

# REES' Pieces

## Where's Our Oprah?

The education system in Nova Scotia is in turmoil, with some school boards, particularly Chignecto-Central Regional School Board (CCRSB), being accused of Fear Mongering. This is the result of the province's eight school boards being called to Halifax and instructed to conduct an exercise outlining required cuts to reduce expenditures, over three years, by \$197-Million, which equates to a 22% cut.

CCRSB released its findings to the public, and then turmoil started. I feel bad for the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board (CCRSB) members. They are caught in a "no win" situation with credibility at stake and not much influence to solve the funding problem faced by the education system, since 85% of budget expenses are mandated by the Department.

Premier Dexter, education officials, leaders of NSTU, NSGEU and CUPE were silent until release of the report. It didn't take long for them to get in front of the cameras, making public pronouncements accusing the board of "Fear Mongering" and saying cuts of that magnitude were not expected.

Let's also consider. We might not as bad off as previously suggested. In 2010-2011, Dexter's government is spending \$350-Million more than any other government. They also spent mega-millions topping up the pension plan for teachers.

In midst of this turmoil, the only thing all parties agree upon is enrollment is dropping and costs are rising. If the number of teachers should equate to the number of students, let's go back 30 years, presuming we were somewhat correct at that time.

In 1980: 186,000 students – 11,000 teachers a ratio of 17:1. At the same ratio, today's 130,000 students would equate to 7,700 teachers. Projecting ahead to 2014, the anticipated student population of 119,000 students would see teacher numbers drop to 7,050.

I'm not suggesting this is correct and is a platform to overhaul education, but it does illustrate how things have changed.

In today's world, we are not getting the required outcome. Nova Scotia students rank far below those of other jurisdictions. Hence, no one is happy regardless of the cost. Reducing costs will not solve anything, except assist reach a balanced budget.

It's very important, but having a balanced budget is not the greatest priority. A quality education system is. A quality health care system is equally important. However, they must, above everything else, produce the required outcomes.

As Karen Casey said, while speaking from the floor, at the public meeting in Onslow on January 18<sup>th</sup>, there are savings to be found in every department. Her analogy also included: Identify the required Outcome; work line by line to identify the programs and services to produce that outcome. Left on the table will be things not contributing to the outcome.

Here's my take on the situation. There is no sympathy for teachers; public service pension plans gets little sympathy from the public; the 22% exercise was designed to divide and conquer leaving the school boards "high and dry".

Optics is everything and right now they are bad. Dexter appointed two new cabinet ministers at a time, when requesting restraint; Recently, ATV reported during the last decade the number of educators earning in excess of \$100,000.00 increased from 16 to 160; on January 18<sup>th</sup> ATV announced the Dept of Education has a budget of \$6.5-Million for staff professional development, which includes several travelling to Florida in May.

It will be difficult, if not impossible, to get needs, costs and outcomes adjusted to where they should be from within the education system. That's because every employee of school boards, including the superintendent, is a member of one of the three unions – NSTU, NSGEU or CUPE.

Imagine laying off someone, when they are member of the same union as you and would be the ones called forward to speak on your behalf should you have received your "pink slip".

Would it be easier to design a new system rather than remodel an existing one? What would happen if parents and residents decided it would switch to private schools? Would the Department of Education transfer a base amount for each student to a new system?

Education and all departments need a major overhaul to deliver the required outcomes.

Who will champion the cause? Where if our Oprah?

**Maurice**

# Letters to the editor

*This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.*  
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### To My Constituents:

As your MLA for Colchester North, it is important that I address the questions you may have about my decision of January 10, 2011 to resign from the Progressive Conservative caucus. This decision was not made lightly.

As many of you know, I had a rewarding career in education. Like many others who have entered public life, I wanted to give back to the communities that had been so good to me.

I have lived in Colchester North all my life. I know that we share the same beliefs about what is important to rural Nova Scotia. Public education, jobs, strong rural communities, access to health care, and a wise use of taxpayers' dollars are things that we value.

There are two important parts to being your member of the Legislative Assembly.

The first is to be available through my constituency office to hear your concerns, to get answers to your questions, and to help resolve your problems.

I have worked with many of you on issues that are important to you. The fact that my office becomes busier each year tells me that you understand my role as your MLA, and that we can work together to get answers. It also tells me that you have confidence that I will work hard on your behalf.

As constituents you have many excellent ideas that need to be heard. You have elected me to be your "voice" in Halifax. Because of that, the second part of being your MLA is equally important. It is to take your concerns, suggestions, and issues to a provincial party and its leader, and to the floor of the legislature.

As your MLA, I need to be confident that, on your behalf, I can take these issues to a leader who will listen and will understand. Stephen McNeil is a leader who has demonstrated that he does understand. He recognizes the importance of a balance in Nova Scotia between vibrant cities and strong rural communities. I made my decision of January 10, 2011 based on that.

Some constituents may not be happy with my decision. I understand and respect their opinions. My decision was made because I believe that I have a responsibility to those who elected me to work with a leader and a party who will give me the opportunity to be effective as your MLA. That opportunity exists with the Liberal caucus and Stephen McNeil.

Some of you may remember my response to a question

during the candidates' debate in June 2009. Candidates were asked where they would stand if the position of their party did not reflect the needs of their constituents. I clearly stated that my stand would be with my constituents.

Many people during both the 2006 and 2009 provincial elections put aside their traditional patterns of voting for a political party. They voted for the person they believed would best represent them in the Legislative Assembly. I am proud to have been your choice and I ask for your continued support.

My commitment to you is to continue to be your voice, to work with you, and to stand for what is important to Colchester North. That will never change.

**Karen Casey, MLA, Colchester North**

### Hi Maurice:

I sent you a cheque about two weeks ago for my renewal. Let me know if you got it since. I just got your mail today. I would never be without your paper.

This paper has improved so much and all for the better since it has been in your hands. Since I used to live and work in Bass River, I have a lot of friends and customers there who I miss seeing on a regular basis.

There are no people to equal them anywhere else from Great Village to Parrsboro. Happy New Year to everyone.

PS. You can put this in your paper.

**Thanks Sheila Smith  
December 26, 2010**

### Hello Maurice.

I enjoy reading your paper. Here are my comments on the content in the December Issue by a fellow Great Villager and attendee at the Remembrance Day Service, and some of my own observations. I know his father and his support for the local Legion and thought he done a very nice job of stepping in as Master of Ceremonies for the service.

It is unfortunate due to the location of the cenotaph, but the highway must be closed for safety reasons due to the amount of traffic on this road. There would have been a steady line of traffic going one way then the other including several large trucks that would certainly have disrupted the service. The time an emergency vehicle spent waiting

for fifty to sixty people to move would have been much quicker than if it met the oversize load, which was waiting near the school, creeping past the service and down to Wilson's gas bar before it could get out of the way.

I was not one of the several who stepped in the path of the first vehicle to attempt to pass through but I and many others found ourselves in the open lane so we could hear the service. As for the legalities, there are countless parades and events in this country every year that block main roads with many taking well over an hour or two.

As for Respect, I feel we do not do enough to respect the effort our military did for us. The enemy made it just off our shore but was unable to inflict the devastation that our European Allies endured. They Respect our dead more than us because they see the graveyards full of Canadian soldiers.

So count me as one of the minority of the people of Great Village who think the road should be closed for an hour so we can Remember and Admire these women and men.

**Thank you.  
Ross Gordon, Great Village**

## Kids Kamp in Bass River on Wednesdays

Funding for an intern to provide 20 hours of service per week has resulted in a "Kids Kamp" being held at the Bass River Elementary School every Wednesday from 3:30-5:00 pm. Activities include: crafts, computer activities, arts etc.

Rose Hill-Johnson, Bass River has been appointed as the new CAP intern for sessions to be held at the Bass River Elementary School. Already a few seniors are having Rose provide computer instruction, how various programs and accessing various internet sites. The internship will continue until the end of May.

Services provided include: free internet access as well as assistance with computer questions and issues. Hours of operation are: Monday - 12:30pm-4:30pm; Tuesday - 6pm-9pm; Wednesday - 12:30pm-4:30pm; Thursday - 11am-2pm; and Saturday - 10:00 am - 4:00 pm. Closed Friday and Sunday. She can be reached at the CAP site at 647-2763.

An upcoming program will expand activities and instruction to assist people with facebook; teach them to take pictures, upload them to a computer, then upload to facebook. Additional facebook related instruction will include how to make albums, change profile picture and other areas, where residents need assistance.

Rose says her role is to assist with any questions, enhance their computer skills and make it fun.

## The Shoreline Journal

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