

Province Takes First Step in Responding to Alarm

March 31, 2000

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce and 92 per cent of Nova Scotians were calling for immediate action to address the provincial deficit. Premier Hamm took the first steps yesterday in responding to this call.

The Premier has announced a plan that redefines the role of government and stops trying to be all things to all people. The blueprint introduced by the Premier responds to many of the points the Chamber has raised in our "Get Alarmed" awareness campaign:

The Chamber called on the government to set priorities that reflected the real needs of Nova Scotians:

- the Premier has now identified those priorities:

- education and life long learning;
- access to quality health care;
- an environment that fosters economic growth; and
- for those who are dependent on government, help to become self-reliant.

Our members were looking for the elimination of duplication and a reduction in the number of departments:

- the Premier's plan will see a reduction from 21 agencies and departments to 14.

The Chamber emphasised the need to maximize the potential of the public service:

- the changes put forward will place a renewed focus on leadership, accountability and empowerment of public servants.

The Chamber is concerned, however, that the proposed plan sees payroll services and information registries streamlined and merged -- but apparently not out-sourced. The plan also explores the sale of NSRL but makes no mention of the many other commercial enterprises, like the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission, in which the province is involved. Private sector management of provincial resorts is not the best answer; the government needs to get out of the business of doing business.

Setting clear priorities, focusing on economic infrastructure and eliminating excess administration and duplication in government are all good first steps to improve the way government handles our money, but they are only first steps. "The Premier has started us down the right road, but we need to see the details in the upcoming budget before we make a judgement on the overall plan," says Chamber President Murray Coolican.

Undoubtedly the upcoming budget, a first step in implementing this strategy, will have its share of detractors. Nova Scotia cannot afford to have its government "back off" from yet another attempt to address the financial crisis.

Chamber members must continue to show support for the hard decisions that will have to be made and implemented if the Nova Scotia government is truly going to redefine its role.



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