



GPI Atlantic  
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20 May, 2009

Dear Dr. Colman:

On behalf of Darrell Dexter, Leader of the New Democratic Party, I write to enclose the response of the NDP to the important questions posed by GPI Atlantic.

I trust that your members will have the opportunity to review these answers in informing their voting intentions in this election. More details on our platform, *Better Deal 2009*, are available on our website at <http://www.ns.ndp.ca/>.

We thank you for the opportunity to outline our positions on these important issues.

Best regards,

*Dan O'Connor*

Dan O'Connor  
Chief of Staff to Darrell Dexter  
Leader, Nova Scotia New Democratic Party

8 May, 2009

Dear Honourable Darrell Dexter,

Genuine Progress Index (GPI) Atlantic—a Halifax-based non-profit research group dedicated to measuring the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of progress—has prepared the following list of 10 questions, which represent abiding issues that not only affect Nova Scotians today, but will continue to affect our children and our children's children well into the future. The questions represent a small sample of the kinds of issues that GPI Atlantic has investigated for more than 12 years—during which time our focus and mandate have been to ask what *genuine progress* in Nova Scotia looks like, and to attempt to assess whether we are achieving such progress. In order to do this, GPI Atlantic has developed a set of genuine progress indicators for 20 components comprising a wide range of social, economic, and environmental realities in Nova Scotia. This completed set of indicators and accounts is intended to provide the government with a practical tool to measure progress towards genuinely sustainable development.

From the GPI perspective, value should be explicitly placed on the human, social, economic, cultural, and natural capital that are integral components of our national and provincial wealth. These assets are subject to depreciation and require re-investment to restore and enhance their value. At the same time, activities like crime, unemployment, and car crashes that cause harm to society, and activities like GHG emissions, pollution, and resource depletion and degradation that cause harm to the natural world and to its essential life support systems, are also recognized in the GPI as having adverse economic impacts, and therefore register as costs. Essentially—from a GPI perspective—the economy should be designed to serve the interests of people and the planet, which are of course inextricably linked.

We ask you please to respond to the following questions by **Friday May 22, 2009**. These questions are being sent to each of the other provincial party leaders as well as to various media outlets. Your responses will be posted on the GPI Atlantic web site and circulated to these same media outlets. Please email your written response to the questions to Ronald Colman, Executive Director, GPI Atlantic: [colman@gpiatlantic.org](mailto:colman@gpiatlantic.org). If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us or refer to the completed 2008 *Nova Scotia Genuine Progress Index* available at <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/integrated/gpi2008.pdf>.

Yours sincerely,





Ronald Colman, Ph.D, Executive Director, GPI Atlantic

### Questions for the Leaders:

**1. GPI Atlantic has estimated that illness and crime attributable to unemployment cost Nova Scotia more than \$200 million in 2006. Given the high social costs of unemployment, what specific actions would your government take to avoid layoffs during this economic downturn and instead encourage shorter work hours and a redistribution of work time.**

The NDP will encourage employers and labour to work together to avoid lay-offs. Michelin workers and management have recently been successful in accomplishing this, and can serve as a model for others.

**2. Inequality has been associated with adverse health outcomes. Yet Atlantic Canada's wealth is very unevenly distributed, with the richest 10% of households owning about half the region's wealth, while the poorest 40% together own only 3.6%. Do you support a reduction in the gap between rich and poor? If so, what is your target and how will you achieve it?**

**And**

**3. Between 1999 and 2005, household debt in Atlantic Canada grew by 62%, while assets grew by 35%. About 77,000 Atlantic households are so deeply in debt that they couldn't pay off their debts even if they sold everything they owned, including their homes. What will your government do to increase the financial security of Nova Scotians?**

Darrell Dexter and the NDP are committed to addressing the many elements of poverty - affordable housing, decent nutrition, and access to training and educational opportunities, including university access for single parents. The NDP believes that the best way to address poverty is a strategy to provide the supports people need to make life better for their families.

On April 3, 2009, the Conservative government released the *Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy*. The Strategy fails to address the root causes of poverty in a systematic way. The Strategy also received sharp criticism from groups like Canada Without Poverty, which noted its lack of targeted, measurable goals.

The NDP plan, *Better Deal 2009*, available online at [www.ns.ndp.ca](http://www.ns.ndp.ca), lays out concrete, practical steps to make life better for Nova Scotia's individuals and families struggling with poverty, including better support for women's centres and transition houses, more

subsidized childcare spaces, home insulation grants for homeowners – a particular issue in rural areas and small town – and the elimination of the tax on electricity. The NDP will also remove the remaining barriers that prevent single parents from retaining benefits while pursuing education and training.

*Better Deal 2009* also focuses on creating secure jobs for Nova Scotians, and ensuring more young people have the ability to stay here and put down their roots.

More broadly, the NDP will work to:

- Develop a provincial housing strategy with new affordable housing, created through an expanded Modest Housing program and new equity co-op housing legislation
- Use surplus space in community elementary schools for non-profit child care centres and seniors' day programs
- Allow people on social assistance to keep more of their earnings should they get a job.

The fiscal situation of the provincial government has deteriorated significantly in recent months – we will now unquestionably be facing a Rodney MacDonald deficit of at least a quarter of a billion dollars, with an increase in the provincial debt because of this. This will increase debt-servicing costs, and therefore further reduce the amount available to fund priority programs in government – including those for poverty reduction.

The first step that must be taken, before committing to any additional spending that is to assess the true state of the province's books through an independent audit. This will determine the capacity of the province to fund needed programs and services. The NDP will make it a priority to work toward better funding to address poverty issues, within the context of bringing the Nova Scotian budget into balance.

**4. Net farm income has declined by 91% since 1971, dipped below zero in 4 of the last 6 years, and in 2007 reached the lowest levels ever recorded in the province. Thus, farming is no longer economically viable in Nova Scotia, and is now in serious crisis—in actual danger of demise as an economic, social, and cultural institution. What will you do to restore farm economic viability in Nova Scotia?**

Agriculture is a vital part of Nova Scotia's future; our farm families manage in excess of 7% of the province's natural capital – soils. All Nova Scotians benefit when farm families are in an economic position to care for and utilize our agricultural soils in a sustainable manner.



The current government's refusal to step outside the comfort zone of ad hoc and cost shared programs, funded predominantly by Ottawa, has left our agricultural industry in a state of decline. Total net farm income in Nova Scotia began a steep decline in 2001 and by 2008 was approaching a negative \$30 million.

Farm families are being forced to leave the land. If the current approach continues Nova Scotia will have no farms left. The current situation has developed in response to the short-term needs of the government rather than being planned as a whole. The status quo is not acceptable anymore, for established farm businesses and particularly for young and beginning farmers.

The margins are no longer there to support the growth required for farm families to provide Nova Scotians with even a basic level of food security. The margins are no longer there to enable farmers to maintain our agricultural soils. The margins are no longer there to provide a realistic lifestyle for either established farm businesses or new farm business.

What is needed now is a new approach focused on the survival of farm families and their role in maintaining and managing the soils that are so important to our future.

Historically, farm families have always demonstrated a willingness to invest in rural Nova Scotia, even in the toughest economic circumstances. It is time that willingness to invest in the future received a positive response from government.

### **A Vision for the Future Of Agriculture In Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia's agricultural industry has struggled, virtually alone, for the past decade against a backdrop of economic uncertainty. In many ways the lack of any central vision and planning on the part of government has been as much of an impediment to real progress as weather events, disease and market failures.

The NDP believe that a clear, uncomplicated vision of the future will provide a source of motivation for the farm community; and this combined with industry's demonstrated skills and resolve to succeed under any circumstances can provide hope and optimism for the future.

The NDP vision is one that promotes agriculture, as a positive economic, social and environmental force working in an open, competitive, dynamic environment in which farm families can make the most of the opportunities that environment has to offer.



The NDP will implement **an institutional and policy framework** that ensures a level playing field and capitalizes on our tremendous ability to produce commodity crops and livestock while identifying ways for smaller, more specialized agricultural operations to expand and thrive. Through this vision we hope to encourage young people to enter agriculture, and give existing farmers new ideas.

The NDP recognizes that transforming vision into successful policies for the future will need genuine engagement by government and all stakeholders; and we recognize that in today's complex society government should endeavor to keep things as simple as possible – simple general programs and policies to guide the agricultural sector and allow farm businesses to realize their own vision.

The NDP will work with industry to implement a 10 year strategy based on the ground work already established by the Federation of Agriculture and commodity groups. The goal is to improve the competitiveness and profitability of the industry based on the shared vision that has emerged from extensive planning done by the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture and commodity groups over the past decade.

### **Maintaining Healthy Soils**

Soil is a non-renewable resource that can't be duplicated. It serves as a stage for human activities, landscape and heritage and acts as a provider of raw materials. Soil is one of the most valuable aspects of our natural capital and is worthy of protection because of its socio-economic as well as environmental importance.

As part of the NDP strategy to improve industry competitiveness and profitability, the NDP will implement a soil amendment program that will assist farm businesses in maintaining provincial agricultural soils, reduce chemical use and make an environmental contribution that will benefit all Nova Scotians.

Re-direct staff from government communications to direct-marketing of primary industries.

There has never been a time when consumers in Nova Scotia have had such a keen interest in what they are eating – food, who grows it and how is it produced. It is evident that consumers prefer locally grown food and will choose it when it is identifiable and available. They place value in fresh local food and a sustainable rural landscape where it is produced.





The production and consumption of local food benefits everyone. It provides consumers with a healthy source of food that they can have confidence in and it provides farmers with an almost unlimited market for what they produce; but only if that market is organized. A publically supported buy local initiative is a beginning for a more competitive and profitable agricultural sector, but there is more that can be done.

Nova Scotia is seen as a pristine environment and we sit beside one of the largest consumer markets in North America, the North East US states. We have to take what we have here and aggressively market it in these areas. We have to more aggressively promote our exceptional agricultural products in these markets. To this end, the NDP will re-direct staff from government communications to direct-marketing of our primary industries.

### **Tool for Agricultural Land Protection**

To address the issue of agricultural lands protection, the NDP will move forward with the recent review announced by the Province and will welcome the input of the Agricultural Review Committee, Farmers and Nova Scotians on what steps may be necessary to protect Nova Scotia agricultural lands and ensure that our farm families have the opportunity to thrive.

Darrell Dexter announced the NDP's intention to create a Community Lands Trust that can be used to protect significant land in the Province Of Nova Scotia. This will provide a vehicle that Nova Scotians can use in situations like the sale of the J.D. Irving lands.

**5. Nova Scotian volunteers contribute \$1.8 billion worth of services to the provincial economy. Between 1992 and 2005, there was a 21% decline in civic and voluntary work in Nova Scotia, with fewer volunteers putting in longer hours to maintain services. Because no money is exchanged, the value of volunteerism is invisible in our economic growth statistics and related measures of progress. What will your government do to ensure that this major decline in social capital is a) recognized and b) reversed?**

The NDP recognizes the vital roles that volunteers play in our communities. In the response to the GPI Atlantic question in the NSEN Election 2009 survey *25 For the Environment*, the NDP committed to *"work with GPI Atlantic to incorporate Genuine Progress accounting into provincial policy analysis."* Recognizing declines in social capital related to volunteer activity could be an interesting test case to begin accomplishing this.

Some jurisdictions have adopted tax credits to foster volunteerism. Currently in Nova

Scotia, volunteer firefighters receive such a credit. The Department of Finance is currently engaged in a comprehensive tax policy review. This review will assess all current tax structures, credits and rebates available to individuals and organizations, and provide recommendations to the government for future action. The NDP looks forward to receiving the results of this review and analyzing its findings.

The first step that must be taken, before committing to any new expenditures or programs beyond those outlined in the NDP's *Better Deal 2009*, is an independent audit of the province's books.

**6. GPI Atlantic estimates that obesity costs Nova Scotia \$148 million a year in direct health care costs—or roughly 5% of the total health budget—and an additional \$173 million a year in indirect productivity losses, totalling more than \$320 million. In Nova Scotia between 1994-95 and 2005, the rate of obesity increased from 16.7% to 20.7% and the province has consistently had higher rates of obesity than the national average. What is your target for reduction and what will you do to achieve it?**

The NDP recognizes that obesity is a complex problem directly linked to poverty and with direct health impacts. Compared to the rest of Canada, health status indicators in Nova Scotia are very poor; for example, the province has the second highest prevalence of diabetes, and the second highest percentage of the population reporting their health as only fair or poor.

The NDP will establish a Task Force on Acute and Chronic Disease Reduction, with a primary focus on diabetes and hypertension, as well as certain other conditions like COPD. This task force will have a mandate to set benchmarks and targets for acute and chronic disease reduction, identify priorities for action, and develop a set of indicators for success. A minimum core set of indicators that are meaningful and feasible to collect, and which can be used across the province to evaluate efforts in chronic disease prevention, will be a major benefit in planning and implementing disease reduction strategies.

The NDP will also establish a 9-member Council with a rotating membership of representatives from the Department of Health and from health advocacy groups in Nova Scotia, like the CDA-NS. The Council will accept applications for healthy living grants and prioritize them for the reduction of serious, acute, and chronic illness in addition to wellness projects. It is anticipated that diabetes will be one of the focus areas of that Council.



We will also encourage doctors to practice preventive care through the establishment of preventive care checklists, a measure that should help doctors address obesity early on, and help to prevent insulin resistance and the development of Type II diabetes.

In 2004, the College of Family Physicians developed and validated the effectiveness of an easy-to-use Preventive Care Checklist Form for family physicians to use during adult complete health check-ups. The NDP will encourage wide use of this checklist.

**7. Electricity production accounts for more than 31% of Nova Scotia's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, highlighting the need to shift away from coal-fired power plants. Transportation accounts for 29% of total GHG emissions. If elected a) will your government strive to achieve the Suzuki Foundation target of 25% reduction of GHG emissions below 1990 levels by 2020, and b) what strategies will you employ in the energy and transportation sectors to achieve this?**

In 1997 governments around the world signed the Kyoto Accord, under which Canada was committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 6% by 2008. The Conservative government of John Hamm helped to defeat the Kyoto initiative, promising instead to stabilize emissions at 1990 levels by 2010. The Conservatives are well on the way to breaking that commitment, too – most recent estimates put emissions in 2007 some 16% above 1990. This is because our reliance on fossil fuel for electricity generation has shot up from 80% to nearly 90% since the Conservatives came to power.

The Conservative government's new Action Plan sets the target at a reduction of at least 10% from 1990 levels by 2020. During the course of its mandate, an NDP government will assess whether this is an achievable goal, and if a greater target is practical and feasible, given that the province is starting from further behind than if the Kyoto initiative had been implemented immediately.

The NDP plan *Better Deal 2009* calls for immediate action on energy retrofits, home insulation grants, and an increase in the renewable energy target to 25% by 2015. In addition, the NDP will bring in the required legislative changes and create a performance-based independent efficiency agency as soon as possible, to administer electricity demand side management program

The NDP supports absolute carbon caps and participation in a trading system. The NDP will consult with stakeholders to determine whether the Western Climate Initiative, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, or some other market will best serve Nova Scotia's needs. Specific, measurable targets are necessary. The NDP will review the caps at the same time as the Demand Side Management agency is established.

The NDP has also consistently supported the creation of feed-in tariffs. A rate will be recommended to the UARB in consultation with the renewable energy sector, NSPI, and NSPI rate-payers.

The NDP has always supported increased resources for sustainable transportation, particularly in light of Nova Scotia's climate change goals. We recognize that active transportation and public transit, particularly in rural areas and small towns, need more resources. We applaud the work of the Ecology Action Centre's Green Mobility Capital Grants Program with communities across Nova Scotia. However, any new funding must take place within the context of balancing the budget.

**8. In 2005-06, clearcutting accounted for 94% of all forest harvesting in Nova Scotia while selection harvesting—which removes trees selectively to maintain the integrity, age and species diversity, health, and value of the forest as a whole—only accounted for 1.5% of all logging. Will your government reduce the level of clearcutting and increase the level of more sustainable selection harvesting? If so, what targets will you try to achieve by when, and what will you do to achieve them?**

and

**9. Nova Scotia has lost most of its old forests, with forests over 80 years old down from 25% of forests 50 years ago to just 1.5% today. There is a continuing shift to ever younger forests, and an increase in the number of known forest-dependent species at risk. Do you consider these trends problematic, and if so, what will your government do to help restore Nova Scotia's forest wealth?**

Decades of clear-cutting and other types of poor forest management have nearly destroyed our native Acadian forest. Our forests have fewer species and have lost biodiversity. Our forests are made up of younger and smaller trees. Trees over 100 years old now make up less than one percent of our forests.

The NDP has repeatedly introduced legislation that would restrict the use of unjustified clear-cutting and would obligate the province to use sustainable forestry practices. The NDP will work to promote responsible forestry on Crown, corporation and private woodlands, encouraging Forest Stewardship Council certification.

The NDP supports the conclusions of the report *Investing in the Future: Findings and Recommendations of the Uneven-aged Management Outreach Project*, submitted to the Minister of Natural Resources in late 2008. The successful pilot Category 7 silviculture program, overseen by a working group co-chaired by the environmental and forestry sectors, has

proven a good model to promote the implementation of uneven-aged management on private woodlots. The NDP will continue the current funding commitment by the Department of Natural Resources for the next two years of the program.

The NDP will work with communities and environmental organizations in Nova Scotia to ensure that at least 12% of Nova Scotia's land is protected through legislation by 2015 or sooner. NDP MLAs have raised this issue with the government repeatedly through resolutions and debates in the house, since the target was first agreed to by the province in 1992.

The NDP is aware of, and supports, the negotiations between major forestry interests, the Ecology Action Centre, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society through the Colin Stewart Forest Forum Memorandum of Understanding. Since 2005 industry representatives have devoted considerable time to that process, which has identified both candidate protected areas and a range of wood supply mitigation options. Apparently some of the Crown land candidate areas are of no value to the industry, as they are bogs, barrens, or old growth already protected under current policy. It appears that these could be designated candidate protected areas with little opposition from the forest industry.

It is our understanding that the current Minister of Natural Resources received the draft consensus report from the Forum but has failed to respond. The NDP will make it a priority to give clear direction based on the findings of that report.

The NDP applauds the work of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and other independent trusts working to protect ecologically significant areas. The Crown Share Land Legacy Trust Fund will remain in place to assist these efforts. The NDP introduced legislation in 2009 to establish a land trust entity entitled the Community Lands Trust that is separate from the control of government, and would support the protection of areas that are of significant community value. The initiative is part of the Genuine Leadership 2009 platform, and will protect lands for public access and primary resource use.

The NDP supports the work currently underway to develop a new Natural Resources Strategy for the province. It is anticipated that recommendations will be made that could affect the protected areas process, as well as many other questions posed in this paper. The NDP does not wish to pre-empt the findings from this long process.

The NDP will provide a clear, timely response to the recommendations of the Phase 2 technical panel, chaired by Chief Justice Constance Glube, to provide certainty regarding provincial direction on natural resources policy issues as soon as practical.

**10. In the late 1990s, Nova Scotia became a world leader in solid waste management, achieving 50% waste diversion in 2000—the first jurisdiction in all North America to achieve this target. But Nova Scotians are now producing and disposing nearly one-third more garbage, and waste diversion dropped from 50% in 2000 to 36% in 2006. What will your government do to restore Nova Scotia's leadership in this area?**

In the course of its mandate, an NDP government will first ask the RRFB and municipal waste management authorities to carry out a SWOT analysis of solid waste management in Nova Scotia, using existing staff resources, to pinpoint areas of concern and of possibility.