

Submission to Law Amendments Committee, February 16, 2017 by Wanda Leese, CPA, CA

I am furious as a taxpayer in Nova Scotia that I am not being given the opportunity to speak to the Law Amendments Committee on this vitally important bill that affects each and every Nova Scotian, regardless of age or political stripe. The Legislature is the People's House, Our House. Law Amendments is the opportunity for the people of this province to give their input. Denying speakers based on a false notion of 'emergency' is the wrong thing to do. Deep down, each and every Liberal member of the Law Amendments Committee must know this.

When I wrote to my Liberal MLA Margaret Miller last night with that very comment, asking her to push for everyone to have the opportunity to have their voice at law amendments, she sent me yet another rude and condescending email with more deflection in it. Everyone needs to understand how this fight for improvements in our children's education conditions has played out. Only those who have not paid attention believe this has been handled well. Listen to this example of a typical email exchange with your MLA, when you are lucky enough to get a reply because you cc'd it to many opposition MLAs:

To Margaret, Tim, alfiemla, davewilsonmla, davidwiltonmla, info, jamie.baillie, patdunm
la, pictouwestmla

Margaret,

Your government has lost sight of the fact that the Legislature is the People's House. Limiting the timeframe of Law Amendments and denying taxpayers the right to speak is wrong. Deep down you have to know that.

If there is such a large response, then your government needs to hear the suggestions and thoughts of the people and represent them in the house.

Still asking you to Vote No.

Sincerely,
Wanda

Her reply:

Wanda. We tried to have law amendments in 2 rooms but it would have required support of the whole house. All opposition refused. We could have heard double the number of presenters. You can however do a written submission.

Email from me identifying the Liberal vote at LAC Wednesday evening:

Margaret, I appreciate that. But your members also voted tonight against taking the time to allow everyone to have their chance to speak. Two wrongs don't make a right.

Cross the floor- I will support you. I will campaign for you, I will do everything I can for you.

And her condescending reply:

Margaret Miller MLA

9:29 PM (11 hours
ago)

to me

There was no vote. It's up to the chair of the committee to determine the length of the hearings. FYI. We are the only province who has this type of input from the public. As to crossing the floor. You've got to be kidding. ..Tim who makes fun of kids with learning disabilities? Nasty. And the ndp...do you forget who took 65 million from the schools.

I support the premier 100% and so do many of our constituents who have been in touch with my office.

I replied with a media tweet identifying the vote to assure you I wasn't giving her alternate facts, which she loves to insinuate.

When did it become okay for our government to disrespect and abuse the very people they are supposed to represent?

When did it become acceptable for our government MLAs to disrespect the other members who have been elected to represent other residents of this province?

How could a Nova Scotian honestly think that the government, whose MLAs are clearly treating so many with disrespect, has negotiated in any kind of fair or good faith manner? The government has not shown good faith to many Nova Scotians these last years, and we know it is continuing right now with teachers.

How does this tie to Bill 75?

Bill 75 is the shameful culmination of this government's failure to negotiate with the NSTU. I've experienced several failed attempts to negotiate with my very own Liberal MLA, the one I voted for in the last election. The disrespect and condescension she shows to her constituents has highlighted for me that negotiating with this Liberal government in Nova Scotia means listening to them dictate their ideas, ignore your impassioned plea and, if they respond to you at all, it will include a rude rebuke.

Sounds an awful lot like the so-called negotiation with the teachers of this province, doesn't it?

Here's the dictated wage pattern in Bill 148. Accept that or we will legislate.

Those deferred wages negotiated in good faith with previous governments – they're gone. Accept that or we will legislate.

Money for classroom improvements – here's a committee to address it. **An aside – we all know how committees work, just like the Law Amendments Committee today changes will be made at the government's bidding that prevents any feedback or negotiation from happening.** These are the committees the government spoke of in tentative agreements 2 and 3. Accept that or we will legislate.

So now that we are here and we all understand why, and who is to blame, let's talk about possible improvements to this piece of legislation. I am not going to speak to the constitutional issues except to say that I believe MLAs who support legislation known to be at a substantial risk of being unconstitutional and therefore costing us hundreds of millions of dollars in court costs and legal fees, should be held personally responsible when the future costs incurred are put onto the backs of the taxpayers in this province.

In this legislation, the government has removed two paid days of personal time from teachers and given them an effective decrease in pay by combining the removal of the service award with no or limited raises over the five year contract. I believe the net impact on teachers' wallets looks something like this: -1%, -1%, 0%, 0.5%, and on the very last day, if it isn't taken away in the next contract, 0.5%.

That's a lot of money the government is set to save on wages, especially considering inflation. This bill should include funding to be spent immediately on needs for classroom conditions. 9300 teachers have told us what the needs are. As a parent of a child with learning challenges, I can tell you some of what the needs are. I can support the fact that all of us know what needs to happen immediately. This bill needs to address those needs immediately. *That is the only emergency right now – fixing classroom conditions.*

You have even named the bill after classroom improvements. So please include something immediately that will do what the legislation suggests: improve classrooms.

This bill needs to address immediately the children who require EA support and do not have it. This bill needs to address immediately the children who are sitting in overcrowded classrooms. This bill needs to address immediately mental health and violence in our schools. Use the savings from the wage pattern, the stripped service award, the removed two days and put that immediately into resources to improve classrooms.

Ignoring these immediate needs is just another failure by our government to listen to the voices of tens of thousands of Nova Scotians, possibly hundreds of thousands, asking them to address the emergency in our classrooms. The only real emergency that exists today in Nova Scotia.

Respectfully submitted,

Wanda Leese