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Letter to the Editor – AllNovaScotia.com

By Robert Batherson and Valerie Payn

Dear Editor:

It will undoubtedly be disappointing to many business owners, operators and employees - the women and men who are pushing hard to grow, create and sustain jobs and transform Nova Scotia's economy for the better - to read Finance and Treasury Board Minister Randy Delorey's suggestion that nothing will be done to bring about tax relief. Halifax Chamber of Commerce members - who are primarily small business people employing 25 and fewer employees - consistently tell us that high taxes are a major barrier to growth, more jobs and better wages. It's why reducing the tax burden is a major part of our strategic plan aimed at ensuring Halifax is a top three growth city by 2018. With half of Nova Scotia's GDP in Halifax, growth in our capital city will also benefit the entire province, including many small towns and rural communities.

Last year's report on taxation and regulation by Laurel Broten clearly pointed out that there is a major economic cost to the high taxes that Nova Scotia businesses and people pay. It is hardly a coincidence that Nova Scotians pay among the highest tax rates in Canada and suffer from among the lowest rates of economic growth over the past 25 years. Although there were specific aspects of the Broten report that the Chamber would have opposed - namely measures that increased taxes on businesses that already pay sky high taxes - the overall message is as relevant today as it was when the report first came out in November 2014. Nova Scotia's tax rates are too high and must come down if we expect businesses to grow and create long term jobs in this province.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce supports the efforts of government to bring about more responsible spending of tax dollars, starting with salaries and benefits to our hard working public servants at a level that taxpayers that can afford. We support the work of Premier Stephen McNeil and Immigration Minister Lena Metlege Diab to increase the number of immigrants to come to, and stay in, Nova Scotia to create more wealth, more jobs and more economic activity. We also welcomed the announcement by the provincial government in this year's budget of the convening of a tax working group. The Chamber has asked Premier McNeil to have representation on this working group so the views of business can be reflected in the deliberations and recommendations of the group.

It's nonetheless vital for the Nova Scotia government to send a clear message that tax relief is on the way. Based on the recommendations of the tax working group, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce urges the provincial government to implement the Broten report's recommendation to "legislate a 10-year tax reform agenda... to provide certainty and predictability to Nova Scotian citizens and businesses as well as to ensure that all measures to which the government commits... are brought into effect."

It's time for action.

Robert Batherson is chair of the board of directors and Valerie Payn is chief executive officer of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce

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