

FROM PROVINCE HOUSE TO HOME

June 21, 2008

Environment Canada is telling us to expect a hot summer (when it arrives!) this year and here in the Valley we feel it more than other Nova Scotians. All that heat makes it tempting to turn on the air conditioning – or at least have every fan in the house running at top speed – but many people are eyeing their electricity bills wondering if they can handle a little heat to save some money. Household electric bills are high enough to put the chill on even the hottest summer day and it's only getting worse. Not only has the Conservative Government eliminated an 8% electricity rebate it was offering, now Nova Scotia Power is seeking a double digit increase in rates while, at the same time, posting first quarter profits double that of last year.

All that information has some of my constituents asking who's running the show over at Nova Scotia Power. The answer is part of the problem. Private industry is in charge. We can't blame a private company for doing what it is supposed to do: answer to its shareholders and make more money. What we can take issue with is the fact that it's a private company at all. The company that powers our province should answer to us, yet we lost control over Nova Scotia Power when the Conservatives privatized it in 1992. The premier claims he'll oppose the proposed rate increase but without that ownership he has limited power. I am more pleased that our bill passed in the spring sitting of the Legislature will for the first time represent small business at the UARB hearings.

That loss of control over Nova Scotia Power has a number of implications. Not only does the province have limited control over rates, it also can't control how that energy is generated. In a world of rising fuel costs and growing environmental concerns, this is becoming an increasingly important issue. The majority of the proposed rate increases will cover higher fuel expenses says Nova Scotia Power. It says the cost of acquiring fuel to produce electricity in 2009 will be \$90 million more. Fossil fuels are expensive. They're also dirty.

The issue of power in Nova Scotia goes beyond just the bottom line. We are leaving a scarred world to our children. This generation is growing up in fear of climate change like the one before feared nuclear war. We have a responsibility to generate clean energy and try and clean up our legacy. Right now, Nova Scotia Power gets only 12% of its power from renewable sources like wind, solar, hydro and bio-mass. Is that good enough? Consider that Nova Scotia is one of the world's largest polluters of green-house gases due to our coal fired plants and then ask that question. Try standing on the shore of the Bay of Fundy feeling the wind whip by and watching the highest tides on the world and ask it again. I think most would agree we can do far better. We have a great opportunity to be a national or even international leader in the production of green energy yet we're still using fossil fuels to run most of the province.

This government talks a lot about the environment and has made some grand promises, particularly about the generation of renewable energy. Yet all that work relies on negotiations with Nova Scotia Power, in convincing a private utility to buy green power. It's the same utility that chose not to speak at a large renewable resources conference

earlier this month saying its executives were too busy. When the utility was privatized in the early 90s we were promised it would save money and jobs. What we got was skyrocketing rates, high private sector profits and more fuel for global warming. Furthermore should Nova Scotia Power's CEO receive a salary 41% higher than the average power utility boss in the country? Is this really how you want our province powered?