

Immigration

1. How effective has this strategy been?
2. What are our retention rates today as compared to 2009?
3. What will your government do differently to improve our immigration policies for Halifax?
4. What do you plan to do to increase retention and attraction?

In the past six years, two immigration strategies have been developed in Nova Scotia.

In January 2005, Nova Scotia launched an immigration strategy which aimed to improve its retention rate from 40 to 70 percent and more than double its annual intake of immigrants to 3,600 by 2010. Our second strategy, released in April, 2011 set out an objective to double the annual intake of immigrants to 7,200 by 2020 and consolidate those gains by increasing the retention rate to 70% or better.

The 2005 strategy failed to meet its goal of 3,600 with 2008 bringing in the highest number of permanent residents at 2,651. To date, the second strategy, with the exception of estimated 2012 numbers, has seen year over year declines in the number of permanent residents coming to Nova Scotia.

Both strategies set a target retention rate of 70% that had essentially been met before the two strategies went to print. The 2001-2006 census period showed Nova Scotia had a retention rate of about 67% and the 2006-2011 census period showed we had a retention rate of 70%. I have been informed by ISIS that the current retention rate is now in the vicinity of 74% which is a trend that is moving in the right direction. Credit for this success rests largely through the leadership exhibited by ISIS who has been instrumental in establishing the on line pre-arrival program for immigrants and ensuring that settlement services are available to new Nova Scotians wherever they choose to settle in our province.

According to the 2010-2011 Office of Immigration Accountability Report, 2,444 provincial nomination certificates were issued from the period 2003-2010. It wasn't until 2010 that Nova Scotia issued its full allotment of nomination certificates (500). The current government has failed to produce an accountability report since 2010-2011 making it difficult for the public to determine how many nomination certificates have been issued in the last two years.

Unfortunately, despite the fact the most recent Immigration Strategy commits to "reporting back to Nova Scotians with clear results" and making the strategy "more transparent and accountable", data with regard to retention rates and certificates issued is not readily available. It is interesting to note that the Auditor General in his 2008 Report on the failure of the former Economic Stream noted there was no formal method in which the Office of Immigration tracked individuals coming to Nova Scotia through this particular nominee stream. Tracking of all nominees internally enables us to monitor retention rates for our provincial nominees in a timely manner.

While a strategy is useful when it comes to providing a road map for potential success, it is self-evident that changes and actions undertaken by the Federal Conservative Government coupled with an economy that ensures new Nova Scotians are able to work and support their families are crucial to growing our population.

As outlined in our platform, a Liberal government would establish a Premier's Advisory Council on Immigration which would include successful immigrants who have chosen Nova Scotia as their new home. This council will have a legislative mandate and will report directly to the Premier. Halifax, and indeed all Nova Scotia is fortunate to have many successful immigrants who have gone on to become exceptional entrepreneurs and business owners. Our province can benefit from their wisdom and insight as to how best to make HRM and our province a more attractive place to settle. While a Ministerial Advisory Committee now exists, they meet very infrequently and do not have an established mandate. The Liberal Party believes this issue is so vitally important, that the Premier should play a leadership role when it comes to increasing immigration to our province. A Liberal government would also engage our Honourary Counsel Generals in a discussion around immigration and use these individuals as contacts in countries around the world. It is vitally important we maximize every opportunity to showcase our province to the world.

A Liberal government will also establish an Entrepreneur Stream under the provincial nominee program. Properly constructed economic streams that ensure immigrants are able to control their own success are highly successful when it comes to retaining these individuals for longer periods of time. We currently do not have an economic stream under the provincial nominee program and in fact, this government has cut in half, the number of streams immigrants can chose from when coming to Nova Scotia. We have lost 50% of our ability to control our own destiny, including the International Graduate Stream. International Graduates must now apply to the Canadian Experience class so it will be crucial to monitor processing times so we don't lose International Graduates who have grown accustomed to the ways of life of Nova Scotia and want to stay here.

A Liberal Government will also develop two distinct "connection" programs: one for International Graduates who have studied here and left for other jurisdictions or returned to their native country, and a Nova Scotia Connect program that will connect with Nova Scotians who have left our province. Both of these programs will involve showcasing business opportunities with the goal of bringing these talented individuals back to Nova Scotia.

Many of the initiatives outlined have the end goal of attracting and retaining immigrants. A robust economic climate is essential. When it comes to retention, we have many great organizations, various levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) and the business community at large who see the urgency of not only attracting immigrants but retaining those who choose to come to Nova Scotia. The provincial government must play a key role in bringing all of these parties together; after all there is strength and greater success when working together.

Education

1. How will your government modernize our P-12 education system?

We need to have a public education system that better meets the needs of our students and our province. A Liberal government will undertake a full curriculum review, which has not taken place for 25 years. For too long, teachers have had their hands tired when it comes to giving students the very supports they need. When students are pushed through the system, they are not getting the education they deserve. We want to build a public education system where teachers can teach and students are prepared and held accountable for their success.

2. How will your government raise our math and science skills to levels we can champion?

We need to have higher expectations for our students. As mentioned earlier, teachers have had their hands tied and have not been able to ensure that students get the support they need. We cannot keep pushing children through the system when they aren't ready. We will be capping class sizes in grades p-2 at 20 and 3-6 at 25 so that students get the attention they require in order to succeed in the early years.

Many parents and teachers have expressed concern that our curriculum offers too many concepts with too little depth for each. We need to focus more on literacy, numeracy and creative thinking in the early years to give our students the best foundation to build upon. Strengthening literacy and numeracy is vital so that students have a solid foundation and this must go hand-in-hand with creative thinking. Entrepreneurs are made, not born, and it is essential that we invest in creative thinking in our schools so our young people have the tools to discover that new idea that fosters a new industry, or which improves and innovates within existing sectors.

3. How will your government work with the business community to ensure that they are equipped with the right training for the labour market?

Government has to consult with business and really listen to the concerns that businesses face. We have seen different stakeholders, including the business community, coming together to tackle serious issues – the most recent being apprenticeship challenges. I believe that we can do the same thing with our education system and give our young people the best tools to succeed in the workplace.

Youth Retention

1. What retention strategies will be implemented by your government to mitigate this demographic time-bomb?

We need to grow our economy if we are to attract more people to the province and keep our workers here. We need to look to immigration and address some of our demographic issues by encouraging more people to live and work in Nova Scotia.

For too long, government has handed out big cheques to corporation. I believe we need to support our small and medium enterprises and our entrepreneurs – our job creators. We need to have a strong health care and education systems so people aren't leaving our province for lack of services. We need to make it easier for our sons and daughters who have left to come back home. I announced changes to the apprenticeship system, on September 4th that would do just that.

2. How will your government work with our universities, colleges, schools and the Halifax business community to harness our knowledge economy?

We have to support innovation. A Liberal government will offer innovation scholarships to graduate students working in research and innovation. We need to support universities partnering with the private sector to encourage more research work, and more commercialization of these innovations. There are amazing things happening at our universities and we need to work closely with them on how we can best foster research and how we can use it to advance our province.

3. How will your government work with the City to retain and attract youth?

Our young people will choose stay in the city, and in Nova Scotia, if they can find good jobs and the opportunity for growth. We will support job growth by investing in businesses who hire recent grads to give them a start in their careers. We will also modernize the current apprenticeship system by allowing more flexibility to access block training, updating apprenticeship ratios based on trade and per labour and industry recommendations, and count hours earned in Alberta so our young people can come home to work.

Debt Taxation

1. What are your plans to reduce our provincial debt?

The provincial net debt has increased by \$1.7 billion over the past four years. Looking to the future, a responsible approach to debt management is essential. As a government, everything you do has to be part of your debt management plan, as every spending commitment requires a sober analysis of the impact on the ability of the province to pay for that commitment. This analysis must include not just a present value costing, but the impact on future financial position. A Liberal government will balance spending commitments with the ability to pay by undertaking this important analysis. We will seek to maintain and reduce current Debt to GDP ratio levels and will approach all spending decisions in a manner that reflects the ability to maintain our debt ratio at manageable levels. A Liberal Government will not download public debt onto the backs of Nova Scotians. We will do this by growing the economy and ensuring a more fair and competitive tax system

2. Will you make a commitment to Nova Scotians to decrease personal income taxes to competitive levels during the first year of your mandate?

A Liberal government will create a fair and competitive environment for business by engaging in a responsible and comprehensive review of taxes, regulations and fees, guided by the principles of simplicity and fairness. We will conduct a broad review of our tax system to give as much money back to Nova Scotians and our businesses as possible, but, we will do it the right way. Nova Scotians will gain a deeper understanding of our tax system and we will then be in a position to reduce the overall tax burden that we are faced with. It's time we ended the political games that have been played with our tax system and begin to approach reform with honesty and fairness, and fix our tax regime as a whole.

A Liberal government will create a competitive business environment and get out of the way.

3. How else will your government ensure Halifax has a competitive business environment and a strong entrepreneurial spirit?

Entrepreneurs are creative people with a drive to succeed, they are also willing to take risks in order to achieve success – government needs to give them the room to do this. Government can help foster entrepreneurs from the start though investing in education – giving young people strong foundations in literacy, numeracy and fostering creative thinking

We already have successes, but to really develop this entrepreneurial spirit, the government needs to understand their strategic role. Regulations and legislation needs to be full reviewed – we simply can't afford to have needless, or redundant, regulations slowing down new business opportunities. In some cases, this "red-tape" is even driving talent away from our province. Entrepreneurs, like all small businesses, need access to capital in order to fully exploit their ideas. We need better integration with our post secondary institutions so that we can commercialize the innovative research taking place already in Nova Scotia.