'm trying to represent my constituents as well as the constituents of the Similkameen Valley, for instance, who are not my constituents now, but I have talked to them because that's part of the changes that have been proposed.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Finally, we know that with the boundaries commission there's a lot of emphasis on communities of interest.

I'm wondering if you could speak to how the draft report doesn't take into account communities of interest or historic connections between communities in the proposed boundary change.

Is there an easy fix to this situation?

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I would say that the commission has a difficult task. It has to create ridings that fit as best as possible with population numbers to make sure that people have proper representation, but it also has to represent those communities of interest and those communities of identity.

If you asked a certain citizen if they would rather be in a riding that puts them with their neighbours and keeps those communities together than in a riding that might have 5,000 fewer people so they'd have 1% or 2% more representation, I think they would choose to be in a riding that kept communities and neighbourhoods together.

**The Chair:** Thank you for those fruitful rounds today.

It brings us to the final panel for British Columbia. I have to say that I've learned a lot about this great province. I will suggest that in 10 years when we do redistribution, or whoever does it, perhaps we travel to the communities as part of this process to really be able to experience it in person.

I want to thank all of you on behalf of the PROC committee members for your work and for being here today. If you have any other information that you would like to provide, please provide it to the clerk and we'll have it circulated to all members.

With that, we wish you a good day. Keep well and safe.

PROC committee members, we'll suspend for three minutes and then we'll continue in camera. Thank you so much.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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