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[REDACTED] provincial bills 1 and 6

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**** EXTERNAL EMAIL / COURRIEL EXTERNE ****

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Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to you to express my deep concern about the legislation recently proposed by the current Progressive Conservative government in Nova Scotia. Reflecting on these bills, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Progressive Conservative government is “moving fast and breaking things” just like the Trump government is doing to the south. This is something we really do not need in Canada right now, and departs completely from the platform on which this party campaigned and was recent elected.

This approach is exemplified in Bill 1, part of which, as far as I can see, aims to substantially reduce government transparency and accountability. Why else empower the premier to remove the Auditor General (a move recently backtracked by Premier Houston, but the intent remains)? Contrary to the government’s statements in the media, this proposed change did NOT bring NS more in line with most other provinces – only with those having egregious anti-transparency policies already in place. Aping bad policy is not a valid excuse for the removal of crucial accountability and transparency provisions. I suggest that if the Progressive Conservative party was in opposition right now; they would condemn this move, because this is a policy that only looks appealing from the “inside”. A similar anti-transparency agenda is obviously behind other elements of Bill 1, including the disbanding of Communications Nova Scotia and empowering government department leaders to refuse freedom of information requests without pretext. At this moment in world history, we need to strengthen our society’s democratic tools and protections, not diminish them under the pretext of “getting things done”.

I am also deeply concerned about provisions in Bill 6 that would rescind past bans on uranium exploration and mining, as well as on fracking for natural gas in Nova Scotia. These provisions were put in place for sound, well-thought-out, science-based reasons, and rescinding them was not detailed in the platform on the current governing party ran and was recently elected, clearly indicating that they have no mandate to make these proposed changes. I believe they comprise a regressive approach to economic development in Nova Scotia, as well as representing a direct threat to the quality and resilience of our provincial environment for future generations. What we need at this moment, in the context of a recent influx of new people to our province, the convergence of the worsening climate and biodiversity crises, and the immense changes in global and national economic alignments, is a fresh, modern, future-focused approach to economic development. Promoting increased industrial, profit-driven resource extraction is the opposite of this. It returns Nova Scotia to a failed, infinitely-expansionist, 19th century approach to economic development, where large multinationals are encouraged to remove our resources at the lowest possible cost (including hiring the fewest possible people) in the shortest possible time with a minimum-cost approach to environmental protection and remediation. All of this is done in the interest of maximizing profit, which is unarguably what these corporations and their shareholders are about. To be blunt: if we do this, the resources will be extracted, the environment damaged, a minimum number of local people will benefit, and ALL of the people of Nova Scotia will be left with the cleanup legacy. To go down this path now is indefensible, in my opinion, given the ample evidence we have about how this approach has

failed us in the past, here and elsewhere around the world. It is a perspective that is exclusively responsible for the twin climate and biodiversity crises that we now face. It has become painfully obvious that, to be sustainable, resource use must be right-sized and executed thoughtfully, locally, and with care.

I send these opinions to your committee cautiously, as I know I risk being labeled as a “special interest” by Progressive Conservative colleagues on the committee, and as a voice that puts the “no” in Nova Scotia. I hope that you will see, through a careful reading of what I have tried to articulate above, that dissenting voices are not lazily and ignorantly saying “no” to Nova Scotia. These voices are trying to help us collectively learn from the past and avoid approaches that have previously demonstrably failed us, and are pleading for better leadership that will say “yes” to a future-focused plan for government transparency and economic development in this province.

Sincerely,

Scott Digweed

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