

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Special Committee on Democratic Renewal

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SUBJECT: COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS ON PLEBISCITE QUESTION

COMMITTEE:

Jordan Brown, MLA Charlottetown-Brighton [Chair]
Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, Leader of the Third Party, MLA Kellys Cross-Cumberland
Paula Biggar, Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, MLA Tyne Valley-Linkletter
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Mermaid
Janice Sherry, MLA Summerside-Wilmot

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

none

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Brad Trivers, MLA Rustico-Emerald

GUESTS:

Sandy MacKay; Gary MacDougall; Lucy Morkunas; Anna Keenan; Randall Affleck; Brenda Oslawsky;
Allan Rankin; Nils Ling; Andrew Lush; Mark Gallant; Jim Bartley; Rob Litke; Gilles Michaud; Randy
Shaw; Marie Burge; Dwight Parkman; Larry LeClair; Brent Gallant

STAFF:

Marian Johnston, Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees

The Committee met at 7:00 p.m.

Chair (J. Brown): Okay, folks, if we could get everybody to grab a seat we'll get going as soon as we can.

Maybe, I guess, just so everybody can see me while I'm talking I'll stand up, for now anyway.

Welcome, everybody. My name is Jordan Brown, I'm the Chair of the Special Legislative Committee on Democratic Renewal. The other committee members, in no particular order, are Peter Bevan-Baker, Sidney MacEwen, Janice Sherry, and the hon. Paula Biggar.

With us this evening is the committee clerk, Marian Johnson, right here. She will have a more formal role in this evening's events as we move along.

By way of a brief introduction – what I should mention as well, Brad Trivers, your local MLA, is here seated in the back row back here. Thank you, Brad, for coming out this evening.

I just want to give a bit of background and context to you in terms of what we're doing here tonight, where we are in this process, and where it's likely to go so that you can kind of fit that in the grand scheme of the comments you're likely to hear here this evening, if you weren't already aware.

In the spring sitting of the Legislature this year the White Paper on Democratic Renewal was released and tabled in the Legislature. Essentially there were three main topic areas in the white paper, which I have kind of boiled down for the sake of my own ease of use and referenced to who we might elect, how we might elect them, and the rules pertaining to elections.

We have, through our work to date, focused on the how we go about conducting elections piece of things, and that is really the continuation of the work that we're here doing this evening. More specifically this evening we're focused on what a plebiscite question would look like and the different options that might be on a plebiscite question.

To give you the context of how we got there, we were charged with guiding discussion stemming out of the white paper. We set out first to essentially look at the different possibilities in terms of electoral systems that might be appropriate on Prince Edward Island. Through our consultations last fall and some great presentations by Islanders – many of whom are here tonight – we distilled some themes out of what we heard in the fall and we came up with four options as we saw as representing, in a fairly general way, the comments that we had heard throughout the course of the fall. We've essentially recommended that they be given some further consideration as possibilities that might work on Prince Edward Island.

From that part we have basically looked to move forward to try to refine that process, refine what a plebiscite question would look like, whether it includes all of those four options plus our current system, or how exactly that would look. We'll talk a little bit more about the specific breakdown of the question and some of the issues that would be involved in that that I think everybody should be aware of and give some consideration to.

We're here tonight to get your general input in terms of the process as well, and how a plebiscite might be conducted right from the technical aspects of that. To give everybody an indication of what I mean by that, we have had a presentation from the Chief Electoral Officer, and we've been actively looking into alternative means of conducting a plebiscite, which is really to say whether it be conducted by electronic or other means. I think there's a fairly good chance that we will look at that – well, we have looked at it – we will recommend that that be given some further consideration and may even recommend that that take place that way. That's on the basis that – the Chief Electoral Officer, as I say, has been looking into it and has, at least on a preliminary basis, found that it's a very reliable way of doing things, it's much more efficient, it allows a much greater opportunity for people to participate in ways that are generally easier and more accessible. It's something that we'd be interested in looking at for this purpose.

Without too much further ado, we have produced a video that outlines the four options that we've kind of whittled things

down to at this point in time. It is a video so we do have the benefit of being able to rewind if there's something that you didn't catch the first time. So feel free, if you have any questions on any of the options as they're presented in the video, which we will play in a moment, to ask the questions, and if need be we can rewind things, as I say, a little bit and replay them or hopefully answer the questions as we go through.

If you have any suggestions in relation to those options we're here tonight to hear you out on them. I guess – and we've heard this a few times before – I want to make clear that we're not here to serve as kind of your last opportunity to get to know about these systems. We're here as much to learn as we are to impart any wisdom. I should be very clear that – I was going to say none of the five committee members have extensive expertise in electoral systems beyond what we've learned in our capacity here, although a couple of the committee members have had some past experience. But we don't hold ourselves out to be, by any means, experts in this area. We started out pretty well from the same position each of you would have and we've learned what we've learned through the presentations that we've had and some research that we've done independently. So we don't purport to have all the answers nor do we feel that we should have them all at this point in time. We're here to learn from you.

Without further ado, we'll play the video and then we'll have a discussion after the video is over about what we see in there and about how a plebiscite will be conducted generally. If anybody has any trouble seeing from where you are – I appreciate the screen's smallish – don't hesitate to move forward in the room. I should note, as well, that this video is available on our website which is assembly.pe.ca/democraticrenewal, and you can go on there at any point in time and watch the video in its entirety.

If you want to go ahead, John-Ross?

[“Electoral System Options for Prince Edward Island” video was played]

Chair: Okay, so basically the format the meeting will take from here is that Marian, who you see in the back here, will have a microphone. This hopefully will devolve

into a discussion about the various issues pertaining to a plebiscite and a plebiscite ballot and how it will be conducted.

What I will ask is that as the microphone goes around we'll just ask you to put up your hand if you have something to say. As the microphone goes around the one thing that I do request of you is that you say your name clearly into the microphone before speaking and that's because this meeting is recorded. Everything that's said at the meeting is recorded into Hansard, and we need to have your name to associate with the comments as we go forward.

We also have a survey, which I'll ask Marian to hand around to everybody and briefly introduce. By way of context in relation to the survey I want to let everybody know that it's nothing official. It's more meant to engender discussion about different possible plebiscite ballot structures than anything else, and really, we're looking to try and get some input and to get a conversation going about the possible issues that might arise out of structuring a ballot in different ways. This was one kind of interactive and pointed way we figured we might go about doing that.

Really, the discussion will be somewhat free-flowing throughout the evening, but we would appreciate it if you would be so kind as to mark the survey and also provide us with any comments that you would have, either in the space that's there or if you need additional paper please let us know.

Go ahead.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees:
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am Marian Johnston. I'm the clerk for this committee and so I get to come out and have coffee and Timbits at all kinds of places across the Island and talk about the survey.

This survey is, of course, not mandatory. You don't have to sign your name, either. It's also available on our website, so if you want to think about it and take this home with you, you can put your answers on our website which is a great way to answer it.

I thought I'll just run through it very quickly. You have four options on there and

we're looking for the format, not the actual systems that might be listed, but what format you think would give us the best results.

Your first option, number one, is just a general one-part question and that would just ask simply if people were in favour of change or the flipside of that coin, if people are in favour of retaining what we have.

Option number two is a choice between the current system, which is first-past-the-post, and one other option. So it's a choice between first-past-the-post and something else, and the something else it to be determined.

Option number three is a two-part question. The first part is, again, asking just sort of: Are you in favour of change? And part two, if you are, please choose your favourite from the list of electoral systems that are there.

The fourth is almost the same except in part two we ask that you would rank with number one being your favourite, number two being your second favourite, and so on.

Those are options that we're interested in finding out if – well, what the feeling is. I have survey results from a couple of meetings so far and I'll tell you it's a dead heat. We're pretty much split even-stein among the four options so far. But what's been really helpful is that box on the bottom where people put their comments in. We're collecting those and categorizing them as well and so, please – perhaps at the end of the evening I'll be collecting them at the door, and if you prefer to take it home and think a little bit more about it you can answer online.

Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you.

Did everybody get a copy of the survey, I guess, is the first question?

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Chair: No?

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: Where is it now?

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Chair: It's gone around, yeah. Maybe out. Does everybody now have one?

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Chair: No? Okay, we may have to share for now. That's all right. We'll work on getting some more. I guess I might – yeah, sure.

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Chair: No, that's all right. That's actually what I was going to do. The first question that I was going to put to you was: Does anybody have any questions on the various systems or comments, I guess, on the various systems? Again, if you can put your hand up and when the mic comes around, say your name.

Sandy MacKay: Yes, I'm Sandy MacKay. I live in Hope River and just the first question on this. If you ask us to answer the survey, I'm kind of wondering – like, you gave four options in the video, but when you look at the – there's no question that says that.

Chair: No, so –

Sandy MacKay: So when you're saying a general one-part question, in other words what it said: You're either in favour of this system or you want change. But would people know what change would mean?

Chair: Yeah, so –

Sandy MacKay: When we had the plebiscite for the bridge and the boat it was easy, you're either going to get a bridge or a boat.

Chair: Yeah. To be clear – and so we'll address this – well, maybe I'll just do it now.

The basic premise of this discussion is that we have not finalized the options that would be on any plebiscite question at this point in time. In fact, as you saw the options that were presented there, there was probably a lot of detail that's yet to be filled in in relation to each option or a level of detail in respect to some of the options, I guess I might say. It's not to say that all four of them would necessarily be on a ballot either.

That's part of the consideration. I think separate and apart from that there's the general structure of the ballot. Maybe to provide you with some insight as to kind of the considerations that we've undertaken so far in relation to this, there are four different structures that we have presented there. There are probably more than that that are out there for consideration and they really range from a broad, open-ended question like: Do you want change, yes or no? The answer that you're going to get to that really is only going to be as reliable as the question that you've asked. So change for Sandy might mean a totally different thing than change for Nils. Really, the answer that you get is probably, likewise, going to mean different things to different people. You saw the four different options that have been presented really range in the differentiation from what we currently have from what I would call more like incremental change to holistic change. There are all different kinds of ways of structuring things that give you different information.

Another possibility that you see on this sheet would be to have that kind of a yes or no question then followed by options. With the options you could either, say, pick one or rank your options or look at that different ways, and you could have it with one option or 10 options or whatever might be best. The issue really when you get into having a number of different options, particularly if you set the ballot up such that you have a number of options and you're asking voters to pick one option only, is that there's usually going to be – or when I say usually, statistically speaking, going to be a much smaller chance that people are going to collectively arrive at something different than we currently have because they will probably split their votes up amongst the different options that are there.

In other words, say the population generally broke down 50-50, those wanting change, those not wanting change. The 50% that want change probably don't all want the same kind of change so they will probably divide their votes up different ways amongst the different options.

One possible way around that is to rank the options so that if there's a crowd that wants change, eventually they will arrive, presumably, at a consensus as to what that

change should be through the ranking of their different options. That would essentially run off against the first place option.

There are a number of different ways of doing that and they all provide you with different levels of information, they all provide you with different degrees of certainty, and they all present problems.

I guess the other point that's worthy of making is that – I guess two points I would make – one, and probably most of us in this room looking around would have heard this before, in particular in relation to the Quebec secession reference, and that said if you're going to ask, in that case, a question of constitutional importance you really need to have a clear answer to a clear question. There's a pretty good question as to what constitutes a clear question, and therefore, what's going to ground a clear answer by way of a response to that question. Whether you get that by answer to a yes-no question I don't know, that's something that we're interested to hear from folks.

You might even argue that the last plebiscite that we had, despite the fact that the question was very precise and the model that was attached to it was very precise, the way the question was asked and answered, we weren't necessarily provided with a clear answer to a clear question only because there could be umpteen reasons why folks did not vote for that particular model as it was presented. You might say: People didn't want change. You might say: People didn't want that kind of change. You might say: People didn't support that particular model or elements of it.

You're running that through your head trying to figure out what's kind of the best of all worlds, I guess, or what leaves you least open to problems and provides you simultaneously with the best opportunity to come to the wishes of the Islanders being best presented through that plebiscite question.

Just one final comment. There's been a fairly great debate on the federal scene about whether a plebiscite question should be asked or not in the first place. I think it would be fair to say – and it was not anybody on this committee or in this room

that decided which avenue was going to be taken – but I think it would be fair to say that government generally chose not to presume what people’s thoughts were, rather to consult and have the people of Prince Edward Island decide what kind of a system they wanted to have. Generally speaking, that approach should be encompassed, we feel, in the plebiscite question.

There are those that would say, and have said federally, that perhaps a better way to effect change would be to say that we are going to change and have some general party make the decision in relation to change.

There’s different ends of spectrums, I guess, that need to be examined in putting this question together and undertaking this consideration, and that’s all part of the work that we have to do and that’s all what we’re interested in hearing from you folks about this evening.

Gary MacDougall: Hi, Gary MacDougall.

I salute the Assembly for taking on this challenge which we all sort of agree, maybe, we want a change but how do we get a change. One of the things that I’m curious about – and I doubt I’m the only one in the room that burned up some gray matter trying to absorb those four proposals over there. The fear of God went into me when I thought of some people actually sitting down trying to figure it out.

But without rattling on too (Indistinct), has the committee looked into how you fundamentally – how have other countries – we often hear about it’s all better in Slovenia or someplace like that. How did other countries come to changing their first-past-the-post? Did they actually do what we’re trying to do, vote on A, B or C? Or did somebody just bring it in like the Trudeau government seems to be saying: Parliament will just bring in a change? I’m curious how other countries have done this.

Chair: I think maybe the easiest way – and you’re looking for an answer from me – I think maybe the easiest way I can answer that question is we have done some research in that regard. We have also had some great presentations in that regard and I see, actually, Anna Keenan’s got the mic in her

hand. One such presentation was given by Anna. We’ve had other meetings where, as one example, somebody explained the context within which New Zealand changed their electoral system – I guess it’s getting close to 15 years ago now – it might even be more than 15 years ago now.

Lucy Morkunas: (Indistinct) 1993.

Chair: Lucy Morkunas is saying it happened in 1993, so there you go.

Lucy Morkunas: (Indistinct) 1996 was their first election (Indistinct).

Chair: Thank you. So, 1996 was their first election with MMP.

Anyway, all to say, yes, we generally have – again, I’m not going to say any of us are expert in that field – but we generally have looked into that to some degree. There’s no set formula that’s necessarily worked to achieve change. I should say jurisdictions that have utilized the same formula as has worked in other places have not seen the results that have occurred in other places.

If that answers your question, Gary.

Anna Keenan: Hi, my name is Anna Keenan. I live up the hill here. Thanks for hosting another one of these consultation nights.

I suppose I’ve got a bunch of points but I’m going to restrict myself to the questions that are on the survey here. Which of the four options we think is the correct format for a plebiscite. I have to say that I strongly favor option 4 and I’d love to have the opportunity to just explain why that is to others in the room.

Option 4 is actually the model that was successful in changing New Zealand’s electoral system. There’s a number of other referendums that have happened in various countries, and also jurisdictions in British Columbia, for example, in all different provinces, here in 2005, that had failed because of the way that the plebiscite or referendum question was formatted.

We know that if you just choose: Do you vote for change, yes or no?, and that’s all the information that you ask from the public,

that there needs to be more information or somebody needs to be making a decision about the model that is changed to later. By only asking: Do you want change, yes or no?, it pretty much guarantees that the general public has no voice in what model you change to. There's a smaller group of people that are making that decision.

That narrows it down to option 3 or 4, if you want the public to actually choose between options. If you chose option 3 where you don't have a ranked ballot, then let's say you have three or four options. You might have 30% voting for option A, 30% voting for option B, and 20% each for option C and D. Then you know A or B is the most popular, but still only 30% of the population supports that particular model. You'd end up with the option that has the largest public support still only being supported by a minority of Islanders overall, which is exactly the same problem that we have currently in the electoral system. Forty per cent of the population voted for the party that now has 60% of the votes, and that's hence the whole reason we're starting this process.

That, to me, is why the second question in any plebiscite needs to be ranked. Because it basically means that if a certain option is eliminated it says: This doesn't have much popular support so we eliminate it. Then all the people who voted for those eliminated options can say: If you're not going to count my vote in the first round, my second preference is – and they get to say what their second preference is and that goes into counting the votes.

I feel very strongly that it needs to be option 4 and I just wanted to make sure that everyone's sort of aware of – yeah, I suppose the reasons that option 4 has been successful in reforming the electoral system in other jurisdictions, whereas any of these other options could fail or produce anti-democratic results. So, yeah.

Chair: Could I ask you a question, Anna, before you sit down?

Anna Keenan: Yes, please.

Chair: If you're going to have a ranked ballot or ranked choice in terms of what options you might go for, do you think it makes sense to ask the first question: Do

you want change, yes or no? Or would it make more sense to have our current first-past-the-post system in amongst the other systems that would be presented on the ballot and say: Rank in order of your preference, one to whatever?

Anna Keenan: That's actually an excellent question that I haven't sort of previously thought about. I'm reluctant to form an opinion on that and respond to you immediately. I'll think more about that and get back to you by the end of the night.

Chair: Everybody knows why I'm asking that question of, Anna. Really, the thought would be that it takes the existing system down onto the level of all the others and says: If you want that system you have to affirm that that is what you want. You have to pick it and it has to be ranked and win by a majority in terms of what's there.

Kind of the con of that is that some people might feel that if you have a complicated ballot and you're looking for change, it presents a bit of a hurdle or a higher threshold in terms of basically people thinking that they need to go out and effectively vote to support what they already feel is their option. There's some pros and cons in that, in and of itself too, but it adds a dynamic to the question.

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Chair: If you don't have the mic in your hand it's not your turn, yet. Sorry about that, that's my fault, I caused that confusion.

Randall Affleck: My name's Randall Affleck. I'm ready for change. In my view the first-past-the-post is not sufficient for the modern age. But this past election is a bit more balanced than others. But when you have one opposition member – as we've had multiple times – it's just completely inadequate.

I have a couple of questions. I wonder if you couldn't – it would be helpful in some of these scenarios if we could, using previous election results, kind of tease out what the seat format would look like. Obviously you'd have to make some pretty broad assumptions on some of those proposals. But I think it would be doable and it would

be kind of useful for people to see that result.

I guess a question I have is: In terms of a plebiscite, what's going to be the magic number in terms of voter turnout and results? It's always the tricky part of a plebiscite and a referendum, especially if it's – I tend to favour number 4 option myself, but I think I'm not entirely convinced that all the options are on the screen that have been presented.

In the past election when 20% of the popular vote are choosing something other than the two parties that are in, it really is time to look at some threshold, probably a percentage of whatever the seats are in the Legislature. I think those parties that achieve a certain percentage of the popular vote should definitely have a representation.

Chair: Thank you. I might just make two comments stemming out of that.

The first is that, with the possible exception of preferential balloting, all of those options have been, as you put it, Randall, teased out by different presenters in the first round. Those presentations are actually on our website. Again, that's assembly.pe.ca/democraticrenewable.

If you forget that, or whatever, I think we either have information in the room or we can get it to you if you want to give Marian or one of the committee members your email or phone number or whatever. We can do that.

The other piece that I wish to address is the threshold piece. We're here to seek your input on – so the threshold piece, do we need a number different than 50% to decide to change? Probably more importantly than that, what proportion of Islanders, or eligible Island voters, do we need to see out casting a ballot in a plebiscite in order to get to that percentage that the plebiscite would have some kind of binding effect?

I should say plebiscites generally are not binding on government, but I think if you had a very low turnout there would be a pretty valid question as to what impact that has. That has been something that's been discussed broadly both in relation to the previous plebiscite on Prince Edward Island

and the plebiscites in British Columbia and Ontario. Thoughts on that would be appreciated.

Lucy.

Lucy Morkunas: Hi, it's Lucy Morkunas.

In 2005 there was something on the website that enabled you to figure out what would happen if a particular system was in. You could plug in. That was on the 2005 plebiscite information pages. Is that something that you might consider doing?

Chair: I think all of those options are definitely up for consideration at this point in time.

So everybody knows, basically the breakdown of the process – and I think I explained this but to try and make it as clear as we can. When a plebiscite question is set it will be our recommendation that an extensive education process take place at that point in time. I'm not exactly sure how that will look and I think probably the members in the Legislature will have input on whatever our recommendations are in any event. But my suggestion to you is that there will be – greater than a committee going around to community meetings and so forth – kind of an education campaign that will occur. That could very well, and likely will be, part of that.

Lucy Morkunas: That would answer Mr. Affleck's question.

I just wanted to speak to New Zealand and about what happened in Canada with respect to change. In New Zealand there was a lot of public support for change. When they did do the initial plebiscite, the first one, they had a two-part question. The first question was: Do you want change? Do you want change, yes or no? People had the option to say no, but still choose from the second question, and people did. Interestingly enough, they didn't use ranked, although ranked is probably a better way to do it. They just had a single choice, and MMP was chosen overwhelmingly. Like, 80% chose – whoever voted they choose MMP. That's how that started.

They had a second one and that one also was not a super-majority like they've had in

Canada, but that also kept MMP as a choice. People still had the four choices but they were able to choose MMP and chose it over all the rest.

With respect to the rest of Canada, there were two referendums in BC and it wasn't just the referendum that was the reason for a choice of no. There were a lot of other factors involved. The first referendum – 58%. If it had not been a super-majority there would have been a type of proportional representation in BC. There would have been single transferable vote, which uses a ranked ballot, which is what the committee refers to as a preferential ballot. That 58% was not enough for it to go. It got abandoned, but they waited three years before they did another referendum, and by then the momentum that a citizens' assembly which chose that particular system, that momentum was gone and so the people chose no.

At about the same time Ontario came into the fray. They also did a citizens' assembly, but there was no education involved in that. There was a very low profile and people didn't know what was going on. In that happening, in the result of that, was a no vote as well.

Quebec also did it, but there was a change in government and it got abandoned. Same with New Brunswick, and a change in government also resulted in abandoning a potential referendum vote.

So lots of change can be initiated. It seems that when we get to Canada a referendum doesn't necessarily translate into a change in the voting system. I think that the reason why is that there isn't the kind of incentive that there was in New Zealand. I mean, 80% – it was overwhelming, this desire for change, and people were very angry with their government so they figured that the best way to deal with that is to change the voting system.

Now, speaking of angry with their government, I really don't think that a single-choice question, even with a specific choice, is a good idea. Because oftentimes people are angry with their government and they will choose no just because they think that supporting something may be a vote for the government. I really think it's important

to have the ranked choices. You get more information. I think it's also important to have that first question. It almost sets the scene: Do I want change or not? It gets you thinking and then you know: Okay, so I have four choices. I think it's important to have that first question.

Brenda Oslawsky: Hi, my name is Brenda Oslawsky.

I did just want to actually address the issue that somebody had brought up earlier about how many countries have brought in PR with referendums and plebiscites. There's actually been only two. One is New Zealand and one is Switzerland, but Switzerland puts everything to a referendum or a plebiscite. They are direct-democracy driven and it took them till 1974 to have a plebiscite that passed to allow women to vote.

I mean, there are lots of problems. The federal government has said that they will not go to a referendum, at least at this point they have said that they are not going to go to a referendum, and there is nothing – federally, a referendum is not binding so that is probably one of the reasons why. As Lucy's pointed out there's a bunch of problems as far as ensuring that there is adequate education, adequate resources, that people are aware of the plebiscite, and when it's held.

One of the things that I'm actually concerned about is: How many people on the Island are aware that this plebiscite is going to happen in November? I mean, I don't know – I haven't seen a lot of coverage of this in the media so my concern is that there might not be very many people who are aware of it.

Allan Rankin: Allan Rankin, Hunter River.

I really commend the committee for the work you're doing. I think it's extremely important. Although I'm a little confused and I'd like some clarification on this. Am I wrong in thinking that all four political parties in the last election campaign campaigned for electoral reform, including the governing party?

Chair: No, you're – well, I shouldn't say campaigned for electoral reform. They all campaigned promising that they would

undergo a process to see if electoral reform was something that Islanders wanted, would be my understanding. We have one party leader here who can probably clarify his party's position, but –

Allan Rankin: I had thought that the governing party actually campaigned in favour of changes in the electoral system, with a review, and maybe I'm out to lunch on that. I think if that's the case or if it's nearly the case or if the optics are that it's the case, or the perception, then really that first question is really redundant, whether Islanders want change or not.

I mean, there just seems to be so much beating around the bush and so much talking about the desire for change that whenever a government has mandate to govern and approaches this issue that we retreat back to the first question: Do we want change?

I think this lady that just –

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Allan Rankin: Lucy, when you spoke about people who are not supportive of the government at any given moment, at any given time, and they're asked that question, and it's really the government asking the question, that there is a tendency for people who don't like the government or oppose the government just to say: No, leave it as it is.

I think I see it as a bit of a quandary because I think if you ask the question whether Islanders want change, change is sort of a fearsome thing and I think most Islanders, and this happened the last time around, are going to fall back to the status quo.

But I was of the assumption that our political parties – and I know that maybe not the Liberal Party, although I was sort of including the Liberal Party in that group – that our political parties really had decided that it is time for electoral change and electoral reform.

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct) that's federally.

Chair: Yeah, and just to maybe add –

Allan Rankin: No, I know that. I'm talking about the provincial election campaign that just passed.

Nils Ling: I think Allan's quite right. I think that –

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: Say your name.

Nils Ling: Oh, I'm sorry.

Chair: Nils Ling (Indistinct).

Nils Ling: My name is Nils Ling. I live in what Mr. Rankin describes as the downtown heart of Breadalbane.

I think Allan's quite right that we were told that this would be the last election in Prince Edward Island that was going to be held under first-past-the-post system. I'm sure that we were told that.

It feels to me like an abrogation of responsibility to throw it back. Because we elect some pretty smart people to make decisions for us and then to say: We don't want to make that decision, we're going to give it back to you, it feels like an abrogation of responsibility but here we are and that's fine. We can take it on, but the problem is that you start off by posing a really complicated question to people who aren't used to answering those on the ballot.

A further thing that is happening here, and it's, I think, very concerning and it's another conundrum, we say that Mr. Bevan-Baker as the leader of his party but also as a citizen has the right to say: I prefer this system, that system or the other. Why shouldn't it also apply to the Premier? But when the Premier's – the only issue that the Premier feels it's appropriate for him to express a personal opinion on is that he doesn't think there should be change in the electoral system. That has, I think, a fairly chilling effect. It has a chilling effect on his own members who obviously want to please the Premier, but it also generally, if he's held in high regard, it changes the nature of the debate.

When we come out of the election saying that this is going to be the last election that's held with first-past-the-post, and then the Premier says: Yeah, but I'm in favour of

staying the same, that feels like it's sending a really mixed message, and we don't have room for mixed messages in this.

Andrew Lush: Hi, my name's Andrew Lush.

I have a few brief points to make. I had looked through the website earlier today. First of all, I'd like to say the existing system has failed me in that the person I voted for wasn't elected and the MLA who does represent me isn't in government, he's in the minority opposition, so anything has to be better than that.

I agree with Nils and Gary about perhaps the government is in the position to decide which is the option that they prefer and then put that on the ballot. I've heard some convincing arguments that perhaps having these different choices to people available is a good idea, but really I agree with what Gary says. I had trouble deciding which would be the best option, and I think from what Randall was saying, putting the votes that were cast in the last election into those new systems isn't going to work because people will vote differently if there's a different system. Perhaps not so much as was visible, obviously, in the federal election, but in the provincial election people would vote differently.

Also, people on PEI, I don't think, would vote for a second candidate, definitely not a third candidate, because people here vote for a personality or a party, I think – I might be wrong but that's what I think anyway – which is completely different from the federal system. We don't have party politics on the Island like we do in the federal system. I think the Conservatives and the Liberals don't have anything like the division between them that there is at the federal level.

I think we need government by consensus and the third and fourth parties have said that they would support that. I think if we had a minority government, a proportional representation system, then people would have to bang their heads together and get on and make decisions.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: I don't have anyone on my list at the moment. Did anyone want the microphone?

Gary MacDougall: Gary MacDougall. The systems being proposed which would, I assume, result in more opposition people being elected, they do allow for a sitting government to be able to fill out Cabinets and things like that, do they? I mean you do have to have Cabinet ministers, right?

Chair: Again, there's always that question. I think the fairly standard answer would be it would be depend on how large you wanted to have the Cabinet. I don't think there's any real restriction on that one way or another. We have currently 27 MLAs, but nobody has really said that we have to stay at exactly that number. I think there's probably a fairly broad consensus on Prince Edward Island that too many more is too much and too many few is too little. Part of what you just said implies that.

Gary MacDougall: (Indistinct) unpopular, (Indistinct) unpopular. When you say (Indistinct) add more politicians. It seems unpopular when you say we need more politicians. But on a per capita basis you do need a certain size of a Cabinet, right?

Chair: Yes.

Unidentified Voice: God forbid we pick someone from a different party (Indistinct).

Chair: That's kind of what I was working around to, is that there are all kinds of different ways that's been dealt with through various uses of those systems.

I should mention the DMP or DMMP system that was referenced was effectively dreamt up by a young man named Sean Graham who's a student at the University of Alberta and fleshed out with the help of Anna Keenan who's here this evening. It has never been utilized any place. I will say Sean Graham initially an incredible amount of research and detail into the proposal that he had prepared. He didn't just prepare it for us, he's been working on it for two years now, and it's means for a general purpose use in Canada, not just on Prince Edward Island.

All to point out, I guess, that those are the kinds of the things that we like to hear at these meetings in terms of details that need to be considered and fleshed out and all the

rest of it as we look at the different potential systems.

Not only asking things as questions, but providing your views is definitely helpful to us as we undertake these considerations.

Sandy MacKay: Sandy Mackay. I've run 15 elections and probably I'm unique in that I'm probably – well, there was four of us presidents of UPSE who actually had to campaign and get elected in every constituency on the Island, from West Point to East Point and all parts in between.

Coming from that background it was always 50% plus one. Anytime there was a vote, if you didn't get the 50% plus one – and I lost an election by one vote – then you had to go back and campaign again. When I ran my second election across the Island I didn't get the first so everybody had to vote twice. Any question of change had to be by 75%. If you came to a convention and you wanted to change something that the members had the right to do, it had to be by 75%.

If we look at the last provincial election, 77% of the people that voted either voted Conservative or Liberal. I'd suggest that it's going to be an interesting ballot in November because I would think – and I might be wrong – that 77% were happy with either one of those two parties, the rest chose some other vote.

But you did ask two questions, and I think the first one has to be 50% plus one. Now I guess the problem would be we don't want to see a coin toss or people didn't like that coin toss. Well, the minister did, McIsaac, he was happy with it, the other person wasn't. But I think that that's democracy. That's the way the bridge was, that's the way the plebiscite for the – it's got to be 50%.

As far as people voting, I don't think there is going to be any problem with people coming out to vote. Whoever votes, that's their decision. I mean, I've won elections by 2,500 and I've won elections by 1,000. People don't vote, they get the ballot, they get it home, there's a free stamp on it, they mail it back. If you can go electronic – which is even better – because then I just have to sit home on my email, I email in my vote and away it goes.

I would really encourage you: do lots of advertisement, make people aware there's going to be a vote, it's November whatever. If you go electronic you don't have to worry about weather and away we go.

Chair: Do you think just on that point, Sandy, so everybody knows, if that was the way things are done – it's done in a lot of other jurisdictions, particularly in European countries, and they would typically vote over a period that would range from five days to maybe 10 days. Just wondering whether people have any thoughts on that, how long you leave the period open for. Does it really matter if you have a plebiscite how long you leave it open for? I guess some people might say –

Sandy MacKay: If you look at the federal election it ran from – I left in early September. I voted before I left. The election was in when I came back. I was gone for a month. So you could vote any day in Clyde River. What's to stop that? Because nobody knows how you voted.

Chair: No, some people might say that – in the US you see exit polls and all kinds of things like that. Some people may get a sense of the way things are going, would be kind of the argument for a shortened period, but I think there's counter-arguments, too. Just interested in thoughts on that, if folks have any.

Allan Rankin: Allan Rankin. Has there been any discussion at the committee level on the different – if you have, for example, within one electoral district, a larger electoral district as we sort of saw it described – you would have, as I understand it, if we're going to change the system, we're going to have one member – or could have one member – elected by the voters within that district, and the second member, in effect, representing all Islanders. That's one of the options, right?

Chair: I'm not sure exactly what you're –

Allan Rankin: Here's the question. Here's my concern, I guess. One reason I've never been really in favour of an elected Senate, federally, is because once you elect a Senator within a constituency as they're currently defined – like Prince Edward Island, Senators represent all of the Island,

then really you give that one Senator more electoral authority than the Premier, or not as much. Or not more, but you could argue, as much authority as the Premier of the province.

I guess my concern is if we're going to have some elected members who draw their constituency from the entire Island and that they're there, they serve as you said, I think, or as you said on the video, Jordan, that they're serving the entire province. They're really going to operate with more authority than the members who are elected only by the people in their district.

It's an interesting thing because those individuals really have more inherent authority because they're representing the entire Island.

Chair: Just if I might address the facts here so we make sure everybody understands. I think what you're talking about and what the different models are that we've distilled things down to –

Allan Rankin: Mixed member, I think.

Chair: Mixed member proportional would typically involve members coming from a list that would represent a party overall that would not have a specific jurisdiction within the larger jurisdictions. So in other words, there would be a list of folks elected proportionally that would have the entire Island as their district under MMP.

Under the first-past-the-post plus system, by a totally different mechanism which would be that each party would designate one person, there would be the capacity to have one person represent the entire Island. A little different then and I just wanted to clarify that difference.

Allan Rankin: Do you see my point?

Chair: Well, I do see your point but I just –

Allan Rankin: (Indistinct) would the premier in a mixed member proportional system be elected by all Islanders or within that individual's own electoral district?

Chair: I don't purport to have the answer to that question, Allan. I think I hear what your

concern is and that's what we're here to do this evening –

Allan Rankin: Yeah. I find when you do start mixing it up – and I'm not saying that I oppose, necessarily, those changes, but when you do create two different authorities, really, electoral authorities, it kind of raises the question of: Really, who can claim more real political authority or power? You could have an individual who can say that: Look, I'm here because of all Islanders, the entire province has sort of stamped their seal on my back, or I'm here for that reason. The premier of the province, on the other hand, is elected by the people within his district, in Charlottetown or wherever.

You know? It's a heterogeneous kind of way of electing people and it's a different kind of representation radically, but what does it mean for authority, I guess, power and authority electorally and politically?

Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Biggar: I'll just try to be as brief as I can. Just to your point, Allan, I think for clarification – Paula Biggar, excuse me.

That second portion that you're talking about is off the party lists. They don't campaign at the door the way the other candidates do. They're taken off the party list and –

Allan Rankin: So then my question is (Indistinct) –

Ms. Biggar: No, sorry, and then I'll make another point. We hear a lot of the phrase wasted vote. I think anybody that goes out and votes for their candidate in their district, their vote is not wasted. With the turnout that we have on PEI, the ones that are wasted are the ones that don't go out and vote. That's just my perception.

But I just wanted – maybe that first point, if that was any clarification?

Allan Rankin: Yeah, I know what you mean, but if that second person is coming off a party list who are they representing? That's my question to you, Who do they represent?

Chair: Just to clear –

Allan Rankin: Do they represent the political party or do they represent – so they don't represent Islanders in any free election.

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Allan Rankin: Right, okay. So what authority do they have when they sit in the Legislative Assembly?

Ms. Biggar: I agree (Indistinct).

Allan Rankin: I'd say they don't have any. You know, I'm very opposed to –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct).

Allan Rankin: No, I'm very opposed to, just for the record, taking names off party lists.

Ms. Biggar: As am I.

Chair: Just to be clear, that was Allan Rankin that – sorry, Allan, you didn't say your name before the second part of that.

Lucy Morkunas: It's Lucy Morkunas. I just wanted to speak to a couple of things.

I think Mr. Campbell or MacKay was talking about – I think he was alluding to a super-majority, that you really need a lot of people to choose. The only election ever on Prince Edward Island that got a super-majority was in 1912. No other government has ever been elected in the Legislature with 60% of the vote, so that says something.

Then Mr. Campbell was talking about Cabinet and the required size of Cabinet. Cabinet needs to be a certain size. The opposition needs to be a certain size in order to oppose Cabinet. Then you need to have a certain number of backbenchers to also oppose Cabinet, so you cannot really – unless you change the way government is arranged, you really need to have those bodies sitting in seats of the Legislature.

If you choose a system like a consensus system, then you don't have an opposition and that's a whole different story. So if it's possible – I mean, this is a big change, but to remove an opposition and become a consensus government like they have in

Nunavut, then you are changing more than just the voting system.

Chair: Thank you, Lucy.

Mark Gallant: Yes, my name is Mark Gallant from Hunter River.

I've been listening to a lot of these discussions and it's really – a lot of people put a lot of work on this, the people that's on the board and that. There's no doubt there's a lot of input into it.

My concern is: Why are we rushing into it when the federal government says they're going to change the way we're going to vote there? Would it not be better to wait until we see what they do and then PEI decides what it wants to do? It's just one of my concerns.

As far as getting more politicians – and God knows, we're taxed to death here now and we don't need any more politicians for 150,000 people. If we had 15 that's all we need, and if 15 people can't run this little province they shouldn't be in government.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gallant.

Jim Bartley: Hi, Jim Bartley, Malpeque.

I just had a couple of observations. Over 60 years on this Earth. Okay, first of all, you don't get people supporting anything in their hearts or with their votes unless everybody is included and that's why I'm very much for, say, like the Australian method of doing it where if you aren't registered you get fined. If you don't vote, even to refuse your ballot, say yea, nay or I just refuse, you get fined, and it's a monetary fine. It's not a huge one, I think it's about \$100 Australian –

Unidentified Voice: Fifty (Indistinct).

Jim Bartley: Fifty. It was \$100 at one time.

But you have to – and anything that puts you on a list should be automatically registering you. On PEI, for example, drivers' licenses and health cards. If you're registered for either one of those things, you're automatically on the voters' list so you have no excuse.

Secondly, I'm really against list representation where a party chooses a list and they get to decide who gets elected based on proportional representation. As far as I can remember in history in Canada, PEI had a better system and they threw it away, which was the multiple member when there was only two parties and people could vote party A, party B (Indistinct) one of each, two of one party or two of the other party back when there were effectively two parties.

Again, in history, not all that long ago in my lifetime, Saint John, New Brunswick, I think, was the last place which had multiple member. In other words, the city of Saint John was represented by I think it was five MPs, and the ones who got the highest votes were the members. It meant that if the party decided that Mr. A or Ms. B were going to be at the top of the list, they could be sixth as far as popular vote and they wouldn't be elected. It was a direct democracy that way.

I will say one other thing about questions. If they're put honestly people can make a good decision. I will say I'm very much in favour of New Zealand because it's done a lot of the things Canada is thinking about, and it's done it first and it's done them right. (Indistinct) getting rid of the penny and the five-cent piece, they got rid of both. Also, when they put in the GST before Canada they did it right. They told everyone there's no choice, you have to do it because we have to get rid of excise taxes because we have to get rid of import duties. There's no choice about it so we have to go and tax everything fairly, so get over it, stop whining, because we have to get rid of import duties, and if we put it all in excise taxes we'll bankrupt every single manufacturer in the country. Get over it and we're going to do this. We're going to put the effects into place like additional cheques out to pensioners and students and everyone else a month ahead before it starts. It's not free money, it's just to pay the tax, so get over it, don't spend it, and don't whine about the prices going up. They put it on everything.

It was so fair that a few years later – because they started off at a 10% national GST – they had a financial crisis and they put it to a question: We've got a crisis. Either we slash spending or increase the GST. Which do you

want? They voted for an increase in the GST. Can you imagine them?

That's it.

Rob Litke: I'm Rob Litke.

I just had a couple of comments I wanted to make with respect to the representation of the MMP system.

An MLA is elected to represent a district. They represent the whole Island. They work for the whole province. I think if your district doesn't have let's say representation of your party that you tried to get their policies in, you might want to have a contact in there in the government that you can work with. I didn't vote NDP but I kind of felt for those guys that they didn't have anybody to represent, so now they have nobody in there. At least the Green Party can have Peter they can go to, but if you didn't, you'd at least have somebody you could contact that would be representative of the party. I did like that point.

The other thing is the electoral reform the government is proposing, I don't think we should have the phrase of the question in two parts. Because you're asking for change and there's going to be some people out there going to say: I don't feel like doing change, I don't like change. Just check off the box no, we're not doing it. If you phrase it so you just say: Here's your options, one of the options is first-past-the-post. If you're familiar enough with it you'll say: That's the one I like, I've always done it that way. Take it. But if you don't, you might do the research and do the other options and you might like those.

I think you should not have change in there anywhere because that's just going to invite that whole situation. Just say: Here's the electoral reform part we're looking at, here's the four options, pick one. Then you vote from there. Do a little homework and you'll be able to pull it off.

Anna Keenan: Anna Kennan. Technically I'm New Glasgow, I suppose, but my address says Hunter River.

I'm not going to respond directly to that question about whether it should be a two-part question or one part. I said I would get

back to you by the end of the night. I've heard some arguments for and against. I think they both sound like excellent systems.

I wanted to respond to the comment about no vote's a wasted vote. Of course, the votes that don't turn up, like, if you stay at home, then you're definitely wasting your opinion. But the term wasted vote is actually like a technical academic term that is used in analyzing election results around the world. It refers to if somebody turns up and votes and the election result would have been the same if they hadn't turned up. Yeah?

Under the first-past-the-post system I think in the last provincial election – I have the exact number on my computer – it's somewhere around 50% of the people on the Island who turned up and voted in the last election. The result would have been the same if they just had stayed at home that day. That's what the wasted vote means. Yeah?

In any proportional system, in either MMP or DMP that is being proposed, the wasted vote is about 1.9% in any of the models that I've done. I've gone through and done computer models for the dual member proportional system and over the last six elections the largest vote waste that I saw was like 2.2%. That's really close to 100% of the Island as having an influence on the outcome of the election. That's the primary reason why I am personally very much for proportional representation.

To address Allan's point earlier, personally I'm quite okay with an MMP and taking positions in the Legislature off party lists and so on. I've seen how that's worked in a number of countries in Europe, I used to live in the Netherlands and I saw how that worked, and I'm okay with that. However, I acknowledge that there are some people who are deeply uncomfortable with that and I think that's okay for people to have discomfort with that model.

The reason that I've been promoting dual member proportional as an alternative is because it is a proportional system, so it fulfills that criterion of not wasting votes, while also fulfilling the criterion that all candidates are locally accountable. In a dual member proportional system there are no people in the Legislature who could call the

whole Island their district. It would have to be 28 rather than 27. It needs to be an even number because it's two members per district. But all of those candidates would come from a local district of about 6,000 voters. They're known in their personality, they're known to the community.

I've lived here for nearly a year now and I can see how that important that is on the Island. I love how it's – I know half the people in this room already. I think that's an important part of the system for the Island community and I'd encourage people to look into dual member proportional and for that reason.

Chair: Thank you.

Anna Keenan: I had one more thing, can I? Can I?

Chair: Sure.

Anna Keenan: Cool. I wanted to speak to first-past-the-post plus which is currently one of the four options being considered for the plebiscite.

I feel very strongly that it needs to be completely removed from consideration. I think it's very weird and strange that there would be an election that's based on local district representatives, and then in addition there are these, like, bonus seats for parties. I've never seen a system that operates like that in any other jurisdiction and I feel like it's been raised due to just a reaction to last year's electoral result where two party leaders – was it two? – were not elected. I think it would be very strange to make a knee-jerk reaction and say: We need to put a patch on that problem that happened in one election last year by changing our electoral system forever on PEI. I think it's important that we don't really consider that a serious option and that we remove that from the list being considered for November.

Nils Ling: I'm Nils Ling.

One of the things about the wasted vote – and I agree with Anna – but as we've seen in the most recent federal election, there was this thing called strategic voting. A mixed member proportional representation system gets you away from strategic voting because people now have a reason to vote that

doesn't include just getting rid of whoever they're trying to get rid of or accomplishing that kind of goal. It does remove the spectre of strategic voting.

If I'm wrong – I could be wrong – but Gary had a question about how you form a Cabinet, and you don't need to add members to form a Cabinet. Basically, if you have three or four parties, the way it's done in other jurisdictions is that sometimes there's a big enough majority within the governing party in a coalition to form a Cabinet from within its own ranks, but sometimes it draws from other parties. The whole point about coalition, or one of the great things about a coalition, is that it forces people to work together.

If you want to look at whether or not coalitions are successful, I can refer you to – I mean, a couple of the greatest pieces of legislation in Canadian history were brought in – there was the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and before that there was what Tommy Douglas fought so hard for, which was Medicare. Those were brought in by governments that were substantially weakened, not necessarily coalitions, but they were forced to cooperate with the other parties and in cooperating we got a better result.

I believe that the fear of coalitions – which has been expressed by a lot of people, including our Premier – is I don't believe a legitimate fear. I think it's a straw man that's being raised.

Brenda Oslawsky: Brenda Oslawsky. I was just going to say that one of the other things to think about is that when the majority of voters don't actually cast a ballot that elects anyone, then you have to say: What is the authority of any government? It doesn't reflect the majority of voters.

Most jurisdictions that use coalition governments and have PR systems have open list systems. Some of the most successful ones have open list systems. By that, you don't vote for the party when you cast your party vote. You vote for a candidate of that party, and it counts as a vote for the party. So you're electing individuals directly.

MMP, for example, you could have an open party list and that would get around: Who are they answerable to? They might be answerable to the people across the Island who voted for them directly. For those people who voted somebody on the open list who didn't get in, well then, they still have somebody from that party that they can go to.

But most of the countries like Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, a lot of those countries have open list systems.

Gilles Michaud: My name is Gilles Michaud.

One of my greatest concerns is a time limit that's been put on this survey and certainly on these meetings. I know that for me personally, when I heard from the political parties that there would be a greater interest in looking into proportional representation, I took it upon myself to become a little bit more educated as to what that really meant. I think that many other people are interested in finding out what is the difference between proportional representation and first-past-the-post.

My concern is that with these meetings – certainly this meeting here has brought out quite a few people, but the last meeting up west apparently there were six people showed up at the meeting.

Unidentified Voice: Morell.

Gilles Michaud: In Morell. I'm just wondering, if there is such a low number of people, why are we setting the date as the fall for the plebiscite? Why are we not looking at, first of all, helping people to educate themselves a little bit better as to what proportional representation is? I think this meeting here has helped me a great deal, but when I talk to my neighbours or other people here on the Island and I ask them how they feel about proportional representation, generally the answer is: I don't know that much about it.

I would think that the committee should consider delaying the date from the fall till later on where we can have ongoing committee meetings or informative types of meetings for the general citizenship of PEI.

Chair: Before you give up the mic, if I might, given the point that you have raised, indulge you to provide us with some insight as to when you think an appropriate timeframe would be. It would be appreciated.

Perhaps in putting that to you, to provide you with a little bit of context, we have had this issue addressed fairly significantly through our fall consultations. We had presentations to us that certainly said the process needs to be slowed down and we need to take longer or whatever longer would be constituted by. We had also presentations that indicated that you can take too much time. We felt we went through that consideration and tried to strike an appropriate balance between the two.

I think it would be fair to say that the real issue boils down to momentum. If you take too much time you lose momentum. Lucy addressed that as being an issue that was thought to be present in BC, and we heard that in a presentation from Professor Jeffrey Collins from UPEI who you saw in the video there earlier this evening.

The long and the short of it is I don't think there's a right answer as to the too short-too long dilemma, but we're certainly always interested in people's thoughts on that. So everybody knows, I don't think any of the committee members are feeling that there's time pressure really in any particular way.

Really, the only time pressure, I guess, that would be out there would be that sometime before the next election occurs we have to redefine the districts on Prince Edward Island, particularly if we change the way that we go about electing our officials. The two processes have to dovetail somewhat, and there's a natural delineation of when that districting would start, which would be in May of next year.

Beyond that there's not really a set time within which this process has got to happen other than if it takes too long you're at a risk of losing momentum. If it doesn't take long enough or if you're not giving it long enough, you don't have enough time for education.

The other thing that we're cognizant of on Prince Edward Island is that if you do it in

the spring or the fall you run into fishing or harvesting. If you do it in the winter you run into Prince Edward Island winter. That might explain to you how we came to Novembers as being an appropriate timeframe. I am interested in thoughts on that, too.

Gilles Michaud: I understand the dilemma of setting a date and what is too long and what is too short. I'm just addressing the fact that this seems to be too short of a time. Just listening to people that I encounter on a daily basis and ask them about the question about proportional representation and their response is generally: I don't know anything about it. I suspect that a lot of us would have that same experience in talking to our friends or our neighbours.

I'm not talking about too long, but I'm talking about a strategy by which we would inform more and more Islanders as to what is the difference between PR and first-past-the-post and have meetings and a strategy put in place where you would attract more and more people throughout the Island to do this type of thing of what we've done here this evening.

Chair: Thank you.

Gary MacDougall: Hi, Gary MacDougall. Sorry, this is the last I'll say tonight.

It seems to me when it comes to electoral reform the biggest problem is getting the bride to the church, or getting the bride and the groom to the church. It's fraught with danger, but I think we might be trying to do too much, when first we're saying: Do you want change? And then: What do you want to change? Then while people are sitting there spinning around: Do I want to change?, you've got this other stuff coming at them and all these initials.

What about – and this is easier to sell, I think – a very simple plebiscite on Prince Edward Island is: Do you want electoral reform? Not what you want, do you want electoral reform? I think in many ways that's easier to sell. Because I think most people, if you generally ask them, they'll say: Yeah, I want electoral reform, I don't think my votes are all counting. This plays into my comment a little bit about what Mr. Gallant said. If you can win that vote, then

the show is over as far people wanting to go back.

Then you get into your education thing – you'd probably have to do a bit of education – no, you wouldn't, electoral reform. Do you want electoral reform or not? What other countries do? But if you could win that vote people then know the die is cast, that change is coming, and we have to get serious and figure out what kind of system we want to take in. As Mr. Gallant said, maybe it would be what the feds come up with in a year or two.

We've decided we want change, we're not sure what kind of change. I just think we might be biting off more than we can chew.

Allan Rankin: Allan Rankin. What Gary's suggesting is interesting, but the only thing about that is that I think if you pose that question first, most Islanders are going to – and first of all there's no champion, there would be no champion for electoral reform. I mean, when we had the plebiscite on the bridge, as Sandy said, it was the bridge or it was the ferries and there were very strong proponents of both and it was a bitter campaign fought to decide that issue, as you remember.

I think that this is so nebulous and so difficult that if you ask that question first, which would be kind of a nice thing to do if you could, but what you're going to do is you're going to get a no because most Islanders are simply going to, once again, fall back to the established sort of status quo –

Gary MacDougall: (Indistinct).

Allan Rankin: Well, that's the problem. See I think there is nobody championing electoral reform in the province from the government side, certainly. I mean, we heard a lot of positive things said about – as I said in the first comments I made – from the governing Liberal Party and from the other parties that advocated something other than first-past-the-post.

Well, you know, now there's certainly silence and there is even a reluctance on the part of the Premier to have a certain kind of reform which is proportional representation. I guess I was going to ask the question, Mr.

Chair: Does the committee feel that with the Premier's comments that that prejudices your work? How can the government even pretend to be an advocate for electoral reform when the Premier has those strong personal feelings?

Chair: I think if you want my own personal answer – and I'm not going to say that this is the committee's answer, by any means – we have basically, by virtue of a motion that was put forth in the Legislature by both the Premier, I should note, and the Leader of the Opposition – at the time it was Mr. Myers – and unanimously supported in the Legislature, been struck to look at this issue. We've had presentations from, I believe, two MLAs, possibly more – at least two, two government MLAs, I should add, both of which were in relation to the first-past-the-post plus system.

What I took the Premier to say is that he has personal views in relation to proportional representation. I don't think he's been secretive of that –

Allan Rankin: He said he was happy with first-past-the-post.

Chair: I'm not going to rehash what he did or didn't say. Everybody can go –

Allan Rankin: Well, you know, that's what I heard and that's fine (Indistinct) –

Chair: If you can let me finish? You asked the question as to what our thoughts were –

Allan Rankin: Do you think it prejudices the committee's work (Indistinct) –

Chair: I guess my answer to you is no. My personal thought – and certainly the other committee members are free to answer this if they wish – is that we are set here to do our work. His thoughts do not prejudice the work that I'm doing. I can tell you that from a personal level. I can also tell you that the Premier has gone to great lengths not to have any direct influence on any of the committee members, so far as I am aware, and again, you can ask them each personally that.

Really, the process is what the process is, and so far as I'm concerned, the Premier is one of 27 MLAs. He is one of 140,000-some

odd people. I do recognize what you're saying, that his view might influence others, but I think there are a bunch of people you could say that about. I think he's put kind of his stamp on this process through the white paper and the initiation of the process itself.

Allan Rankin: And it's all excellent.

The one other thing I would say is you talked about clarity. I think that's of really utmost importance. I believe that getting back to that questionnaire – when you ask that first question, do you want change?, it's a red herring, and I would just ditch that completely.

I would get that out and assume or presume that some kind of change is desirable by Islanders at this point, and having presumed that, then as clearly as possible set out the options, and then – I mean the challenge is, as several people have said, to educate and inform. My question to you on that is: What's your plan for doing that? How are you going to go about doing that with the complexity of all of this?

Chair: If you're asking that as a question, I can't tell you the answer because that's why we're here tonight. But, like –

Allan Rankin: I don't think – I don't know whether – I can't answer that for you, but you must have – the committee must have some people planning some educational strategies around that and (Indistinct) what are you going to do?

Chair: I can tell you the groundwork has begun.

The way I've explained this process to others before, and again this is certainly primarily my thoughts amongst those that we've discussed at the committee level, but we don't really purport to think that there is one person on Prince Edward Island that has the franchise on a great idea as to how this is to be done. What we're doing is we're going around to these kinds of meetings, we're getting little snippets from a large number, or as large as possible a number, of Islanders as we possibly can.

We had a plebiscite on this very – I shouldn't say this very issue, but on a very similar subject 10 years ago. We know what

the education process looked like in relation to that. We have a pretty solid idea of what happened in other jurisdictions in Canada and how the education process looked like in relation to those plebiscites that took place. We've had the benefit of presentations as to what that has looked like in other parts of the world. We hear snippets tonight, like: You should have an interactive – well, if it was done today it would probably be an app that would allow you to run scenarios.

We go back, we take all that information when we're done of our consultations, we try to distill some common themes out of it, and effectively we put forth the best kind of education program that we can do. I think it would be fair to say that considerations are underway as to how that process will look and who will undertake the education piece of this. It's not to say it will necessarily be the five members on this committee or a particular organization or a commission or whatever. But we're here to hear input from everybody, we're here to take lessons from how things were done last time, and basically try and put our best foot forward.

Mr. Trivers: Hello, it's Brad Trivers here.

First off, as the local MLA, just wanted to welcome everyone, especially visitors, here to the beautiful District 18 Rustico-Emerald, Central Queens United Church. Yes, you can applaud if you want, that's great.

Anyhow, it is great to see so many progressive thinkers all here tonight, and not just Progressive Conservatives, so it's really good to see.

I wanted to comment on what was being talked about of mixed member proportional representation and how it would create two different types of MLAs with not only different accountability, but I think they'd have much different responsibilities. It would really change their day-to-day activities in many ways, right? I know I spend a lot of my time as an MLA working with local constituent issues, and I know all MLAs do, even if you're a Cabinet minister, for example. If you ended up with MLAs that didn't have accountability to local constituents, they would have a much different focus and you would – I'm not sure

that would be a good thing so I wanted to make that comment.

Secondly, I wanted to point out – and I'm sure most of you have thought of this – but if this is a plebiscite versus a referendum, which means it is non-binding, right?, and so my question is: What is the process going to be after the plebiscite is over? Because I think what that process is and how electoral reform might actually take place, and what changes might be decided, might impact what the plebiscite question should actually be.

I don't know if any of the committee members have a comment on that, but I think the process after the plebiscite could actually impact what I think the question should be on the plebiscite.

Chair: Maybe I can provide whatever insight we're able, of course, Brad at this point in time.

Really, the final say does not devolve to us. I should be clear about that. We're a committee that's struck to guide public consultations stemming out of the white paper, so in the end we report back to the Legislature, the Legislature will presumably make a decision as to how we go forth from there.

I think the process after a plebiscite really depends on what the decision is in the plebiscite. In other words, if Islanders were to say: We want to proceed with a mixed member proportional representation system – there would have to be a new delineation of electoral boundaries that would include some larger boundaries, no doubt, geographically speaking, and then a decision as to how those additional proportional seats are allotted, unless that was decided on or before the plebiscite question was asked.

There are those kinds of considerations that you go into, and just to give that as an example. We've heard here tonight that if you're going to do elections by way of a mixed member proportional system it might be better to go with an open list rather than a closed list. We're not going to say here tonight that one or the other is more representative of Islanders' views because we're here to figure that out.

I guess really the answer to that, we've kind of set a road map out in terms of how our considerations will go. First, we looked at narrowing the different possibilities. Now we're looking at consulting on the possibilities that are there, perhaps looking to narrow them further. Then, from that point in time, a plebiscite question will be developed. Presuming the Legislature sees fit to move forward with that, there will be an education process, there will be a plebiscite, and depending on what the result is on the plebiscite, the will of Islanders pursuant to that plebiscite will have to be put into action. Of course, depending on the result, there would be a mechanism by which that would have to take place.

Ms. Biggar: Paula Biggar. Just to follow up on Allan's question in regard to the makeup of the committee.

We are a multi-party committee made up of different representation – I guess you would say mixed member proportional representation – and we work very cohesively, I will say, from the day that we came together to start this process. We've tried with great pains to leave our political hats at the door, I believe, when we come to the table together to have those discussions about how we would lay this process out. Also, being very cognizant of the fact that once we get to this next step in regard to what the question should be put out there, that there is a great need for further education between whether it's spring and November, and looking at the process. And are very cognizant of the fact there needs to be a great level of education so people have that information.

I just wanted to follow up on that. I'm not speaking for the rest of the committee members, but I think probably I do, in that we have worked very cohesively together as Members of the Legislative Assembly, not as political party members in this particular process. We try to keep that as close as we can.

Chair: I should add, before the mic gets to Peter, we agreed when we set out that we would operate, at least as closely as we possibly can, by consensus and we haven't deviated from that yet. My expectation is that we'll continue to do that and we're

hopeful that we'll carry that through to the end.

Randy Shaw: Good evening, everyone. My name is Randy Shaw, I'm from DeSable.

My question is basically (Indistinct) on education, but as you can tell I'm kind of a younger generation coming up into this political process, and that's where my question comes back to education.

I've been involved in the political process as much as I can. I was born and raised into a party, but that's not the point of it. My goal over the last election was to engage my age group in the political process and that's exactly what everybody is doing here this evening, they're trying to change things and I'm all for that. I really appreciate everybody's opinion because this is just a starting point for me. I haven't done any background checks on this. This is kind of my first night. There's a lot of folks here that have done their research and I applaud you and I really respect your opinions. I'm really looking forward to how this plays out.

My question or concern is going forward – like I said, I'm very engaged in the process and I'm trying to engage other people in my age group to do the same. How do I bring it up to them to say: Okay, when you go to the polls – maybe this is wrong, too – when you go to the polls there are four parties, the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Green Party, the NDP, are you going to go to the poll and you're going to say: Okay, I want the Liberal party first, the Conservative party second, the Green Party third, or however way you want to do it? Why are we telling the young people today to choose your thoughts on who should represent you in the district? Who should represent you as the province in their views? And then why would you go about changing it? Why aren't you focusing more on choosing one particular party or person to represent you and your opinions and your ideas?

I'm very for this process and I am very engaged and interested about it. I just voted for the first time, and the way it worked it seemed reasonable to me. I voted for somebody that I felt would best represent myself and my community and my district.

I don't know if you can answer that, Mr. Chair, or any sitting members. Or anybody in the room. I feel welcome to open that question to (Indistinct).

Unidentified Voice: So to clarify, are you (Indistinct)?

Chair: Just a second, you need to have the mic in front of you before –

Lucy Morkunas: Lucy Morkunas. I think what you're talking about is kind of tension between whether you want to support a constituency MLA or you are concerned about how the whole province is going to be governed. Am I going to choose the government of the province or am I going to choose a single Member of Parliament?

Randy Shaw: I thank you for your question and I wasn't expecting to answer questions. As far as I'm concerned, when I go to the polls, personally, I want to vote for the person who's going to represent me, and like I said, I'm very engaged in the political process. I'm doing the research to who's the particular person in each party in that district. I said I'm from DeSable so I live in District 17, whether it be Peter Bevan-Baker or any other member that decides to go for the other parties. When I vote I want to vote for that particular person who I know, who I like, who I respect. I know it's a further comment that somebody said you're voting for the personality and what they're going to do for you. If I was to vote for anybody in my district – I'm getting away from the question, sorry – I'm wondering why we're not focusing on you have to pick a certain person per party. Right now, I don't see the interest from a young person's point of view of why we're forced right now to pick between parties and then why we want to go down the line and pick between three or four different parties.

Unidentified Voice: He answered my question.

Lucy Morkunas: Sure. The reason why there's this tension between voting for a single member constituent candidate and the party is that you have to – it is first-past-the-post system, you have to add up all of those single members and that then becomes the party that gets into power. You may like your member, but the trouble is that your

member is not going to form a government. One member is not going to form a government, it is a collection of one particular party, and that's where the party comes in and that's the tension. You might like your constituency candidate, but you may not like the party they represent or you may not really take into account that the consequence of your choice is that party.

The reason I wanted to talk was that I asked for a little vote in a class that I was in at UPEI. I asked: Do you want change? Might have been 20 students in that class. Only three put up their hands as wanting to have change. But the interesting thing was that during the break one guy came up to me and said: Because I said no to change, because I didn't put my hand up, doesn't mean that I didn't want change. It was because he did not know the choices that were being put forward. The problem with that, though, is that he was not really willing to learn about the choices. He's a busy guy, he's got lots of assignments. It is quite a complicated process in order to understand the different voting systems. I don't think, though, that that is a reason not to include different choices. I still think that the fourth choice is a better way of doing things, but I think we also have to remember that there are a lot of people who are not going to take the time, who are not as interested in electoral reform or voting systems, like we are. We're not the average person, but I don't think that our passion about electoral reform means that it isn't – our exclusive passion for electoral reform is not a reason to continue doing it.

It's interesting to have a plebiscite. I'm kind of wondering – that it sounds like this is a binding plebiscite, which I kind of feel is a bit odd because, as I understand, a plebiscite – yeah, that it's like opinion to the Legislature and it's up to the Legislature to actually follow through. So you guys have to convince the Legislature, even though there's been a vote, there's still the option that the Legislature will say: No, we don't want to do this or we're only going to maybe do one little part of this.

Anyway, I just wanted to say that there is going to be, regardless, a portion of the population who will vote, who will not know about all the options, who will not want to know about all the options, but they still want to have their say.

Chair: Just note for everybody it is 9:00 p.m. now. Not to say we're going to usher anybody out of the room, but if you did come here thinking you wanted to say something or you do feel that you do, I would ask you to ensure that Marian is aware of that. If there are others that have to leave at 9:00 p.m. or whatever the case might be then we won't feel offended if you get up and leave.

Marie Burge: My name is Marie Burge.

First of all I wanted to say that I kind of know the process that went on for the months before and I really congratulate the committee. I was kind of a groupie for that series because I think I went to every one of the sessions except one and I liked what they did. I liked that they listened, and I liked that if there were suggestions that they could follow that was still within their mandate that they did, and so I really was impressed. This even tonight is quite different from what you did the first time I met you and so I wanted to say that.

The other point that is really important to me is the whole question of education of people. I don't know how many ways this can be said. I don't think there's any way that people learn something new just by being told. The more we decide that we're going to have really smart people going around telling people how things are, I don't think – people shut down. That's one thing. Do you get me? I feel that we have to (Indistinct) process of education that actually is from the bottom up, that people are learning from their own experience and from learning something new. That's a process and it's not very complicated, but I feel really strongly that the last people in the world who can go out to the community to educate the community are elected officials.

In PEI, I'm sorry, but I think the elephant in the room is patronage. We have a long history – we haven't gotten over it yet – of people looking at elected politicians in a very traditional way which is they don't tell politicians everything once they're elected. Which brings me to another point – no, I wanted to relate to the length of time of this current process. To me it depends on whether or not we have really honest education processes in the works. We can do it. It's been done before. We can have really

good, solid community education happening across PEI that engages people and that takes a little bit of time, but if it were really well done it doesn't matter, this could be done by November. But people have to sit down and work that out because the education of – like, we have to educate ourselves. The people have to educate ourselves.

That brings me to my final point, and some of you heard it from me before, and that is that the Premier speaking out on this issue was totally inappropriate. If he thinks he's one of 140,000 people in PEI there's something he's missing. I really believe that if somehow or other people who are elected officials feel you can go back to being the good boy and the nice girl of the community, it doesn't quite work like that. There is a class, it's a political class that you belong to, and I really feel that – I like you, but I really don't think that when you speak that it's just your personal opinion. You don't have that privilege anymore.

I feel quite insulted by the Premier speaking like that because he told the people of Prince Edward Island – not that we kind of suck up everything the Premier says – but the fact is that has an influence. It had an influence in 2005. I tell you it had an influence. The premier did the same thing in 2005, and so did the leader of the opposition, and that was when the whole question broke down.

So when you start saying why we didn't have change in 2005 that was a big part of it. On December 31st I just really felt we're doing it again, and then I said: Maybe it's the end of the year and I know he doesn't drink so I didn't think it was that. But I was just sitting there saying: Well, maybe I'm drinking too much. I knew that wasn't true. But I thought – well, I did take him on in the media.

I was introduced, actually, by Bruce Rainnie who did the original interview. On the anniversary of the Premier taking office he was asked the question again by Bruce Rainnie. He gave the same answer. It was not a mistake. It was not a slip. That was well thought out. I don't think the Premier – our Premier, I really respect what he does and what he says, except for that time. Because he's not just a smart man, he's a politician, and he knows what he's saying

before he says it, and that's what gives me just a little bit of discomfort in this whole question.

I don't know if you understood me or not.

Chair: No, we did.

Mark Gallant: Just a short question, Mr. Chair. My name is Mark Gallant, I'm on the mic again.

A short question to you – I did hear mention about the boundaries. Are they not supposed to be redrawn before the next election? Is that right?

Chair: That's correct, yes. Legislation was struck, I don't know, probably last 15 years ago requiring that the boundaries be redefined every three elections, and we've come to that point. In the spring sitting that legislation was amended to change the requirement that the commission be struck I think it was originally within 90 days after the election to within one year after the election. The work will start to get the commission in place this upcoming spring, which is to say in a few months, and the commission will effectively take on its work from there.

Mark Gallant: Yeah. Would you not think, probably, it would be better to have the boundaries redrawn before we have the plebiscite?

Chair: No, actually. The answer actually is simple as to why not, and it may not be apparent until we get there, but the basic issue with that is that if we said we're going to go with anything really other than the current system that would impact the boundaries and how they're drawn.

Mark Gallant: I realize that, yes.

Chair: Basically, if you started and did that before you went through the plebiscite piece, then you'd have to redo it after the plebiscite unless we end up in the same spot.

Mark Gallant: Okay, thank you.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Peter Bevan-Baker.

I'd like to frame my remarks my first saying that I do not dispute at all what Paula and

Jordie have said about the cohesiveness of our committee.

But I would like to say that there's not a unity of opinion about the Premier's conduct. I personally think that it was inappropriate of him to have entrusted us, a special legislative committee, with this process, to have created an arm's-length process as he has, and then, at a very sensitive time, to have interjected his opinion as he did.

I don't think this is going to affect our work as a committee, I don't think our work is prejudiced, Allan, as you said, I think we will continue to work together. But I do think the Premier needs to be told he was a naughty boy. I was with him last week and I essentially said that. I think he does recognize that he should not have said that.

But this is not the end of the process. Far from it. I think this is something that could spark interest in this whole process, but I do think we need to make a distinction between the coherence of our committee, but perhaps some differing opinions on whether the Premier was appropriate in saying what he said.

I'd like to go back to the very first comment that Randall Affleck made about the disproportionate Legislatures which Prince Edward Island has elected over the years. For me that's almost the most important thing that we have to change. A legislature cannot be effective if you have an opposition of one person, or two or three for that matter, which has been almost the norm recently. Actually, the Legislature we have now is an aberration, the fact that we have a reasonably balanced Legislature. But I think if we want to change that then we need significant change. I don't think a little bit of change is going to do that. I certainly do not think that preferential ballot is going to change that.

My concern about what the Premier said is not that he expressed a preference for one or the other, but that he quite clearly showed that he was not interested in any form of proportionality, and I think that is an issue.

I'd like to close by saying that I think Prince Edward Island has a golden opportunity to be pioneers here. I think as well as being

known as the Cradle of Confederation, if we do this right we could become known as the cradle of democracy as well. Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing? I just do not think we need to wait for what happens federally. I think we're small, and as the Premier likes to say, we're nimble. We have an opportunity to do something quite innovative and different here and I hope we grasp that.

Dwight Parkman: My name is Dwight Parkman.

I understand that you're looking for change. How do we expect to get change when the bureaucrats that are in the offices have been, a lot of them, protected from the Binns government, and they've been there for some time and their laws or their points of view are still progressive? How do the people of PEI have their views changed just by changing their politicians when the bureaucrats are the ones that are making most of the rules?

Randall Affleck: Randall Affleck.

I've often felt that election day is probably the least important of all the days in the political calendar. Not that voting is not important, but in terms of governance and putting people in position to lead the country or the province for the next four years, five years, a balance of people that will assess the issues that need to be dealt with and action taken on it.

I'm thinking as the discussion is going on on the proposals that we have and how the candidates will be selected. Just about every election that I've ever voted in I've often thought that the ones that I didn't vote for would have been quite acceptable in the Legislature and I was confident that they'd make the right choice. In year three when something came up and it would need to be dealt with they'd do the right thing, yet most people lose.

It was mentioned earlier that the parties are not as important as the individual. I'm not so sure that's the case. The parties play a very powerful role in this province and they definitely play a very significant role in how candidates are selected. It's possible to get elected when you're not the chosen candidate. In politics, most of our elected

members are extroverts and they're friendly and popular, and that doesn't necessarily mean they're the best person to analyze and really think. I don't want somebody on a complicated issue that's quick to action and reckless with details.

We've all been on different boards in communities and having a balance of people that thrash out all the issues and are not bound by whatever the party position was on election day and realize that Peter Bevan-Baker or Brad here made a very good point and I'm not right, and not to be punished at the polls because you do the right thing.

When we're looking at this, I'm a bit concerned now more so than I was when I came in that the parties in selecting the candidates in a list – I've had an opportunity to be on a farm organization where 50% of the board members were females and youth and older people in different quantities and the discussion that comes out of that is phenomenal. It's probably way too complicated to do for what you're doing in the committee. But selecting the candidate that's balanced and really trying to address some of that stuff would be important.

The weakness that we have is we know what the system is now, the first-past-the-post, and I'm not sure we know just how much power the party brass and the people that pick the winners like they're going to a horse race – anyhow, that's my comment.

Chair: Thank you.

Allan Rankin: Allan Rankin.

I only have best of wishes for Peter, for the committee, and you guys. You're doing really very important work for the province and I hope there's a real good, solid, positive outcome to it all.

But the one doubt I have though – I go back to this – of there not being a champion for electoral reform and that the government is not advocating, it's not supporting, it's not in any kind of overt way, promoting electoral reform. I think the Premier shouldn't really be a bystander to this. I mean, he's been more than a bystander, he said some negative things that would sort of negate a certain kind of change. But I think on the other side of it he should be out

promoting among Islanders that we need to change our electoral system. I'm really doubtful – and I hope I'm not right – but I'm really doubtful that without that that we're not going to get change.

Andrew was talking – he whispered in my ear earlier about – he said, well, mandate – if I misquote you you can correct me – he said: The government has a mandate to do a whole lot of other things, how come it doesn't have a mandate to do this? It's a good question.

Like Gary said earlier – if you take Gary's suggestion that we ask the one question first, which is do we want change, how does that question get asked? I would suggest that it get asked in a general election. If it didn't get asked in the last general election and answered, then maybe it should get asked in the next one. That the two major political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives who really control the political fate of the Island – let's not kid ourselves – with some important exceptions, maybe there has to be a clarity around the desire for change. Whoever is running in the next general election should actually run on that. Maybe that's how you get that question answered, Gary.

Then once the bride is at the church – to use your analogy – you know what the bride looks like, at least, before you marry her and you can go down the road.

I don't get a feeling as a citizen that there's any clear mandate, let alone clarity, around the options. What I want to hear from the party, the governing party, the government of the Island and from my Premier, is that he clearly wants electoral change, not some fuzzy-wuzzy review, but change from the status quo.

Larry LeClair: My name is Larry LeClair.

I live in Darlington. I don't want to hold anybody up, the hockey game is on, and I hate following Allan Rankin (Indistinct) too long.

Further to Allan's point, it's been occurring to me all evening that I'm sure everyone on this committee is a good, loyal, honest, hard-working Islander, and I honestly, with all sincerity, believe you're in an untenable

situation. You cannot legitimately and with a profound sense of sincerity go to Islanders and say: We want to talk about political transformation, devolution or whatever, and we're going to have a committee of the House lead these discussions, we're not going to have a third party, we're not going to have a task force, we're not going to have a commission, we're not going to have an inquiry. We're going to have a committee of the House. This is a bit like, frankly – and I don't mean this in any sense demeaning – employees coming to the employer and saying: We're thinking of re-jiggering our job description.

Now, we've got a bunch of options here. There's the hookum-dookum which – I saw Gary MacDougall, I thought he was going to faint there at one point. You know what I mean? There is a complexity to these issues and if it's not put forward to Islanders from a clearly impartial third party, it's a Caesar's wife scenario. There's apprehension of bias. There doesn't have to be bias, I'm sure there isn't bias, but why would you want to put yourself in the situation where you're vulnerable to that? Why would you want to, as politicians, go out and say: We as politicians want to talk about political transformation? Why wouldn't you have a third party lead those discussions and have you appear before the third party and talk very cogently, very sincerely, and with great sophistication about the issue?

My concern is not what was done in Sweden and Switzerland, but how do you sell that in Miminegash? You've got a bunch of politicians – I don't mean to be pejorative – well-meaning, honest, hard-working Islanders but from a particular sector of our society now talking about, essentially, ways they may transform themselves. That's an untenable thing for a Premier to send politicians out to do. It's very easy. Is Ralph Thompson not busy?

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Larry LeClair: Oh, he died. He is busy. That's right. Well there must be – where's Gerard Mitchell?

Allan Rankin: He's still living, Gerard. I saw Gerard last week.

Larry LeClair: Gerard's still here. No, I guess what I mean is clearly we can find some other impartial body to conduct these kinds of conversations with Islanders.

I'm not at all being dismissive about the work done here. It's been wonderful and it's great to go out and consult with Islanders. I'm not dismissing that. It's just I feel badly for you. I feel badly that you're put in this position. I feel badly that you're having to lead a discussion in which it's hard for many Islanders not to have an apprehension of bias even if there isn't any. It doesn't matter that there isn't any. It doesn't matter that you're collegial and have the best interest of Islanders at heart.

But why go there, I guess is my question. I don't understand why the Premier would send you there, why there wouldn't be some form of impartial body that you could then appear before. That's what's I think behind a lot of the concern that – Bernie Sanders draws 80,000 young people. He just has to stand up and say the system is rigged and they all come running in the door. You don't want to even go anywhere near that suggestion, and that's why I believe there's a kind of structural flaw that I think was a fly in the ointment 10 years ago and is the fly in the ointment today.

Anyway, thank you.

Chair: I might just take a minute to address that just by way of a couple thoughts, and people can leave here thinking about this and hopefully it will engender some discussion in the community. I don't purport to know the answer but I'm throwing these out there as thoughts.

We were essentially given a mandate and we're doing what we're told so the answer probably doesn't really matter from our perspective, but the first thing I would say to those comments is in this day and age, with the Bernie Sanders agenda or the media that we see everywhere – Mr. Rankin not the least of which – day in and day out, I can say as a committee member that it wouldn't matter to me – and I'll say this right here on the record – if the Premier told me that you had to rig this system and I want a certain outcome, I wouldn't do it because my reputation is at stake. I was elected to

represent my constituents and I hope to be able to do that.

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct).

Chair: Look, I'm not saying that's your point, but I just want to say that, that as somebody who is in this position, those are the kinds of things that go through our minds that we have to overcome that apprehension of bias and we have to do more than the average person would to do that. That really is what keeps our feet to the fire. That keeps us wanting to make the process as good as it can possibly be and to go there.

In terms of the third party, I guess, if you will, I think it would be fair to say that probably was considered. I guess in saying that I think the Premier has actually addressed that to some degree in terms of his thoughts. What essentially was said was that there were issues last time when that happened. There's been issues in British Columbia when it happened, as an example. I'm not going to speak to too much length to what happened in Ontario or other places because I don't know that much about them, but there's no silver bullet, I guess, is basically the be-all and the end-all of it. The one kind of counterpoint to politicians who, as you say, there may be some automatic perceptions around is that there's some level of accountability as well, and if we don't do a good job in the eyes of Islanders we're probably not going to be around next time to find out that Islanders didn't appreciate the job that we did.

That's kind of a final thought, and I'm not to say that that is the end of the day and everybody's certainly entitled to their opinions, but that's what the committee looks at and goes from there.

I think Janice has a comment too.

Ms. Sherry: I do.

Good evening everyone, I'm Janice Sherry. I'm the Member for Summerside-Wilmot and have the privilege of being a part of this committee. I just wanted to make a couple of broad statements that I think need to be kept at the fore of the mind of Islanders.

Myself and my colleagues that are a part of this committee are all elected by the people and our job is to represent and do the work with the people, for the people. When we began the committee work way back in July when we started to do the preparations and we started to have just broad discussions about how we were going to approach this, it seemed like a daunting task when we began. Through our first set of consultations, at the end of that, through all of the comments and deliberation, we did come up with a list of possibilities that we felt were a reflection of what the people saw as possibilities.

We now enter our second area of deliberation which is about the question. Should it be one question, should it be two questions, and how we should set that up. I'm confident that the numbers are growing, which is a very positive thing. We've had younger people. We did, contrary to what the news reported, have a very good discussion in Morell last week. There wasn't a large crowd, but it was a very well-balanced and wonderful discussion and every Islander's voice, whether there's nine or 90, has to be considered in a process that will affect each and every Islander.

The last thing I will say is I believe we will get there after this round and we will have a question, and we will have a process for educating the public, raising the awareness of the issue around a plebiscite, what that question will be and what the options are, and how we are going to educate on those issues.

I'm confident. It's hard work. It absolutely is a daunting task, it's been said, but I do believe, with the help of Islanders coming forward, we will be able to do that effectively and appropriately moving forward.

I just want to say thanks to everyone who came out and were painfully honest at times with your comments because it really makes a difference in the work that we're trying to accomplish on behalf of Islanders. So thank you.

Brent Gallant: Thank you. Brent Gallant. I'm from here in the Hunter River area.

First of all, I'd like to thank everybody on this committee for the work that they are doing. It is a daunting task to do things in the evenings. Everybody has their families and I think a lot of people don't appreciate that aspect of it.

I'm glad to hear your comment that the committee is willing to listen to the people, and when they host these events and a community gets together – one of the things that I would hope that the committee takes back is just what's happened here this evening. We've sat here for two and a half hours and I've heard different people comment on: I've concerns about this and I have concerns about that. We have come nowhere near this paper that we've actually been asked to address. That's how ready we are, and this room is full of people that have an interest in this. What about the poor people outside this room that have no interest in this yet? Because they don't know what's going to happen to them – not with them, to them – because they're not part of the process.

Now, everyone in this room watched that video. It was well done, it was well articulated, but to most of us, because we've never seen it before, myself included, it was like train A goes to east (Indistinct) and is travelling at 600 miles an hour. If it goes this way – that's the kind of – when you start to put all the acronyms and everything together, people are trying to make sense of that.

I guess the thing I'm trying to say is that if we as a group in this room – and I haven't been to any other presentations – if we as a group in this room really haven't come to any consensus on whether we want questions one to four – as the gentleman said down here, you don't want to go so fast. What's that quote? You don't want to move so fast and be so far ahead that your own troops see you as an enemy.

My thing would be for this committee to take back to the Premier that Islanders really aren't ready yet.

Thank you.

Chair: Okay. I don't see any other hands and it's well after 9:00 p.m. With that I'd like to thank everybody for coming out this

evening and for participating in such an engaging discussion, and great to follow up on that point – I would like to, as we depart, also challenge each of you to go back into your communities or your collective community and start this discussion with your neighbours and your family members.

It's really this kind of thing that will start momentum towards this end going and that's essentially how these discussions start. We've all seen how elections work. They usually start out slowly, and this is probably not all that different, and hopefully by the time we roll to the end of it, whenever that might be, we all have a decent sense of what the issues are and what the different possibilities are. Really, that has to start some place which I would challenge you by saying is with the group here in this room tonight.

With that, thank you very much, again, for coming out and for spending the time and for engaging to the extent that you have. We look forward to doing it again.

The Committee adjourned