



Your MLA at WORK

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Howard Epstein • MLA Halifax Chebucto • Winter 2006

Cleaning up Political Parties

Dear Resident:

Since the June election, there have been two sessions of the Legislature. Both have been significant.

In the Summer session, the main piece of business was the Government's Budget. It had been introduced in May, but was put aside when the new Premier called an election. The Budget received all-party support. At the end of the session, the Liberals announced a working relationship with the PCs: "We hope to have an ongoing relationship with the Progressive Conservative government," they said. This statement has widely been interpreted to mean a commitment to maintaining the present government until at least 2008.

One main Budget measure was the removal of HST from home heating. The NDP and PCs both campaigned on this in 1998. Our Caucus has continued to raise this issue year after year, with success achieved at last. The Liberals have opposed the measure, but changed their position in order to support the Budget which included it.

In the Autumn session, there was extensive debate over political party funds. Legislation to change the rules was introduced, filibustered, and then referred to a Select Committee for study. How political parties are funded is a central question in a democracy. The system in Nova Scotia has many flaws, and my colleagues and I are determined to clean it up.

Our proposal is to eliminate completely donations to political parties from corporations, unions, or anyone except individuals. The



Howard with Maddy, 10, the family dog.

Do you have any questions, information or opinions? Contact me at:

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PCs want to allow such donations up to \$5000 per year. Our proposal is to wind up a dubious trust fund operated by the Liberal Party since the days it practiced toll-gating. In 1983, some senior Liberals were convicted of influence peddling, on the basis of requiring companies wanting to do business with the government to make contributions to the party. The bill introduced by the PCs and supported by the Liberals would allow the trust fund to be used to support ongoing party operations (but not for election purposes).

The opportunities for undue influence or even outright corruption are enormous when dealing with other people's money. Making electoral politics in Nova Scotia clean, and seen to be clean, is fundamental. There are entirely too many ways for a narrow range of interests with deep pockets to influence politics. We are dedicated to building a system that can effectively guard against that.

Best wishes for the New Year.

keep in touch!

We send out regular email updates on issues of concern to citizens of Halifax Chebucto. To get on that list, send your email address to hepstein@ns.aliantzinc.ca

Canada Post does not deliver these newsletters to homes that display "No Flyers" signs. We are trying to change this policy for MLA newsletters. Meanwhile, please pass this newsletter on where appropriate. Copies are also available from the Constituency Office.

HOWARD EPSTEIN

From the floor of the Legislature

Climate change

One of the points that Mr. Gore makes in the film [*An Inconvenient Truth*] is that if the Arctic icefields melt due to global climate change, there would be a 20-foot rise in sea levels worldwide. Even small changes in sea levels would be highly problematic in many parts of Nova Scotia, including the minister's own home constituency. I wonder if the minister will tell us, what is he doing to lead the way in coastal zone planning in order to avoid potentially disastrous consequences from flooding?

HANSARD, July 6, 2006

“Even small changes in sea levels would be highly problematic in many parts of Nova Scotia...”

Kyoto Accord targets

Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Environment and Labour. The minister's colleague, the Minister of Energy, said last week this government would wait and see how the federal Conservatives tackle the issue of greenhouse gases, but this House knows that Quebec and Manitoba have both announced... that they will implement Kyoto. Why will the minister not announce the same target for Nova Scotia? ... There is nothing in law to prevent the Province of Nova Scotia from acting, and we have coal-fired power plants here. We have a cement plant, we have hundreds of thousands of cars and they all emit greenhouse gases. The main one is CO₂, this problem is pressing, but Nova Scotia has no laws at all to control the emission of CO₂. I'm asking the minister, what is he waiting for?

HANSARD July 11, 2006

Establishing new private universities in Nova Scotia

What is the appropriate process for the establishment of a new university in Nova Scotia? The thrust of Bill #5 is that the appropriate way... is to come forward, speak to the Cabinet and request their review and approval... The alternative, being promoted by those of us in this caucus, is to recognize that the traditional way in which universities have been established has really been through legislation in this House... This is not a situation that is akin to the establishment of a private business... If we were at a time when, say, no branch of Canadian Tire had been established in



Howard with the full NDP Caucus. 20 New Democrats were elected to the Legislature in June.

Nova Scotia and... they wanted to open up a branch in Nova Scotia, we wouldn't be saying that they have to bring a bill to the floor of the Legislature... [There's] an appropriate level of regulatory oversight for some casual business that wants to get going in the private marketplace. But that is not the appropriate model when it comes to universities.

HANSARD, Nov. 7, 2006

Supplementary Education Funding

There's another problem when it comes to the funding of education at the school level in Nova Scotia... even when the province receives the \$200 million from the municipalities and adds in monies from... provincial revenues... we hear complaints that maybe it's still not enough... I know there are parents everywhere in this province who are concerned about the quality of education their children receive... I think if supplementary education funding really were about finding a few extra things... if we already had a really good system... maybe there might be a little room left over in some communities for adding on a little bit extra... They invented [supplementary education funding] in... the former cities of Halifax and Dartmouth and it's now spread out since the formation of HRM. They invented it because they were concerned... about the fundamental quality of the education system... They felt what they called supplementary education money... should have to be put in place in order to give the quality of education they thought their children ought to be receiving in the first place if the system were adequately funded...

HANSARD Nov. 7, 2006

NSPI power rate increases

Has [Nova Scotia Power Inc.] become a predatory corporation?... It's time we looked back on the context that has led us to arrive at the point where 14 years later, the government is coming forward with a bill to try to tell our monopoly electrical utility to stop trying to get increases in their rates more than once a year because we... their customers, probably can't afford it... Maybe it's time for the government to look back in earnest and think about whether [privatization] was such a good deal, because we still have a monopoly situation... with all of us as captive customers — businesses, homes and commercial establishments alike — and the rates have been going up year after year after year... Nova Scotia Power,

“Nova Scotia Power, since privatization, year in, year out, has generated \$100 million of profit...”

since privatization, year in, year out, has generated \$100 million of profit — that is more than \$1 billion of profit that they've generated, that they paid out in dividends to their shareholders... Suppose the rates were still the same, but it was a public company? That money could have been used to improve the equipment; it could have been used to improve the environmental controls to limit emissions; or it could have been used to raise salaries for those linespeople, the ones who go out there in the dead of winter, in the storms like White Juan, and help us out when the system goes down... most of the owners of the shares of Nova Scotia Power are not in Nova Scotia. A lot of them are pension funds, a lot of them are big

institutional investors, a lot of them are private investors elsewhere. That money left this province — not every last penny, but most of it certainly left this province, which is in and of itself an economic drain on us... Well, I think that it is time the government rethought this.

HANSARD Nov. 6, 2006

Energy Poverty

Today in the newspapers we saw people speaking up on behalf of that segment of Nova Scotians who are so poor and have such great difficulty paying their electricity bills that a term has been invented to describe [their] situation... energy poverty... Representatives... that came to speak on behalf of the poorest of the customers of Nova Scotia Power, said to the [Utility and Review Board] you should create a special system to deal with the poorest customers of Nova Scotia Power and the Board threw up its hands and said... we don't have the authority to do that... It struck me as a little strange, because there are different... payment plans that exist now with the blessing of the Board and some of those categories include... special arrangements for the very largest of customers like the pulp and paper plants. But no, there's no legal authority to set up a special category for the poorest of customers... Are we to understand that the government thinks that the present situation is just fine? That it's fine for a special category of rate to exist for the largest of industrial customers, but not a good thing to have a special category of rate for the poorest of customers?

HANSARD Nov. 6, 2006

Regulation of Aquaculture Operations:

We observed this week... that responsibility for making a decision about an aquaculture operation rests with the same department — Fisheries and Aquaculture — that in fact sees as its mandate the promotion of that sector. There should be a distinction made between the function of promotion of a sector and the function of making decisions of a regulatory sort... that are akin to environmental assessment... This government should take a good hard look at removing that decision-making function from that department and moving it to an arm's-length department, moving it to the Department of Environment and Labour.

HANSARD Nov. 23, 2006

The full text of these excerpts can be viewed at www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/HOUSE_BUSINESS/hansard/han60-1/



Howard Epstein on a recent visit to Birchtown, Sheburne County, with Elizabeth Cromwell, Board member of the Black Loyalist Heritage Society. Ms. Cromwell was a member of the Voluntary Planning Heritage Strategy Taskforce which has just reported (www.gov.ns.ca/VP). Howard is Opposition Critic for Heritage.



Howard with Jack Layton, Leader of Canada's New Democrats.

HOWARD EPSTEIN — From the floor of the Legislature

... continued

Energy Sustainability

We will never be in a position to say, we didn't know what the consequences of our inaction were. We knew. We always knew. The information has been in front of us... Are the government still doubters on the science of global climate change? If so, they ought to say so, and we could have a scientific debate... Are they worried about how to deal with the existing electrical monopoly? That's a fair point, but we ought to debate that... The government has to get the ball rolling here. If they don't, what will ultimately happen is that in other jurisdictions... the technology will be developed... the economic models will be developed... Everyone else will have moved.. beyond us and at some point we'll be left to say, okay, whatever has been done in Ontario, in Vermont, in California, we will at last — the last in North America perhaps — finally do it ourselves... There will also be economic consequences... We'll be buying our electricity from somewhere else — someone else will be manufacturing the solar panels, the wind turbines, the wave and wind generating machines... We'll be buying that technology and the dollars will be going out of our province. The scientific

expertise will not be developed here — it will be developed somewhere else and we'll just pay for it... Surely [the Minister's] government can understand that if you don't get ahead of the wave, it's just going to come crashing over you.

HANSARD Nov. 9, 2006

Government by Cabinet?

Why are we nudging government more in the direction of decision by the Cabinet? Clearly, this is something that's convenient for a government that's in a minority position... It's not as if the government had a vision for the positive transformation of Nova Scotia society that it wanted to put forward in legislative form. Essentially for this government, being the government is about occupying chairs around the Cabinet Table, it's about appointing people they know to agencies, boards, and commissions, and it's about passing regulations... we should look somewhat askance and very suspiciously at bills that come to us and invite us to give a lot of regulatory-making power to the minority Cabinet.

HANSARD Oct. 30, 2006

Municipal Monitor

NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Major changes might be in the works for elementary and junior high schools on the Halifax Peninsula. In Chebucto, the School Board plans to eliminate Westmount, Oxford, and St. Catherine's. In addition, LeMarchant-St. Thomas, attended by some Chebucto children, is to go. Furthermore, the Sir Charles Tupper School would be merged with the new elementary schools by 2020. And Cornwallis School would be merged with the new junior high school, but with no specified date. The School Board's planning document "Proposed Capital Program (www.hrsb.ns.ca/files/Downloads/pdf/reports/2005-2006/September/05-09-838.pdf) from August 2005 gives details. The proposal is to build:

- ♦ a new Central North Junior High School by 2012, replacing Oxford, Highland Park, and St. Pat's-Alexandra (7-9)
- ♦ a new Central North Elementary School by 2013, replacing Oxford (P-6), St. Stephen's, and St. Joseph's A. MacKay
- ♦ a new South West Elementary School by 2014, replacing Westmount and St. Catherine's

The central issue for the Board appears to be their projections of enrollments, and efficient use of funds. For families, the prospect of loss of small neighbourhood schools is unwelcome. A website has been established by concerned parents which will update developments (www.citadelschools.ca). A recent inclusion to this site is a history of the closure proposal which can be accessed at <http://www.citadelschools.ca/assets/History%20of%20School%20Closure%20Proposal.pdf>.

School closures are a feature of life across the province. In response to a series of disputes, the Province has put in place a two-year moratorium on closures while the process of considering closures is examined. The study group's report is due to be presented to the Department of Education early in the new year.

The HRM School Board is of the view that its capital expenditures do not amount to closures, a point disputed by many families. Board Member Lynn MacGregor attempted in November to have the Board agree to put its plans on hold for its first priority project, a new elementary school in the south end of the Peninsula. But the Board was not prepared to agree and postponed consideration of this until January. In the meantime, Board Superintendent Carole Olsen has met with the Advisory Councils of the three schools which could be closed. The Board, with the participation of the Dept of Education, will be

conducting more consultations with parents. Stay tuned.

It is very likely all aspects of the Board's proposals will be intensely challenged.

DOWNTOWN TOWERS

In October, the Court of Appeal confirmed the Utility and Review Board was correct in reversing HRM Council's approval of a 17-storey tower for the **Midtown Tavern** site. The main political supporters of the project, Councillors Sue Uteck and Sheila Fougere (along with the former councillor, Jerry Blumenthal) were ruled to have acted outside the land use planning rules and principles of the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS). Their approval failed to take into account the requirement to protect the setting for the Halifax Citadel and compatibility with heritage buildings. Your MLA represented the community groups that launched the appeal against the tower proposal.

Also downtown, United Gulf Developments Limited has won HRM approval for two 27-storey towers on the former **TexPark** site. Your MLA is representing various community groups that have appealed to the Utility Board. Hearings are scheduled for February 2007. All of the MPS policies that were considered in the **Midtown** case are relevant to the United Gulf proposal.

CHEBUCTO ROAD TRAFFIC

HRM has proposed expansion of Chebucto Road between the Rotary and Mumford Road. Homeowners are facing the prospect of expropriation of their front lawns, as well as increased traffic. The proposal is strongly opposed in the entire neighbourhood, including adjacent streets where families fear shortcutting as well as problems on crosswalks. Widening roads will not deal effectively with the core issue of movement of people on and off of the Peninsula. That will just allow more car traffic to flow. Your MLA has made representations to HRM Council on behalf of the residents but the municipality has not yet abandoned its plans.

CITADEL HIGH SCHOOL

Construction of the new high school seems to be proceeding on pace for a September 2007 opening. Families are working to raise \$2.3 million to pay for the auditorium, which will have 800 seats. HRM is paying for the second gym/community centre. Fundraising events are being organized. Watch out for more details. A link to information about Citadel High can be found at either www.st-pats.ednet.ns.ca or www.geh.ednet.ns.ca. The team leader for the fundraising is Jay Lugar — 425-4967.

THE SCANDAL SCORECARD

Rodney MacDonald

The new Premier appoints his leadership campaign strategist, Heather Foley-Melvin, as his Chief of Staff. After failing to win a majority government, he fires her but moves her to a newly-created (unadvertised) position to be in charge of conservation programmes in the Department of Energy, a position for which she has no obvious qualifications. She keeps her \$130,000 salary from her months as Chief of Staff. Question: How many Chiefs of Staff does it take to put in an energy efficient lightbulb? Answer: Only one. But you have to pay her \$130,000.

Chris d'Entremont

The Minister of Health, asked about the Premier's commitment to 40 nursing home beds in Middleton during the May/June election campaign, responds that it was "election propaganda." Smooth move, Chris.

Karen Casey

The Minister of Education, for some unimaginable reason, muses publicly whether Nova Scotia has too many universities.

Bill Dooks (No.1)

The Minister of Energy declares his absolute confidence in the prospects for development of an LNG plant in Bear Head in the Strait of Canso, just as the whole project stalls. Column writers in the *Chronicle Herald* wonder if the Minister even remotely knows what is going on in his portfolio.

Bill Dooks (No.2)

The Minister of Energy muses about the potential for renewable sources of electrical power in Nova Scotia, especially wind turbines. "What happens when the wind stops blowing?" he asks. Column writers in the *Chronicle Herald* wonder if the Minister even remotely knows what is going on in his portfolio.

Judy Streach

The Minister of Community Services refuses to extend pharmacare benefits to a seriously-ill young woman, Irene Larkin, who cannot afford to purchase necessary medications. Nova Scotia continues to avoid putting in place coverage for catastrophic circumstances. Avoiding financial catastrophe is one of the basic reasons a Medicare system was started in the first place. Back to school, Judy.

Murray Scott

The Minister of Justice phones the Director of Public Prosecuting to ask about a case in which his colleague, Judy Streach, had been ordered to appear in court to answer questions about how her department had supervised a troubled teenage girl. Since the days of the Marshall Royal Commission law and policy has kept the Prosecution Service at arm's length from Cabinet ministers. Just step away from the phone, Murray...

Carolyn Bolivar Getson

The Minister responsible for the Liquor Commission can't explain why NSLC needs a "customer loyalty programme." For one thing, it's a monopoly. For another, the product is pretty popular and tends to sell itself.

Richard Hurlburt

The Minister of Economic Development, responsible for implementing a new information technology (IT) system for the provincial government, has to admit that the project is \$20 million over budget and two years late. Worse, the project was outsourced, started with an unsolicited proposal from a company, and was continued without a public tender. We thought the virtue of the private sector was supposed to be competition, Richard.

New 8% energy rebate

Your energy rebate took effect on December 1st.

- If you heat with oil or propane you don't need to do anything. The 8% provincial tax will be deducted from your bill by your supplier, starting with deliveries made on or after December 1st.
- If you heat with electricity, you will not have to do anything either. The 8% provincial tax will be deducted from your bill by Nova Scotia

Power. You will see the reduction in your January bill.

- If you heat with wood or wood pellets you need to supply your receipts and apply for the rebate. Unfortunately if you bought wood prior to December 1st you are ineligible.

Check out www.youenergyrebate.ns.ca or call **424-5200** for more information.

local hero

MARGARET STANBURY, 1913-2006

A respected former member of Halifax City Council and teacher of dance and theatre, passed away November 27. Margaret Stanbury lived in Halifax Chebucto on Connaught Avenue. Born in New Brunswick, she settled in Halifax

in 1935. She ran a preschool for 40 years. Elected to City Council in 1971 as only the third woman ever, she served three terms and was Deputy Mayor. Hundreds of children learned from her how to perform and appreciate the arts, and thousands attended her plays by and for children.

new YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUP

Website: <http://e-earlypsychosis.ca>



This past summer Howard attended the meeting of the Council of State Governors in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he visited the Liberty Bell.

About Howard Epstein

Howard Epstein was first elected to represent Halifax Chebucto as MLA in March 1998. He was re-elected MLA in July 1999, August 2003 and June 2006. Previously he was on municipal council, first for the City of Halifax (Ward 4) from 1994-96, and then, after amalgamation, for HRM (District 14) from 1996-98. He teaches Land Use and Land Use Planning Law at Dalhousie University. He has a long history of involvement in environmental issues, having served as Executive Director of the Ecology Action Centre from 1991-93. Born in Halifax, he attended QEII and Dalhousie University, as well as Carleton University in Ottawa. He has two children, Hannah and Noah. As a Member of the NDP Official Opposition, his Critic areas are Economic Development and Heritage.

Important Phone Numbers

Adsum House	429-4443	Mainline Needle Exchange	423-9991
AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia	429-7922	Mayor Peter Kelly	490-4010
Bryony House	422-7650	Metro Food Bank	457-1900
Crisis Line	423-7183	Metro Transit	490-4000
Inquiries	423-7183	Metro Transit	490-4000
Canada Employment Centre	1-800-523-4732	Metropolitan Housing Authority	420-6000
Chebucto Links (Seniors)	422-3525	NDP Caucus Office	424-4134
Children's Aid Society	477-2777	NS Drug Dependency	424-5920
Dalhousie Legal Aid	423-8105	NS Human Rights Commission	424-4111
Dept. Community Services (Intake)	424-4150	NS Legal Aid	420-3450
Emergency	911	Premier's Office	424-6600
Federal MP, Alexa McDonough	426-8691	Phoenix House	422-5583
HRM Councillors' Office	490-4050	HRM Police (Incident Reports)	490-5016
IWK (Emergency)	470-8050	QE II Health Sciences (Emerg)	423-2043
Kid's Helpline	1-890-668-6868	Residential Tenancies	424-5200

Senior Citizen Directorate	424-4737
SPCA Metro Animal Control	468-9219
Workers' Compensation Board	491-8999
Youth Helpline	420-TEEN (420-8336)

Federal

Canada Pension, Employment Insurance, Citizenship and Immigration, CRTC

Alexa McDonough 426-8691

Provincial

Workers Comp., Income Assistance, Home Care, Student Loans, Property Assessment

Howard Epstein 425-8521

Municipal

Roads, Traffic, Tax Rate, Police and Fire Services, Solid Waste removal

District 14 - Sheila Fougere 452-3209

District 11 - Pat Murphy 490-4050

District 13 - Sue Uteck 425-1724

School Board

District 8 - Kim Berkers 455-3412

District 9 - Lynn MacGregor 422-6235