

## FROM PROVINCE HOUSE TO HOME

I think there were six bills of significance passed during the short fall session which concluded on Thursday evening Dec 13th. It was not surprising that they centered around crime, health and worker's benefits. Nova Scotians have raised their voices on three of these issues often and with a clear message. In my view minority government delivered and that's why I don't think there will be a provincial election in 2008. In a year that will mark the 250th anniversary of democracy in Nova Scotia, it is my belief that democratic practices and principals exercised among the three parties will prevail and that great right of voting will be for our federal and municipal representatives.

During the recent session, Liberal leader, Stephen McNeil entered a bill to restore statutory holidays and this was a year overdue. This is an issue that has nothing to do with partisan politics and everything about doing the right thing. Ever since the MacDonald government brought in Sunday shopping it also included the seven longstanding statutory holidays. Naturally, much confusion resulted and increased tension between store owners and retail workers. For example in most rural areas Canada Day saw wide-scale closure of retail outlets while in Metro it was business as usual for most stores. This Christmas, store owners and their workers can look forward not only to Christmas Day but also Boxing Day and New Year's Day when family time and celebration can be given the high regard it needs and deserves. In addition Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Canada Day, Labour Day and Thanksgiving will be a statutory or in the new legislative language, "designated days off." Remembrance Day has its own special act governing time off to attend a ceremony. This is a wonderful change that is not a question of "telling business what to do"- it is protection of the workers and protection of certain holidays.

Governments broad-ranging bill on crime will impact on our use of cell phones, photo radar, crosswalks and "squeegee kids». A quick note of explanation: it will mean that only hands free cell phones will be permitted in vehicles. This is a compromise position, because the evidence of cell phone distractions and accidents is well documented. Photo radar received much debate as its use became law in some provinces and then withdrawn after a period of time because it was being used as a "cash cow" rather than an effective tool to reduce speeding and illegal driving practices. It will be implemented in HRM on a trial basis at troublesome locations, such as high rate of accidents and crosswalk accidents. One of the requirements is that signage of their locations must be posted. So the jury is still out on whether this will become a widely-used measure in this province. The requirement of flashing lights at cross walks is a measure that should be implemented all across this province. I applaud Kentville on the use of this safety device, and I think their use will serve as the potential tool required to reduce deaths and serious accidents. This omnibus bill also called got "squeegee kids" being illegal on the streets of Halifax- they can set up in parking lots and areas other than roadways. This clause of the bill received lengthy debate as they are often seen as one of the faces of poverty. In reviewing the accident rate of several Canadian cities, it was deemed to be a safety issue.

I believe the Poverty Reduction Strategy Bill introduced by the Liberal party will go a long way to address the root causes of poverty in Nova Scotia. The best aspect of this bill is that the leaders who will create an action plan are the leaders who will create an action plan are the leaders who have been making recommendations for the past decade. I will write one of my first articles in the New Year on this very important issue that impacts on all our lives.

Three other bills that will have positive results are eliminating lunch supervision fees in Metro. This was a "private members bill" that I introduced and all members of the House of Assembly supported. 7,000 families can now place this money into wellness activities that will enhance their children's well being. In addition, casual employees who work for Dept of Natural resources for example, as forest fire fighters and park attendants will receive benefits if they only work seasonally, for 10 weeks to six months. The other bill which I was very pleased to support is the elimination of smoking in vehicles when children under 19 are present.

May you and your family have a Merry Christmas and enjoy many blessings in the New Year.