

Bill # 9 - House of Assembly Act

Presentation to Law Amendments Committee

Sandy Point

November 16, 2012

Chairman Ross Landry and members of the Law Amendments Committee ... welcome to Shelburne County. My name is Kent Blades and I am a resident of Lower Clark's Harbour, that portion of the county to be joined with Argyle under Bill#9. I am proud to say that I was born in Roseway Hospital, Sandy Point and have lived in Shelburne County all except a period in my early married life. For all my life, and well before, Shelburne County has been provincially recognised as a distinct constituency and represented by a member of the Legislative Assembly. It must remain that way with no boundary change.

This review must return to the first finding of the Boundary Review Commission which recognised no need for change to our boundary and continued special status for Argyle, Clare, Richmond, and Preston. Law Amendments must review, challenge, and change the assumptions on which this first report was thrown out.

The two assumptions that need to be challenged and thus set aside relate to admirable principles of one member/one vote and effective representation of communities of interest and rural areas. Those assumptions are that the 25% variance must be a rule and not simply a guideline and that we must reduce the number of MLAs in Nova Scotia.

The answer to the first assumption is tied to the second. To achieve a balanced representation in the face of outward migration from our rural and special populations and, on the other hand, growth in population in metro, it is assumed that we must decrease rural representation. I challenge that by suggesting that a much better and much less painful approach would be to hold the status quo in rural and special status ridings and increase the representation in Metro Halifax. There would be increase in legislative cost though a frugal review of salaries, pensions,

and the savings recently realised with regard to MLA expense claims would make the increase in cost easier to swallow.

This is an appropriate time to consider the cost of democracy and the value of democracy. Our veterans of war have often paid the extreme price of their lives and their health for the freedoms we have. To reach deeper into our pockets to maintain the democratic rights of our citizens pales by comparison with that offered by our veterans of both yesteryear and of today.

This whole process of boundary review didn't hit the fan until the first review was rejected. The second report upset our neighbours of Argyle, Yarmouth, and Clare and put them through needless pain and suffering. The final review took Yarmouth off the hook but put Shelburne, Queens, and Digby on the grill along with our good neighbours of Argyle and Clare. Similar disruptions are felt throughout the mainland and Cape Breton.

Someone asked me the other day who was behind this layered pain. My response was that no one was apparently willing to raise their hand and acknowledge that it is them, either in whole or in part. If the House passes this bill the answer to the question will be that it is the House of Assembly is responsible – the very people we sent to Halifax to represent us. The vote will no doubt be a “yea” and a “nay” response with the “nays” asking for a registered vote so as to distance themselves from the outcome. That is fine but, as a voter, I call on both sides to come together and recognise that they have a duty to reach a consensus that best serves the electors of the Province of Nova Scotia.

I ask this Committee to recognise that a goodly number of residents of South West Nova Scotia have gone on record as opposed to this bill. They have signed off as opposed.

Others, however, are simply signing off. Former Mayor and MLA for Queens County, John Leefe is quoted in the current edition of the Coast Guard newspaper on the sentiments of his people. He cited their response as one of cynicism rather than disinterest.

“I think people are so cynical of the process, that they have just thrown up their hands and said what is the point saying anything when (the province) won't listen anyway”.

This committee and the House have the opportunity to regain the confidence of voters of Queens and beyond. My proposal is only one alternative to the disastrous course Bill #9 charts for our province. You can prove that the faith the creators of the Law Amendments had in careful review of tabled legislation was not misdirected. This committee was designed to hear from the people, amend legislation not in the best interests of the majority, and to recognise the needs of those requiring special protection and needing equal opportunity. I ask you to take the capital "P" of politics out of your discussion and reach a consensus that will serve our people.

Thank-you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Bladen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "K".