

# 2024-25 Election Guide

Province of Nova Scotia



**HALIFAX  
CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE**

# Taxation

## Cost of Living & Doing Business

### Current Situation

#### Basic Personal Amounts:

Last year, the provincial government announced they would begin to index our income tax brackets to inflation, finally putting an end to years of bracket creep. Despite this change, there remains a significant disparity that leaves Nova Scotians almost \$6,000 behind other Canadians when income tax is calculated.

#### HST:

Nova Scotia is currently tied with 3 other Atlantic provinces for the highest level of combined sales taxes on good and services at 15%. In Ontario west, excluding Alberta, the sales tax ranges from 11 to 13%.

#### Corporate Taxes:

Nova Scotia's current higher corporate tax rate of 14% is on average 2.13% higher than the provinces west of the Atlantic region, making us a less attractive region for businesses to want to invest.

### Chamber's Position

While the Chamber was pleased to see meaningful action taken to start to address the current tax regime, we feel more changes are needed to keep the province competitive and improve the cost of living for all Nova Scotians. The Chamber continues to advocate strongly for meaningful changes to our personal and business taxes through thoughtful updates to our province's Basic Personal Amounts and Sales and Corporate Taxes. We believe this will have positive impacts on investment attraction, capital expenditures and workforce attraction/retention.

### Questions for Candidates

- What is your party's position on increasing our Basic Personal Amounts to close the \$5,787 gap to the Canadian average?
- If our taxes were more competitive with provinces like Alberta, Ontario, and BC, do you think that would help attract/retain more workers to the Province?
- What would your party do to make business taxes more competitive with other Canadian provinces?

# Health Care

Efficient Spending and Demands

## Current Situation

### Healthcare Pressures:

From January 2021 to January 2024, Nova Scotia's population has grown by 58,600 people, with 72% (42,300) concentrated in Halifax. This rapid increase in population has created significant pressures on the our healthcare system. And despite significant investments and improvements in many areas over the past few years, there are still shortfalls in access to family doctors, emergency room outcomes, and long term care availability.

### Significant Health Spending:

Health care is currently Nova Scotia's largest budget item at \$5.5 billion in estimated spending. This represents roughly 34% of the entire yearly provincial budget. The spending has mostly gone towards new infrastructure, recruitment programs for nurses and doctors, increased wages, retention bonuses, and new digital services.

## Chamber's Position

Having access to reliable and timely healthcare is an essential component for attraction and recruitment of new talent. Health, Housing, and Transportation are critical pieces of infrastructure needed to support economic growth. However, we would like to see a long-term integrated plan that balances healthcare spending with the necessary spending to support the critical infrastructure that keeps the economy growing in a sustainable and affordable way for all Nova Scotians.

## Questions for Candidates

- What would your Party do to improve health care within the current budget of \$5.5 billion?
- How will your Party balance the need for improving health care outcomes with the need to spend on other infrastructure needs, reduce debt, and make life more affordable for all Nova Scotians?

# Transportation & Traffic

## Regional Connectivity & Congestion

### Current Situation

#### Traffic Congestion & Public Transit:

Halifax and surrounding communities have been growing at a rapid pace recently. This pace of growth has exceeded even the most optimistic population growth rates and represents some of the most significant growth in Canadian municipalities. This growth has increased traffic congestion throughout municipalities, especially Halifax, and the city's public transit system has struggled to keep pace with the increased demands.

#### Regional Transportation Connectivity:

To address the challenges associated with a multi-jurisdictional transportation system at the provincial level, the Government of N.S. established the Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA). The JRTA is tasked with long-range strategic transportation planning across Halifax and surrounding communities. A key deliverable of the Agency is to create and execute a Regional Transportation Plan.

### Chamber's Position

Population growth is essential for the growth of the economy however our region must also accommodate that growth with the infrastructure needed to support and retain it. The Chamber will continue to advocate for more Provincial funding for local public transit departments through programs like the Provincial Public Transit Assistance Program and more funding to support transit infrastructure through the Province's Strategic Acquisition Fund.

### Questions for Candidates

- Will your Party commit to funding and implementing the recommendations made from the Joint Regional Transportation Agency?
- In other provinces, municipalities receive provincial funding to help with public transit and infrastructure (e.g., Ontario's Gas Tax Program). Do you believe that Halifax requires a similar agreement to meet its strategic public transit goals?

# Labour

## Expanding the Skilled Trades

### Current Situation

#### Shortage of Skilled Trades:

According to industry stakeholders, Nova Scotia needs about 11,000 new certified trade professionals to meet the required demand. Currently, the province is bringing in about 615 tradespeople a year, a shortfall of about 38 per cent of what's needed to address our current demands for new housing, new health care infrastructure, and new transportation infrastructure.

#### Recent Changes:

In 2023, the Government of Nova Scotia announced \$100 million in investments over 3 years to support the recruitment of 5,000 additional skilled trades professions. The investment includes \$40 million in various grants and incentives for students, apprentices, employers and journeypersons to help with such things as buying new tools. The Province has also expanded the ratio of apprentices, allowing three apprentices per journeyperson instead of two apprentices.

### Chamber's Position

Last year, the Chamber advocated for the Province to increase funding for housing related trade apprenticeship programs, which the Province announced. In addition the Chamber advocated for better promotion of direct entry pathways in the trades like the BTAC. As well, we advocated to expand the age requirement for the MOST program to allow for skilled tradespeople over the age of 30 to benefit from the tax credit.

### Questions for Candidates

- With the recent further reduction in immigration announced by the federal government, what programs is your party considering to fill the skilled trades gap by enabling greater participation in the workforce from our underrepresented groups?
- What strategies would your Party implement at the high school level to promote opportunities and pathways for skilled trade professions?
- How would your Party help businesses ensure they don't lose their skilled trades people to other provinces? How can we remain competitive for labour?

# Housing

## Supporting Infrastructure & Supply

### Current Situation

#### Shortage of Supply:

The needs assessment report, by Turner Drake & Partners Ltd., estimates that at the current pace of construction, which brings about 6,000 units to market each year, there will be a shortage of 41,200 housing units by 2027-28 in Nova Scotia. This shortfall has seen housing prices across the province surge, with homes in the Halifax-Dartmouth area selling for an average of \$530,000. Compared to 20 years ago, Nova Scotia has increased the number of apartment starts by over 200%, while the number of single, semi-detached, and row houses has actually decreased by roughly 11%.

#### Supporting Infrastructure:

New housing developments require significant planning and supportive infrastructure to create new areas for housing like roads, water, wastewater and sewers, transit infrastructure, and schools. This will require funding and collaboration from all three levels of government.

### Chamber's Position

The Chamber will continue to advocate for more funding for the creation of new supportive housing infrastructure, while also advocating for more streamlined approval process, less government imposed costs on new housing developments, and for expanded programs to expand the skilled trades workforce. In order for our region to attract and retain top level talent, housing options for new and young families are also required.

### Questions for Candidates

- What will your party do to increase the supply of housing, specifically single, semi-detached, and row family homes?
- What is your party's plan to reduce the government imposed cost of housing, and are there any processes you think could be better streamlined to speed things up?
- How would your party help municipalities address the cost to build new infrastructure to support the development of new housing?