
To: Legislative Counsel Office
Law Amendments Committee

From: Jason Buxton, writer-director, Nova Scotia resident

May 5, 2015

Concerning Bill 108: Changes to the Nova Scotia Film Tax Credit

To members of government, counsel, and committee:

I am an immigrant. I'm from a working class British family. We moved to Canada when I was nine years old. Reading in my family home was considered frivolous, unproductive. That is the culture in which I grew up. From grade four on, I lived in rural Nova Scotia. This reinforced my working class narrative. Yet I knew in my bones that I was a storyteller. Was I displaced? I don't think so. You see, I believe my circumstance gave me perspective. It helped me more clearly define myself, who I was, what my contributions could be. It's an instinctive thing, so despite my high school friends mocking me for my "lofty ambitions," I could never be swayed – despite an internalization that I was meant to work with my hands for five bucks an hour. So it was fitting when, in 1996, I broke into the film business as a "grunt" on the film "Titanic." I lugged gear for fifteen hours day for three weeks on a Russian research vessel ten miles off the coast of Nova Scotia.

In 1999, I worked on the TV series *Pit Pony*. One of my jobs was to lay down colored tape at the actors' feet so they knew where to stand during each take. One of those actors was a precocious twelve year girl – Ellen Page. She was one of a dozen child actors on the show, talented, happy to be there.

We were all happy to be there. It was summer in Cape Breton and we spent a lot of our time shooting exteriors. I was moving up the ranks in the camera department, upgrading every now and then to focus puller. I was working in the film industry and while I enjoyed it, I was not telling stories. So I started to spend my earnings on my own films – short films. Those early films got some attention and allowed me to leverage equity for my film projects. In 2002, I made a film that utilized the Tax Credit. I was ambitious and the film went over budget. I spent the next three years paying off those debts. I had hit the wall. I was broke.

But somehow I kept going. Looking back, I don't know how I survived. But here I am. In 2007, my wife and I had a baby. It was "shit-or-get-off-the-pot" time. With the support of Telefilm Canada, myself and producer Marc Almon developed a feature film script. I had a new-born "incentive." A great motivator I may add. I was learning to write long form narrative as I went, and in 2011, with the assistance of the Nova Scotia Tax Credit, I directed a film based on that script. The film, *Blackbird*, won the Best First Feature at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2012. Six months later, I was awarded the Claude Jutra Award for Best First Feature, the first

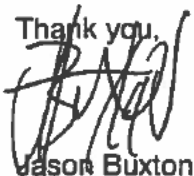
time the award went to an east coast filmmaker since Thom Fitzgerald for *The Hanging Garden* in 1997. In my acceptance speech at the Canadian Screen Awards, I spoke about this east coast pride. Because that pride defines us. It's who we are, we all are, proud to live here, to be Nova Scotians, to shine a light on our culture, our people. We are underdogs and proud of it.

Currently I am adapting Joseph Boyden's great war novel *Three Day Road* for producers in LA and Toronto. I would not have this opportunity if it weren't for the Nova Scotia Film Tax Credit. And twelve-year old Ellen Page would not have had the career she's had without it, as she herself tweeted.

But I am not here today on behalf of Ellen Page, or myself. Writers, directors, and actors are much more mobile than the thousands of technicians who work here year round. I have never met smarter, interesting, harder-working folk. There's a lot of talk, murmurings about the millionaires who get rich off the tax credit. Yes, there's a handful of people – and it really is a handful – who perhaps get paid more than the bureaucrats in the Department of Finance who administer the Tax Credit. I can imagine how the grievance goes: "Why should Bubbles get more than me? Bubbles!" *Um – he's funny?* Seriously though, even if this is a fair point, there's a fair remedy, rather than the destruction of an entire industry and the loss of two thousand jobs.

We're all consumers. Let's look at some of our favorite TV shows. *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Walking Dead* – all made with government tax incentives.

The question is simple: do we – does Nova Scotia – want to be in the film and television business or not? If the answer is no – and I understand it is the governments' prerogative – then we go elsewhere. But if the answer is yes – then a cap on an incentive must be removed. A cap is bankable. It is this simple. Please stop your horsing around and answer this question.

Thank you,

Jason Buxton