

## Presentation to Law Amendments Committee

November, 2012

Chairman Landry, Members of the Law Amendments Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen ;

My name is Eddie Nickerson. It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to speak before you this morning.

First, thank you for holding this meeting here in Shelburne.

Unlike the other communities who had the opportunity to be heard by the Electoral boundaries Commission, and had the opportunity to influence change in their report, we weren't given that opportunity.

We have one chance to influence this process, that is with you here today. As all here do, I hope our presentations do not fall on deaf ears.

You will hear many reasons here, during these two days, why Shelburne County should stay united. All of them are valid reasons.

My reason for being here today is simply to say that the process has failed us all.

We have gone through three recommendations and what it comes down to now is that we may have to stick with the final recommendation, which, in my mind sets a dangerous precedent to allow the desired outcome to be the final one. This is a dangerous precedent not only in this case, but for the many cases that will follow this decision.

The final recommendation was the only recommendation of the three that was not presented for public consultation by the Commission.

It seems to me that this process was done in reverse – should we not have put the various alternatives on the table and then took them to the public for consultation?

Had this been done we would have had our opportunity to present our case before the Electoral Boundaries Commission as did Yarmouth.

If you check the Electoral Boundaries Commission Final Report, you will find on Page 25, they make this change a recommendation.

This would have kept Shelburne County and everyone else from being “blindsided” and led to a more democratic process that would have allowed public concerns to become known.

Had the residents of Shelburne known that they were going to be split, as did the residents of Yarmouth County, there would have been a larger crowd at the Mariners Centre.

As you heard here last night, there was No Change recommend for Shelburne County. What would you expect and do if you were told this?

Mr. Chairman, it appears that the change now being recommended is the result of the resistance shown by the residents of Yarmouth County.

Although there are many opinions, I feel the difference between the present proposal and the previous Yarmouth/Argyle proposal is that Shelburne has been substituted for Yarmouth. It appears the Commission took the path that they thought was the least resistant.

Mr. Chairman, it wasn't right in Yarmouth and it isn't right in Shelburne.

The Argyle/Barrington combination was not an option until the residents of Yarmouth County opposed the splitting of Yarmouth.

The Argyle/Barrington alternative was the one of least resistance, especially since the Commission could not have a public consultation in Shelburne County.

It baffles me to understand how one could see either of these two areas getting equal and fair representation under this current recommendation. We are two different cultures.

According to Statistics Canada, Argyle has an official language minority of 44.9% that means French speaking and French mother

tongue. On the other hand, according to Statistics Canada, Barrington has an official language minority of 1.2%.

Although we are neighbours and do share many things, we differ in many ways as you no doubt have heard and will hear during these presentations.

Not only do we hear this from the residents of Shelburne County we also hear it from the residents of Argyle who have also expressed their displeasure with combining the two areas.

In his address to the Committee in Halifax, Mr. Robichaud, the President of the Acadian Federation of Nova Scotia stated;

**“We feel that the Recommendation of the Commission is a prejudicial measure that will silence the voice of the Acadian people in this historic building that witnessed the birth of parliamentary democracy in Canada.”**

On October 22<sup>nd</sup> there was a public meeting at Barrington Municipal High School.

Both Mr. MacNeil, the Leader of the Liberal Opposition, and Mr. Baillie, the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party attended that meeting and both stood before that crowd of some 400 residents and stated that Shelburne County was not being treated fairly.

Both leaders said that their respective parties would be voting against the Commission's recommendation.

Mr. Chairman, Mr Epstein just last night cited many instances right across the province where your party felt this report was not fair. Our MLA has stated on many occasions that he does not support the recommendation the way it stand. Premier Dexter said that it was not fair to the people of Shelburne County. If this is the case why support the recommendations.

This recommendation is not about politics, as political parties and many Nova Scotians may try to make it.

It is about fair and equal representation for a County that has had a member in the Nova Scotia Legislature since 1772, and that is still within the required 25% of the average number of electors.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I hope the Law Amendments Committee did not just come to Shelburne County only to listen.

I hope you and your Committee came here with an open mind, to right a situation which was flawed from the very start. All three parties have shown their dissatisfaction with the process.

As was stated in my opening remarks, the process was not followed properly from the beginning.

The alternatives should have been put forward first and then the public consultation should have taken place.

Again, the Commission has recommended this change in the process on pages 24 and 25 of their Final Report.

The House of Assembly determines the method of engaging the public through two rounds of public meetings, both before and after preparing a Preliminary Report.

The Commission believes that the consultation process would be strengthened by having a draft of proposed boundary changes made public prior to the first round of public meetings. I agree with the commission.

It therefore suggests that the Nova Scotia Legislature modify the House of Assembly Act, requiring a draft of proposed boundary changes be made public by the Boundaries Commission before the first round of public meetings, followed by a preliminary report before the second round of public meetings.

Mr. Chairman, let's not worry about what has been done already, let's not worry about who may be at fault.

Let's get this process right. Let's do the right thing. Vote against this final recommendation. It was flawed from the beginning, it is unfair and it is unjust.

Keep the status quo, keep Shelburne County united.

Again, thank you, the committee members and staff for taking the time to travel to Shelburne to hear us.