

ADDRESS TO

MEMBERS OF THE LAW AMENDMENTS COMMITTEE

By John Nause, Ph.D.

October 16, 2012

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to air my views on the proposed legislation concerning rearrangement of the electoral boundaries of Nova Scotia.

Legislation requires that in Nova Scotia a boundaries review should be undertaken every ten years. It became obvious to those of us who followed proceedings that the government wanted a commission report that would effect a reduction in the total number of constituencies, and that would get rid of four so-called protected ridings.

Let me quickly look at the number of constituencies. Nova Scotia has 52 of them. Two other provinces in Canada have populations roughly similar to ours: New Brunswick, with a population almost 200,000 less than Nova Scotia's, has 55 ridings. Saskatchewan, with a population about 150,000 more than ours, has 58 seats. So, based on those comparative figures, there seems to be no real rationale for disturbing the present total number of constituencies.

Now we come to the question of protected ridings. Of the four minority ridings, two are located in southwestern Nova Scotia.

Clare riding and Argyle riding are smaller than most, it is true, but, to cite Appendix "G" to the initial interim report of the now-defunct Boundaries Commission, made before the government's interference, it is important to

recognize "...the unique place and role of ... minority groups in the province's history, and within its present cultural diversity."

In that same very rational and well-written Appendix "G", it was also observed that

"Acadians across the province, whether they live in the three protected ridings or not, depend on these protected political districts and the elected representatives they send to the legislature to play an important role in safeguarding the interests and identities associated with the Acadian language, culture and tradition."

One should note also the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in 1991 which states that:

"Factors like geography, community history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic. These are but examples The list is not closed."

The key phrase here is "effectively represent". Effective representation, is a crucial element. Add to this the terms "Geography", "Community history", "Community interests". How can one justify destroying the Clare and Argyle constituencies in the light of those comments?

Add to this list the concept of minority representation, and how can one justify watering down the Acadian influence by putting it in danger of having not two but possibly NO representatives in this part of the province?

The Committee might recall that a re-write of the Boundaries Commission's initial proposal of maintaining the status quo was rejected by the Minister of Justice. The commission, holding their noses all the while, submitted a proposal that would involve merging half of Yarmouth constituency with Clare, and the other half with Argyle.

Yarmouth riding, with a voting population on par with the average numbers in the province, has been in existence for many generations. The people of that area have learned to work in cooperation with each other. The town and municipality are an excellent partnership and to split them politically would have had only a detrimental effect on both of them. The August 13 meeting at the Yarmouth Mariner's Centre, attended by more than 2,500 citizens, demonstrated most clearly that the people of the Yarmouth area were vehemently opposed to any change in the present configuration. So the Commission went back to the drawing board again and made their final submission in September.

Now we come to the latest crisis. Should there be any tampering with the Digby and the Shelburne constituencies? The sane and logical answer is a firm and resounding NO.

The Supreme Court of Canada observations a propos of geography, community history, and community interests, are most certainly applicable to Digby and Shelburne constituencies. There is no obvious rationale for disturbing the status quo in those cases.

My point, members of the committee, and ladies and gentlemen, is that, for the reasons I have enumerated, the existing configuration of the ridings in western Nova Scotia should be allowed to remain as it is.