

## **Liberal Party Response**

### **GPI Atlantic**

1. The Liberal Party has been the only political party throughout this election campaign that has laid out a strategy that would enable us to move our economy forward.

Positive measures that assist small businesses have a significant economic impact and help improve the lives of everyone. Small businesses employ half of all Nova Scotians and generate 50 per cent of our province's GDP.

Reducing the business tax burden will give entrepreneurs more opportunity to invest in their businesses and their employees. Reducing the business tax burden will also attract new companies to our province, generating more job opportunities.

The Liberal plan will reduce the small business tax rate from five per cent down to one per cent. This 80 per cent reduction will benefit all Canadian-owned businesses, from natural resources to tourism.

Tax reductions allow Nova Scotia's small businesses to keep more of their earnings so they can invest in their future growth. A Liberal government will make new credit options available. They will be scaled appropriately to the specific needs of sole proprietors and small businesses.

Many small businesses need financial support to help make their operations sustainable and profitable. With existing financing tools designed for large and medium-sized borrowing, sole proprietors and small businesses are often faced with lending options that are not well suited to their needs.

A Liberal government will implement a microcredit lending program within Nova Scotia Business Inc. We will expand the mandate of NSBI so they can provide loans of up to \$25,000 to small businesses in our province, allowing them to thrive here.

Liberals know that our ability to meet future social and economic challenges relies on a highly skilled workforce.

A Liberal government will work with community colleges, local businesses and the non-profit sector to ensure that funding for skills training is effectively allocated through the Labour Market Agreement. The federal monies being allocated to the provinces for skills training will enable us to better allocate monies to the specific needs of industry here in Nova Scotia.

2. The Liberal Party has again been the only party to address the issue of poverty reduction during the course of this campaign. Liberals recognize that reducing poverty is about more than improving the well-being of Nova Scotians struggling to afford basic necessities. It is also about improving our economy and promoting an inclusive society. Poverty is directly linked to increased costs for health care, community services, corrections and education.

A Liberal government will ensure the Interdepartmental Ministerial Committee on Poverty falls under the leadership of the premier and endorses the recommendations of the Poverty Reduction Working Group. This committee will be supported by representatives of outside stakeholder organizations.

Liberal initiatives contained within our plan which address poverty include:

- Early childhood learning initiatives and a commitment to work towards the reinstatement of the National Early Learning and Child Care Plan
  - A community-based Early Learning Support Grant
  - Reinstating the \$30 cap on the seniors' pharmacare co-pay
  - The development of multi-year service agreements with community service partners
  - The development of a fund to help communities establish recreational infrastructure and programming
  - A province-wide school-based mental health program
  - The establishment of a drug recycling program to help families pay for high-cost prescription drugs.
3. Nova Scotians should be able to retire with dignity and financial security. This is why Liberals are speaking to the need of establishing a province-wide Nova Scotia Public Pension Plan.

Many employers simply aren't able to provide pension programs to their workforce. Under The Liberal plan, every employer – regardless of size - has the ability to opt in to the public fund and provide these benefits to all their employees. The goal is to provide as many Nova Scotians as possible a means to provide for their retirement.

4. Agriculture has been a key component of Nova Scotia's economy for generations and the decline in the number of farms in recent years is a disturbing trend. A Liberal government would make it a priority to ensure the agricultural industry in our province is both sustainable and viable.

We would focus in four key areas: transitional funding; strategic infrastructure investments; taking advantage of green technologies; and the development of a sustainable multi-year strategy.

A Liberal government will enter into negotiations with federal agencies – the Department of Agriculture, Agrifood Canada and ACOA - to provide a transition fund for our farmers. Transition funding would provide farmers with the flexibility to respond to changes in the market.

A Liberal government will initiate a steering committee on carbon capture technology, made up of agriculture industry representatives and academics. Our agricultural community has a large role to play when it comes to protecting our environment. In addition, carbon capture has the advantage of being financially beneficial to our farmers.

A Liberal government will work with the industry to ensure that the Strategic Infrastructure monies made available through the Federal/Provincial Growing Forward Agreement are invested in projects that will support the agricultural industry in Nova Scotia today and tomorrow.

A Liberal government will enhance and expand the Agriculture in the Classroom Program - today's students become tomorrow's consumers. When students learn about the importance of agriculture, they not only make healthier food choices, they also become more aware of the importance of supporting our local economy.

While these initiatives are immediate priorities, it is important to acknowledge that securing the future of the agricultural industry in Nova Scotia requires we take a long term view.

A Liberal government would work with all industry stakeholders to develop a multi-year strategy.

5. Socio-economic stability in our province finds its foundation firmly footed by three separate silos – the government sector, the private sector and the community non-profit sector. While they operate in isolation, they are in fact interconnected.

The volunteer sector has been stressed by years of government neglect and financial instability. There are approximately 5,820 not-for-profit organizations in Nova Scotia contributing \$2 billion worth of services to our provincial economy. Nearly 400,000 Nova Scotians contribute their time and talent to programs and services that enrich our lives.

Liberals recognize that the non-profit sector and government cannot achieve their individual goals without a constructive working relationships built on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation.

A Liberal government will work with the Nova Scotia Volunteer Advisory Council and community service providers to develop an action plan on the implementation of multi-year service agreements. We recognize that multi-year funding enables organizations to plan, grow and innovate.

6. According to a 2002 comprehensive study conducted by your organization, physical inactivity costs the economy of Nova Scotia \$354 million annually. \$66.5 million of this is attributable to hospital, physician and drug costs alone.

The Liberal Party recognizes that an investment in an-all ages comprehensive physical activity strategy will reduce health care costs and help boost our economy in the future.

A Liberal Government will, starting in the first full year of its mandate, invest \$5 million annually in an all-ages comprehensive physical activity strategy. Funding for this initiative will be reallocated from an increase in tobacco taxes.

There are many on-going initiatives across government which strives to incorporate physical activity into their plans. There is however a distinct lack of coordination when it comes to the integration and coordination of these plans. Leadership from all departments will be required in order to decrease physical activity levels across all age groups. Interdepartmental cooperation will be mandatory as we move forward.

A Liberal Government would ensure that a Physical Activity Coalition was established with the main purpose of bringing together key provincial, regional and stakeholder organizations along with membership from each of the key provincial departments. This coalition would collaborate in development, support and implementation of a province-wide all-ages physical activity strategy.

7. The Liberal Plan contains a number of initiatives that address our commitment to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Nova Scotia.

As you point out, the transportation sector is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. The Liberal party believes the current investment in public transit is insufficient. Additionally, the current funding excludes HRM. A Liberal government would double the province's investment in transit and support community-based public transit infrastructure projects. The increased funding will also be made available to HRM.

If Nova Scotia is to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we will have to make changes to the way we produce electricity. A Liberal government will aggressively pursue a number of initiatives that will achieve this. A Liberal government will open the electricity market to allow renewable energy producers to sell directly to customers. This will encourage renewable energy production resulting in benefits to both our environment and economy.

A Liberal government will encourage the conversion of coal-fired generating plant to natural gas as new sources of supply are secured. We will ensure that all new offshore and onshore natural gas projects will dedicate an appropriate amount of supply to Nova Scotia's energy needs.

The most significant step we can take to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to take a regional approach to renewable energy development. The Liberal Party is the only party that has been actively championing the development of an Atlantic Energy Corridor. Atlantic energy projects, such as tidal power from the Bay of Fundy and the Lower Churchill hydro project, are important sources of clean, renewable and stable energy sources. A Liberal government will move quickly to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is built so that we can access energy from these projects.

8. Our forests cover roughly 75 per cent of Nova Scotia. We must address the issue of clear-cutting for the health of our forests and wildlife. While addressing this matter is important, we must take into account that the forest industry in Nova Scotia is responsible for several thousand jobs and approximately \$1 Billion in exports internationally. Forest harvesters are currently required to plant trees in proportion to the amount of wood removed. However, they are not required to re-plant in harvested areas.

A Liberal government would consult with the industry and implement an annual allowable cut on Crown lands. Our forests are a precious resource - providing an annual limit on harvesting will benefit both the industry and our environment. Before moving forward on reducing the level of clear-cutting, we must first extensively consult with officials from the forest industry as well as all concerned stakeholders. In doing so, we can strike a balance that is acceptable for both industry operators and those concerned about the strength of our forests.

9. We do consider this matter to be problematic and are concerned with the well-being of our forests and eco-systems. The Conservative government has failed to implement proper silviculture practices. This must be changed if Nova Scotia's forests and eco-systems are to survive. The Liberal Party will consult with industry officials to ensure more proper and responsible silviculture practices. We also commit to achieving the mandated goal of protecting 12 per cent of land in Nova Scotia. Approximately 8.2 per cent is protected and we are prepared to will prohibit mining, logging and other invasive activities in game sanctuaries. Moving forward to achieve this goal, a Liberal Government is prepared to designate the public lands of the Chignecto Game Sanctuary as a protected wilderness area.
  
10. All of Nova Scotia's earlier success around the issue of waste diversion was a result of initiatives implemented by a Liberal government. The Resource Recovery Fund Board (RRFB) was established in 1996 as a not-for-profit organization under the mandate of a Liberal government. It administers many important waste diversion programs such as the province's bottle, tire and paint recycling programs.

The RRFB supports businesses who manufacture new products from waste. It also delivers province-wide education programs for schools and the general public. Since the Conservative government has assumed power in this province, Nova Scotia has lost ground when it comes to waste diversion rates. It is time for a government to take a leadership role on this issue once again. Reducing the amount of plastic that ends up in landfills is a priority. While industry and companies have taken a leadership role in reducing non-recyclable plastic use, government needs to make this a priority as well. A Liberal government will work with all industry stakeholders to ban the use of non-recyclable plastic bags in retail stores and non-recyclable plastics from restaurants.