



May 23, 2009

Ronald Colman, Ph.D  
Executive Director  
GPI Atlantic  
via e-mail: colman@gpiatlantic.org

Dear Dr. Colman:

I thank you for your survey and for the chance to respond to your issues.

**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?**

Our Government remains mindful of the human costs in the shadow of something as mammoth as a global economic recession. Before we had even concluded our budget deliberations and compiled Budget 2009-10, we determined that cuts to the civil service would only negatively affect both this large body of citizens economically and socially and our province as a whole. We made tough choices that allowed us to refrain from making layoffs in our public service. This was announced in our budget address.

In fact, we have helped to grow jobs in this province by some 50,000 since 1999. As well, we announced several months ago our Building for Growth strategy - a three-year economic stimulus plan that will create and maintain 20,000 jobs in Nova Scotia.

Our government has a proven record when it comes to attracting business to Nova Scotia and helping Nova Scotia businesses grow. For example, over a six year period (2001-2007) an independent study concluded that our Industrial Expansion Fund created and maintained approximately 11,000 full-time jobs.

As part of our plan to address challenges created by the global economic recession, we have increased our investment in the IEF to \$175 million to support and help to maintain jobs in Nova Scotia.

Examples of where these funds have assisted businesses and their workforce include Michelin, NovaScotian Crystal, Apple Valley Foods, Ledwidge Lumber Company, LED Roadway Lighting Ltd., Professional Quality Assurance Ltd, Lockheed Martin Canada, and Flagstone.

Douglas Ledwidge, Ledwidge Lumber President said this February, "We really appreciate the support of government. To us, it means we can continue to employ our staff and serve our customers and partners as we go through these tough economic times."

Some businesses, Stanfields for instance, have gone to four-day weeks to keep staff by taking advantage of a Federal program to offset that fifth day of wages. This was a positive addition to the options businesses have had to take advantage of as an alternative to layoffs.

**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?**

As our means have allowed, we have addressed many measures to assist those Nova Scotians in need of our help. For example, as announced in our 2006 election campaign, we introduced the Family Pharmacare Program to help Nova Scotians who do not have a medical plan receive the necessary drugs.

As Joan Weeks of CBC Cape Breton Radio reported November 29, 2007 - "Mary MacDonald says she can now accept a job with no health coverage because the Family Pharmacare program will help pay for her prescriptions." This is exactly what we hoped to do for thousands of Nova Scotians in the same circumstance. We are so glad it is one way to assist those not fortunate enough to have a medical plan.

Other examples include:

- Announced almost \$128 million to build new, or renovate existing affordable housing. The funding for housing - through an amendment to the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Program Agreement and an extension to the Canada-Nova Scotia Housing Renovation Program Agreement - is on a scale we have not seen in Nova Scotia for decades. It will create needed housing units and construction jobs. The program includes 8,600 social housing units.
- Making it easier for families of people with disabilities to save for their loved one's future by allowing them to use Registered Disability Savings Plans, while continuing to receive income assistance.
- This winter, provided more money through the Heating Assistance Rebate Program (HARP) because of dramatic increases in oil prices.
- Funded an eight per cent rebate to lower home heating costs - sending Nova Scotian homeowners, on average, a \$260 benefit from the program.
- Helping children and families across Nova Scotia to benefit from the province's child and youth strategy just a year after it has begun.

- Assisted more low-income seniors to make home repairs so they can remain in their homes longer through the Senior Citizens' Assistance Program.
- Added over 550 new child-care spaces as the first step in the province's new 10-year, Early Learning and Child Care Plan. Also helping child care staff to further their education and build on their skills training.

Of course we also introduced a \$155-million Poverty Reduction Strategy to help train low-skilled workers, increase affordable housing and improve benefits for low-income families. As our minister said at the announcement, "The poverty reduction strategy is a framework for breaking the cycle of poverty and improving the standard of living for low-income Nova Scotians. This is a long-term plan for a Nova Scotia where resources are used wisely and government and community action is co-ordinated to effectively help those in need."

**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?**

If there is one silver lining in the aftermath of the global economic recession, I believe it is a realization that we all need a better understanding of the dangers of overextending our credit and the need to invest more in our own savings.

We had joined the call for the federal government to address credit card interest rates.

We know that the earlier our citizens understand finances, the better. In our schools we are helping offer instruction through a course called Career Development 10 - which includes financial management and workplace readiness - introduced in 2008. As well, we have a multi-year plan to redo our high school business courses. We have supported the use in Grade 9 of a 'Something About Money' resource published by the Canadian Bankers Association. These are in addition to other lessons about money that will help educate our students earlier in life about some of the pitfalls of credit and mismanaging their finances. It is all part of our commitment to life-long learning.

In Fall 2006, we passed legislation enabling the province to enforce stricter guidelines and penalties on payday lenders. The bill will help to ensure greater protection to those people who need to borrow from the companies that make small, short-term loans.

Our Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations promotes fairness in the marketplace and champions consumer protection through education, regulation and complaint resolution. It has important consumer information on issues like dealing with debt, credit reporting, and much more.

As a government, we have worked for the last decade to lead by example.

Until the global recession, government was, for the first time in memory, paying down the debt. Our government has introduced eight balanced budgets. These measures, and by living within one's means, help greatly in "the security of Nova Scotians".

**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?**

A PC Government recognizes that our farmers feed us all and Nova Scotia's farms generate more than \$454 million in revenue each year. To that end, in the last three budget years, investment of taxpayers money into Agriculture went up over 50% (\$38 million in 2006 to over \$60 million in 2009).

A PC Government will continue to support programs to help them adapt to changing consumer markets, enhance food safety systems, support environmental actions and prevent disease and track food to its original source.

Our government has invested a great deal to support the agricultural industry in our province. As recently as Budget 2009-10, our government pledged \$2.3 million over three years to support farmers markets, and direct marketing for local trade and food system development.

We created the Strategic Infrastructure Investment Fund to support farmers and committed up to \$6.2 million in transitional assistance for hog and ruminant farming. Doubling the fund to \$1.5 million - to enhance and diversify our agricultural infrastructure.

We provided an additional one year's interest grant on existing and new ruminant loans.

We invested over \$2 million in a new Halifax Farmers' Market to help showcase local produce and provide a larger venue for our farmers in the city.

We are helping apple growers who plant more profitable varieties of apples in 2009, with an additional \$200,000 to the Orchard Renewal program.

We introduced the Buy Local program. New funding - \$2.3 million over three years - will support the development of the local food systems, which includes everything from farmers to consumers, and improve access to local foods for consumers throughout the province. We will continue to invest in this program to promote the benefits of local products and to increase opportunities for agriculture growth and development.

A PC Government is supportive of protecting a modern supply management system, and recognizes its importance to stabilizing our entire agriculture and food sector, responsive to the needs of our producers and consumers.

We are working together with neighbouring provinces to increase co-operation and expertise on initiatives through a memorandum of understanding.

We are spending \$750,000 for agriculture industry revitalization, through the federal Community Development Trust.

We signed the five-year Growing Forward agreement between the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia to give Nova Scotia farmers more support to achieve profitability and incorporate innovation with new programs. AgriStability - one of the new business risk-management programs for farmers - provides support after large income losses.

We are also committed to looking at another issue of concern to farmers. We are working with the Agriculture Land Review Committee appointed in April 2009 to help address issues surrounding the long-term future of the province's agriculture land base.

**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?**

Volunteers contribute their time, passion and expertise in their community every day, making a significant impact on the lives of Nova Scotians. The Province of Nova Scotia appreciates this valuable contribution. Through events such as the International Day of the Volunteer, National Volunteer Week, and the Provincial Volunteer Awards, the province strives to raise the profile of volunteers and to honour their contributions.

We named a minister responsible for volunteers and signed an agreement with the Volunteer Community Advisory Council to give volunteer organizations across Nova Scotia the full support of government.

In the last few years we provided \$130,000 to support priorities from the Talking with Volunteers Report, including addressing volunteer liability and insurance issues through an affordable and accessible insurance program, and developing regional and virtual volunteer resource centres.

In 2008, we designed and implemented a volunteer insurance program.

We established a Volunteerism Inter-departmental Co-ordinating Committee, with representation from various government departments. The committee will continue to grow and will include membership from most government departments with a goal of ensuring the needs and concerns of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers in this province are addressed.

In terms of critical areas of volunteerism, we are making direct interventions. Our government knows the value of our volunteer emergency responders and have focused on helping them protect our communities. We committed an additional \$250,000 to assist our volunteer emergency responders and we will take steps to ensure they are supported through Nova Scotia's EMO joint operations. In addition, we are increasing the tax credit amount from \$375 to \$500 for both volunteer firefighters and members of ground search and rescue teams.

We also assisted 222 volunteer fire departments and emergency response organizations across the province through the Emergency Services Provider Fund - 124 projects, including jaws of life, defibrillators and ground search and rescue vehicles, were announced in March 2008 to help enhance safety in communities province-wide. As well, we extended the gas tax rebate to include all vehicles used by volunteer fire departments.

**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?**

A PC Government has done more in the last decade to turn around the focus from treating illness to promoting healthy living than ever before.

We created the first government department dedicated to leading the collaborative effort to promote and protect health, prevent illness and injury, and reduce disparities in health status.

We have invested millions and made inroads through initiatives such as:

- The Active Kids Healthy Kids (AKHK) Strategy (2002) - updated (2007) to address physical inactivity in children. We expanded on existing initiatives and incorporated new programs and action plans to help children and youth become more active by increasing and improving opportunities for physical activity, sport and recreation activities. This strategy will provide the opportunities and support that Nova Scotia families need to embrace and promote physical activity. The strategy used input from the first (2001) and second (2005) reports of the Physical Activity Levels and Dietary Intake of Children and Youth in the Province of Nova Scotia study.
- Last year, we invested \$500,000 to make physical education a mandatory high school credit. In the previous budget, we invested \$400,000 to increase the number of physical education teachers to prepare for the introduction of physical education as a mandatory high school credit.
- A PC Government released the first school nutrition policy in Canada. Under this policy, schools can only sell healthy snacks, food and beverages. Students can no longer buy deep-fried food and soda pop, for example, in school cafeterias. Our school food and nutrition policy remains one of the strongest in the country. Since the policy was first released in 2006, it is now the norm for schools to provide fresh fruit and vegetables, water and healthier snacks.

- Along with healthy eating, we're addressing physical activity, youth sexual health, tobacco reduction, addiction and injury prevention to promote a happy and healthy future.
  
- We have dedicated \$68 million for new sport and recreation infrastructure, province-wide, by 2016, through our new Building Facilities and Infrastructure Together (B-FIT) Program to help address inactivity in our youth. It's the largest commitment to sport and recreation infrastructure in the history of the province. Improvements are heading to facilities across the province, including:
  - Kings Mutual Century Centre, Berwick;
  - Brigadoon Village - a camp for chronically ill children, Aylesford Lake.
  - Windsor Curling Club;
  - Northside Community Civic Centre Society;
  - the YMCA Dartmouth Centre;
  - a new health recreation complex in Cape Breton, and funding for Renwick Park and Ski Ben Eoin;
  - the Trenton Minor Sports Community Centre;
  - Multipurpose Facility in the Truro/Colchester County Area; and
  - Pictou County Wellness Centre.
- Fulfilled the 2006 commitment to create 500 km of new trails and have signed a memorandum of understanding to expand the trail system in Nova Scotia to make it the province most connected by trails.
- Invested in the Sport Futures Leadership Program and After-School Program.
- Directed funding to a program for Nova Scotians who face barriers to participate in recreation programs through the Recreation for Accessible Leisure Lifestyles, or Recreation for ALL.
- Created the Healthy Living Tax Credit of up to \$500 per child to help with the cost of registering children and youth in sport or recreation activities.
- Found clear results through a four-year project - Healthy LifeWorks - in partnership with Creative Wellness Solutions. It was the first Canadian study to address the business case for workplace and was implemented to improve the health of Nova Scotians and reduce the risk of chronic disease and involved more than 400 employees from the Department of Justice. It measured individual health, musculoskeletal health and organizational health. The project showed significant improvements to employee health including:
  - a 19 per cent improvement in nutrition scores, determined by combining low saturated fat meals, high-fiber foods, fast food and snacks, daily breakfast, and fruit and vegetable intake scores
  - a seven per cent improvement in fitness scores, which included scores based on the frequency of weekly aerobics, and strength and stretching activity
  - a nine per cent reduction in the average number of lifestyle risk factors such as smoking and cholesterol level.
- The overall wellness score of department staff increased by 12 per cent over the course of the study - demonstrating the significant benefits of a comprehensive approach to workplace health. The project also showed an improvement in staff morale with more employees reporting that they felt good about the opportunities to learn and grow within their work environments.

We will continue, as a government, to work with our all departments affected within government, stakeholders and all communities in Nova Scotia to ensure all our citizens have the chance to grow up healthier and happier, live better and longer lives. This is not only good socially, but, economically it will help reduce the strain on our healthcare system and the cost burden that this places on all Nova Scotians.

Our efforts - in partnership with the community - will mean a healthier future for all Nova Scotians.

**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?**

Our government released a Climate Change Action Plan to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect our province. Nova Scotia aims to reduce GHG emissions by at least 10 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020.

The greatest single reduction will be achieved by imposing caps on emissions from Nova Scotia Power Incorporated (NSPI), which produces 46 per cent of the province's GHG emissions. The caps will take effect in 2010, 2015, and 2020. The two most cost-effective means of reducing emissions from power generation in Nova Scotia are straightforward: generating less electricity and generating it from clean, renewable sources.

Transportation is the second-biggest source of GHG emissions in Nova Scotia. This plan focuses on increasing the efficiency of our vehicles, encouraging alternatives, and planning our communities to reduce the need for transportation. The province's response will include:

- by 2010, a Sustainable Transportation Strategy that will build on existing work
- a pilot project to help make commercial trucks more efficient
- incentives for consumers to choose cars and trucks that use less fuel and produce less air pollution
- by 2010, regulations setting fuel consumption and emissions standards for new vehicles.

It was a PC Government that brought in the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act in Spring 2007. As our government noted at the time, this act builds on some of the best work government and the private sector have done on the environment and the economy in the past few years and recognizes that our environmental assets are the foundation of our long-term prosperity. The act contained more than 20 objectives to help Nova Scotia become cleaner and more sustainable.



**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 clear cutting 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?**

The forests of Nova Scotia are an important component of the province's environmental, economic and social structure. Traditionally, forest management has concentrated on the growing and harvesting of trees. The focus has shifted to sustainable forest management whereby the well-being of the forest as a whole is considered. Nova Scotia's Code of Forestry Practices recognizes that forests provide many other values all of which are important to the health of the forest and to society in general. Therefore, the primary objective of sustainable forest management is to sustain the integrity of the forest for future generations while providing for the multiple uses, experiences and needs of Nova Scotians.

Our government's Natural Resources Strategy was announced in May 2007 as a three year process. The Natural Resources Department's current policies for forests, minerals and parks have been in place since the 1980s and are in need of renewal. The biodiversity strategy will be the first for the province. The decision to re-evaluate government's policies on forests, minerals, and parks, and to establish a policy on biodiversity is in keeping with our focus on sustainable prosperity and competitiveness, and the shift to a green economy. The Nova Scotia Government's Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act commits DNR to develop a new Natural Resources Strategy by March 2010.

The Strategy is being developed in three phases.

Phase 1 - Citizen engagement - led by Voluntary Planning - January to December 2008

Phase 2 - Technical expertise/Stakeholder engagement - January to September 2009

Phase 3 - Strategy Development - October 2009 to March 2010

The Natural Resources strategy - which will guide our future direction - is expected to be completed by March 2010. As we have stated on our website: "Nova Scotia's forests are a mainstay of life. While the requirement to provide wood fibre to support our forest economy is still a primary concern, there is a need to sustain the quality and character of our forest resource and maintain a varied forest ecosystem."

**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?**

Once again, this Government is committed to sustainable forest management and Nova Scotia's Forestry Strategy will ensure future generations can enjoy Nova Scotia's forests.

As part of our Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, we continue to be committed to protecting land for nature conservation. We have many initiatives underway to protect priority public and private lands. In fact, by the end of 2008, over 26,000 hectares of protected lands had been protected.

Examples include:

- In March of 2007, the PC government acquired ecologically-sensitive lands from Bowater Mersey in the largest acquisition of private lands for conservation purposes in the province's history.
- Designated five new nature reserves will protect old-growth forests, wetlands and ecosystems-developed on lands acquired from Bowater Mersey Paper Company in 2007;
- Designated Bird Islands, the small islands of Hertford and Ciboux in Victoria County, as a Wildlife Management Area;
- Protected the Shubenacadie Provincial Wildlife Park by adding 65 hectares of Crown land;
- Protected the Tobeatic Wilderness Area;
- Continue to acquire thousands of hectares of land throughout the province including land in western Nova Scotia, land near Cape Split, islands in Mahone Bay, St. Margaret's Bay and in North Harbour, Victoria County;
- Established, in partnership with the community, the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area on Halifax doorstep. Awaiting final public input on areas in Ship Harbour Long Lake, Eastern Shore and Shelburne River Wilderness area, Queens County; and
- Offered to buy more than 21,000 acres of land in western Nova Scotia - owned by JD Irving Ltd. with significant ecological, recreational and heritage value to Nova Scotians.
- Will continue to work with the Nova Scotia Nature Trust to help conserve our lands for future generations.

**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 1995, Nova Scotia developed a Solid Waste Resource Management Strategy that committed the province to achieving a national waste diversion target of 50 per cent by the year 2000. Nova Scotia was the only province to reach this goal and remains a national leader in waste diversion. In fact, our disposal rate is 45 per cent lower than the Canadian average. This achievement was realized through the cooperative efforts of municipalities, the Resource Recovery Fund Board (RRFB Nova Scotia), industry, and citizens in reducing, recycling, and composting waste.

The province has recently established a new commitment to maintain Nova Scotia's position of leadership in waste resource management. In 2006 amendments to the Environment Act, Nova Scotia legislated a new disposal target of 300 kg per person per year by 2015. This target, the most aggressive in Canada, was reinforced in the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, passed in April 2007. At current disposal rates (477 kg in 2006-07), achieving the target will require reduction or diversion of an additional 177 kg of waste per capita, a 37 per cent reduction by 2015.

We have been proud to welcome government delegations from other countries studying our methods of waste diversion. It is a source of pride and an environmental necessity to maintain that record.

We were pleased to be the first province in Atlantic Canada to develop and implement regulations to effectively deal with electronic waste.

We just recently launched an anti-litter campaign because the 2008 Litter Survey shows Nova Scotians are littering 21% more than they did in 2004.

This is an area for which we can never give up on finding new ways to educate and additional ways to become leaders. As the Anti-litter campaign states: Put your trash where it belongs: in compost bins, recycle bins, and trash cans. Hold on to your trash till you can discard it properly. Contact a Waste Reduction Educator in your area. Never litter. No excuses, and we all win.

Thank you again for allowing the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia to respond to your concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rodney MacDonald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Rodney MacDonald  
Leader, PC Party of Nova Scotia