

# REES' Pieces

## Where should the money go?

Before I get too far into this rambling, I will admit I am a fan of Premier Stephen McNeil and many of his cabinet. That is personal preference, which I will not let influence my comments here.

However, I'm not so sure Premier McNeil will be a fan of mine when I am done.

The provincial budget has been delivered. It was a tough balancing act for the ruling Liberals to try to be fair across the board. They didn't raise taxes to try to balance the budget, other than smokers who now must pay at least Fifty cents more per pack of smokes.

It also shows the municipalities how careful they need to be when bringing down their budgets. We are all aware the belt is tightening, and as taxpayers, must find ways to invoke efficiencies, and temper our expectations on what we expect from government, whether it's federal, provincial or municipal.

I must say, the Municipality of Colchester has spend a lot of money in the last couple of years, or should I say they have invested and its paying dividends. For instance look at the \$-Million+ they spend back in 2012 to construct a sewer line from the Kemptown Balefill to tie into the sewage treatment plant in Lower Truro. Granted a fair distance, and in the beginning many councillors went along with the recommendation of Wayne Wamboldt, but were concerned about rationalization of the expenditure.

The pipeline carries leachate from the balefill facility, which previously was trucked. According to Wamboldt in winter of 2015 due to heavy snowfall, the pipeline saved the municipality approximately \$155,000 in one month alone. The savings paid for the installation in less than 3 years. Now it's a "free ride" permitting money to be used elsewhere.

Wamboldt has brought several other projects and initiatives to council and based on his record, of investment and actually making money, council has approved some big expenditures. The most recent is the wind turbines now under construction, which he says in 11 years will be money makers.

My point is it's not how much money you are spending, but is it a sane and economic decision, will there be a pay-back?

Now let's look at the province. Is Colchester's Wamboldt strategy being applied?

Instead of grants and loans to companies, payroll tax rebates are a more prudent approach. Create the jobs and we'll cut you some slack. I agree a good policy and I'm sure you agree.

Now let's look at some NSBI payroll rebates - \$22-Million to RBC in May 2015 - 500 jobs - duration 10 years. April 15, 2016 - NSBI ready to spend \$6-million on payroll rebates to Canadian Maritime Engineering (CME); Mobivity Holdings Company and TD Insurance - for 420 jobs over five years. (TD Insurance was getting approximately \$4-Million of the six.

Within one year that is about \$28-Million to very profitable multi-nationals. There are very few Nova Scotians who feel the big banks need our tax dollars.

Which brings me to what has become McNeil's Achilles heel, which will haunt him until the next election, maybe beyond. I am speaking about the film tax credit fiasco.

I am not saying it should not have been changed. From the beginning, I felt McNeil's finance minister at the time, brought in changes, without knowing the full impact of the film industry on Nova Scotia's economy and without proper amount of consultation.

Most citizens agreed a 50-60% wage subsidy was too rich, and I admit I did not think a subsidy of that magnitude was warranted. But were all the facts known and placed on the table?

It was suggested by the finance department that \$23-Million +/- was unsustainable. Canadian Media Producers Association and Screen Nova Scotia commissioned PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) to do an independent study. The PWC study, released within the last couple of weeks suggests the film industry with about 3,200 workers in the province, impacted the provincial economy by \$137-Million.

Maybe it's a matter of perception, but as a publisher in a small rural area, far outside the synergy of downtown Halifax and its proliferation of tall construction cranes, I'd be much more comfortable spending \$25-Million to \$30-Million helping fellow Nova Scotians grow their company and stay in Nova Scotia, than cozying up to some of the Forbes 500 multi-nationals.

As Monday morning coaches, we can all see some wrong moves were made and the most professional communicators in the province were turned into enemies and they have very long memories.

It will be hard to convince Nova Scotians a few Forbes 500 companies are a better bet than several Nova Scotia companies employing over 3,000 people. That's about equal to saying good-bye to Michelin.

**Maurice**

# Letters to the editor

This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.

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## OP-ED

### Equipping Designated Sheriffs with Tasers

By Diana Whalen

In Nova Scotia, sheriffs work hard every day to keep us safe. Our 235 sheriffs are responsible for court security, civil enforcement and prisoner transport. In rural areas, they also transport money from courts and serve summonses. Their duties can be dangerous and at times they can be exposed to violence. They take their responsibility to serve and protect Nova Scotians very seriously. We too have a duty to keep them and the places where they work safe.

About a year ago, the union representing the province's sheriffs raised concerns about the safety of their members. They told us that they want more tools to deal with potential violent situations and to improve their safety on the job.

In response to the concerns, my department initiated an independent occupational health and safety review. It examined whether sheriffs are adequately

equipped, trained and supported to do their jobs safely. There were 51 recommendations; one being a limited arming of the sheriffs.

The report was thorough and we took the recommendations very seriously. When determining a go forward on the recommendation to arm the sheriffs, we were careful and systematic in our approach. Arming our sheriffs with firearms would be a significant change from the way our sheriffs currently do their jobs and we wanted to be sure our decision was based on research, evidence and facts. Our examination revealed that few other jurisdictions across the country arm their sheriffs. We also discovered through conversations with sheriffs, the courts and our correctional partners that many would like to see alternative measures to firearms explored.

After significant study and review, we are confident we can address the safety concerns raised in the occupa-

tional health and safety review and reduce the risk to staff and public using other measures. That plan includes rigorous risk assessment, increasing physical security at courthouses when necessary, using armed police officers when risks are heightened and equipping designated sheriffs with conductive energy weapons, commonly known as Tasers, rather than firearms.

Our plan includes training for 24 deputy sheriffs in the safe use of conductive energy weapons. They will have to meet the same rigorous fitness and mental health standards used by our police services. My department will also continue to work closely with occupational health and safety experts to ensure that our plan achieves the right balance between workplace and public safety and addressing the concerns of our sheriffs.

Identification of candidates and testing is occurring now. Training for the sheriffs is expected to begin by May, with implementation of the new safety measures beginning in the summer.

The purpose of arming the sheriffs with conductive ener-

gy weapons is to ensure that officers are able to protect themselves, the facilities, clients and staff they serve from significant or immediate threats. We are confident that our approach will achieve these requirements.

I want to sincerely thank our sheriffs for the work they do every day to keep our communities safe. We did not take this decision lightly and we are committed to providing additional tools, supports and resources to help keep our staff and the public safe.

**Diana Whalen is provincial Justice Minister**

## OP-ED

### Eileen Stubbs granddaughter does well in Alberta

My family history is common among fellow life-long Albertans whose parents left other regions of Canada to find new opportunities in Wild Rose country. My parents moved to Alberta in the early 1970s; my mother from Newfoundland, and my father from Nova Scotia. Today, my relatives live in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec.

As a first generation Albertan, I have always been proud of my East Coast background, and I treasure memories made throughout my life when we visited Dartmouth to spend time with my grandparents, and aunts, uncles, and cousins on my dad's side. My trailblazing grandmother, Eileen Stubbs, who served as a councillor, and as Mayor of Dartmouth in the mid-1970s, loomed large in family get-togethers, and in the stories that inform our family's history. She had a profound influence on me, and perhaps that's why I've been so interested and involved in public service, politics, and community advocacy my entire adult

life. I am grateful for the trust the people of the rural Alberta constituency of Lakeland have put in me to represent them in the House of Commons, following in the public service footsteps of my grandmother.

As part of my responsibilities as the Official Opposition Deputy Critic for Natural Resources, I've been meeting with natural resources stakeholders across Canada. For four days during the recent two-week break in the Parliamentary session, I visited Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Former Member of Parliament Scott Armstrong was instrumental in setting up meetings with stakeholders and significant natural resource developers, including Alton Natural Gas Storage and the Fundy Ocean Research Centre for Energy, and he was kind enough to join me on this quick whirlwind trip. I really enjoyed seeing parts of Nova Scotia I hadn't visited before, and learning about such innovative projects in a province that's so close to my heart.

The natural resources sec-

tor in Canada contributes twenty percent to our country's GDP, and provides 1.8 million jobs to Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast. On average, over the last 5 years, natural resource firms have contributed approximately \$26 billion per year in revenue for all levels of government. Many of those employed in the sector are from Atlantic Canada. In fact, while I visited Nova Scotia and New Brunswick earlier this month, I saw a disproportionate number of Alberta license plates. My family told me that while it's so nice to have family members and friends home, they're struggling to find jobs and to provide for their families; the downturn in the energy sector, which is having devastating impacts in my riding of Lakeland, isn't just isolated to that industry, and it isn't just an "Alberta problem". It's impacting all of Canada, particularly those from the Atlantic provinces, because it is people from the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador who have con-

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