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**CHAMBER SUPPORTS BALANCED BUDGET, URGES FOCUS ON TAX RELIEF**

**April 19, 2016 - Halifax, NS** – The 2016 - 17 provincial budget makes major progress on fiscal sustainability but fails to take action to reduce the tax burden on Nova Scotians.

“We agree with the Premier when he says that the private sector needs to lead economic growth and create jobs in Nova Scotia”, said Rob Batherson, Chair of the Board of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. “It’s time, however, for the Premier to show confidence in the private sector and reduce the tax burden on businesses and people in our province. Chamber members will be very disappointed by the lack of action on taxes by the government.”

After accounting for funding for the new Halifax Convention Centre, the government is projecting an operating budget surplus of \$17.1 million in 2016 - 17, which the Chamber called for in its pre-budget submission. Unfortunately, the debt will rise to \$15.189 billion this year and the total number of public sector employees is expanding by 6%, both of which are causes for concern. To make this plan work, the government will also have to sign affordable collective agreements with its unions, something the Chamber has long supported.

“We welcome the provincial government following through on last year’s commitment to balance the budget this year, as it shows that Nova Scotia is getting its fiscal house in order,” noted Batherson. “The government will still have to keep a close eye on spending in light of the small size of the surplus on a \$10 billion budget.”

Despite the surplus, the provincial budget is silent on reducing Nova Scotia’s tax burden, which is a key priority for the Chamber under its 2013- 2018 Strategic Plan. The Chamber has been calling on the Minister of Finance to appoint a tax working group, as promised in last year’s budget, and was disappointed that it was not included this year.

Through its strategic plan, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce is committed to enhancing the prosperity of its members and to realizing Halifax’s potential to be among the top three highest growth city economies in Canada by 2018.

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