

2012 rings in with concern

The start of a new year always seems filled with promise. But this year, the outlook is not so rosy.

Schools here in Nova Scotia will be hit with more cuts at budget time. While the NDP government likes to say this is because there are fewer students enrolled in the system, the fact is that our per-student funding is the second-lowest in the country. This is making itself felt in classrooms shared by three grades, by layoffs of educational assistants, and poor international assessments.

While Darrell Dexter howled when the federal government unilaterally cut the increases to health care funding post-2014, he appeared to forget that he's already cutting health care funding by 3 percent (and forcing health boards to absorb increases in labour and power costs as well). While I disagree with Stephen Harper's approach, he may well have thought Nova Scotia didn't need those increases, because the government is cutting funding to health care already.

Meanwhile, we have the lowest job growth of any province in this country. In fact, the job situation outside of Metro has been nothing short of disastrous: in the last year alone, rural Nova Scotia has lost 6600 jobs - a far cry from the 2200 jobs per year the NDP promised to create during the election.

Even when the government does try to rescue some jobs, it manages to botch the deal. When the NDP concluded an agreement to keep some workers on the job at the Resolute pulp and paper plant (better known as Bowater), it gave away up to \$90 million dollars without any job guarantees!

The Liberal caucus feels strongly that, with this bailout, Nova Scotia taxpayers are being asked to sacrifice twice; we are paying for the bailout and for higher power rates. Bowater workers are being asked to sacrifice; the workforce at the plant has been decimated. But there is no indication what the company is sacrificing in return.

Similarly, the NDP botched the Yarmouth Ferry issue. Recently, the government had to give a \$1 million forgivable loan to the Rodd Hotel in Yarmouth. Half the money will renovate the hotel. The other half will go towards the losses the hotel has rung up over the past two years. We don't begrudge the hotel the money - it really needs it to continue operating. But if the NDP government had given a year's notice of the cancellation, and if it had worked with the community to find a suitable replacement ferry during that time, the transition to a new ferry could have been seamless. Instead, the Southwestern portion of the province has been decimated by an economic tsunami created by its own government.

In careening from one fresh disaster to another, the NDP government is not living up to the promises it made during the election campaign. It is picking winners and losers, and far too often the losers are Nova Scotia families, Nova Scotia businesses, Nova Scotia taxpayers.

It's not how I'd hoped we'd start 2012.

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