

8 May, 2009

Dear LEADER's NAME

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. 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.
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?
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?
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?
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?
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?

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?

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?

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?

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?