



Halifax Chamber of Commerce
2009 Provincial Government Campaign Commitments Review
October 2012

Context:

With our current provincial government in the last year of its mandate, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce saw it to be timely to review what the current government had committed to do when elected in 2009 and what it actually had done.

During the 2009 election campaign the Nova Scotia NDP under the leadership of Darrel Dexter made seven key commitments under the banner *“7 commitments that will make life better for today’s families”*.

The seven commitments are:

1. Creating secure jobs across the province.
2. Keep emergency rooms open and reduce waits times.
3. Ensure young people stay and build a life in Nova Scotia.
4. Take the HST off home energy to make life more affordable.
5. Fix rural roads and keep communities strong.
6. Give seniors options to stay home in their own community.
7. Live within our means.

Whether these commitments and actions to support each are the right ones for the future of our province is not part of this analysis. Nova Scotians provided the current government with a majority government based on this platform.

It is clear in our review, and seen in attached analysis, the current government has worked the plan set out 2009. Many initiatives have been undertaken to support each of the commitments. While the provincial debt burden has grown, we are on track to be back to balance in 2014.

When the current government took office we were experiencing one of the most economic challenging time since the Great Depression. Did setting out a plan and working it make a difference? Did it provide us with stability to begin to grow our economy?

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Indicators	2009	2012
Population	940,293	945, 250
Labour Force	497,000	500,825
Employment	451,400	455,863
Unemployment Rate	9.2%	9.0%
Average Weekly Wage	731.16	780.51
Immigration Rate (Permanent Residents)	2,424	Unavailable at time of writing
Real GDP Growth	(\$m chained 2002) 29,390	Available in November
Provincial Debt Level	\$12.2 Billion as of March 31 st , 2009	\$13.2 billion as of March 31 st , 2012

A Comparison of Key Nova Scotia Economic Indicators in 2009 and 2012

Source: Nova Scotia Department of Finance

Stability is important for business confidence. And business confidence leads to investment and hiring people which creates wealth. Chamber members are looking for competitive taxes, an open for business attitude and minimal regulations. They are looking for government to create the conditions to let them do business.

In the Chamber analysis, what we did not see were measures to show how successful the initiatives were to support the commitments. While initiatives and working the plan are laudable, the real test of a plan is if it achieves the defined goals and objectives. We did not see any indication, to date, of measures for the election commitments.

For example, the jobsHere Strategy said success would be:

- Nova Scotians securing higher value jobs
- People participating in the workforce
- Companies in all sectors and all regions of the province growing and producing higher-value products and services
- Adult Nova Scotians earning high school diplomas
- Investment in new processes and equipment
- Companies exploring new markets and securing new business within and outside our borders
- Nova Scotians engaging in skills and learning in the work place

The jobsHere Strategy notes a performance measure framework is an essential part of the economic plan. We agree and are looking for the provincial government to show how expenditures, investments and initiatives line up with these success measures.

As an advocate on behalf our members, we are looking for government to publicly provide a status report on the success of each commitment and how it has created economic opportunity for our

province. Also when we look to the future, the Chamber would like to see our provincial government – pre or post election, do the following:

- Tie commitments to measures of success.
- Any decisions using taxpayer dollars should be able to show how taxpayer dollars spent increase our economic growth. If this cannot be done, can we really afford it?
- Have a good discussion based on solid data on what it would take to put us in the middle of the pack nationally on a competitive corporate tax rate.
- Show how investments by government will grow the economy for and of the future.
- What is the weighting of each commitment and the dollars/resources attached to each.
- And, are these the right commitments for the future?
- Give priority attention to our increasing debt burden.
- Provide a public accounting of the status of the expenditure management review.

As government enters its last year of mandate, it will be easy to be distracted by the upcoming election – there should not be any “last year in mandate spending madness”. Any spending should align with the plan set out in the government’s own plans and commitments and should be sustainable and only considered if we can afford it.

This government itself said Nova Scotia’s economic future cannot look like its past, it is time to do things differently and that we need to coordinate scarce resources with a single focused approach to grow the economy. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is looking for that.

Readers Note: All the facts and figures provided in the below analysis have been accessed from the Nova Scotia [Department of Finance Budget website](#). There have been no alterations of any facts or figures. Any press releases or other government documents have been cited and highlighted in red with a link. A checkmark indicates actions underway under each commitment, a red X indicates actions not take under a commitment. Chamber comments and analysis are in blue.

Review of Election Commitments:

Election Commitment number one: Creating secure jobs across the province.

On November 23rd 2010, the Government of Nova Scotia released *jobsHere*, in response to their first campaign commitment. *jobsHere* is a three year \$200 million commitment that consists of three key priorities: *learning the right skills for good jobs, growing the economy through innovation, and helping businesses compete.*

- The primary objective to achieve the *right skills for good jobs* is implementing a New Workforce Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to retain young Nova Scotians by offering tax rebates, attract more immigrants, enhance education programs to allow for more disadvantaged individuals to brighten their future through literacy and essential skills training, and offer better resources for employers and entrepreneurs. In 2009, the government acted on the items outlined above by investing in educational co-op programs in 39 high schools across

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the province. Moreover, the 2009-2010 budget allocated \$2 million to Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) for 250 new seats in campuses across the province.

- To assist businesses and entrepreneurs the government has developed the Productivity Investment Program with an estimated annual value of \$25 million. This program is designed to assist businesses in purchasing new equipment that will increase productivity, assist businesses in obtaining international certifications, and assist businesses in implementing programs that will allow for additional co-operative and internship opportunities.
- *Growing the economy through innovation*, the second priority, focuses on improving productivity across the province and supporting investment in research, new ideas, new processes and new equipment through a productivity and innovation partnership. The plan of this partnership is to support and assist with the adoption of new technology, clean energies and recruitment of talented employees. Other initiatives include a 10-year farm strategy, an aquaculture plan, clean technology fund and an innovation and competitive fund.
- *Helping businesses be more competitive globally*, the third and final priority focuses on encouraging Nova Scotia's businesses to become more competitive in the global market, increase foreign direct investment and international trade, and continue to improve productivity. This includes a number of programs/entities that are currently underway, such as Nova Scotia Business Inc. which assists businesses in expanding and relocating, and Trade Team Nova Scotia, a team of federal, provincial and private sector leaders who seek potential opportunities abroad. The government also has many new actions in place including the Global Business Partnership Initiative which assists businesses in accessing international networks to build international relationships, in addition to attempting to increase trade between the EU and Nova Scotia.

Chamber Analysis/Comment: The above overview provides a brief summary of the key priorities that comprise *jobsHere*, in addition to a few of the current and future actions to which the government has committed. With this overview, it is important to analyze if the \$200 million the government has committed to *jobsHere* has in fact been allocated. Of the \$200 million, **Budget 2011-2012** allocated \$53.05 million to *jobsHere*. The breakdown is as follows: \$28 million allocated to the *learning the right skills for good jobs* priority, \$22.9 million allocated to the *growing the economy through innovation* priority, and \$2.15 million allocated to *helping businesses be more competitive globally*. **Budget 2012-2013** invested a total of \$56.5 million. There is still roughly \$90 million remaining to be allocated at the time of writing.

Budget 2011-2012 (the first *jobsHere* budget) allocated the following:

- ✓ The \$25 million Productivity Investment Program to make businesses more productive.

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- ✓ The \$1.8 million strategic co-operative education incentive to double the opportunities available to students to receive valuable, hands-on work experience.
- ✓ Over the next three years, \$3.5 million will be invested to ensure more African Nova Scotians have the skills they need to enter the labour market.
- ✓ A \$2 million innovation and competitiveness fund to increase productivity and help companies bring new ideas to market.
- ✓ A \$750,000 investment to create a new international commerce strategy.
- ✓ An investment of \$5 million in forestry to support a new policy direction, which includes a 50 per cent reduction in clear-cutting, to help ensure good jobs in a successful and sustainable industry.
- ✓ More than \$30 million in loans have been approved under the Credit Union Loan Program to support ownership and succession planning for small business.
- ✓ More than \$1 million in new incentives to be offered through the Equity Tax Credit.
- ✓ The small business tax rate to fall for the second year to 4.0 per cent, saving small businesses up to \$4,000 annually. (*Chamber advocated for this.*)
- ✓ \$585,000 to support the creation of 2-1-1 Nova Scotia, in partnership with the United Way, to make information about social services more accessible. This will be among the first province-wide 2-1-1 systems in Canada. See [jobsHere](#) for more 2011-2012 details.

Budget 2012-2013 allocated the following to *jobsHere*:

- ✓ Help fund the cost of technologically advanced machinery, clean technology, equipment, software, and hardware for companies—\$15 million, Capital Investment Incentive
- ✓ Encourage companies to invest in skills development and certification—\$9 million, Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Incentive
- ✓ Increase the number of work placement opportunities for students enrolled in universities and community colleges—\$1.8 million, Strategic Co-operative Education Incentive
- ✓ Launch International Commerce Strategy to support companies competing internationally—\$1.6 million
- ✓ Increase funding to small businesses to improve productivity and innovation by working with educational institutions—\$500,000
- ✓ Implement a Social Enterprise Loan Guarantee Program—\$2 million
- ✓ Implement a Social Enterprise Strategy—\$200,000

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- ✓ Help businesses become more globally competitive by increasing the Business Development Program—\$450,000
- ✓ Support *business.novascotia.ca* to create an integrated approach to economic development for businesses—\$200,000
- ✓ Focus on commercialization of research and capacity-building in our post-secondary sector, through investments in the Nova Scotia Innovation and Research Trust (NSRIT)—\$5 million
- ✓ Create a regional venture capital fund to provide early-stage seed capital, in partnership with the private sector and other governments—\$15 million
- ✓ Increase the number of trade apprenticeships—\$3 million
- ✓ Launch HR Toolkit and Welcoming Workplaces program—\$300,000
- ✓ Help increase skill sets through the Recognition of Prior Learning Project—\$1.45 million
- ✓ Put career kiosks in high schools to help students think about jobs after graduation—\$1 million

Election Commitments number two *and* six: Better Care Sooner. Keep emergency rooms open and reduce waits times (2). Give seniors options to stay home in their own community (6).

Chamber Comment: The impetus for *Better Care Sooner* came from Dr. John Ross's 2010 report on healthcare in Nova Scotia in which he made 26 recommendations to improve the healthcare system. Better Care Sooner accepted all of the recommendations and has already acted on some of them in an effort to make a patient's visit to a hospital less onerous. Better Care Sooner consists of 13 objectives, and the status of each is listed and reviewed below.

Objective One: Improve access to emergency care.

The government has committed to creating Collaborative Emergency Centres starting in 2011 in smaller communities based on input from communities and anticipated need. These centres are intended to provide numerous services including: same or next day medical appointments, 24/7 access to emergency care, and collaborative care teams.

Objective Two: Better access to primary care.

The government has committed to a Physician Resource Plan which will allow the government to see which areas are in need of doctors, nurses, and medical specialists in an effort to meet communities' medical needs. The government has also committed to the Emergency Room Protection Fund focused on having doctors work hard to fill shifts.

Objective Three: Provide consistent safe quality care.

The Ross Report suggests that the government adopt province-wide emergency care standards. In order to succeed in this initiative the province must analyze what emergency rooms need, ranging from staff to equipment.

Objectives Four & Five: Get people from the ambulance into the ER quicker.

The government has committed to getting emergency patients out of ambulances and into the ER quicker. To do this, the government has reached out to every District Health Authority in the province to submit a plan as to how this goal can be accomplished collectively.

Objective Six: Ensure staff are working to their potential.

The government has committed to a concept known as “model care” ensuring one’s talents and skills are used to their fullest potential and striking a balance with more practical and flexible shifts.

Objective Seven: Treat seniors, mentally ill, and all other patients with respect.

The government has committed to making emergency departments more patient friendly by directing the District Health Authorities across the province to direct their staff to make patients more comfortable in emergency rooms. This includes such action as communicating more and explaining wait processes, giving particular comfort and sharing knowledge with seniors and mentally ill patients.

Objective Eight: Better care for seniors.

The government has committed to improving care for seniors in and outside of hospitals. Some of the initiatives include: setting up stroke care units across the province, allowing patients to go home sooner with the same quality care, directing paramedics to provide even more care for seniors in their homes and nursing homes, in addition to providing District Health Authorities with more power by shifting the responsibility of continuing care from the province to these authorities. All successes and failures with regard to this initiative will be documented in the Minister’s Accountability Report.

Objective Nine: Give mental health patients more care.

The Minister of Health has committed to appointing a Mental Health Strategy Advisory Committee whose purpose is to ensure that mental health patients are treated properly. This will serve as the groundwork for a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy for Nova Scotia.

Objective Ten: Increase public knowledge of 911 and 811.

The government has committed to launching a public awareness campaign in an effort to make the public more knowledgeable of the purposes of 911 and 811.

Objective 11: Improve paramedic training/equipment and provide additional services for 811 nurses.

The government has committed to increasing the role of paramedics by providing them with drugs for blood clots and other life saving tools. The government has also implemented a new program, Extended Care Paramedic Program, which will allow paramedics to bring the “hospital” to the nursing home instead of moving the patient. EHS will also have a full-time aircraft for emergency use across the province, in addition to two new two-stretcher ambulances which are to be on the road by 2011.

Objective 12: Adjust ambulance to support new Collaborative Care Centres.

The purpose of this program is to allow for ambulances to travel wherever they need to go to care for someone in need of urgent care.

Objective 13: Create a new funding model for the healthcare system and physicians.

The government has committed to treating and compensating medical workers fairly, as well as a Master Agreement working in conjunction with Doctors Nova Scotia to monitor alternative ways for physicians to work. The latter could include encouraging doctors to visit their patients at home or during evenings and weekends and any other alternative that the government may explore during its mandate.

Chamber Comment: Since Better Care Sooner was implemented during the government's second year in office in December 2010, much of the information below will be gathered from the 2011 budget onwards, with a brief analysis of the 2009 and 2010 budgets with respect to healthcare. After the review of the budgets, we analyze the extent to which the government has acted on its 13 objectives outlined in Better Care Sooner.

The 2009-2010 Budget provided the following recommendations and contributions with regards to healthcare:

- Greater need for revenue from the federal government.
- Increase of \$216.3 million in healthcare program spending.
- Creation of a \$750,000 fund for families' accommodations cost when they need care outside of the province.
- Elimination of the need to take security deposits from seniors when they enter long term care facilities.

The 2010-2011 Budget provides more detail with regards to healthcare promises and spending than the 2009-2010 Budget. Below are the recommendations and contributions:

- \$212 million increase in program spending.
- \$1.3 million to create "pre-hab" teams to assist patients before surgery, in an effort to reduce stress on the healthcare system.
- \$3 million ER Fund.
- \$4.8 million to create Rapid Assessment Units which are intended to move patients through the ER quicker.
- More nurse practitioners will be placed in nursing home in an effort to streamline programs and reduce costs and other pressures.
- Transition houses and women centres will receive \$500,000 in 2010-2011 fiscal years.

The 2011-2012 Budget was the first budget in response to the commitments outlined in Better Care Sooner. The government allocated funding for the following:

- Open Collaborative Emergency Centres in at least four Nova Scotia communities this year. This includes investing up to \$800,000 for salaries for paramedics and other healthcare providers.

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- Provide \$3 million protection fund to help keep emergency rooms open.
- Hire four new nurse practitioners for nursing homes in Cumberland, South Shore, South West, and Cape Breton District Health Authorities, at a cost of \$568,000.
- Recruit additional nurse practitioners and other healthcare providers to work in primary care settings and collaborative practices, including Collaborative Emergency Centres, at a cost of \$1.5 million.
- Add 169 new and 593 replacement nursing home beds, at a cost of \$21 million.
- Expand the Caregiver Benefit, at a cost of \$1.8 million, helping seniors to remain at home in the communities they helped to build.
- \$72 million to support major hospital and community health care projects across the province. This includes money for the following: \$2.6 million to build a modern, cost-effective and efficient emergency department at the Aberdeen Hospital; construction of the new Colchester East Hants Health Centre in Truro; purchase and install three new radiation therapy units for the Capital Health District; improvements to the nursing home and hospital in Inverness; and construction of community living units to provide more appropriate housing options for people with mental illness.
- \$988,000 to expand renal dialysis services in the province. The funding will be used in part to hire 12 nurses to provide renal dialysis closer to home.
- \$616,000 to support pre-hab teams in the four District Health Authorities that perform hip and knee surgeries: Capital, Pictou, Cape Breton, and Annapolis Valley. The clinics also provide patients with tools and information they need to prepare for surgery and to support a successful surgery and quicker recovery.
- The number of people dialing the 811 nurse line increased by more than 30 per cent since December 2010, as a result of Better Care Sooner's public awareness campaign. Government will invest \$466,400 as the demand for this important healthcare service rises.
- This budget contains \$500,000 to combat acute and chronic diseases, keeping Nova Scotians healthier in the long term.

The 2012-2013 Budget continues on with the commitments outlined in Better Care Sooner. The government allocated funding for the following:

- Meet emergency room standards developed by Dr. John Ross—\$3 million.
- Provide physician oversight of Collaborative Emergency Centres—\$433,000.
- Increase the number of paramedics and nurses in Collaborative Emergency Centres—\$1.4 million.
- Announce up to four new Collaborative Emergency Centres.
- Increase funding to meet the growing case load for home support visits—\$11.8 million.
- Provide additional in-home nursing care services—\$6.5 million.
- Provide additional money for home improvements to support accessibility—\$1.5 million.
- Help seniors better manage their mobility and medications—\$250,000.
- Open 76 new and 440 replacement nursing home beds in communities across Nova Scotia—\$8 million.

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- The province is protecting families and seniors from unfair drug prices. By the end of 2012–2013, the plan will save taxpayers \$17 million.
- Invest in the Medicine Families Need—\$10.2 million.
- Protect more than 100,000 seniors against increases to their Pharmacare premiums and co-payments—\$3.3 million.
- Provide additional funding for Lucentis—\$1 million.
- Increase funding for exception drugs—\$2.9 million.
- Provide additional funding for oncology drugs—\$3 million.
- Upgrade Cape Breton Regional Hospital, South Shore Regional Hospital, and other healthcare facilities—\$22 million.
- Purchase new hospital equipment such as anesthesia machines, monitors, and patient beds—\$15 million.
- Fund design renovations at South Shore Regional Hospital—\$1.5 million.
- Allow more people to receive dialysis treatment at home—\$1 million.
- Reduce wait times for radiation therapy—\$1.1 million.
- Expand Digby Primary Care Clinic and upgrade Shelburne Medical Clinic—\$300,000.
- Help children eat well, move more, and grow up healthy—\$2 million.
- Build physical activity facilities, including rinks, ball fields, and community recreation facilities—\$10.1 million.
- Allow more municipalities and aboriginal communities to hire physical activity coordinators - \$100,000.
- Develop and begin to implement a strategy for people living with mental health and addictions issues - \$3.8 million.
- Expand addictions treatment in the Annapolis Valley—\$356,000.

Now that all of the funding for Better Care Sooner has been reviewed, it is important to see if the initial 13 objectives outlined in Better Care Sooner have been met.

- ✓ Objective One: Improve access to emergency care as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013.
- ✓ Objective Two: Better access to primary care as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013.
- ✓ Objective Three: Provide consistent safe quality care as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013.
- ✓ Objectives Four & Five: Get people from the ambulance into the ER quicker as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013
- X Objective Six: Ensure staff is working to their full potential. Chamber Comment: Difficult to assess, although more staff have been hired there is no measure.**
- ✓ Objective Seven: Treat seniors, mentally ill, and all other patients with respect as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013.
- ✓ Objective Eight: Better care for seniors as per Budgets 2009-2010, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013.
- ✓ Objective Nine: Give mental health patients more care as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013
- ✓ Objective Ten: Increase public knowledge of 911 and 811 as per Budget 2011-2012.
- ✓ Objective 11: Improve paramedic training/equipment and provide additional services for 811 nurses.

- ✓ Objective 12: Adjust ambulance to support new Collaborative Care Centres as per Budgets 2011-2012 and 2012-2013.
- ✓ Objective 13: Create new funding model for the health-care system and physicians. Set to expire in March of 2013, see: [Master Agreement](#).

Election Commitment number three: Ensure young people stay and build a life in Nova Scotia.

Chamber Comments/Analysis: The government recognized that Nova Scotia is facing a labour force challenge, and as one report stated: “the challenge before us is jobs without people and people without jobs”. In addition to jobsHere, one of the government’s other strategies to increase and retain the labour force is through the [Workforce Labour Strategy](#), introduced in November 2011, in reaction to the successful Irving Shipbuilding bid. The Workforce Strategy has three specific objectives:

1. Support learning and skills development in the workplace.
2. Help Nova Scotians connect with good jobs.
3. Grow the workforce in numbers and skills through innovation.

The first objective: *Support learning and skills development in the workplace* consists of six initiatives in an effort to create a larger workforce:

- Workplace Education Programs intended to offer employers funding for training programs for their employees. Training may range from building knowledge of computer programs to upgrading literacy and writing skills.
- Human Resources Support program for small and medium sized businesses as well as non-profit sectors. This program is intended to provide businesses with an HR Toolkit and an online portal which is designed to assist employers in recruitment and retention processes that are often lacking in small and medium sized businesses.
- Welcoming Workplaces is a workplace diversity program which is designed to encourage employers to be more open when recruiting staff. The program recognizes that diversification in workplaces is important for businesses to succeed.
- Internships and Co-ops is another initiative in which the government has committed to offering high school and university students, as well as recent graduates, valuable internships. Individuals can gain applicable work experience through reinvestment in the Strategic Cooperative Education Incentive and the creation of the Graduate Internship Program.
- With a wave of retirements on the horizon the government also committed to increasing youth employment in the provincial civil service. The Nova Scotia Sector Council Program is a program in which the government will invest \$2 million over three years for organizations committed to human resource development. Organizations like these can also apply for funding under the Workplace Innovation Fund and Productivity Skills Incentive fund.
- Lastly, in the Apprenticeship initiative, the government is undertaking a review of the apprenticeship program in preparation for the development of the Apprenticeship System

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Strategic Plan, a \$2.5 million investment in an effort to support, diversify, and enhance the province's trade programs.

The second objective: *Help Nova Scotians connect with good jobs* consists of four initiatives:

- Career Nova Scotia Centres are aimed at providing career seekers with professional support for their job search through hands-on experience and online tools (which can be found at careers.novascotia.ca).
- The second initiative focuses on parents as coach and community leaders. The government is investing an additional \$50,000 to renew the Parents as Career Coaches program.
- Thirdly, is the Career Development Focus in Public Schools initiative which provides young Nova Scotians with support to think and learn about their future careers, in addition to incorporating additional entrepreneurial programs in public schools.
- Fourth is the Sector Awareness Campaign which aims to bring public awareness to possible projects and initiatives; an example would be the Ships Start Here campaign.

The third objective: *Grow the work in numbers and skills* consists of five initiatives:

- The first initiative focuses on immigration. The government has committed to attracting more immigrants to the province through the [Welcome Home to Nova Scotia](#) immigration strategy.
- The second initiative focuses on increasing the number of visible minorities in the workforce by implementing programs like Skills Up! and Women Unlimited.
- The third initiative focuses on providing citizens with the opportunity to go back to complete their GED through the Expansion of Nova Scotia's School for Adult Learning (NSSAL) and Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS). The government has committed an additional \$1 million to these programs so everyone can obtain their GED at home or online.
- The fourth initiative is focused on attracting and retaining immigrants in particular. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a program in which the province is working with the federal government and private sector in an effort to create a process that recognizes international credentials fairly.
- The last initiative is the [Graduate Retention Rebate](#) program in which the government is offering tax incentives for students to stay and work in Nova Scotia.

Chamber Comments/Analysis: Now that the Workforce Strategy commitments have been reviewed, it is time to review the budgets to assess the extent to which the government has acted on its commitments.

The 2009-2010 Budget allocated dollars to the following (It is important to keep in mind this was the government's first budget in which they allocated funds to honour the commitments from the previous government):

- ✓ On January 1, 2009 the government implemented the Graduate Retention Rebate.

The 2010-2011 Budget included:

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- ✓ Workplace Education Programs, these include: Adult Learning and Literacy (NSALL), Workplace Education, English in the Workplace, Workplace Skills and Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Incentive (see: [Workplace Education](#)).

The 2011-2012 Budget included:

- ✓ \$1.8 million funding for strategic co-operative education incentives which will double the opportunities available to students to receive valuable, hands-on work experience.

The 2012-2013 Budget included:

- ✓ Invest \$8.2 million to the Workforce Strategy by way of investing \$2.5 million for apprenticeship, increasing the number of Nova Scotians in trades, and another \$1 million toward workplace education.
- ✓ Apprenticeship System Strategic Plan, a \$2.5 million investment in an effort to support, diversity, and enhance the province's trade programs.
- ✓ Career Development Focus in Public Schools Initiative, see: [Putting Kids and Learning First](#).
- ✓ Increasing the number of visible minorities in the workforce by investing \$7.5 million over the next three years to ensure more African Nova Scotians have the skills they need to enter the labour market.

Chamber Comments/Analysis: Overall, the government has acted on over half of the commitments outlined in the Workforce Strategy in its budgets thus far. However, after reviewing government press releases the government has acted on other initiatives during its mandate. In the Workforce Strategy the government committed to Career Nova Scotia Centres and a [website](#) which encompasses diversity, and the government acted on this commitment. The government also acted on the [Strategic Cooperative Education Incentive](#). Another initiative which was met is the [Nova Scotia Sector Council](#). Working in conjunction with NSCC, the government also acted on its Workforce Strategy commitment with respect to [Recognition of Prior Learning](#).

In summary, after review of budgets and press releases, it appears that the government has acted on all of its commitments outlined in the Workforce Strategy. However, have these initiatives been effective? For example, have the Graduate Rebates and Co-op/Internship programs actually retained recent graduates? Are our workplaces actually becoming more welcoming to immigrants through Nova Scotia's immigration policy? Is the government working with the federal government to increase our immigration cap, or alternatively is an increase required? Although significant funding has been contributed to numerous programs, the outcomes of many of these commitments remain difficult to measure.

Election Commitment number four: take the HST off home energy to make life more affordable.

Chamber Comment/Analysis: One of the overarching issues discussed during and after the 2009 campaign was the HST on home electricity. The NDP committed to eliminating the 8% tax on basic

home electricity. Commitment four also consists of two other energy objectives: provide insulation grants to thousands of homeowners and help communities reduce energy use and costs by way of retrofits.

- ✓ The government committed to taking the 8% off home energy and the government acted. According to Budget 2009-2010 the tax was removed on October 1, 2009 and the government committed to keeping it off for good. See [announcement](#).
- ✓ With respect to insulation grants, there was no mention of these grants in any budgets. However, there have been press releases on this subject. The government committed to 1300 insulation grants in his 2009 [State of the Province Address](#).
- ✓ There was no mention of energy retrofits in any budget thus far. However, there have been numerous initiatives and funding announcements that have been underway outside of the budget. See: [Energy Projects](#) and [Nova Scotia's Climate Change Action Plan](#) for more details.

Election Commitment number five: Fix rural roads and keep communities strong.

Chamber Comment/Analysis: The government committed to increasing the budget for secondary road repaving by 50%, in addition to implementing a 5-year paving plan. The government has acted on the following:

- ✓ The government committed to increase funding by 50%, according to Budget 2009-2010; the government allocated \$325,000,000 to highway construction and maintenance, compared to \$140,000,000 in the previous year, an increase of over 50%.
- ✓ Budget 2009-2010 announced one of the largest highway improvement plans in the province's history in addition to improvements of provincial roads and rural roads. See: [Five Year Plan](#) and [Announcement](#).

Election Commitment number seven: Live within our means.

Chamber Comment/Analysis: The government committed to managing the province's deficit and debt in many ways. One of those ways was by running a government that lives within its means. During the campaign the government committed to running government with a smaller cabinet, in addition to conducting an independent audit to find out the true state of the province's finances in an effort to get Nova Scotia *Back to Balance* by 2013-2014.

The government acted on the following commitments:

Budget 2009-2010:

- ✓ Made mention of living within means, however, no groundwork was laid to achieve this until later budget announcements.

Budget 2010-2011:

- ✓ Implemented Expenditure Management Initiative to review the departments for their effectiveness and affordability. According to the Department of Finance: in year one savings

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from the Expenditure Management Initiative will be \$54 million; year two will see savings of \$252 million; year three will see savings just under \$500 million, and year four, the balance year, will see cumulative savings of \$772 million.

- ✓ Committed to ending March Madness annual spending spree.
- ✓ Centralizing services, sharing administrative costs and using technology to not only improve service, but the bottom line as well.
- ✓ Work with third party agencies to ensure accountability.
- ✓ Reduce the civil service by ten percent by 2013 through attrition, retirement, and voluntary leave.
- ✓ Make MLA expenses more accountable and transparent.

Budget 2011-2012:

- ✓ Hold program expenses at 2010–2011 levels. Overall program expenses will be up \$323 million from 2010–2011, entirely due to reinstatement of university funding.
- ✓ Reduce debt servicing costs.
- ✓ Ensure government gets value for money by negotiating better terms in all contracts.
- ✓ Further streamline government activities to reduce costs and improve services.
- ✓ Expand the professional services policy, which to-date has achieved \$7 million in savings.
- ✓ Expand the ban on March madness spending, and implement other expenditure controls, to all government agencies and boards.
- ✓ Implement a Change and Innovation fund to encourage efficiencies.
- ✓ Continue to review departmental programs for effectiveness and affordability. See [Highlights](#) for more details

Budget 2012-2013:

- ✓ Merge administrative services of District Health Authorities and the IWK, with anticipated savings of \$7.6 million growing to \$41.5 million.
- ✓ Continue to evaluate departmental programs and services for effectiveness and affordability.
- ✓ Save more money through strategic purchasing.
- ✓ Continue restraint on out-of-province travel through the use of a travel provider for government; travel has already been reduced by 38 per cent, saving \$1.7 million to date.
- ✓ Continue restraint on the purchase and utilization of cell phones, Blackberries, and office space. See [Highlights](#) for additional details.
- ✓ Reduce the number of cabinet seats. There has been a decrease from 18 from the past government to 14 at this time.

In Summary – Chamber Comments: Overall, as noted earlier, since 2009, the government has generally done a good job acting on the commitments laid out in the 2009 election campaign and should be applauded for their efforts and dedication. It is important to keep in mind that this government came into office after economic challenging times. Trying to balance budgets and implement new programs is extremely difficult, however, the majority of the election commitments were advanced. One of the key issues the government is having difficulty with is retaining youth in the province, and creating strong incentives to keep youth in Nova Scotia. The Irving Shipbuilding contract will indeed draw people back. However, relying on one or two large projects is a poor strategy for

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retention, especially when the majority of these projects rely heavily on trades. Trades are indeed of incredible importance to creating a competitive province; however, Nova Scotia is in need of stronger R&D strategies and stronger international trade partnerships. It will be interesting to read and analyze the 2013-2014 budget to see what strategies are in place for retention of youth in an effort to prevent Nova Scotia from becoming a province of retirees. It will also be interesting to watch the next election to see if the public realizes the government's adherence to the plan they laid out for themselves.

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