

FROM PROVINCE HOUSE TO HOME

As the summer days get shorter and our evenings cooler, many Nova Scotians are growing anxious-and with good reason. Autumn is nearly upon us and winter's frigid grip will soon follow. Home heating season is on the horizon, and the price of energy in this province has a lot of us concerned. In October 2007 the price of heating oil was 78.9 cents per litre, and most oil companies capped their prices at 85.9. A month ago the price was \$1.29 cost per litre and today it is \$110.9. A number of companies will cap around \$119.9, while some smaller dealers will not provide customers with that option.

As Atlantic Canadians, we are always ready and maybe even genetically disposed to face record low temperatures. Unfortunately this winter, we must brace ourselves for the record highs-oil bills, electricity costs, and energy prices across the board. After having been gouged weekly at the gas pumps province-wide, our wallets will be squeezed ever harder as we fill and refill our oil tanks. About 60% of Nova Scotians heat their homes with oil, significantly more than residents of any other province. That means the demand for home heating oil in this province is about to skyrocket; in turn, so will the price. With oil companies already experiencing dizzying levels of profit, the MacDonald government has done little but count its share of the windfall. Nova Scotians should expect some relief when almost a 40% increase is expected. This is a period of transition that has never been experienced before, including the oil embargo of 1973.

Oil companies and the provincial government aren't the only winners in this energy crisis. Nova Scotia Power has already earned nearly \$90 million in profit this year, with six very prosperous months to go. I feel like hundreds of constituents I talk with- the MacDonald government has not stood tall for Nova Scotians in opposing the 12.1 per cent increase. Apparently, \$90 million just doesn't go as far as it used to. In my view the UARB should throw out NSP's request in light of this profit track.

The government's energy plan consists of little more than continuing to wring out hard-working Nova Scotians. There is "feet-dragging" on the development of renewable energy sources and technology, choosing instead to feed the province's absolutely unsustainable addiction to oil. We can avert any further energy crisis by shifting our focus and our resources to renewable sources of power right now. Investing in the development of our wind, tidal and solar assets will insulate Nova Scotians and put us on the leading edge of the sustainable energy sector. It is too late for this type of investment to assist overburdened Nova Scotians this winter, but we must kick our reliance on oil, if we are to re-establish fair and reasonable energy prices.

Raising the efficiency levels of homes must become more of a priority. With outrageous energy prices providing ample encouragement, Nova Scotia homeowners need to be assisted-both technically and financially-with this process. The cumbersome provincial rebate hasn't achieved the necessary results, and for the most part people aren't aware of what available assistance they qualify for. If Nova Scotians don't know that help is out there, how can they possibly take advantage of it? I have had several occasions when the winter passed and constituents discovered too late to apply. Why not use NSP bills to insert information on a government program, as they already work very closely on the energy windfall margins?

As the energy crunch intensifies, so too will our efforts to provide solutions to a government with too few at hand. I will be working throughout September to ensure that no one has to choose between heating their home and feeding their family this winter.

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