

REES' Pieces

Pressure on Liberals to Manage

Many have watched to see if the newly elected McNeil government would keep or break promises made during the election campaign. Kudos to them. So far, they have done what they said they were going to do.

With the publication of Graham Steele's book, providing an insight into how governments work on the inside, it appears most decisions are made on electability, not on what's good for the province in the short and long term. With the Ivany Report as a wakeup call and a roadmap, the challenges are much greater than just decisions made by MLAs. It requires all elected personnel, to consult, counsel, persuade, beg and twist arms of the general electorate to change their way of thinking and expectations.

The electorate individually and collectively must also keep pressure on MLAs and municipal councillors to create the climate to bring changes to this province. If we do not succeed in making this province a better and more economical place to live, work and play, we only need to look in the mirror to see who is at fault.

For many years, we have jokingly said we are over-governed and the number of people whose income is derived from government coffers is far too high. A recent study completed by Ben Eisen and Shaun Fatauzzo of the Atlantic Institute of Market Studies proves what the electorate has been saying for decades.

According to the report, if governments in Atlantic Canada adjusted the provincial and municipal staffing levels to the national average, based on population, annual savings of \$1.9-billion would be achieved. The combined deficit in Atlantic Canada was \$1.1-billion on 2012-2013. Wonder how much better life would be if provincial governments had a combined surplus of \$800-million per year?

In 2013 18% of all jobs on a national basis are the civilian public sector. In Atlantic Canada it's much different: PEI, 23%; Nova Scotia, 22%; New Brunswick, 20% while in NFLD & Labrador it's 28%. Removing federal employees from the equation, the national figure is 16% and 20% in Atlantic Canada.

Keeping federal employees out of the calculations, and calculating only on local and provincial staffing there 84 employees per 1,000 population nation-wide; 96 in Atlantic Canada, while Nova Scotia tops the list with 99 per 1,000 population.

Bantering figures and percentages around can be confusing. According to 2011 Census, Atlantic Canada's combined population is 2,327,638. If public service staffing levels were reduced to the national average of 84 per 1,000 population, 27,932 positions would be eliminated. Using 900,000 as Nova Scotia's population, we would have to reduce the local and provincial staffing level by 13,500 to get down to the national average.

Try as they might to reduce the public service as one of many tools to eliminate the deficit, McNeil's Liberals are running into an almost insurmountable obstacle created by the one-time elected Dexter NDP's. During 2010 negotiations the NSGEU got the government to agree to "no layoffs" and staffing level reductions could only be achieved through attrition.

The same agreement was used by a 34 employees, who refused transfers when the NDP government moved some government offices to smaller communities outside HRM. Positions had to be found for them in HRM and the positions filled with 34 new employees.

No wonder, Labi Kousoulis, Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission said, "We currently cannot manage our workforce". Considering the foregoing with Nova Scotia falling deeper in debt every day, and Energy Minister Andrew Younger introducing legislation to eliminate fracking as a possible way to regenerate the economy, the future is bleak.

If Graham Steele is correct in saying all decisions including those of backbench MLAs is made based on being re-elected, I wonder if current MLAs have the where-with-all to take up the challenge? Do they have the tenacity to "stick with" those challenges?

Will they look beyond the next election and do what is right for the province even if major disruptions evolve in trying to reduce the public service sector? Will they create the climate to generate new revenues even if it is fracking?

I surely hope so.

Maurice

Letters to the editor

This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.

MAIL TO: The Shoreline Journal, P.O. Box 41, Bass River, NS, B0M 1B0
(902) 647-2968; Fax: 902-647-2194 Email: maurice@theshorelinejournal.com

Dear Maurice

Thanks for all the memories the Shoreline Journal brings every month. I pass it along to my son, who spent most of his childhood in Nova Scotia and is very interested in everything going on in and around Economy and Carr's Brook.

It is a great newspaper
Vera M. Kaintz
Coopersburg, PA

Dear Maurice

Enclosed please find enclosed cheque to cover my subscription and for my son's for another year of your great paper. I enjoy it every month and so does James.

Thank you for the birthday Party for the Ninety+ people. 2014 was the first I was entitled to attend. Great Fun.

Here are two more names for you: Isobel Horne, who will be 90 on October 23rd and Myles Rushton on December 8th.

Sincerely,
Eileen Eaton

Dear Editor:

I want to assure the editor of this paper and anyone who reads my "rants" that anything I submit is on my own behalf, that is, observations made and opinions expressed are solely my own.

On the evening of Wednesday, September 10, members of the Wentworth Community School Council and supporters donned red "Menace" shirts and went to the public meeting of Chignecto-Central Regional School Board being held in the Chiganois Elementary School in Masstown. The group consisted of 8 women, six of them seniors. They had questions to ask during the public question period. They chose to sit in the front row facing the elected members. Some of the group thought it would be a good thing for the board members to see them and recognize them for what they were (menaces to the "security and safety of students and staff at the school", CCRSB letter to WCSC June 27, 2014) so that any future "menaces" would be recognized in a more timely manner. It took 30+ years for this devious group to be found out.

The meeting progressed, as these meetings do, with various reports and presentations. The Director of Educational Services gave a Power Point presentation on the board's anti-bullying initiative "Stand Up. Speak Out 2014: We are NOT Afraid".

Some of the WCSC ladies thought it was most appropriate considering what they were there for. Much of the evening was spent listening to the Director of Operational Services talk. He first spoke about the proposed Hub School Model that CCRSB is demanding River John, Maitland and Wentworth Elementary Schools become. He stated that the schools must raise enough money to equal the amount ('Projected Operational Efficiencies') that would, in his estimation, be saved by closing them. These amounts, to be raised annually, were: River John - \$173,123; Maitland - \$130,258; Wentworth - \$244,796. Wentworth would also have to provide \$160,000 for roof repair. (CCRSB Impact Assessment Reports for River John Elementary, Maitland Elementary, Wentworth Elementary, September 2012). This was supposed to be a "review and discussion", but there was not much discussion. It is hoped that real discussion will take place at some point. He spoke again at a later time on construction and maintenance that has or has not been done to various schools in the Board's care.

Finally the public question period was reached. Two WCSC ladies passed copies of their questions and a list of all the activities and donations to the school made over their 30 years of operation to all board members and staff present. Four others presented the questions. It was understood by WCSC members that answers to their questions would not likely be available during this period as CCRSB might want to consider them in depth, so they requested that any answers composed after the meeting be forwarded in writing. These are the questions and the answers:

1. Why did we receive no answer from the elected members of CCRSB to the question in our letter of May 12, 2014? That question was "Does the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board no longer honour agreements made with other organizations?"

Answer from Chair: We will answer you in writing.

2. Why, after 30+ years of working with and for Wentworth Consolidated Elementary School and with its two school boards,

were we identified by your Operational and Educational Services staff as a danger to the, quote, "safety and security of students and staff at the school", unquote? (Letter from your staff dated June 27, 2014.)

Answer from Chair: We will answer you in writing.

3. Why did the Superintendent's office ask the Chignecto Family of Schools Supervisor for, quote, "specific information in regard to individuals who have keys to the school and have active security codes", unquote? (Letter from your staff dated June 27, 2014.) What is this 'specific' information, who collected it, how was it collected and why was it done without our knowledge?

Answer from Superintendent: He needed the names of the people with keys and codes as the matter had "got out of hand". He did not elaborate.

4. Why was the WCSC never formally - as an organization - contacted at any time during the past year about concerns your staff had regarding our activities in the school and why did the Operational and Educational Services staff refuse to meet with us to discuss the matter after the action taken by them in June/July 2014?

Answer from Chair: We will answer you in writing.

Two gentlemen were upset with the ladies asking questions. One said he preferred to be informed about matters before he was asked any questions. Considering that many letters have been sent to the elected board members covering the matters which were in the questions, one wonders how he could not be informed. Perhaps he was a staff member not an elected one. Another board member said he was tired and didn't need to hear any more negative stuff.

That was it. The public left the meeting as the board was to go into 'in camera' mode. Board members later had a nice picture taken with the "Stand Up. Speak Out 2014: We Are NOT Afraid" material. It is posted on the CCRSB website.

"Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything" John Kenneth Galbraith

Community School Update: No word about proposed September meeting with CCRSB staff. No activities can be planned. AA still meeting in United Church. When the Wentworth School Sustainability Association, who are supposedly working with and for CCRSB on a Hub School Model, made a request to the Principal to hold their September 11th meeting in the school they were told, "I have checked with (the Director of Operational Services).....If you wanted to meet in the evening, you would need to pay for a custodian to be in the building". (e-mail from the Principal, September 8, 2014). They are still meeting at an alternate site.

Sincerely yours,
Carol Hyslop.

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Maurice Rees, Publisher
902-647-2968,
or E-MAIL:
maurice@theshorelinejournal.com

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PHONE: 902-647-2968; Fax: 902-647-2194 Toll Free 1-800-406-1426; Cell: 902-890-9850 • E-MAIL: maurice@theshorelinejournal.com

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