

Sunday Shopping: The Time is Now

October 30, 2000

The issue of deregulated store hours and Sunday openings is of significant concern to the business community and to the retail, tourism and hotel sectors in particular. Government should not be in the business of regulating store hours. By allowing stores to open as the market dictates, it allows communities, particular industries and individual stores to make their own decisions on when, and when not, to be open. This improves their ability to compete and their control on their own bottom line.

Several public opinion polls on this issue have been conducted in recent years. These surveys indicate that the majority of Nova Scotians, in all areas of the province, now support Sunday shopping.

According to one estimate, Sunday shopping has the potential to add up to \$21 million in shopping revenue through increased tourism traffic. This could translate into 300 sustainable full time equivalent positions with 1,036 additional people working on any given Sunday.

This issue is not unique to Metro Halifax and should not be portrayed that way. General deregulation of retail hours should be introduced, even on an experimental basis, as early as possible. While full deregulation of retail store hours is the preferred option, limited Sunday openings is better than no Sunday openings at all.

To this end, the Chamber is encouraging the Province to consider possible compromises if they do not feel comfortable in moving forward with full deregulation. Options we propose include:

- a one to three-year experiment with general deregulation (three years being the preferred time line to allow for a full and complete analysis of impacts), or
- a one to three-year experiment with deregulation from June 1 to December 31 to cover both the tourist and Christmas seasons, or
- a one to three-year experiment with deregulation in a geographically limited area including HRM and possibly other key areas (Sydney, Yarmouth, or Amherst for instance).

To address possible concerns, any move to deregulation could include protections limiting the impact on employees and small retailers. The Ontario model, for example, explicitly allowed retailers in a mall setting to elect to open or close, thus overriding any general opening provisions in mall leases. In addition, Ontario put in place a labour standard protecting employees who declined to work on Sunday.

The Chamber's message to the Province is simple:

- Nova Scotians want it.
- visitors to our province want it.
- it is a good thing for the business community.

Now is the time to deregulate store hours.

Editor's note: The Retail Committee will be continuing to work on this issue, so watch your fax, email and future issues of Business Voice for updates.



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