



For Immediate Release

## **Chamber: Province Moving “Slowly Down the Right Road, Maybe . . .”**

**Metro Halifax, Nova Scotia -- April 11, 2000** -- The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce notes that today's provincial budget begins to address the alarming state of the province's finances. "The government of Nova Scotia has started to move slowly down the right road in the budget announced today," says Chamber President Murray Coolican. "What is not clear is how they will meet their targets. The budget is short on specifics."

On February 22, the Chamber called on the government to deal with an \$11 billion debt by "cutting smart, paying less and reinvesting in our priorities." Today's budget is a beginning to that process, maybe.

The government has started to "cut smart" by getting out of low priority services like the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission and using those resources to pay down our debt and secure the future of critical core services such as health care and education.

Today's budget makes strides in reducing costs and making government smaller through a major reorganization of departments. It is not clear, however, how significantly the actual delivery of programs will change. The Chamber was looking for competitive bidding to supply non-core support services like vehicle maintenance, property assessment, and the storing of land registration and other information. This has not happened.

The Chamber is disappointed with the introduction of new and expanded user fees. User fees are taxes. In a recent Chamber poll, 88% of Nova Scotians felt we had enough money to deliver the services they require and that we did not need to raise taxes -- the government apparently disagrees.

The Chamber shares the government's enthusiasm for the future growth potential of our province. This growth should be used to help Nova Scotians secure a better long-term future, but the continued dependence on new revenue and economic growth projections to meet budget targets remains a grave concern to the Chamber. "The government has not gone nearly far enough to get our spending under control and focus on the delivery of core services," says Coolican.

"We are concerned that by the end of the government's four-year plan, program expenditures are virtually unchanged from today," says Coolican. "Relying on revenues to catch up to expenditures is how we created our fiscal problems in the first place -- we must not repeat this mistake."

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a voluntary, not-for-profit organization that represents business interests and provides vital leadership that benefits Metro Halifax and the Atlantic region. The 1,800 corporate members of the Chamber employ more than 50,000 people, representing over one quarter of Metro Halifax's labour force of 194,000. It is also the oldest Chamber in North America -- celebrating 250 years this year -- and was the first certified to the ISO 9002 international standard of quality.

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