

Budget

2020–21

Better Together

Honourable Karen Casey
Minister, Finance and Treasury Board

Budget Address


NOVA SCOTIA

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Finance and Treasury Board
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Introduction

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

On behalf of the government, I am pleased to introduce the *Nova Scotia Budget 2020-21: Better Together*. Today I am sharing what we believe is a message of hope, gratitude and optimism.

When Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, visited Halifax recently he was asked for thoughts about Atlantic Canada. His response was that "... we need to recognize that strength comes from our creativity, our innovation, our diversity."

We agree ... creativity, innovation and diversity are qualities that exist in our people, in every corner of this province. It has positioned Nova Scotia for success on the world stage.

It takes an entire community to achieve change, according to One Nova Scotia.

"Real leadership and new initiative needs to come from both the private and public sectors, from key institutions in the voluntary sector, and from citizens through their community organizations."

Today I am extending thanks to all Nova Scotians, to those business leaders and the private sector, and those valued community partners for the strong contributions they have made, and continue to make, to our province.

A new decade begins with renewed confidence and a continued commitment in our growing diversity and our strong and resilient economy.

We are presenting our fifth consecutive balanced budget with *Budget 2020-21 Better Together*.

We are forecasting rising revenues of \$11.6 billion and expenditures of \$11.54 billion with a positive position of \$55 million.

Improving the Lives of Nova Scotians

Nova Scotians want to be self-sufficient and to provide for themselves and their families. Government's priority is to create opportunities and pathways so that our success helps make this happen.

In *Budget 2020-21* we are making significant investments in a variety of programs to make lives better.

These commitments include improvements to:

- Nova Scotia Child Benefit
- Child, Youth and Family Supports
- Affordable Housing
- Accessibility Initiatives
- Pre-Primary
- Public Transit
- Minimum Wage

We will continue to do better.

With our stronger economy and our positive fiscal position, we want to share this economic success. *Budget 2020-21* supports Nova Scotians who may not have been feeling the success of the province. The budget for Community Services is increasing by \$54.3 million to more than \$1 billion in support of Nova Scotians who need it the most.

No child should live in poverty.

That is why government is expanding the Nova Scotia Child Benefit by adding \$18 million to adjust the low-income threshold to include more families under the benefit.

Families with incomes of \$34,000 or below are now eligible. This means almost 50,000 children and about 30,000 families are now included.

This is the largest single increase to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit since it was created in 1998.

We also want to improve the monthly income of our most vulnerable. This budget also directs an additional \$17.3 million to support the Standard Household Rate under the income assistance program. The new rate began in 2020.

Parents want to provide the best they can for their children.

In 2017 our province committed to implementing a free, universal pre-primary program for all four-year-olds. We want children to have an equal opportunity to participate in quality, play-based learning regardless of their socio-economic circumstances. Early learning provides meaningful and life-long benefits.

In 2016 only 25 per cent of our children could access childcare and early learning opportunities.

That is why our government committed to fully implementing a free, universal pre-primary program. This September, every four-year-old in Nova Scotia will have access to this program.

Budget 2020-21 includes an increase of \$17.5 million, for a total investment of \$51.4 million. That makes Nova Scotia a leader in Atlantic Canada in pre-primary education.

Families have told us that transportation would make it easier to access pre-primary, particularly in rural Nova Scotia. Bus service for all eligible pre-primary children begins this September with new funding of \$4 million under *Budget 2020-21*.

Creating this opportunity for young children also means more parents can attend school themselves or return to the workforce and contribute to family income.

We are investing in Child, Youth and Family Supports for new and expanded programs.

Community-based resources can be a lifeline for parents and children and we want to expand on the excellent work of our community partners.

We will invest \$1.9 million this year to enhance the essential work of our Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters and our Family Resource Centres.

We will increase our investment every year for the next three years to guarantee stable program funding of \$7.7 million every year after that.

We are also providing a \$400 thousand increase to Phoenix House to support their work.

These investments will allow us to grow and shape our programs to reflect the needs of our families.

Our government also wants to enhance programs that support adults and children with disabilities by adding \$16.6 million to the Disabilities Support Program.

Of this, \$7.4 million will be used to transition residents from larger facilities into community-based living.

This means 50 Nova Scotians will move into communities next year with increasing numbers and investments in each of the following three years and beyond.

Government will also invest an additional \$2.8 million in the Flex In-Home program to support people with disabilities who live at home with their families. In 2019, there were 1,694 individuals and this number is likely to grow.

All Nova Scotians deserve the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

In recent weeks, government has made important investments to support social enterprises that provide services to Nova Scotians with diverse abilities.

This included facilities in Sydney, North Sydney, New Minas, East Hants, New Glasgow, Truro and Lawrencetown, Annapolis County. This investment will improve facilities, expand programming and provide employment opportunities.

In Sydney, the Horizon Achievement Centre supports adults with diverse abilities in accessing employment training. The province has invested \$2 million and provided 2.2 hectares of land in the Harbourside Business Park for a new building. Horizon is Cape Breton's largest provider of vocational training and employment development services.

This \$6 million is a significant investment in social enterprises across the province.

An accessible Nova Scotia by 2030 is the goal of the Accessibility Directorate. Their work with the disabilities community, municipalities, businesses and post-secondary institutions will continue with an increased total budget of \$1.9 million.

Businesses can apply to improve accessibility through the ACCESS-Ability program through continued funding of \$1 million.

Transportation is a cornerstone of the government's *Poverty Reduction Blueprint and Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population*.

We are supporting upgrades for the Kings Transit fleet in the Valley, linking Kings, Annapolis and Digby counties. A new service is being introduced in Stellarton and New Glasgow, providing the communities with a fixed-link bus service for the first time in decades. Buses, terminals and shelters are being added in Bridgewater and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality and five other communities. We continue to support Income Assistance recipients in Halifax Regional Municipality by providing free bus passes for Halifax Transit.

The quality of life for Nova Scotians greatly depends on access to safe and affordable housing.

A substantial investment in affordable housing for Nova Scotians of \$394 million will be supported over the next nine years under the National Housing Strategy. The provincial contribution is \$197 million for this federal-provincial partnership.

Close to 3,000 households in need will benefit from this partnership under Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Affordable Housing from 2019 to 2022. Adding to this impact, another 2,500 households in need will benefit from provincial funding of \$70 million over this same three-year period.

Nova Scotia is contributing \$18.7 million in *Budget 2020-21* for affordable housing, home repairs, urban Native housing, community housing, rent supplements and other provincial housing priorities.

Rent supplements improve housing security and promote mixed-use, mixed-income communities by making rents affordable for those living in non-profit or co-op housing and private market units. Housing Nova Scotia will add an additional 560 new rent supplements and of these, 120 will be directed for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Affordable Renters Program will be sustained with an ongoing \$2 million investment. Last year alone, under this program, more than 400 low-income homes in Cape Breton received free energy efficiency upgrades, and those families are now saving an average of \$900 a year.

Addressing homelessness is key to changing lives.

Some of our most vulnerable Nova Scotians will be supported by a \$20.5 million investment over five years, starting in 2020-21, for the *Integrated Action Plan to Address Homelessness*. This is the largest single investment in homelessness prevention made by government. This investment will focus on “Housing First” support: finding permanent, stable and safe homes for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

We will work with community partners such as Adsum for Women and Children on their shelter diversion efforts and have invested \$400,000 to keep children out of shelters.

We also want to give more low- and modest-income earners an opportunity to own their own home. In 2020-21, we will double the lending capacity under the Down Payment Assistance Program.

On April 1, 2020 Nova Scotia’s minimum wage rate increases by \$1 per hour to \$12.55 per hour. This will improve the monthly paycheck for minimum wage workers and their families. This is the largest annual increase to the province’s minimum wage in a decade.

It brings Nova Scotia closer to the highest minimum wage rate in the country and is the second highest in Atlantic Canada.

This budget is a reflection of the hard work of Nova Scotians and the value this government places on helping those who need it the most.

Access to quality health care is the number one priority for Nova Scotians. We are transforming health care for all Nova Scotians by providing better services today and into the future. The overall investment in the health care sector has grown to \$4.82 billion.

Budget 2020-21 includes \$86.1 million in response to increased demand for services.

Our work continues to recruit doctors and we are seeing success by supporting community groups with their recruitment. We are encouraged that Statistics Canada shows that Nova Scotia ranks fourth nationally for patient attachment to a primary health care provider.

A new agreement with our doctors is a critical step to strengthening physician recruitment and retention.

We are dedicating an additional \$75.3 million for physician services and salaries in *Budget 2020-21*.

Family, emergency and anesthesia doctors will become the highest paid in Atlantic Canada. Other specialties, such as psychiatry, obstetrics and gynecology will be among the highest paid in Atlantic Canada.

Dalhousie Medical School will continue developing the next generation of doctors with an additional \$4.7 million this year including:

- \$1.9 million increase for the second cohort of 15 specialty residency placements
- \$1.5 million increase to add 12 first-year seats at medical school with a focus on rural communities, Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous Peoples, and African Nova Scotians, bringing the total to 16 seats
- \$1.3 million for the next group of 10 family medicine residents.

A fast-track immigration stream specifically for doctors is helping ongoing recruitment efforts. Family doctors Baldeep and Kiran Bains recently relocated from London, UK, to Nova Scotia. Their decision to move here was influenced by the quality of life and the welcoming community they discovered in Nova Scotia. We have successfully recruited 54 doctors through this new physician immigration stream. Along with other successful recruitment efforts this brings our total to 440 new doctors since 2016.

Nova Scotia also needs more nurses. Seventy more students will be able to study at the Dalhousie nursing program in Yarmouth; and at Cape Breton University. More students will be able to study and stay here after they graduate.

Together these initiatives will help stabilize priority services such as access to family doctors, maternity care in home communities and mental health services in rural areas.

Collaborative care is working in this province. Health care professionals told us they want to work collaboratively. In 2016 we had only 39 teams. We listened, we worked together. We have strengthened teams and created new ones. Today we have more than 85 collaborative family practice teams supported with an overall investment of \$28.4 million in *Budget 2020-21*. These teams are found in communities across the province.

Nova Scotians also need access to medications when and where they need them. And we are going to do more – with an additional \$21 million. This brings total investment to \$370.3 million through Health and Wellness and Community Services for families, seniors and cancer patients.

Cancer touches all of us. For some women, ovarian cancer means there is no recovery. The outcomes have not improved in five decades and that needs to change.

We have provided \$1 million to Ovarian Cancer Canada to collaborate with Dalhousie University for ovarian cancer research.

We are the first province to support a national campaign to find a cure.

The province's 1,300 urban and rural pharmacists are an important part of delivering health care to Nova Scotians. A new agreement is changing their scope of practice. Pharmacists are now able to renew prescriptions for 180 days for many items with the fee publicly funded for all residents with a valid health card.

Budget 2020-21 includes \$3.2 million to implement the Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act, which is expected to take effect during 2020. Every Nova Scotian will be presumed to be a potential donor, unless they opt out. This will give patients waiting for transplants more opportunity by increasing the availability of organs and tissue. This legislation is the first of its kind in North America.

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation is the fastest growing crime in Canada – it also hits close to home. *Budget 2020-21* highlights what we can accomplish when we work together and right now we need to fight this crime. Our government is taking action and has released an approach to fight human trafficking. We know the devastating effects for victims, survivors, their families and entire communities.

Over the next five years, government will invest \$1.4 million annually for more supports and services with a focus to protect Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities.

This support will include a team of family and victim support navigators, an additional crown prosecutor and dedicated police investigators. The focus of our strategy is protection, prevention, prosecution and partnership. We can not do this alone. We have to work together to fight this sad reality.

The government is also continuing to support those who have experienced sexual assault, through the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, which expanded during 2019.

Funding for mental health and addictions continues to be a priority for this government.

We will increase funding to sustain and expand services and supports. This brings the total investment to \$316.5 million.

Children and teenagers who need mental health and addictions support are getting better care faster at the IWK Health Centre.

Children and teenagers are also able to access additional mental health resources through SchoolsPlus which has now expanded to every school community in the province. These additional resources include social workers, community outreach workers, facilitators and mental health clinicians.

The Mental Health Crisis Line means mobile support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Callers are connected to supports at work, home, school and in the community.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Stan Kutcher, an internationally renowned expert and educator in the area of adolescent mental health, for his leadership and guidance.

Our youth are our future and we want them to be healthy. Too many of our young people are smoking and vaping and research shows this may result in severe lung disease, even death.

Recently Dr. Robert Strang, Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Officer of Health, joined his colleagues across the country in expressing significant concern about the rise of nicotine vaping among Canadian youth. They urged governments to take action with stronger regulations.

We listened.

New efforts will be made to reduce youth smoking and vaping.

We will introduce a tax on vaping products starting in September 2020. In addition, all retailers will require a permit to sell vaping products starting in July 2020.

As part of our harm reduction strategy, we are also increasing the tax on cigarettes, cigars and other forms of tobacco.

Our aging population also needs care. Our investments will show that long term care remains a priority.

This budget adds \$5.3 million to enhance long term care, for a total of \$612.4 million. These new investments will include implementing the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Long-Term Care. They will also be used to convert under-utilized residential care facility beds to long-term care beds in Halifax. This builds on a previous \$15 million investment for upgrades in nursing homes across the province.

Building on Our Economic Success

This is a budget that reflects the hard work of Nova Scotians to put this province on a solid fiscal foundation. And now, we are in a strong position to lift people up, to make lasting investments and to support those who need it most.

When we first formed government in 2013, our province and our economy were underperforming. Faced with this situation, our priority was to set a new path for our province.

Let us pause for a moment to consider the task before us by comparing then and now.

- The province was borrowing money to pay the bills in 2013, with a \$677 million budget deficit. As mentioned, 2020 brings our fifth consecutive balanced budget.
- Nova Scotia's population was about 940,000 in 2013. In 2019 we made history with close to 977,000 Nova Scotians - the fastest population growth in close to half a century.
- Immigration attracted about 2,500 newcomers in 2013. Nova Scotia welcomed a record setting 7,600 new permanent residents in 2019
- In 2013, employment declined by 1.1 per cent. Last year we experienced the fastest employment growth in 15 years at 2.2 per cent.
- Unemployment in 2013 was 9.1 per cent. Today we are seeing the lowest unemployment since the 1970s at 7.2 per cent.
- Exports were at \$15 billion in 2013. These rose to \$16.6 billion by 2018.
- In 2013 parents watched their sons and daughters choose to move out of Nova Scotia for opportunities elsewhere. In 2019, our population increased by 3,461 as people from other parts of Canada came to Nova Scotia.

I want to acknowledge the guidance of the *Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy*.

The challenge they presented was to build a more diverse population and a stronger economy. The Commission believed that a sustainable economy would provide the foundation needed to move our province forward.

This required difficult decisions, solid fiscal management and strong leadership. Today, we see the results of our commitment to build a better province.

The province's population is more diverse than ever. Employers and community are our partners in supporting the highest newcomer retention rate in Atlantic Canada, at 71 per cent.

A growing population creates momentum with more workers, more entrepreneurs, more professionals and more consumers. We want to build on this success by increasing our immigration. Our Premier is working with the federal government to increase our allocation and we are continuing to invest \$100,000 in the Office of Immigration for the extension of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program.

Nova Scotians are proud of our successes, but we can do better together.

The strengthening and resilient economy means that Nova Scotia is well positioned for the new decade.

I want to thank our business leaders, the private sector, the entrepreneurs and the innovators. They have demonstrated their confidence through their private investment and their job creation.

Ongoing dialogue with our business community is essential. Many business groups came forward with pre-budget submissions and we listened. Over the past several years we have heard from the Halifax Chamber of Commerce, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Retail Council of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and others that represent the business community. We have heard a consistent voice in favour of lower corporate taxation.

The corporate tax rate will drop by 2 per cent to 14 per cent to help businesses to become more competitive, to innovate and to reinvest. This will bring Nova Scotia in line with New Brunswick for the lowest rate in Atlantic Canada.

The backbone of rural Nova Scotia, as well as our urban centres, is the successful small business community. These small businesses employ thousands of Nova Scotians. We want their successes to continue. *Budget 2020-21* will reduce the small business tax rate by 0.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent. This brings us to the lowest small business tax rate in Atlantic Canada. This will allow our small business owners to invest more in their own businesses and to continue to employ Nova Scotians across the province. It will also allow our province to be more competitive in attracting new businesses on the national and global stage.

Business competitiveness fosters innovation, investment and growth. Reducing regulatory burden is a priority of our government and we are leading the country with this initiative. This saves businesses time, and time means money.

The Office of Regulatory Affairs has already found \$34 million in savings for business. Continuing efforts will cut another \$10 million by the end of 2020.

According to Statistics Canada, for the first time in our province, private sector employment grew to 300,000 during 2019. Strong private sector employment growth helped to drive record high employment of almost 469,000 jobs last spring. Nova Scotians are experiencing the lowest unemployment rates since the 1970s.

We acknowledge the potential impact on the lives of workers and the sector of the decision by Northern Pulp to put their mill into hibernation.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. This government believes the forestry sector has a future in this province.

We know we are in a time of significant change and transition. That is why we are working in partnership with the forestry sector to move forward.

We have created the Forestry Transition Team, with representation from government, industry and post-secondary education, to help lessen the impact on the workers and the sector. We will continue responding to constructive ideas from the sector on programs and services.

Workers who want to develop or transfer their valuable skills will be able to retrain. We believe in investing in Nova Scotians so they can continue to support themselves and their families.

Forestry contractors affected by the closure can apply for short-term repayable financing. The government worked with credit unions on this program which helps contractors with payments on their equipment loans.

Self-employed forestry contractors who are not eligible for Employment Insurance need our support. We are making sure they have access to employment programs through Labour and Advanced Education with \$1.45 million in new provincial funding.

Forestry contractors and woodlot owners can now apply for additional silviculture and roadwork.

Replacing imported fossil fuels with a locally sourced renewable resource will create a new market for lower grade forest fibre and reduce the carbon footprint of public buildings.

The team is focusing on how we can get more economic value from our natural resources, with new markets, new products and new innovative approaches.

With the establishment of the \$50 million Forestry Transition Trust we will continue to provide both short and long term support to those in the sector and to the industry.

In an independent review commissioned by the province Professor Bill Lahey recognized that ecological forestry protects ecosystems and biodiversity, supports economic growth and keeps the forest healthy and sustainable.

Using the expertise of the sector we will continue our efforts to maintain and increase the economic value from forestry. This includes new markets, new products and innovative approaches for this valuable resource.

These are the same approaches that have driven our export success in other sectors.

Nova Scotia exports of all commodities and services reached a milestone \$16.6 billion in 2018. This represents average growth of more than 5 per cent per year since 2016.

On behalf of the Province of Nova Scotia, I congratulate the province's business community for their global success. More and more customers around the world are recognizing the high quality of our products.

Nova Scotia remains Canada's largest seafood exporter with exports worth \$2.3 billion. Shipments of tires are up and close to \$1.2 billion. Frozen fruit is up to \$138 million -- and around the world, people are still wild about our wild blueberries.

Government support for businesses to start and grow exports includes international business development education, business navigators, export growth program funding, and support for trade missions, market intelligence and logistics.

Investing in Modern Infrastructure

After decades of neglect this government will invest \$1 billion in much needed infrastructure. This is the largest single investment in the history of the province and will better support health care and education in the future.

Early in 2020, The Scotiabank Forecast noted public investments in highway twinning and hospitals, as well as shipbuilding and an airport expansion, are helping to support a healthy domestic economy in the coming year.

Modern health care delivery, state-of-the-art schools, safe and efficient highways and waterfront developments will stimulate employment for this generation and serve Nova Scotians for generations to come.

The largest healthcare redevelopment in provincial history is progressing with a \$154 million investment this year.

The QEII New Generation project will expand health care services and facilities at many locations:

- A community outpatient clinic at Bayer's Lake
- Expanded services at Dartmouth General Hospital
- Improved operating capacity at Hants Community Hospital
- An outpatient centre at Halifax Infirmary
- Centres for cancer care at Halifax Infirmary

The Cape Breton Regional Municipality Health Redevelopment will include:

- Major expansion of Sydney's Cape Breton Regional Hospital to include enhanced cancer care unit
- Renovations to the Emergency Department in Glace Bay
- New health centre and long-term care in North Sydney
- A community-based paramedic program covering the Cape Breton Regional Municipality
- A community hub for New Waterford that includes a school, health centre and long-term care facility.

Community-based hospitals and medical centres around the province – such as Middleton, Pugwash and Bridgewater – also require upgrades. This important renewal is supported by \$54.3 million in *Budget 2020-21*.

These investments will modernize the delivery of health services for patients and improve workplaces for medical and health care specialists.

We want all motorists to be safe on our highways. That is why we are investing \$85.3 million more to twin the 100-series highways and to repair and maintain roads, highways and bridges.

Construction on highways 101, 103 and 104 and the Sackville-Bedford-Burnside Connector are either underway or about to start.

We know how important the 104-twinning project between New Glasgow and Antigonish is for all motorists.

We are also committed to the five-year capital plan to build new schools. Students and parents across the province will benefit from about \$266 million to build and renovate 16 schools and the purchase of 30 existing P-3 schools.

Major infrastructure investments will revitalize the waterfront districts in Sydney and Halifax.

The new Marconi Campus for the Nova Scotia Community College will offer state-of-the-art facilities for those who wish to begin or retrain for new careers. In Halifax the Art District will feature a new home for the Nova Scotia Art Gallery and common public spaces. It will provide access to art, culture, world-class exhibitions and festivals.

High-speed internet is critical to the social and economic wellbeing of our communities.

More Nova Scotians will soon have access to high-speed internet connections through the Nova Scotia Internet Trust Fund. This was established in 2018 with investment of \$193 million. Just recently, about \$45 million was committed to five projects, leveraging funds of about \$56 million in private and other public sector funding. More than 42,000 homes and businesses will gain access to high speed internet through these community-based projects. Develop Nova Scotia will also be announcing additional projects through a second round of applications.

The impact on individuals as well as business in rural Nova Scotia will allow them to become more effective, more efficient, and supported by reliable high-speed Internet connectivity.

Confidence in a Brighter Future

We look toward a bright future with confidence in the next generation of Nova Scotians.

The province depends on their diversity, their innovation, their resilience, their creativity and their entrepreneurship.

Government is committed to supporting the development of our future leaders.

Youth employment in Nova Scotia has risen by 8.1% in 2019 – this rapid jump sets a 42-year record. This is encouraging. This tells us that our youth see a future for themselves here at home and are already actively engaged in our growing economy.

We are also seeing a record number of international students who are choosing to stay in Nova Scotia after graduation. In 2019, 601 international graduates were approved by provincial immigration programs. The retention rate rose to 12.6 per cent in 2018 – this represents an historic high for the province.

Government and businesses are supporting students to gain valuable on the job experience and to add innovation to the workforce.

Dartmouth's MetOcean Telematics is a strong exporter currently expanding from ocean technology into wireless business -- part of a worldwide effort to better understand, interpret and connect our planet.

Their Iridium satellite positioning has applications for ice melt monitoring, oil platform safety, wildlife monitoring, tsunami forecasting and search and rescue.

The company hires new graduates through Graduate to Opportunity. As a regular co-op employer, they are embracing the new diversity bursary.

They are not alone. More than 640 employers have hired more than 1,200 recent grads for full-time jobs in their chosen careers through this program.

Clearly, Nova Scotia's highly motivated, skilled and educated population are a strong asset for businesses working in Nova Scotia.

University grants will increase by \$3.6 million as part of a Memorandum of Understanding, bringing the total budget to \$443 million in support of post-secondary education for Nova Scotia students.

The Nova Scotia Loan Forgiveness Program is helping recent Nova Scotian graduates from provincial universities start their working lives with lower debt loads. We will continue this program and add graduates from the Nova Scotia Community College.

We also want to provide opportunity to our African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq students. We will be supporting the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University with a \$350 thousand investment.

We are continuing our strong investment in the P-12 education system.

We are investing another \$15 million – for a total investment of \$45 million – on recommendations from the Commission on Inclusive Education.

Nearly 400 additional teachers, education workers and specialists have enriched our classrooms in the last 19 months. This includes autism specialists, behaviour support specialists, and child and youth practitioners.

Around the world, young people have spoken. They want government to take actions on climate change. We have been listening.

We have set the most ambitious goals in Canada for cutting emissions – 53 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and net-zero by 2050. Nova Scotia is a national leader in fighting climate change and we are making strategic investments as we transition to a greener economy.

Environment is planning to spend \$1.6 million for the start up of the Green Fund.

Energy and Mines is investing nearly \$125 million over the next three years in programs that reduce emissions and create jobs in the green economy. The province will spend about \$44 million for the following initiatives in 2020-21.

- A \$3 million provincial investment in the Low Carbon Economy Fund for the residential solar electricity program, energy efficiency rebates and discounts on efficient products.
- A \$6.5 million provincial investment in green infrastructure projects such as bike lanes, and energy upgrades for Mi'kmaq and public housing.
- A \$10.3 million provincial investment in low-income energy efficiency programs such as HomeWarming and others.
- And we will invest \$24 million towards the Low Carbon Economy Fund and green infrastructure programs.

Today, more than 200 businesses and 1,400 people work in the energy efficiency industry.

We will look to the next generation for leadership on climate action.

When Barack Obama spoke in Halifax, he inspired thousands of students and young people in the audience. And we are in turn inspired by their voices, their talents and their leadership.

Conclusion

As a new decade begins Nova Scotians can be optimistic.

Budget 2020-21: Better Together reflects the importance of partnerships with the private sector, our municipalities and indeed all Nova Scotians.

We have worked hard together to get the province in a position where we can provide investments and support to all of our communities and to all of our citizens.

Our province is in a stronger economic position and *Budget 2020-21* supports programs that matter to Nova Scotians. It also articulates our investments for the future.

When we started on this journey, our Premier, Honourable Stephen McNeil, stated that we as a government will stand beside you and support you. We have done that. We have demonstrated that we can be better together. We are better together.