

NOVA SCOTIA

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

COMMISSION

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2018

Cambridge Inn Suites Hotel
Sydney, Nova Scotia

PROVINCIAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION

Dr. Colin Dodds, Chair
Ms. Carlotta Weymouth
Mr. Michael Kelloway
Mr. Paul Gaudet
Mr. Michael Baker
Mr. Glenn Graham
Mr. Peter Marshall Butler
Mr. Leonard LeFort
Ms. Angela Simmonds

WITNESSES

Ms. Giselle LeBlanc-Lavoie
Mr. Shane Russell
Mr. Clermont Charland
Mr. John Shaw
Ms. Laurie MacCuish
Mr. Tim Menk

SYDNEY, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2018

NOVA SCOTIA ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION

7:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Dr. Colin Dodds

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good evening. Thank you so much for coming out on a Saturday evening. I know there is a wedding going on somewhere in the hotel today.

My name is Colin Dodds and I live in Halifax. I am chairing the Nova Scotia Electoral Boundaries Commission 2018, so I'll chair tonight's public consultation. First let me acknowledge that we're on the unceded lands of the many First Nations of Nova Scotia. I'm pleased that this evening we have eight of the nine Commission members and I will ask them to introduce themselves, commencing with Leonard on my right.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: This evening what we're waiting for - all the microphones are live so anything that is said, if you are going to speak you can come forward, give your name, speak into the microphone and likewise from us. This, of course, will be taped, transcribed and then be on the public record.

Let me provide a context for this evening's meeting. An independent Electoral Commission is established every 10 years by an all-Party Select Committee of the House of Assembly but in the case of this Commission, only six years has elapsed. The 2012 Commission, which I was the vice-chair of, had produced an Interim Report, which the Attorney General at the time did not accept as it continued the protection of the electoral districts of Clare, Argyle, Richmond and Preston. He directed the Commission to produce another report, which we did, a revised interim and then the final report of September 2012. As a result of this, those are the boundaries which the previous election, the last election, was called. We have that map if you want to see it, but there's not an awful lot of room in this room to do it.

In terms of the maps, we have a map on my left there which shows the whole of Nova Scotia with the proposals that we have at the moment for 55 electoral districts. At the back we have two sets of maps, one for 2012 and one for 2018, showing the seats in the Cape Breton area.

As a result of the Attorney General's action there was a challenge to the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal which found in January 2017 that there had, in fact, been a violation of Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Subsequent to this finding the government of the day, the current government, established a commission on effective representation of Acadians and African Nova Scotians, and this reported in January of this year.

As a result of that, then a select committee was struck, as I mentioned, and terms of reference were given to this Commission. They are quite broad, those terms of reference - there's a handout with them on. Number 1 stresses the right to effective representation but also elector parity. This is the challenge. We have to balance what many people want, in terms of electoral and effective representation, but also the issue of parity. If you need any clarification with those terms - there are 11 of them - we'd be pleased to try and assist.

As I mentioned, on the walls are awesome maps. We have more, if we had more space, but if you are real interested we can get them out, roll them out and show you.

The data we are using is as of June 29th of this year, which incorporates data from the 2016 census but then is updated as people move into the electoral map, for example, people who are 16, 17 and 18 by 2018 and 2019 are free, of course, to vote.

The total count we have is 743,500. If you divide by 55, that gives you an average of 13,518. As a result of that, just behind me you can see a tabular version of those 55 seats. Then at the bottom there is one for Chéticamp that we call 99, and we can talk about that in a few minutes. This morning we were in Baddeck, and that's an electoral district that we're not proposing any changes to the existing boundaries.

With respect to our proposals, the first one is to restore the electoral districts of Clare, Argyle, Richmond and Preston. As a result, that then produces adjacent changes to the boundaries of the various electoral districts that are close by.

With respect to Chéticamp, where we were last weekend, the options are: to leave it within Inverness - if we do that, that just keeps it in the position it is in right now; to merge it into Richmond because we are allowed, as a Commission, to use non-contiguous electoral districts; or create an extraordinary electoral district, and we show that as 99, but that's not in our count of 55.

We are looking to create two new seats in HRM. I think you are well aware in this region, that seats have been taken out of Cape Breton, as they have been from the South Shore in the past. There's no proposal to do that right now. So, two new seats, one in Bedford because of the population count, which I think is about 1.49, on that basis of the average being what it is, and also do some major reconfiguration in Cole Harbour.

What we would also like your input on is the concept of members-at-large, to represent Acadians and African Nova Scotians, given that those populations are dispersed

across the province. Although we are talking about restoring the boundaries for three of the Acadian ridings, and at the same time for Preston for the African Nova Scotians, we're well aware that Acadians and African Nova Scotians are spread throughout the province, so we're coming to you with the concept of members at large. We've had a lot of input on that in the meetings.

This is the twelfth public consultation and the final one that we've held so far. We will meet as a Commission October 10th. In between, various other working groups may be meeting - for example, the HRM group is meeting next week. We are tasked with producing a report that meets those terms of reference by November 30th but, because of the need for French translation, we're looking at having to produce the report by the end of October.

We are tasked with getting at least two potential sets of maps - one 51 seats, which is the current count. That's going to be quite a challenge if, at the same time, we are trying to protect the effective representation of Acadians and African Nova Scotians.

We're not bound this time with the number of seats. In the past, I think when I chaired the Commission in 2002, we were told 52 seats, 52 seats, that's it. We have the ability to go up or go down. The Keefe report that reported this year mentioned the figure of 54. The figure we are looking at at the moment is 55 but we're not bound by that, so this is why we're out doing our public consultations.

April 1st is the cut-off for our final report of which the all-Party committee has asked for one set of proposals, one map as it were. Right now, for the interim they're looking for a potential of two or three or more.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to turn the floor over to you. We've had one person who has asked to speak in advance, and I'm going to call her forward right now. After that, just because you did not let us know that you'd like to speak does not bar you in any way, so we'd like to hear from you. I'll call our first speaker forward right now. If you could come forward and give your name into the microphone. Unfortunately, we don't have simultaneous French translation here. We had it on the weekend and we had it when we were down on the South Shore. Perhaps, you could state your name into the microphone.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Good evening. I am really sorry I can't speak in French because everywhere else it was in French. Why not here in Sydney?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I apologize for that.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: That's the way the francophones are treated. There is a lot of apologies and no actions.

Why do I make a presentation? It's because the importance of Sydney, as you may know as somebody from Sydney, there are 1,600 people who are speaking in French so there is a good population of French in Sydney. We have a school, as you all know, I hope, and we got it in 1986. The school has 275 children and a staff of 15 people, so there is a francophone presence in Sydney.

The vitality of Acadians is very important, and I am not going to tell you what is in the memoire, the FANE, because everything is explained very clearly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And we have that.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: And you have it, yes. What I am just trying to let you know is that if the memoire is very clear I don't understand why the history of Acadians is continually being changed and why, in 2012, a decision had been made and six years after we are still wasting the time of people. The assimilation is very strong, as you know. Even in the memoire they say that the Acadians are not interested in voting anymore, so there is a pressing need for a change.

Something I would like to say, if, for four centuries, the Acadians have been in Nova Scotia, they were the first francophones to arrive here. They were welcomed by the Mi'kmaq, and they still have to fight for their rights. I can't understand that at all, it is so unjust. If the justice said the boundaries should be as they were in 2012, it should be kept.

Okay, I have another question, too, on the matter. The Government of Nova Scotia has created Affaires acadiennes. This Affaires acadiennes is not dealing with those very problems of boundaries. I don't understand why it is that the FANE - which is supposed to work for the culture, for the activity, for the vitality, for tourism - which has to make the memoire. The ministry of Affairs acadiennes - is it a ministry, am I right? It is a ministry. How come a ministry is not having lawyers doing this research and fighting for that? I really think it is unjust.

Secondly, this Affaires acadiennes is mixed with Immigration, and I find it very offensive that Affairs Acadienne would be mixing with immigration. The Acadians were immigrants in the 17th century, and it was not the same problem at all. I find it is a lot to be done by somebody who is there for four years or more who doesn't know too much about the history of Acadians. Mixing the two is nearly despicable to my idea.

The other thing I find is that when we have been around here for 45 years, the Ministers of Acadian Affairs are more or less effective, but if they are not Acadian-born it's very difficult for them to fight for Acadians, I'm sorry to say. The history is too complicated for somebody to grasp, and the history of Acadians, as you know - and the same for the Mi'kmaq - is not in the history books. The way it is presented is not exactly the truth, so I find this mixing of Immigration and Affaires acadiennes is a bit difficult to understand.

I would like to compare the situation of the English-speaking community in Quebec and our Acadian community here. If I am right, 18 per cent of people in Quebec are English-speaking people; they had a debate in English for the last election. Did you listen to that? Amazing, it's the first time they had a debate in English in Quebec. Here I have a presentation to do, and everywhere else the translation is given but here they forgot, or they are saving money, I don't know.

If we compare the 4 per cent - do you agree that it is 4 per cent of Acadians in Nova Scotia, is it? I heard it is 4 per cent; 4 per cent is a lot. I don't understand why we are not taken into account. So why it is in Quebec two debates, in New Brunswick two debates. Some provinces are open to ideas and some provinces are a bit narrow-minded, don't you find? I find it even more unjust because in 1604 the first French who came here were - it is in Nova Scotia that the New Canada (I don't forget the Mi'kmaq) was created, and still we have to fight so that they listen to us.

I don't need to say that, in the past, a few Acadians have arrived to be MLAs, deputies, federal and provincial. Now, without this effective representation, it's going to be less and less. That's why - it is very well presented in the memoire - they don't want to vote anymore because they think it is burlesque.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've seen the voting statistics that they've given us, that the number of people voting as a percentage has been dropping.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Exactly, I noticed that. Okay.

So, the Acadians have been a big instrument in the economy of Nova Scotia, I don't need to tell you. They are fighting, they are begging for money, but they are doing it. Look at Isle Madame, when we arrived they had fourteen fish plants and now I think it is two. Anybody from Isle Madame? I think that is what it is.

If they have less and less power in the government, how are they going to survive? They are all going to quit and come to cities because you know in Sydney we are between Chéticamp and Isle Madame. They come here and they assimilate, so it's really very sad.

I find the cultural vitality is very important, too, for two reasons. We always talk about tourism, tourism. I mean the bilingualism is very important for tourism, and still in Chéticamp they have to fight for the names to be in French. The Mi'kmaq had to fight for the names to be in French, but everything in Gaelic is all around. It's not fair, not fair at all. Okay?

The point is that, if the law on municipality and the law on education does take into account that the Acadians are important, why isn't it for the boundaries? I don't understand. It's illogical. Okay? So, what did I say.

If we have a Charter of Rights. Why aren't we following the Charter of Rights? For me it seems so simple. I find the FANE talk about genocide. They may not be far from the truth because, if there is a Charter of Rights and the Acadians were in Nova Scotia in 1604 - before everything - the Quebecois know that. My daughter had to argue one week with somebody telling them that the Acadians were in Canada before the Quebecois. She kept saying they arrived in 1604 and the Quebecois kept saying no, we were the first.

If there is no ignorance on both sides, from francophone to francophone, from anglophone to francophone, where is the country going to go?

MR. CHAIRMAN: So, you would support our proposal to restore, obviously?

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Oh, yes, definitely. I would think that Chéticamp and Isle Madame should be linked. When we arrived here we had a young girl from Chéticamp. She didn't know about the Acadians in Richmond. I was appalled. We kept telling her, don't you know that there are Acadians in Richmond and she would say no, I didn't know, so it is very important that they co-operate and meet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I've got to ask you on behalf of the Commission and the 2,000 Acadians who are in this immediate area, how would you propose that they achieve effective representation?

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Maybe by putting them with Chéticamp and Isle Madame because they come from Chéticamp and they come from Isle Madame. In New Waterford, as you may know, they settled in Chéticamp first - no, in New Waterford they settled from Chéticamp, I think, is it, Leonard? I am not - not very many from Isle Madame, it is very interesting but mainly, as far as I know, they settled from Chéticamp. Now we find at the school and in the community that a lot of people are coming from Isle Madame.

MR. CHAIRMAN: One of our proposals is that, because we are allowed to go non-contiguous, Chéticamp could be combined with Richmond, which of course includes Isle Madame. But we didn't get a lot of support for that idea.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Because communication is difficult, but with computers now it should be easy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well it's distance, communication and I think a slightly different history as well. I mean common themes, but

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: But in order to survive they should be interested by that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's why we've put that out as a concept.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: In your members at large, could you put Chéticamp and the Sydneys as members at large?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well there are different versions of members at large. One is to have a member-at-large for the whole of Nova Scotia for Acadians.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Oh, it would be for the whole.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's one proposal, similar to what's available for our First Nations, that seat was established back in 1992 and was never taken up. So, there is a concept of a member at large. Other people have said why don't you have members at large, say three, for Nova Scotia - one in the north, one in the centre and one in the south? Again, that's something we have to look at which is why we're coming out seeking input from people like yourself.

Everything you've said is on record so that will be read by people, including people in government.

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: That's all. Thank you for listening to me.

[7:45 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Any questions?

MR. PAUL GAUDET: Peut-être un commentaire pour un référence historique. En arrière de ma cour où j'habite, à Saulnierville, c'est la baie Sainte-Marie. C'est Champlain en 1604 qui a nommé la baie à côté de ma résidence, la baie Sainte-Marie. Historiquement, c'est reconnu. Donc

MS. GISELLE LEBLANC-LAVOIE: Exactement, c'est pour ça. C'est pour ça que je trouve que depuis quatre siècles - four centuries of discrimination. It's incredible.

MR. PAUL GAUDET: What I stated to madam here - in my backyard, in Saulnierville, St. Marys Bay, la baie Sainte-Marie, Champlain named it la baie Sainte-Marie, 1604. It is well documented, historical.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, madam.

So, who would like to speak next? Please, just raise your hand. Gentleman at the back, right here. No, the one behind you. (Laughter) You're both gentlemen, anyway.

Again, if you can please state your name for the record.

MR. SHANE RUSSELL: Hello, everyone. My name is Shane Russell. I am a 15-year resident of the Sydney-Whitney Pier district, originally from the Northside but after moving back home, I was adopted in the Sydney-Whitney Pier district.

I thank you for the opportunity to be here this evening. I thank Mr. Baker for bringing it to my attention. I would start just briefly by saying, obviously from what I see, you are all in an unenviable position in that your task is to draw boundaries within communities. Obviously, that is very difficult and invites a lot of problems, I guess, and a lot of various concerns and different views and opinions.

I sort of studied up prior to coming here. I had a few thoughts, if I may share them with you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Of course.

MR. SHANE RUSSELL: One in particular, and everything centres around this one concept, is that when I looked at the new boundaries that were proposed as they relate to the Whitney Pier area, for example, one of the boundaries appears to drive through the heart of a portion of Whitney Pier, as we see now. I don't see the exact street, so I may be unable to reference them, but I'm sure the Commission, you will all be familiar.

What I would urge is that with such an area you want to look at things in legal terms, if I could borrow them, through an equity lens and a culturally competent lens. So, essentially, I would submit what you want to do is make any decisions regarding certain pockets or pods of communities, your conclusions want to be based on an understanding of the history, the historical context, and the people, the pride of the people there and their historical context, and their struggles as well.

I don't plan to get into a history lesson, but Whitney Pier has been recognized nationally as one of the most culturally diverse areas or communities we have in Atlantic Canada. That's a long history; that's a very proud history.

If I can be an ally to members of that community, one thing I learned very quickly moving back home after university is that anyone I ever encountered was always very clear to tell me that they were from Whitney Pier. They made a clear distinction that they were from Whitney Pier, not necessarily Sydney-Whitney Pier. The reason why I say that is you want to be overly inclusive in your boundaries of Whitney Pier and not overly exclusionary.

What you want to do, I would submit, is make sure that community is totally included. When I look at the boundaries it appears as though a chunk of Whitney Pier is cut off in what's being proposed, and I don't think that really lends itself to anything positive. I think it divides interests in a proud group of people.

What I see in the proposal as well is that the reference to Whitney Pier is removed. What is being proposed is a new riding of "Sydney," which I think is essentially stripping

an historic, culturally-diverse and proud community of its recognition and name, not seeing things through a culturally-competent lens.

Now the next question becomes, if you expand what's being proposed for the Whitney Pier district, and you add a greater voting pool obviously, and you try to keep things as in balance as possible, what is the solution? How do you do that and roll that in with Sydney?

I would make brief comments about the name of the proposed Sydney riding as well in that, unless there's a reason, I don't see a real reason to exclude Membertou from the name of that riding. I would submit strongly that it should be referred to as "Sydney-Membertou." That is another pocket of the Cape Breton community that has a very long history - in a sense, a sad history, but a very proud history, and a major success story. I think if we're dividing up electoral ridings that should be acknowledged - again, viewing it through an equity cultural-competence lens. I see no reason for it not to be called the "Sydney-Membertou" riding.

When I look at the riding as it is - at Sydney-Whitney Pier - and how it's divided, you then, by expanding Whitney Pier, added extra members in this particular riding. When you look at traditional boundaries, and this is more of a logical approach to a solution, when I see the clear division and lines of Highway No. 125, for example, as it divides Northside-Westmount, it's a very logical barrier in that that boundary line doesn't intersect or cut through a community. If you look at Sydney, if you drove around Sydney - and I've done it, trying to get up to speed - you see little segments and pods of Sydney as it stands now, what's being proposed - they're almost illogically, irrationally divided.

For example, if you go up to the area of Ranna Drive - what Ranna Drive intersects with is Carlton Drive - you literally have neighbours across the street from each other who would share very common interests, no doubt, and they have two different segments of MLAs to vote for, even though they share the same interests.

Another example would be Edgewood Drive in Sydney. Edgewood Drive is in the dead centre of what would be Sydney-Whitney Pier now, surrounded by what is described as the Sydney River-Mira district - again, illogically and arbitrarily drawn. What you have there is neighbours who have common interests who are forced to look in different directions.

Again, I think the most logical boundary line appears to be Highway No. 125. If you're from Cape Breton, everyone - I'm comfortable in saying that - understands that once you go under the overpass, you're in Sydney River. I mean, you're in another district. By using Highway No. 125, you no longer start intersecting and cutting up communities that share common interests. You avoid the problem, and you're covering Membertou. You're coming around. You're not chopping up Ashby, which this current proposal does. Logically, you're losing streets in Ashby. Again, neighbours are arbitrarily divided. Draw that one - Highway No. 125 - as your division in your jurisdiction of Sydney-Membertou.

Now, again, the question would be that you're adding more to the pool. What do you do? How do you avoid the absolute need to not split up Whitney Pier? You cannot drive a stake in the heart of Whitney Pier. You cannot do it. You are the decision makers, obviously, and the recommending body. I would urge you not to do it. I hope this is not taking this too drastic, but what I would suggest is that Sydney-Whitney Pier could become part of the riding of Whitney Pier-Cape Breton Centre. That again is going to make up the balance of voters that you picked up by making clear your Highway No. 125 boundaries, but you don't divide Whitney Pier. It's there. It's recognized in name, which remains so, and it stays intact and stays together.

I don't view what I'm submitting as controversial. Rather, I think it's a logical solution to recognizing Sydney and Cape Breton surrounding areas' deep culture and the different pockets of communities we have within Cape Breton. I think it's a fair and equitable concept to consider. It balances the number of voters in potential jurisdictions and it keeps communities intact. I may be safe to assume that I think that's probably one of the goals of the Commission: to keep communities intact, where possible.

If the Commission has any questions for me, I'd certainly be happy to address them.

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: I do. Thank you, Shane, for the presentation, and the recommendations in your suggestion. I'm wondering if I could give you some homework?

MR. SHANE RUSSELL: Yes.

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: I said I'm from Sydney River, but I'm actually from Glace Bay, born and raised, but I made the big jump, when I got married, to Sydney River.

MR. SHANE RUSSELL: We're imports. (Laughter)

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: Exactly. I'm wondering, at the conclusion of tonight's session, could you go to the map and block out exactly what you're speaking of - Highway No. 125 being kind of the demarcation line in the Whitney Pier suggestion, the Membertou suggestion? You can basically take a pen or a marker, whatever we have here, and if you could just do that for us, I think we'd be grateful. It would be good.

MR. SHANE RUSSELL: Yes. I would clarify by saying I am not proposing geographically large parcels of land and numerous streets. What I'm proposing is pretty straightforward. It's not massive chunks of residences necessarily. Logically, it just flows, and it works.

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: I'm also intrigued by the terminology or the name. I think Sydney-Membertou is an excellent recommendation and suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: These names are not cast in stone and, certainly, at the last Commission the House changed two of the names, anyway. So, yes, former Lieutenant Governor Mayann Francis came from Whitney Pier. She's a good personal friend.

Perhaps you could take up Mike's suggestion at the end. We have some marker pens. This is what we're here for. We can't always get it right. We need some local knowledge to help us. Thank you very much.

The next speaker, thank you.

MR. CLERMONT CHARLAND: Good evening. My name is Clermont Charland. I'm the president of the Centre communautaire Étoile de l'Acadie here in Sydney. Like it has been said by Gisele and by you, sir, there are about 1,500 to 2,000 French-speaking and Acadians in the CBRM.

Of course, it wouldn't be reasonable to request a specific riding for us because I live in Westmount, Giselle lives in Sydney River, Marcel lives in Louisbourg, Richard lives in New Waterford, et cetera, so we are all over the place.

Of course, as we know, the previous government, which I won't name, has done lots of damage to the Acadian community, not only by eliminating the Acadian protected ridings but also by pushing le ministère des Affaires acadiennes, the Acadian Affairs, they kind of pushed everything under cultural and immigration, whatever. They have done lots of damage, and I know that the actual government has re-established Acadian Affairs. As a matter of fact, I am a member of the committee of la Ministre Lena Metlege Diab. We met a few times, which is good.

[8:00 p.m.]

Of course, the community centre here, we are under the umbrella of the Acadian Federation of Nova Scotia, the FANE. I'm sure you have met with . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, we have.

MR. CLERMONT CHARLAND: . . . Norbert and Marie Claude, and everyone has told you their opposition. I fully support their position, no doubt about it, to re-establish the three protected ridings and create one for Chéticamp.

We don't like the idea of contiguous things - I know the Acadian Federation is strongly against this, but that's one of the options that will be up to you to decide.

On a personal side, without wearing the chapeau, the hat, of the president of the community centre, I am glad that you mentioned tonight this at-large member. I know the subject was raised when I was in Isle Madame during the previous Commission. They took

all our presentations. The subject was raised. I kind of like the idea, just like on the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, the French school board, we have a regional director for the northeast, a regional director for the central area, and a regional director for the southwest. If it's not possible to re-establish three or four protected Acadian ridings, I kind of like the idea of having a member at large elected from the northwest, representing Cape Breton and Antigonish, and an Acadian member representing the central area of Halifax, Truro, et cetera, and one representing the southwest. I kind of like this idea too.

I would prefer to get back to the way it was and create a riding for Chéticamp and Inverness, but the other one probably will be an acceptable solution to all of this.

That's what I have to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions from the Commission?

Please, Mike.

MR. MICHAEL BAKER: Just a quick question, and thank you for coming out this evening.

As Chairman Dodds mentioned, nothing is written in stone to this point. We have three potentially protected ridings and we have the potential of having members at large. To effectively represent members of the Acadian community throughout the province of Nova Scotia, what would you like to see as the number one choice - members at large, three of them and three separate districts, or the protected ridings, including Chéticamp?

MR. CLERMONT CHARLAND: I would prefer the protected ridings. I think it would be more effective and closer to those communities. That's where the Acadians are - Clare, Argyle, Richmond and, don't forget, the area of Halifax, where there is now a population of 10,000, 15,000 francophones and Acadians. I'd prefer those four ridings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've heard the arguments, not just this time around but the twice that I've served on the Commission in the past, that the MLAs for those protected ridings saw themselves not just as an MLA for Richmond or Clare or Argyle but saw themselves as an advocate for the Acadian population across Nova Scotia, an advocate for the Acadian population nationally and internationally.

That was a very good question to ask and, to get your answer back, it helps us a lot because we're grappling with the issue of this government now having established what we call the Keefe report - the three members spent a lot of time going across and listening - but then they throw it back to us. Of course, we all just make a recommendation on April 1st, and the government can then either accept or reject - or the House can either accept or reject.

Thank you very much indeed.

Who would like to - this gentleman here. You have plenty time.

MR. JOHN SHAW: My name is John Shaw and I have to get something off the table right away. I'm a returning officer at large for Elections Nova Scotia. My comments here tonight are strictly my own. They don't reflect the views of Elections Nova Scotia or of Rick Temporale, the Chief Electoral Officer, and they've got no idea that I'm even here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You're a private citizen, as we are.

MR. JOHN SHAW: Yes. Along the lines of a previous speaker, once before - I think you were the Deputy Chair - they cut off a chunk of Whitney Pier. Quite a few people raised objections and it was moved back to Egan Avenue, which is at the far end of the Pier, and is the geographic and psychological boundary for Whitney Pier, really. Again, they've moved it back, and I think that's a mistake.

When it was called Cape Breton Nova it encompassed Whitney Pier and part of South Bar. When South Bar was chopped off and put in with Sydney, it was called Sydney-Whitney Pier. There was rejoicing in Whitney Pier; finally, their name had been recognized.

My second recommendation is that you not just call it Sydney, call it Sydney-Whitney Pier-Membertou - encompass part of what he said, but definitely don't drop the name. If we're trying to get people out to vote, I think we have to be concerned about the mental attitude of the voters. If you're going to chop the name off, after they fought for years to get it back, that sure as hell is not going to encourage them to get out and vote.

I also think that moving the boundary back from Egan Avenue is not going to help at all.

The previous speaker mentioned Carlton Drive. Carlton Drive is a dead end. It's off Ranna Drive, it's in Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg, and they have absolutely nothing in common with that riding. They're part of the old City of Sydney. They are contiguous to streets in the City of Sydney and they're on the City of Sydney side of Highway No. 125. To me it just doesn't make any sense to have them cut off and put in another riding.

Thirdly, if you go up at the top end of George Street, it almost looks like someone was doing a bit of gerrymandering. There's that little hook in there. Again, the honourable member can speak for himself, but it must be miserable for him to have to service these people, because when you talk about Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg, these people don't consider themselves part of that at all. So, I'm pushing for Highway No. 125 to be the boundary. That increases the population, so what are you going to do? Maybe cut it off down Churchill Drive or Tupsi Drive, I don't know.

First of all, I would encourage that Carlton Drive be put back in with the people they belong with - their neighbours - and that you push the boundary back to Egan Avenue where it was in Whitney Pier, and that you definitely include the name Whitney Pier in the riding. That's all I have to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Currently, the electoral count for the proposal we have before you is 1.21, so we don't have a lot of scope to play with there.

Are there any questions? Perhaps at the end we could get together and have a look at the map, if you've got time.

MR. JOHN SHAW: Okay, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, the lady at the back.

MS. LAURIE MACCUISH: Good evening, Mr. Chairman and committee members. My name is Laurie MacCuish and I am a resident of the Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg constituency. For most of my adult life I've lived in this area. I live in Dutch Brook now, on the Marion Bridge highway. I formerly lived in Sydney River and also in Howie Centre, so I'm very familiar with the constituency, except for brief periods away for study and work, of course.

I just had a very brief opportunity to look at the proposal on the map; I didn't get an opportunity to really take it in. At first blush, I guess my question is: Is it going to be closer to what we knew as the old Cape Breton West constituency?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think so. Mike, you have a better idea than me.

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: I think "similar" would be the best way to put it, but I think there are some nuances there. It all depends on what other things we do in terms of other ridings and what tweaking may need to be done.

MS. LAURIE MACCUISH: I think when it was changed to become Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg it was problematic, with the name. I think it's dangerous and cumbersome to try to include a whole bunch of different communities because you're always in the danger of excluding other communities, where before we had a name that was all-encompassing under the umbrella Cape Breton West. Nobody seemed to have a problem with it, but there are people who live in other areas that aren't recognized. I know it's entirely too cumbersome to include every community in every constituency. That's not workable at all.

The geography of it was the biggest difficulty because, with the change to Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg, we've moved away from natural geographic lines - natural boundaries like rivers, lakes and county lines and Highway No. 125, which has already

been addressed this evening. It was a natural boundary, and we find ourselves in something foreign in this constituency.

It's about the affinity of community members and where people associate - where they live, work, play, shop, the churches they frequent and support, and the community halls they frequent and support. It's all defining as a community, but when you're grouping different people from different regions of the constituency it's confusing, and it no longer felt like what was known to all of us.

If the new proposal - and if it will go back to the name of Cape Breton West, I thought it was an ideal name for the constituency. It included us all. If the new proposal for 2018 is to go back to the more natural dividing lines of the constituency, I would be fully in favour of that as a long-term resident of that area. I want to thank you for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions with respect to that?

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: Just that it seems - the common theme is Highway No. 125 as a boundary line for much of what we're hearing tonight.

MS. LAURIE MACCUISH: Rivers and county lines as well.

MR. MICHAEL KELLOWAY: Right. Just to clarify what you're saying basically in terms of the name changes - a name that was used previously or a name that doesn't self-identify communities like Sydney, or it would be Cape Breton West and something or whatever the case may be.

MS. LAURIE MACCUISH: Exactly. You're trying to group large regions of rural population with more suburban like Sydney River, so a name like Cape Breton West, for example, would be the ideal, I would think.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Who would like to speak next? Are there any questions of us with respect to our process, the terms of reference that we are bound by?

Please.

MR. TIM MENK: Tim Menk from Gabarus. Having been at the 2012 meeting in Whitney Pier when the lines were going to be redrawn to include Gabarus in the southern part of our county, all the way down to Port Hawkesbury, we found that to be a very drastic change. I appreciate the changes you're making, which are less drastic, and that you're returning to the communities of interest for the Acadians and African Nova Scotians.

[8:15 p.m.]

The question I have is: Since we'll have another census in 2020, will these ridings exist only until another Electoral Boundaries Commission comes along in 2020?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I wish I had the answer to that. They are every ten years so, in theory, there could be another one in four years' time.

MR. TIM MENK: Is it not mandated every ten years? That was the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's mandated, but I don't know how - this is a special one because of what happened. I don't have any clarification from anybody in Halifax as to whether it will be ten years from this - in other words, 2028 - or whether they'll come back to it in four years, to get back to the ten-year cycle.

MR. TIM MENK: My fear is that if it's only a two-year process here, it takes an awful lot of your time and everybody's time for these meetings. It costs money. It should be clarified, because of the dislocations that happen every time this is done - and certainly the last time, the dislocations were major. I think it's important that what you decide, as a group, stands until 2030.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, let's wait and see. In the end, that's up to the House of Assembly. We have tried, where possible, to minimize this time around, so Northside-Westmount has not changed. Glace Bay has not changed. Some of the other changes we're proposing are results of Richmond, so we've moved Port Hawkesbury into Inverness. That's simply the results. If we're going to restore Richmond, well, the adjacent ones may have to change immediately, then.

We tried to restrict the number of changes because it's disruptive for people, it's disruptive for the various Parties that have to organize, and it's disruptive for Elections Nova Scotia. But in terms of the census, as I said, the data that we're using is June 29th. So, it's 2016 census, plus updates. It's quite an interesting exercise that Elections Nova Scotia goes through to produce the data we've got. There's a good chance that when we look at a final report, we'll be using data up to, say, December of this year.

The data set's dynamic. As I explained, if you were 17 years of age in 2016, now you're able to vote. In that sense, the data is updated on a monthly basis.

MR. TIM MENK: I appreciate that clarification. Even more so, then, because you are going to be doing it on a rolling basis, and when you put in the final report it will be done with the numbers that are as current as you can have them. It seems ludicrous to me to have the process start again in 2020-21.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's not our call.

MR. TIM MENK: I'm just saying, I think it's an important thing to have on the record that this should be an issue for the MLAs to be debating and find out whether there's a set schedule or whether it's mandated constitutionally that it must be every ten years.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We do have MLAs in the audience this evening. I have asked the question and not gotten an answer back yet. I think this might go back to the all-Party select committee - I don't know, but at some point, clarification has to be made.

You are not the only one who has brought that question up. It's a very important question. It is not cheap to do this process - just the cost of the work of the Commission, but then all the work that everybody else has to do behind the scenes. Thank you for that.

Would anybody else like to come forward and speak any questions you may have?

This is our last public meeting at the moment. We did hold out the potential that we could have more, but we're going to meet as a Commission on October 10th. We're going to do some work starting next week.

What we'd like you to do is stick around, have a look at the maps. We've got some markers if you've got some suggestions, as Mike mentioned. There is some coffee, and I think there may be tea, and there's certainly water.

I want to thank our staff because they will be clearing up, because there is set-up time. Thank you.

[The Commission adjourned at 8:20 p.m.]