

Law Amendments Committee
November 8, 2012
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Shelburne, Nova Scotia

Mr. Chairman.

My name is Timothy Gillespie. I am a Winnipeg native who has been a property owner in Shelburne County for 25 years. I am a news publisher based in Shelburne.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to this committee on an issue of great interest and importance to me, my readers and my friends and neighbors in Shelburne County.

Although there has been much recent interest in the report of the Electoral Boundary Commission and, more recently, in Bill 94, this was not always the case.

Prior to the initial report from the Commission, there were only two people in my region who seemed to be aware enough of the~~of~~ the possible consequences of the Commission's recommendations to try to inform me of these consequences. One has just been elected to Shelburne town council and the other is the honorable member from Argyle. I have come to regret that I did not foresee that we might be here today, at a hearing about a Bill which could have drastic consequences for my friends, neighbors and colleagues in Shelburne County.

Next week, this committee will travel to Shelburne where you will be surrounded by many dozens - if not hundreds - of citizens who are likely to unanimously implore the Committee and the government to reject the recommendations from the Commission. I will not take time to parrot what the committee will hear directly from Shelburne County mayors, wardens, councilors, business leaders and citizens.

I would like to address, Mr. Chairman, what committee members the Honorable Michel Samson, the Honorable Chris d'Entremont and Howard Epstein agreed in their testimony in the House earlier this week that the current situation is "a mess".

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, I believe that this description is charitable.

What I would like to address more specifically is the level of cynicism that have been operative in the life of this matter and the cynicism that it has engendered in Shelburne County and elsewhere.

Most of the citizens in Shelburne - and I suspect elsewhere - are very dependent upon public officials to safeguard their interests. In this case, the interests of citizens have been ignored and betrayed.

It is - or should be - no secret that every ten years a boundary review is mandated by legislation and it should come as no surprise that such a review could have unwanted or unexpected consequences.

The Commission, as is the practice for most of the deliberative bodies meeting in the province, did not hold a meeting in Shelburne.

Regrettably, we are used to that.

However unfair it might seem, it is nothing new.

Even though the Commission did not meet in Shelburne, it did hold a series of meetings throughout the province, including several in Southwest Nova Scotia. These meetings were advertised and promoted.

As far as I know, none of these meetings were attended by any of the three mayors, three deputy mayors, two wardens, two deputy wardens more than thirty councilors.

Nor by the five chief administrative officers and clerks whose role is, in part, to track those items which can - or will - have an effect on the citizens of the town or municipality they serve.

Further, Mr. Chairman, the MLA for Shelburne, on whom the citizens also depend to safeguard their interests, has, as a minister with two portfolios, considerable resources. These include two assistants in Shelburne County and a senior aide in Halifax.

As far as I know, neither the minister, nor any of his staff or

communications aides attended even one of these important Commission meetings.

While the member from Shelburne did not appear to issue one notice or news release to constituents about the public meetings of the Commission, he has issued no fewer than four recently designed to advise constituents how to protest the recommendations ensconced in Bill 94.

The Honorable member - and the mayors, wardens, councilors and business leaders now say they were blind-sided by the Commission's final recommendations - one of which, if left to stand in this bill, is almost certain to eliminate the prospect of an MLA elected from Shelburne County for many years to come.

Mr. Chairman, although this lack of attention by public officials borders on shameful, it should not foreclose the option by the legislature to reject the Commission Report.

In fact, the issues surrounding questionable changes in the Commission terms of reference, the rejection by the government in the initial report, the unwarranted public criticism of commission members, the amazing hue and cry from citizens throughout Nova Scotia and the considerable current blaming, bickering and "gotcha" between all of the parties, should lead the legislature to end this arguably messy situation.

In this situation, Mr. Chairman, the citizens of Nova Scotia and Shelburne County deserve a fresh start.