

The Law Amendments Committee

My name is Bob Redding. By profession, I am a Chartered Accountant in public practice. My firm has been in existence since 1961 and presently we have two full two full time offices which operate in the Town of Shelburne and in Barrington Passage.

On a personal basis, I have lived the vast majority of my life in this County. It was the area where I, despite having different options, chose to return in 1983 and have been since.

On a personal basis, I read the "final" report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission with total disbelief as it related to the riding of Shelburne. This turned to anger, confusion, disbelief, a sense of being neglected, disrespected and a sense that our County was being treated as little more than a pawn within a number crunching exercise. My emotions and responses are not why you, as a Committee, are here, and I will endeavour to curb these. I apologize, in advance, should any of my comments inadvertently offend any of the members. My purpose is solely to state why I believe the recommendation as it relates to the riding of Shelburne is wrong and should be reversed.

As I said earlier, my firm has operated within Shelburne County since 1961. It was founded by my father and I have had both the privilege and problems of working within the family business. Suffice it to say, I grew up in that environment and do have, what I consider to be a relatively well founded perspective of the business environment, conditions and community within my Town, my County, my region. While in no way can this be empirically documented, I assure each of you, that these opinions do reflect what I firmly and steadfastly believe to be an accurate assessment.

In addition to my own practice, I have had, over my career, several conversations with many professionals within our County. To the extent that I am aware of their situations, I will also draw upon them as well.

It is my opinion and belief that the proposed split of the riding of Shelburne contravenes a very basic democratic right of effective representation to the people of Shelburne County.

The Terms of Reference dictate, in part, that "relative parity of voting power must be achieved through constituencies of equal electoral population to the extent possible" Further, Clause 2c) of these same Terms states that deviations from parity may be justified in consideration of geography (large geographic areas), Community history and interests, and linguistic and cultural diversity. Additionally, the Terms instructed that no constituency may deviate by a variance of greater or less than 25% from the average.

The matter of geographic size of our riding, both current and proposed is a matter best left to cartographers. I will suggest that the proposed constituency boundaries will place a significant physical burden on the MLA elected. By highway travel, the representative will conceivably be required to travel over 150 kilometers to travel between boundaries and incur a travel time of very nearly two full hours. I would suggest that this obligation and situation is among the most demanding of any of the ridings. The extension to include Queens County will vastly increase the size of a riding in terms of meeting concerns of the constituents and providing these residents with, effective representation. Ultimately, it will be our citizenry which will suffer from this lack of effective representation.

The matter of size should have been a non-issue. At the commencement of this process, the riding of Shelburne had a seat entitlement of .82. This size was well within the established guidelines. It was not the smallest and, in fact was left unaffected in both the first two versions of the report. The fact that the riding was not specifically addressed or visited during the process leads me to the inevitable conclusion that our riding became a numerical casualty of the process. I would like to think that were this division originally envisioned as a viable or realistic option, the Commission would have demonstrated a courtesy and consideration of providing our citizenry with a direct consultation with, at very least, our civic leadership. As the primary stakeholder in such a division and restructuring, such direct consultation should have been the bare minimum consideration. In being made the numeric casualty, the Commission has, I believe, abdicated its core direction to recommend a boundary which provides effective representation to the people of Shelburne County.

The one area where the recommendation fails Shelburne County most noticeably in my opinion, is its complete disregard for Community History and Interests.

As I said previously, my practice has been operating as a family business, for now, very close to 52 years. It is my observation that there is very little similarity between the people of Shelburne County and the people in the majority of Queen's County. By way of informal observation, most people consult and use professional services of those who are "in tune" with their situation, who are familiar with them and their situation, people to whom they feel they can relate in some basic sense. This is, I believe, basic human nature. There are always situations where those services are obtained outside the local area, usually for services of a specialist or sometimes when services are not readily available or distance is an issue.

As a point of reference, despite some introductions into the Queens County business community, our firm, over the past thirty years has had business dealings with exactly four corporate clients, with one of those having in fact been transplanted from the western end of Shelburne County. This is not unusual among other professions in my experience, whether it be legal, dental, medical. From a business and therefore economic perspective there is little if any business interaction or similarity between the two counties, by and large. The case could be made and argued that there are similarities between our County and the coastal communities of Queens County, but I would suggest that this extend no further than Port Mouton. Certainly, the similarities do not extend to Liverpool or into North Queens. The latter area has a proud and stated heritage based on forestry and agriculture which is far more common with the County of Lunenburg than with Shelburne County. The vast majority of my business is in fact derived from all of Shelburne County and extending into Argyle. To say the connection with Queens exists is a misnomer. We have, as a firm, in fact, conducted more business in the past thirty years with each of Yarmouth County, Halifax County, Lunenburg County, Kings County and ,even Richmond County than we have with Queens County.

As a further reinforcement of this position, during a meeting in Halifax last week, I did talk with a professional colleague from Queens County. His assessment of our two communities was that the two areas were very different from each other. There are, in other words, little similarities between the two business communities.

Numerous times we, as a County, have been directed and instructed as five municipal units to find ways to work together within the County for the betterment of all. These discussions, instructions and directives from the Province have not included anything more than a nominal or token reference to our County working with Queens. In virtually any establishment of an organisation, Shelburne County will look to work as one or with Yarmouth County whereas Queens will tend to seek a working relationship with Lunenburg County.

From a basic infrastructure perspective we are separated from Queens County. Three of the basic and primary areas of concern to any community are matters of health care, education and economic development. Shelburne and Queens do not have any connection in any of these three areas, all of which are significant economic drivers of a Community. Other speakers will, no doubt, address these areas far more directly, knowledgeably and eloquently than I can, and I will defer these to them. Suffice it to say that these are critical to the development and promotion of the business community.

While these organisational examples have little direct bearing on our representation within the legislature, they do, I feel, exemplify that our County is one unit which includes the whole of the County and is quite separate from Queens County. There, very simply put, is no commonality between the two. This was referred to during the past week in the article published in the Coast Guard quoting the former MLA and Mayor of that area.

To this end, a community of our size, geography, shared interest and culture with an adequate population should therefore be entitled to have a member sitting within the legislative assembly who is a representative for our population and our Community.

In a review of the numbers, the problem does exist and need remedy. To my mind, the two issues in this area were Argyle and Queens but not Shelburne. Neither of these two ridings had sufficient population under the guidelines and term of reference. I believe Argyle to be a distinct situation which needs a special recognition and must be addressed outside the conventional "box". Queens on the other hand had a population which generated a seat entitlement of .71 (before any transfers to Lunenburg). The logical partner, based on history and economics for the vast majority of Queens County was, and is, Lunenburg. They share the same economic base and foundation, health and education vehicles and economic drivers such as RDA and CBDC. The combination of those three ridings totalled a seat entitlement of 2.76, which when split three ways would be roughly .92 per riding. Such an allocation would/could reduce the size of the ridings of Lunenburg and Lunenburg West from .98 and 1.11 respectively thereby giving their communities slightly better representation while providing their normal county partner of Queens with a supplemented voter base to meet the .75 seat entitlement threshold. Not only would this number crunching meet the size requirement, it would be far more respectful of the integrity of the communities involved and affected. In a reading of the earlier referred article, this was, I believe, the perceived course of action which Mr Leefe envisioned and expected, at least in some form.

The Commission, in its Final Report, within its interpretation of the Terms of Reference, interpreted that "the Commission need not be constrained by County lines". This is the third of three "considerations". I find it interesting that the first two of these "considerations" are referenced to the published Terms of Reference clauses 2(a) and 2(d), however the third bears no such reference.

Throughout the final recommendations, despite this ability to not be constrained by county lines, the noted pattern or trend is to restore and protect the integrity of Counties. This is true for:

- Annapolis who "gain the Annapolis County portion from Digby-Annapolis";
- for Clare which "expands to include the remainder of Digby County";
- for Digby-Annapolis which directs that " Digby County portion is to be merged with Clare and the Annapolis County portion is to be merged with Annapolis",
- for Lunenburg West which "expands to gain the remainder of Lunenburg County from Queens", and
- for Queens which loses area within Lunenburg County to Lunenburg West".

All of these reallocations are stated recognitions of County lines and boundaries. They are, in fact, purifications of existing County lines within the electoral system . The lone exception, as I see these recommendations, is the County of Shelburne, which is split between two ridings despite being sufficiently populated. The final recommendation leaves Shelburne County as the sole County in the entire Province which does not have a seat which to claim as its own. This I find to be wrong, a miscarriage of the task which was assigned and nothing short of completely disrespectful to our voters. To be singled out for such treatment and disadvantage is not acceptable.

Regrettably, since the third version of the Commission's report was released, the entire matter has, at least on the surface, become a "political" discussion point with each party, unfortunately, seeming to attempt to gain some advantage by using various positions, undertakings, discussions for their own advantage.

This Committee is charged with clause by clause consideration of the Bill, and receiving representations from interested parties and has the responsibility to make its well considered recommendations to the House of Assembly before passage. There is, I believe, the responsibility and obligation to make recommendations which result in good and positive legislation. It is my belief that, during the course of your deliberations, with an objective of providing all Nova Scotians with fair and equitable representation within the House of Assembly which recognises community as a critical criteria which needs to be respected. Regardless of political bent, this committee has the ability to recommend amendments which provide better legislation. Better legislation, in the case of Bill 94, is not accomplished through the proposals regarding Shelburne County.

In conclusion, I thank the Committee for their efforts and their indulgences towards addressing this matter in a positive manner.