

NOVA SCOTIA
ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES
COMMISSION

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2018

BMO Centre
Bedford, 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. Mary Ann McGrath
Mr. Patrick Sullivan
Mr. Brad Johns
Mr. Darrell Johnston
Ms. Carol Darling

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6:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Dr. Colin Dodds

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, good evening and thank you for coming on another beautiful day. My name is Colin Dodds. I live in Halifax and I'm Chair of the Nova Scotia Electoral Boundaries Commission. I will chair tonight's public consultation.

First of all, let me acknowledge that we're on the unceded lands of the many First Nations of Nova Scotia.

I will now ask each of the Commission members to introduce themselves. We are missing one tonight. Last night we had nine in Sackville, but tonight, Angela Simmonds could not be with us.

[The Commission members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: You can see that we're covering a fair extent of the province this evening.

Just a few housekeeping items. First of all, safety exits—down here, one tucked away on the left-hand side and through to the main area. Washrooms are through there and downstairs. We do have microphones for speakers here. I do want to say that anything that's said through the microphones from the Commission and from yourselves will, in fact, be recorded, transcribed, and then become a public record through Hansard.

I thought I would provide context this evening for the meeting. In the past, the Boundaries Commissions have gone out with a clean slate and have asked for input. This time around, we have our terms of reference—there are copies over there for you to have—but at the same time we were asked to produce a draft report showing the boundaries for Nova Scotia.

There are, in fact, maps at the back. Let me explain why there are so many maps. We have maps for our proposal, which is to create an additional electoral district for Bedford. There's a map there that shows you where we are in 2018. There's a map showing you the current boundaries for a single seat of Bedford. That was the result of the final report. Then there's a total map for Nova Scotia for that and also for the interim report which, as I'll explain in a few minutes, was thrown out by the government of the day.

An electoral commission is established every 10 years. The last one was in 2012, so of course there are only six years between that and us meeting now. The reason for that, as I mentioned, was that the interim report was discarded. The commission then worked on a new final report. That was, in fact, challenged through a court challenge and it was ruled to be unconstitutional. That then led to the government establishing a committee. It's now called the Keefe report, which looked at electoral representation for African Nova Scotians and Acadians. That reported earlier this year, in January.

The key issue of the last commission was the restoration—well, we'll talk about the final boundaries—but was maintaining the protected ridings of Argyle, Clare, Preston, and Richmond. That was the contentious issue, which then led to a final report which did not protect those ridings.

The terms of reference given to this committee are quite broad and I encourage you to look at them. We started our meetings the third week of August, so I appreciate that people sort of say the timelines are very tight, which they are.

We do have maps and we do hope to provide them on our website. One of the challenges has been getting translation. In terms of what we are proposing, I'll summarize that in a few minutes, but the key issue for you this evening, apart from the other proposals, is this new seat for Bedford.

The terms of reference require us to try to stick to 1.25 or 0.75. Depending on the number of total electors in the province, which is over 740,000, you divide that through by the number of seats and then you get an average. Then you just simply go down and look at the number of electors. The data we're using are, in fact, June 29, 2018, so they are the most recent data that we have available.

In terms of looking at the map for 2012, the final on which the last election was fought, Bedford comes out at 1.48, so clearly outside of the 1.25 deviation. There are, of course, constituencies or electoral districts that are below the 0.75. We can talk about that in a few minutes. We are proposing, first of all, two new seats in the province. One for Bedford, because of that deviation, and the second for Cole Harbour.

We have those proposed boundaries over there and all the electoral districts are in alphabetical order, so in terms of Bedford Basin, that is 04, and in terms of Bedford South, it's 05. The first one, it's proposed with respect to Bedford Basin, would have a small

deviation, and the second would have—in the case of one it's 0.77, which is just above the 0.75. The reason for this is we anticipate a lot of growth in the future.

As I mentioned, the electoral commissions are established every 10 years, but this is six years, and at the moment, we don't know when the government will have the next one. Is it going to be another five or is it going to be another 10? Those decisions have not been taken.

Because of our proposal to restore the electoral districts of Clare, Argyle, Preston, and Richmond, and in a couple of cases with a little bit of tweaking, it does mean then that some of the other adjacent areas, the districts that are right next door, those boundaries will be changing.

What we did in the case of Bedford, we also produced the map for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, and also for Clayton Park. Tomorrow night we'll be in Clayton Park, and then on Friday night we'll be in Shelburne. Then we're going next to Tusket for Argyle and then to Clare. We start again next week. We've got Dartmouth, and we'll be up in Cape Breton for the weekend, then back again to Cape Breton the following week.

In summary, what input the Commission would like this evening is, first of all, the creation of an additional seat for Bedford, and if you want to comment on the additional seat for Cole Harbour, please do so. Secondly, is the issue of restoring the boundaries of Argyle, Clare, Richmond, and Preston. Also, the issue of Cheticamp, which you'll know, if you look at the maps that we have for the whole province, is tucked right up in Inverness. It's an Acadian population and we are looking at several proposals for that, one of which is for it to merge with Richmond, and another is for it to have its own electoral district. We have not calculated that right now. That would make it 56 seats. Right now, we've done all our calculations on 55 seats.

[6:15 p.m.]

The interim report had 52 seats. The report then that finally the government accepted has 51, and I stress that's the existing map on which voting took place in the last election.

We are also asking for your input on the concept of members at large, because another way of representing and having effective representation of our communities—Acadian and African Nova Scotian, given the dispersion of their populations across the province, is in fact to have a single seat for Acadians or a single seat for African Nova Scotians. These would be called members at large or you could call it an administrative seat. That is another proposal which is out there.

I have two people that have indicated they wish to speak. I will call upon them in turn, and then I will turn the floor over to you. If you wish to speak, please come forward, state your name because it is going to be on the record. If you have some questions of us,

we'll attempt to answer them as well. Last night we had a good session in Sackville. One of the speakers this evening was there and had the opportunity to speak there and we had a lot of questions from the floor. Again, this is meant to be an interactive session. We're here to help. We're here to give as much information as we possibly can.

In terms of the two speakers, I would first of all like to call Mary Ann McGrath. If you could come forward and give your name. We would love to hear from you. Again, if you have written briefs, we would be very pleased to receive them.

MS. MARY ANN MCGRATH: MaryAnn McGrath, 24 Hamshaw Drive, Halifax, Nova Scotia—which is actually in Kearney Lake, down the road—former MLA for the riding of Halifax Bedford Basin about 15, 20 years ago. I didn't prepare a written brief, but I will send something along afterward.

Particularly in the light of the maps that you're showing, the two main issues I wish to speak to are community and education. The proposals that I'm looking at on the wall, which I didn't see until this evening, would split the historic school district that encompasses the old Kearney Lake subdivision, which is shown in yellow on the maps that I've provided to the Chair, and purple and pink. Those communities share a single P to 9 school system or P to 7 school system currently, and fluctuating populations dictate sometimes it changes.

This has been in place since I went to school, which is 50-plus years ago. So, this is a very historic connection that we have with these three communities: Kearney Lake subdivision, Princess Lodge, and Birch Cove. We have been associated through thick and thin. We share common history, common issues—some of them provincial, some of them municipal – but, irrespective of that, we are quite well joined at the hip and have been for a very long time. The boundary line of Highway No. 102 to us is not a boundary line. It does not divide our community. It was created long after our community came into existence, which is coming close to 100 years now. We don't think of that as anything more than a road.

The second issue is the existence of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area and proposed regional park, which is shown in green on the plans that I have provided. That area will never be homes. It is a declared provincial wilderness, meant to eventually be surrounded by a regional park, therefore there will never be homes there, but having it fractured between too many provincial seats is as big an issue as it is having it fractured between too many municipal seats.

The wilderness area was created as a provincial entity and going forward will be managed, we suspect or we are told, jointly between the city and the province. It is unofficially accessed by many people from the communities basically surrounding Kearney Lake and further points beyond—but it is accessed through people's yards, through their driveways, behind their homes, through pathways, and having the

responsibility for this area split between multiple members of levels of government would create a much more difficult management system.

It's difficult now because it's split several ways. We had a situation a few years ago where the member who represented a good deal of the Rockingham/Birch Cove area announced that because the park was not in the provincial district represented by that member, that they couldn't help, which put us in a really difficult position to move forward on any level with park creation, with support, with management—anything. With safety for fire, which is an issue. Other than that, those two issues are, for me, the biggest.

I would mention the area at the north end of Kearney Lake, which is a new subdivision called Kearney Lake Estates, and the Bedford South subdivision that's joining it, I know that having spoken to them in previous campaigns that they feel kind of homeless because they are attached currently to Clayton Park West. They feel like they're in Bedford. I say that as second-hand knowledge because I don't know if anybody will speak to that from there.

For us, we don't feel like part of Bedford and never have felt like part of Bedford. Our address is Halifax. Our municipal district is Halifax. Our bylaws and our rules and regulations are Halifax. The little bit of us that is parked with Bedford, the currently proposed Bedford South, may or may not create issues, but any time you have overlap of planning districts, I have found in the past from personal experience, that it is very difficult for a member at any level of government to keep up on what their responsibilities and issues are.

And with that I will follow with a written submission in more detail.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. As you know, the issue that faced us was the 1.48 and it has faced us in the past and it faced us with Clayton Park in the past because of the growth. What we want to do is, we're very pleased to have your comments and, particularly giving us the maps, and all I can say at this point is we'll take it under advisement.

MS. MARY ANN MCGRATH: I will point out that there are 60 homes in the piece of Kearney Lake that you've attached to Bedford South and there are not a whole lot more. I mean, more than 60, clearly. But there's just a few apartment buildings in the part of the Birch Cove/Princess Lodge area.

That blank in the middle between the Birch Cove/Princess Lodge subdivisions and the stuff that's to the north of it that comes off Larry Uteck and Southgate, that's a park. Again, it's never going to be filled up with houses. That's Hemlock Ravine. There are some natural separations that may be of assistance and I don't know what it would do to your population fluctuations.

The bit of Clayton Park that you've got divided up there that is adjacent to us that includes the rest of Birch Cove and Rockingham, it's also got a huge chunk of Bayers Lake

Business Park. Again, no homes. Whether that's of any assistance from local knowledge or not, I don't know.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I want to thank you. You know the process. You've presented before in the past.

MS. MARY ANN MCGRATH: I have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know just drawing a boundary on the Bedford Highway around Birch Cove was a problem back in, I think, 2002.

MS. MARY ANNE MCGRATH: I know.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much indeed. The next speaker is Patrick Sullivan.

MR. PATRICK SULLIVAN: Thank you very much. Thank you, Colin. And thank you very much to the Commission for enduring me again this evening. I will point out that I didn't have a submission last night; it was just questions of clarification.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It was, yes.

MR. PATRICK SULLIVAN: We have a submission tonight now that we have the answers to the questions of clarification. Thank you very much for listening. My name is Patrick Sullivan. I am the President and CEO of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. We've been following the potential changes to the electoral boundaries as our members—we have over 1,600 members, that represent over 65,000 employees in the greater Halifax area: Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford, Sackville. And along the Eastern Shore and, of course, Eastern Passage.

The chamber is in favour of a smaller, rather than larger, government. Meaning that we would propose that the electoral boundary numbers remain at 51 or possibly decrease.

I do speak to many MLAs in the course of our work and I know they are hard-working, dedicated to their constituencies and, of course, their constituents. However, I could say the same about MLAs and MPPs right across the country of Canada, and if I were to look at other provinces like Ontario, which might be the extreme example – which has a population of over 13 million people and has recently increased the number of electoral ridings to 124. That represents approximately slightly more than 100,000 people per riding or per MPP in Ontario, versus Nova Scotia's average of between 16,000 to 18,000 per MLA.

We at the chamber believe that with effective communication and if tools are used effectively—there are many ways to communicate with our MLAs, to meet with our MLAs and, of course, they are responsive, but we believe it can be done with fewer MLAs.

As Halifax is 47 per cent of Nova Scotia's population, we want to ensure that HRM is numerically and appropriately represented in the provincial Legislature. With 22 MLAs now, we are approximately 92 per cent represented while the rest of Nova Scotia is over 100 per cent represented. Having one more MLA carved out of the 51 would give Halifax proportional representation. Increasing the Halifax representation by two and increasing the total seats to 55 will simply maintain the current percentage of approximately 92 per cent. The population of Halifax will be under-represented.

I want to point out we are in full support of cultural and linguistic representation for Acadian and African Nova Scotians across our province. We believe that the additional representation of these groups can be incorporated without adding additional MLAs, but rather through the redistribution of current representation and/or through general representation or members at large—from the current number of 51.

We are concerned that the additional representation in the draft plan and the increase from 51 to 55 MLAs will mean significant additional costs to Nova Scotians. Nova Scotia's provincial population is not significantly increasing and would mean additional salaries and costs, which range from \$140,000 when you include salary and constituency costs to approximately \$200,000 depending on position, or an increase of approximately \$560,000 to \$800,000 annually which would put a further strain on our already large debt or per capita ratio in debt-servicing costs. Debt service costs, which are currently the fourth largest item in the provincial budget, are over \$800 million a year.

The costs that are being considered do not simply go away when MLAs retire. The Auditor General reported in October 2017 that the obligation to 186 people was \$109 million—this was the MLA pension plan. It was also reported that the MLA pension plan had no assets and is unfunded. In addition, the province, through taxpayers, pay \$5 for every \$1 of contribution by the MLA.

I'd like to encourage the Commission, as an independent group, to speak truth to power or to our political leadership and recognize that Nova Scotians cannot afford to increase debt or costs borne by future generations of Nova Scotians. We should feel represented, but we should feel that the province is utilizing taxpayer dollars in the most efficient and effective way.

In summary, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce believes that Halifax—which represents 47 per cent of the population—is under-represented by MLAs currently. We are in favour of cultural and linguistic representation for Acadians and African Nova Scotians, but we believe this can be accomplished through a redistribution of seats that are currently available in Nova Scotia. We believe this can be accomplished with the current seats and without bearing additional cost for Nova Scotians.

Thank you again and I hope you'll take time to reflect on our thoughts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. As you know, the terms of reference do call for us to come up with at least two proposals—what we call the interim report; I think they refer to as the preliminary report—by November 30th. And one of those is for 51 seats which is the current seat count for the province. How many variants on top of that we'll come up with is going to be the result of the Commission hearing from people like yourself this evening. Thank you very much.

[6:30 p.m.]

MR. PATRICK SULLIVAN: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you can give us your brief?

MR. SULLIVAN: Sure, I can send it over to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: To Callee, please.

MR. PATRICK SULLIVAN: That'll be fine, and I think we may provide a little bit of additional detail rather than just the words that I mentioned this evening, if that's okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much indeed.

MR. PAUL GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, a point of clarification. With regard to your comments on representation for Acadian ridings and African Nova Scotians, you suggested a general representation or membership at large. I would like to see how, in practice, what would that entail?

MR. PAT SULLIVAN: Well, I think we saw general representation or membership at large as the same thing. For us, that was the same thing. I don't know that we have an answer to how that would take place, but we want to ensure that those communities are represented, and we want to ensure that the communities have the opportunity to vote for the individuals that may be running to represent those communities.

I don't know that we have a particular thought on how members at large—I think the better term we should use is members at large—would work other than a hypothesis on how that may potentially work with the number of people running and people having the opportunity across the province who identify as those communities to vote for that particular individual or individuals.

MR. PAUL GAUDET: Okay.

MR. PATRICK SULLIVAN: Does that make sense?

MR. PAUL GAUDET: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now those are the two speakers that have indicated they wish to speak this evening, but now we can take speakers from the floor if you wish to come forward and make a presentation. If you can state your name into the microphone.

MR. BRAD JOHNS: Thank you very much, Chairman Dodds and members. My name is Brad Johns, and I will be quick. I was late last evening at your presentation at Acadia Hall, and it is nice to actually be able to put some faces to resumes and names, because I have had the opportunity, as one of the selection committee, to help pick the Commission. It's nice to actually be able to put names to faces.

For those who are not familiar with me, I am currently the MLA for the Sackville-Beaver Bank constituency. Prior to that I had the honour of actually representing that area for 16 years on Halifax Regional Council as the councillor for the area. Through that time saw those boundaries change three times, the HRM municipal boundaries for that district. I'm quite familiar with the process.

I'm not really here to lobby on numbers or anything else. There were a couple of things that I thought might be beneficial for committee members to know. I know that MLA Bill Horne did have an opportunity to make a presentation last night. I think I will probably echo some of what he said as well.

The first point, of course, being the fact that currently the community of Beaver Bank, which is a very strong community and has a very strong identity unto itself, is currently split. From my perspective, I see that as a good thing for the community—they have two representatives provincially representing them. But I know that from talking with residents in the community, they would really like to see somehow that their whole community have one representative.

Whether that would be to align that community with Middle and Upper Sackville, whether it would be to align it with Fall River, whether it would be to look at creating a new seat independent of those for itself—I don't know what the solution would be there, I'm open to just about anything myself. But I do want to express that residents have said to me that they would really like to see one representative for that entire community.

The second point I wanted members to be aware of is that there is a new subdivision that has gone in off Highway No. 101, it's just to the south. It's known as Indigo Shores. It feeds out directly onto Highway No. 101 or into the community of Middle Sackville, and the address of that community is Middle Sackville. It's newer and quite geographically large, but there's not a lot of residents in there. They are currently aligned with the Hammonds Plains-Lucasville constituency, but as I said, I know that their address is Middle Sackville and the only way they can exit out of their community is into Middle Sackville. Four or five years ago, it was woods, it didn't even exist.

The third point I wanted to make as well, similarly, is around the community of Lucasville, which is currently in with Hammonds Plains. If there was a need to look at

tweaking percentages in order to offset—if something was to happen to Beaver Bank, the community of Lucasville as well has community interests aligned with Middle Sackville more so than they would with Hammonds Plains, I would think. The majority of that community—of course it's an historic Black Nova Scotian community, most of the students who are there attend school in Middle Sackville, a lot of shopping towards the Middle Sackville way—so there may be some leeway to play with there. I've had the privilege as the municipal councillor to represent all three of those districts, and that configuration all works well.

In closing, I know that the committee has the challenge of looking at how they are going to deal with the African Nova Scotian and the Acadian representation. I would bring forward just as a suggestion, certainly not a caucus suggestion—I know that years ago the Halifax Regional School Board was faced with similar issues. The way they dealt with it was that constituents were given a choice as to whether they wanted to vote for their local school board rep or if they wanted to vote for their African Nova Scotian school board rep. I don't know if there was another choice or not. They were given an either/or solution they could do if they fell within that demographic. That may be something that the committee might want to consider as well.

I certainly thank the members for their time and thank you for your commitment as the process moves forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I know that speaking for the Commission, we are all dedicated to serving on this Commission and following the terms of reference which, as I say, everyone has a copy of, if they wish.

MR. BRAD JOHNS: I have the utmost confidence in the Commission. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Any more speakers from the floor? Please.

MR. DARRELL JOHNSTON: Mr. Chairman, my name is Darrell Johnston. A question, you talked about the boundaries currently on Kearney Lake Estates, behind that now are the beginnings of the rest of what is termed as Bedford West, which is a significant development which will sort of—that whole Bedford West area is almost a community unto itself right now and it's going to be pretty heavily populated, density-wise, with apartment buildings and townhouses and some single homes as well.

That feeling of community that was mentioned earlier is building as a sense of essence of community into itself in that space. As you mentioned, Kearney Lake Estates is sort of in the middle of nowhere. It really is called Hammonds Plains or Ben Jessome's area, but it really considers itself part of Bedford, so some consideration around that.

Then a question—I don't know if questions are appropriate—you had mentioned the parameters, I think it was 1.48 and 0.77, those are the parameters . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can I just clarify, the parameters are 1.25 or down to 0.75 but in the case of the current boundary for Bedford, it's 1.48.

MR. DARRELL JOHNSTON: The question I have, I had a brief opportunity to look at the divisions of boundaries, why would any of the considerations, like the 0.55 for Cape Breton-Richmond, why would that be under consideration? If that's the true parameters, why would not just be eliminated?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The boundaries we are proposing right now, say for Argyle-Barrington, would be 0.46 and for Clare-Digby would be 0.49. The reason for our proposals right now is the result, first of all, of the court challenge, but more particularly the Keefe report.

We are charged in Term of Reference No. 1 for effective representation but also for voter parity and we are trying to balance those two issues. Then, of course, we can look at language, we can look at geography, because again if you look at the total map for the province you'll see that the largest electoral district would be Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie yet, in fact, right now on the current boundaries it would be 0.74.

MR. DARRELL JOHNSTON: Consideration outside of the 0.74 again and 1.25 would be only for parity?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, as I say, the Commission's terms of reference are very broad, so we can go non-contiguous. For example, one thing we're looking at is for Chéticamp, which is currently in Inverness, to be part of Cape Breton-Richmond. Of course, there's a geographical separation between those two. Again, we'll be up there in a couple of weeks to get their views.

There's a whole series of terms of reference, and I say that geography is one, simply the size of an electoral district that an MLA has to represent. If you take one like Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie, take one like Inverness or like Victoria-The Lakes, it might take you two and a half hours to go from one tip to the other. It's very different to, say, metro, particularly as you get into the south end where you can walk across the electoral district in 20 minutes. So, geography is a factor that we have to take into account as well.

MR. DARRELL JOHNSTON: It also works against the other way to have Halifax have the density, or Bedford with the 1.48, is cumbersome for the existing MLA structure to be able to respond to expectations of constituents.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The point was made earlier that some areas of the country have large populations that a member has to serve, but in our case, as I say, we've got some

unique features. The first issue we have to deal with is what is called effective representation. That's what the Keefe report looked at, effective representation for African Nova Scotians and for Acadians.

MR. DARRELL JOHNSTON: My final point on that would be to take a look at such areas as Toronto. The infrastructure is quite a bit different under those representations. There may be one MLA for 130,000, but they are not a single-person office with a couple of people there. They have their own existing infrastructure, or the expectations are lower for their ability to consult on a day-to-day basis with smaller issues.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I want to thank you very much.

Please step forward. Again, if you can state your name, please.

MS. CAROL DARLING: My name is Carol Darling and I am in Bedford. A couple of questions, if I could ask them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, I'll try and answer them.

MS. CAROL DARLING: The Acadian and African Nova Scotian representatives, I'm assuming, I'm praying, these would be voting members of the House, is that correct?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MS. CAROL DARLING: Okay, so it's not Puerto Rico?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MS. CAROL DARLING: Good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's my understanding anyway.

MS. CAROL DARLING: I would urge this panel to please make sure that happens because to have that representation without a vote is meaningless.

Secondly, I do not understand by what mechanism one sorts out which voter gets the extra ballot to determine this representation. Could you explain that a little bit, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll try. This is an issue that previous commissions have grappled with so it's not the first time in the country. There's academic literature with respect to how you self-identify. Of course, if you want voter parity, does it mean then that you can vote in the constituency you live in and then vote for a member at large? That's an issue. We haven't resolved that in our own minds right now; this is why we're coming out to listen to people's views. But, certainly, this is something that we are grappling with.

As you say, the debate is out there with respect to these members at large.

MS. CAROL DARLING: I want to just unravel that a tiny bit. Assuming that the ultimate decision is that voter X, who is a person of colour or French, has only one vote for the member at large and that MLA is responsible for the entire province. How does someone in Yarmouth or Sydney effectively access their MLA in Halifax with that kind of geographical issue and no meaningful public transportation in the province?

[6:45 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, again, you've put your finger on the issue of effective representation. This is an issue that has been debated back and forth and this is why we are trying to get your views. It's something that we want to look at, but we may, in fact, discard and stay with something like our current proposals or something very, very different.

MS. CAROL DARLING: So, for lack of a better description, normal MLAs are left to struggle with the special needs of the representation of those communities on their own?

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I take a seat like Richmond, for example, when we produced our interim report the last time and I was on that commission, I can remember listening to the MLA at the time saying, look, we don't just represent an Acadian community—whether it's Clare, Argyle, or Richmond—we represent all Acadian people in the province because, as you know, they are spread out. Not only that, but we're a voice in the nation and then we're a voice internationally through Francophonie. I think that's another way of looking at the ridings, what used to be called protected ridings. In effect, if you live in that area, whether it's Clare or Argyle or whatever, the MLA for that is also representing those other pockets because they're representing the Acadian population. They're representing the historical and cultural values.

MS. CAROL DARLING: Doesn't that tremendously weaken and dilute the voice of that community?

MR. CHAIRMAN: They have a voice. If they have that individual seat, say a seat for Clare and a seat for Argyle and Richmond, and likewise for the African Nova Scotians in Preston—and we know that African Nova Scotians are dispersed right across the province and we know the history of that, so a significant number in the north end of Halifax, Whitney Pier, Lucasville, and so on. But the argument that people would use for effective representation is that, where you have a seat like Preston or a seat like Argyle or Clare, you have somebody who represents not just the issues of that particular seat but who will carry on the mantle for their particular populations across the province. If I go back, I think it was—and I wasn't on the commission when those seats were first established, but I was on it in 2002 that continued the protection. The last time, we argued in the interim report that they should be continued, and the argument was that they are something more than just an electoral district. Does that answer your question?

MS. CAROL DARLING: I think it does and I thank you. I'm not saying it necessarily settles my mind.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I understand.

MS. CAROL DARLING: I know you've wrestled with the difficult issues. Two more comments and then I'll move on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please.

MS. CAROL DARLING: I would urge you to seriously consider a third seat for Indigenous representation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can I just interject at this point? There was a seat, a member at large, that kind of seat, established probably in 1992, I think. That seat was not taken up by First Nations. We will be consulting. We have talked about this as a commission. We will be consulting with the Chiefs of the Confederacy of Mi'kmaq to ask them if they wish that additional seat to be activated or not. But we'll also be talking to them about the process. There is a seat there right now, since 1992. As far as I know—and I stand to be corrected—that seat is still there, and it would have been a member at large that we've talked about.

MS. CAROL DARLING: One other thing on that issue, and that is I would encourage you, because of distance and geography and transportation and all these things that we've just talked about, to consider doubling that representation with two seats for each in both ends of the province.

I hear the gentleman from the chamber of commerce and his concerns about cost, but I would urge the Commission to the position that Nova Scotians are not looking for cheap government. We're looking for good government. We're looking for representational government that gives every citizen fair access to their political representatives and gives their political representatives a fighting chance of representing the people in their constituency, all the people in their constituency. Budgets are tight and money is hard, but don't cheap out on our representational government. This should not be a financial issue. This is an issue of democracy and representation and it is important to every one of us. I urge the Commission, do not be led down the false path of fiscal conservatism; give us good government.

Now, I have one more thing to say, and thank you so much for your time. I want to preface this comment with my utter confidence that every single member of this Commission is completely qualified, dedicated, and aware of the minefields that you're walking through as you go through this process. I know it isn't easy. But it's 2018 and I walk in this room tonight and we have nine commissioners on this board and only two women. That offends me as a citizen and as a taxpayer. It offends me deeply as a woman, who represents a little better than 50 per cent of the population of this country, that in this

day and age—and I know this has nothing to do with you commissioners. I'm asking you to carry this message back to the government I support, don't misunderstand, that this is unacceptable.

I don't know about the lady who's unable to be here tonight, whether she is a woman of colour or whether she's French, but I see one member of this board who is a person of colour. That is unacceptable in today's society and I would urge you, please, to carry that message back so the next commission that gets appointed more adequately reflects the population that you represent.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Well, your comments will be in Hansard, so they will be on the record. Ms. Simmonds, by the way, is from Cherry Brook. Thank you.

MS. CAROL DARLING: But still, my point is I see a sea of white male faces.

MR. CHAIRMAN. I hear you and it was the select committee of the House of Assembly that appointed us. But as I say, that message is on record now and I'm sure the members will read that in due course. Thank you very much.

MS. CAROL DARLING: Good luck with your work.

MR. CHARMAN: Thank you. Are there any other interjections from the floor? Are there any other questions you might want to ask of us?

As I say, we have the benefit of the comments this evening and some maps, so we have to go back and do our work. Tomorrow night, we're going to be looking at Clayton Park. Then, as I mentioned, we'll be down on the South Shore and then back in Dartmouth, because the proposal is to add a seat in Cole Harbour. Over the years HRM has grown, and in the past, seats have been taken out of the rural areas to accommodate that growth.

Again, I call for any further comments from the floor. Hearing none, thank you very much again for coming. There's still coffee, if you wish to partake.

Have a look at the maps, because they are there. The initial report in 2012 that was not accepted by the government, as I said, was for 52 seats; the final report was for 51; and our report, at the moment, is for 55. Then there's some more detailed maps for Bedford but also showing Bedford as it is right now, Bedford as it would have looked like in the initial report of 2012, and then adjacent ones in terms of Clayton Park and Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

If there are no further comments, thank you very much for coming, and have a safe drive home. This is an opportunity for commissioners to get to parts of the province and parts of the HRM that they haven't been to before. Thank you very much. (Applause)

[The Commission adjourned at 6:55 p.m.]