



Halifax Chamber of Commerce
Attn.: Valerie Payn, President and CEO

September 25th, 2013
Via email: to valerie@halifaxchamber.com

Dear Ms Payn:

On behalf of Premier Darrell Dexter, Leader of the New Democratic Party, please find attached the NDP's responses to your questions on issues of importance to the Halifax Chamber.

I very much appreciate your taking the time to bring these concerns forward. I can assure you that the NDP is committed to good jobs and a better economy. We value our constructive relationship with the Chamber, including your hard work on the Premier's Council on the Economy.

The NDP platform has seven key commitments in this election; I hope that your members can take a moment to review them at <http://nsndp.ca/platform>.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to outline the NDP's positions on these important issues.

Best regards,

Dan O'Connor

Dan O'Connor
Chief of Staff to Premier Darrell Dexter
Leader, Nova Scotia New Democratic Party



HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE – ELECTION 2013

IMMIGRATION

1) HOW EFFECTIVE HAS THIS STRATEGY BEEN?

Is the Immigration Strategy working? Yes. Should more be done? Absolutely.

Under the NDP, a higher proportion of immigrants have chosen Nova Scotia as their permanent home, and the number of provincial nominees has steadily climbed. The Province has successfully negotiated with the federal government to raise the 2013 target to 600. Only 367 people were nominated in 2009.

The numbers of immigrants fell after the previous Conservative government's failed and scandal-ridden Economic Nominee Stream. However, numbers are recovering; Nova Scotia welcomed 2,370 immigrants in 2012, up from 2,138 in 2011.

2) HOW MANY CERTIFICATES HAVE BEEN ISSUED THUS FAR?

As of the end of June, 424 certificates have been issued this year.

Overall nominees certificates issued since 2007 are:

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (1 st half)
405	309	367	500	525	725	424

Last year, Canada granted Nova Scotia a one-time increase, bringing the number of nominees to 725, an all-time high. The province is continuing to work with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to take advantage of similar special circumstances.

3) WHAT ARE OUR RETENTION RATES TODAY AS COMPARED TO 2009?

Under the NDP, far more immigrant and their families are choosing to stay in Nova Scotia once they get here. Targeted recruitment, as well as welcoming and orientation programs, are vital parts of the Immigration Strategy, and they are working. The provincial retention rate has gone from a dismal 38% in 2007-8, to 70% in 2012-13.

4) WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO TO INCREASE RETENTION AND ATTRACTION?

The next NDP government will continue on the path set by the Immigration Strategy, *Welcome Home to Nova Scotia*. In particular, the focus will be on:

- Carefully targeted marketing and recruitment
- Focus on skills shortage and alignment with upcoming jobs
- Cooperative work with employers to participate in recruitment
- Working with our employers to ensure they know how to navigate the new federal requirements
- Working with the other Atlantic provinces to maximize the bang for the recruitment buck
- Working with immigrant families and communities to identify friends and family “back home” who would like a chance to settle here
- Continue to increase protections, supports, and stability for Temporary Foreign Workers and International Students

5) WHAT WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT DO DIFFERENTLY TO IMPROVE OUR IMMIGRATION POLICIES FOR HALIFAX?

The NDP government will work cooperatively with employers with hard to fill vacancies to identify potential immigrants from the federal stream, and reach out to them to promote Nova Scotia as a destination. This work goes hand in hand with the changes to the Provincial Nominee Program.

The NDP will work closely with the Mayor and Council of HRM, ISIS, business organizations like the Chamber, and immigrant support organizations to make sure people’s transition to a new life is as smooth as possible. The province will continue to make sure that the right resources are in place to help with cultural and language transitions. Clear priorities must be developed in consultation with immigrant communities to ensure that services are as effective – and cost-effective – as possible.

EDUCATION

1) HOW WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT MODERNIZE OUR P-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM?

The NDP government has worked with parents, teachers and students to give our kids a better start by focusing on what matters most, specifically smaller classes to ensure that students get the attention they need from their teachers, the successful SchoolsPlus program which improves results by bringing a range of family services into schools, a new math curriculum starting in grades 1-3 and 10 with plans to roll out to all grades over the next two years and Canada’s first Cyber Safety Act and new legislation to protect kids from bullies and cyberbullies. The NDP will build on these initiatives over the next four years.

2) HOW WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT RAISE OUR MATH AND SCIENCE SKILLS TO LEVELS WE CAN CHAMPION?

The NDP believe that strong math skills are key to helping students succeed. The NDP government has introduced a new math curriculum for students in grades 1-3 and 10 and increased the amount of time grade 10 students study math. The next NDP government will roll out the new math curriculum to all grades over the next two years.

Earlier this year, the NDP partnered with business to pilot online math resources from Khan Academy. Today, close to 300 Grade 7 students in four school boards are participating in an innovative research pilot that complements Nova Scotia's math curriculum, enhances teaching and develops technology skills for students.

Initiatives like Khan Academy as well as opening a new trades high school in Cole Harbour will provide students with more options to explore math and science and better tools to hone their skills.

3) HOW WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT WORK WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE EQUIPPED WITH THE RIGHT TRAINING FOR THE LABOUR MARKET?

The NDP has worked closely with the business community to ensure that government resources are targeted where they are most needed. That is why the NDP created www.nsworkplaceeducation.ca, an online resource for employers and employees to access human resource, skills training and other resources at no cost. This resource centre provides targeted resources to small businesses.

In response to industry feedback, the NDP government undertook a review of the apprenticeship system to ensure that it met current needs. The NDP has committed to implementing the recommendations of the industry-led review.

The NDP will continue to work with the business community to ensure more Nova Scotians are ready to be part of the highly skilled labour market.

YOUTH/TALENT RETENTION

1) WHAT SPECIFIC RETENTION STRATEGIES WILL BE IMPLEMENTED BY YOUR GOVERNMENT TO MITIGATE THIS DEMOGRAPHIC TIME-BOMB AND RETAIN OUR YOUTH IN THIS PROVINCE?

The NDP will continue to roll out innovative strategies to help keep young people working here at home. Programs like the Graduate Retention Rebate, the student loan debt cap, and the START program help graduates make the transition from school to the workplace. Through the province's jobsHere plan, investments like those in shipbuilding and the IBM data centre are focused on long term success. The NDP will also create a New Graduate Home Ownership program to help young people enter the housing market sooner and will take the HST off essentials for young families. Nova Scotia has more opportunities for young people today, and the next NDP government will continue to fight for jobs so more young people have the opportunity to live and work here at home.

2) HOW WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT WORK DIFFERENTLY WITH OUR UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES, SCHOOLS AND THE HALIFAX BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO HARNESS OUR KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY?

The NDP will build on the creative partnerships with industry, unions, business and the education sector. Initiatives like the University Excellence and Innovation Fund; the Halifax Marine Research Institute; the data analytics partnership with IBM, NSBI, five universities and the Nova Scotia Community College, which is creating up to 500 new highly skilled jobs; and the Irving Shipbuilding Centre of Excellence at the NSCC are all examples of the NDP's approach to working with industry and educational institutions to promote innovation, a central goal of the JobsHere strategy.

3) HOW WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT WORK WITH THE CITY TO RETAIN AND ATTRACT YOUTH?

The NDP will continue to work with the City to find innovative ways to make Halifax an appealing place for young people to live and work. In particular, the next NDP government will bring together a task force on recruitment and retention that will include the Chamber, the City, and other stakeholders to develop a specific action plan targeted squarely at urban HRM.

DEBT TAXATION

1) WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS TO REDUCE OUR PROVINCIAL DEBT?

In 2009, the new NDP government appointed a panel of independent economic advisers to help Nova Scotians understand the challenges and opportunities that existed as the economy was recovering from the biggest recession since the great depression. The independent advisers reported that Nova Scotia was on track for a \$1.4 billion deficit. The NDP set out to avoid that and working with Nova Scotians a developed a 4-year plan to get the province back to balance. Earlier this year, the NDP government introduced a balanced budget and the budget forecast released in August shows that Nova Scotia is on track for a small surplus. In addition, since the NDP formed government, Nova Scotia has a cumulative surplus and has made one of only seven payments on the net debt in the last 50 years. The NDP passed legislation requiring a 2% reduction in the HST over the next two years, that is the fiscal priority.

2) WILL YOU MAKE A COMMITMENT TO NOVA SCOTIANS TO DECREASE PERSONAL INCOME TAXES TO COMPETITIVE LEVELS DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF YOUR MANDATE?

Over the next four years, the NDP will continue to reduce the tax burden on Nova Scotians as provincial finances allow. The NDP government has already legislated that the HST will be reduced 1% in 2014 and an additional 1% in 2015. Government spending will continue to be controlled to help keep the budget balanced. Over the past four years, The NDP has cut the rate of corporate income tax for small businesses by 40%, meaning millions in savings for small business that can be reinvested to compete, grow and hire. Low income seniors and many others are paying lower taxes and independent tax comparisons show that Nova Scotia is in the middle of the pack.

3) HOW ELSE WILL YOUR GOVERNMENT ENSURE HALIFAX HAS A COMPETITIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AND A STRONG ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT?

Donald Savoie said Nova Scotia should set out to be the most business-friendly jurisdiction in Canada. And the NDP has worked hard to make this the case. Through jobsHere, the province has already invested in nearly 1,400 businesses – small, medium and large. The NDP has reduced the small business tax rate every year, saving small businesses tens of millions. And the province helps businesses through a range of programs like the Credit Union loan program, the Productivity Investment Program, the Graduate Placement Program and the Productivity and Innovation Voucher Program.

But most importantly, the NDP will continue to fight for jobs and compete globally to bring new business opportunities to Nova Scotia. This year, Nova Scotia attracted the highest direct investment of any province or state in North America. The NDP understands that if government does nothing, then jobs will go elsewhere. The NDP will continue to make it clear that Nova Scotians are ready to attract and keep good jobs.