



Our Platform

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Platform

We want to make sure that Nova Scotians are treated fairly when the unexpected happens

Insurance: We want to make sure that Nova Scotians are treated fairly.

Three years ago the cost of insurance was the "hot issue" everyone was talking about. Many complained about sky rocketing rates that went up for no particular reason. Motorists were outraged and put pressure on the provincial government to do something about it.

But the greatest pressure, I believe, didn't come from the motorists; it came from the Insurance Industry. And it worked – for them!

In a public campaign launched in 2003 by the industry they told Nova Scotians that our insurances rates had to go up because, they claimed, they could no longer afford to pay the high number of payouts for claims due to soft tissue injury.

Many even threatened to close up shop here in Nova Scotia if they didn't get their way.

Well, they got their way. The Conservative government buckled under and put measures into place that they thought would reduce the cost of car insurance. Since then, the Canadian industry has posted recorded profits of \$16 billion in the last three years; \$2.3 billion in the year the conservative government took away the rights of many Nova Scotians to fair compensation.

One of the measures the Tories brought in was a \$2500 cap on damages that a person can receive as compensation for many injuries caused by vehicle accident.

This \$2500 cap is causing severe hardship to many legitimate victims who have suffered great loss due to motor vehicle accidents. Those injured in car accidents are being victimized again.

I believe this is a dark downside to this issue. There is case after case, where Nova Scotians have suffered physically, and then financially because of government policy that limits their legal remedies through no fault of their own.

Many are injured so badly they cannot work, yet they are limited to a \$2500 maximum amount claim for their pain and suffering.

As I said earlier, this issue seems to have slipped below the radar for the Conservatives and the NDP. It hasn't for the Liberal Party. It hasn't for Melissa Gionet.

Melissa was seven months pregnant when her vehicle was hit by another vehicle in December 2003. Luckily, the baby is fine but Melissa was diagnosed with lower back strain and a soft tissue injury.

Melissa was unable to work for more than a year because she was in too much pain. The insurance company involved told Melissa that the new cap on pain and suffering awards meant that \$2,500 at most for severe cases and they said her case wasn't that serious, they offered her \$1,900.

I say this is not right. Insurance companies should not be profiting from victims like Melissa.

A Liberal government would not back down to these financial giants. We want to make sure that Nova Scotians are treated fairly when the unexpected happens. If elected, we will lift the \$2,500 cap and place a \$2,500 deductible on all soft tissue injuries. This is a fair measure for the industry and the insured. This is the same program the Newfoundland government has adopted and we believe it is right for Nova Scotia.

Newfoundland didn't back down, the insurance companies didn't pack up and leave the island. I believe its past time that the government does the right thing for Nova Scotians.

Success depends on having both strong urban and rural areas

Economic Development: Success will depend on having strong urban and rural areas.

Nova Scotia is fortunate to have strong entrepreneurs who have the passion, dedication and innovation to grow their businesses and our industries. These individuals work hard every day to succeed, to compete and to expand in our province's economic environment.

These business leaders are spread across our entire province. Yet, some regions have more economic advantages than others.

The metropolitan area – as a centre for commerce, education, healthcare and transportation – has become the engine of growth for our province.

As Liberals, we understand the needs of our urban and rural communities are not always the same. However, we believe those needs should always be equally important to a government – and will be to a Liberal government.

Governments must ensure our urban regions are economically strong, but that success cannot be achieved by disadvantaging our rural economies and communities.

Liberals believe the successful future of Nova Scotia depends on having both strong urban and rural areas. If we are to stop the out-migration of our youth and give stability to all communities in our province we must have a strong, viable economy from one end of our province to the other.

Our approach to economic development first focuses on our key strength – our people. We will invest like we have never before when it comes to post secondary education. A Liberal government offers fully refundable tax credits for university graduates of \$20,000 and community college graduates of \$10,000. Our future must ensure we first find ways to keep our young in Nova Scotia – and then hold them here with a career.

Greater Halifax is strong and will continue to prosper and be a leading business centre within Canada. To strengthen Nova Scotia we must focus on strengthening rural Nova Scotia.

That is why a Liberal government will create a Ministry of Rural Economic Development dedicated to building our rural communities. This organization will help create sustainable industries in our rural regions and create jobs for those who desperately want to stay and work in their communities. We will review the role and necessity of Nova Scotia Business Inc and the Office of Economic Development – our goal will be to move to a single agency approach.

In our first announcement we talked about the significance of accountability. In particular, we spoke about stronger measures for business loans. All loans over \$250,000 will be reviewed by an all party committee with equal representation. Earlier this week we announced a commitment of \$34 million to our primary industries of fishing, farming, forestry and tourism. Unlike any other party, Liberals believe in our rural economy. While we will take strong measure to re-aim our tourism marketing efforts – we will also support operators with low interest loans of up to \$50,000 for operators. Our money will help operators improve their product and our monies will be aimed at hiring local labourers and contractors.

A Liberal government understands the value of transportation infrastructure to our province's economic development.

That is why a Liberal government will strengthen the infrastructure in rural Nova Scotia. We will spend \$404 million over four years to rebuild rural secondary roads including subdivision roads. This represents an estimated 1,750 kilometers of road rebuilding.

We will begin to lay the groundwork to strengthen our provincial infrastructure. This will include:

- The Port of Halifax
- The ports of the Strait area, Sydney, Shelburne, Digby and Yarmouth
- An air cargo park in Debert
- Commuter services from Windsor, Truro and Halifax and all points in between, and
- Strengthening rail service

A Liberal government will build Nova Scotia's economy, through infrastructure but also through investing in our people and our workforce.

With an aging population and decreasing birthrate, immigration is a vital piece in our province's economic development.

A Liberal government will expand the provincial nominee program. And we will expedite the credentialing of professionals who must meet domestic standards. We commit to increase the training spaces and recruitment of foreign trained nurses and physicians. Further, we will create a family class under the provincial nominee program.

We will focus on professions facing shortages in our province, like engineers, physicians, nurses, trades people and occupational therapists. Nova Scotia will increase support for community-based settlement services, and seek a level of federal support for immigration services similar to that provided in Quebec and Ontario.

A Liberal government will also invest in the long-term success of our province. We will focus on young, skilled immigrants and create retention programs that discourage them from moving to larger centres that traditionally attract more immigrants.

A Liberal government will also support our immigrants with more community-based settlement services, including language training. We want our new Nova Scotians to be included in our economy, and also our society. The key to that involvement is sharing a language.

Beyond having strong human resources to grow our economy we know that we must have strong natural resources.

One of our greatest natural resources is not being developed. Our oil and gas industry has potential, but without the proper development, Nova Scotians will not experience the economic benefits from the industry.

A Liberal government will reduce the regulatory burden on the offshore and inshore industry. We will work with the industry to stimulate exploration and development with an investment of \$4 million over four years.

Nova Scotia has the resource but we must make it easier for companies to explore and develop that resource.

Liberals know that small business owners help keep our province's economy healthy. They provide products and services to our larger employers and they provide thousands of jobs to Nova Scotians.

We will undertake a detailed review of the \$6.5 billion in spending and undertake an economic benefit measurement and analysis on any contract over \$250,000. We will make greater efforts to ensure Nova Scotian companies are invited to bid on contracts under \$25,000. We must ensure Nova Scotian companies have every opportunity to competitively bid and win contracts.

Liberals understand the hard work and determination it takes to succeed in business, especially small business. To recognize that, by July 2008, a Liberal government will increase the tax-free threshold for small businesses from \$350,000 to \$500,000.

A Liberal government will respond to the recommendation by small business and have a targeted reduction in red tape and regulations. This will be a comprehensive review with a goal to reduce regulations and red tape by 1/3. A Liberal government will provide a \$3,000 rebate on provincial portion of HST for first time homebuyers of newly constructed housing units. The rebate will be to a maximum of 20% of the provincial portion of taxes up to a maximum of \$3,000 and be effective in 2007.

As well, we recognize the value of the film industry to Nova Scotia. We appreciate that without adequate support our province will lose this industry and its workforce. A Liberal government wants to strengthen the film industry. We will ensure the film tax credit remains competitive at the national level. As well, we will re-instate the Nova Scotia Arts Council.

A Liberal government will help our business leaders; entrepreneurs and small business owners grow their businesses and build our province.

We will invest in our people. We will invest in our infrastructure. And we will invest in our industries. A Liberal government will create a more prosperous Nova Scotia for today and for generations to come.

Living within our means: a costing of platform initiatives

Platform Costs: Living within our means

Liberal leader, Francis MacKenzie today released a document entitled "Living Within Our Means" * the full costing of the Liberal platform, a four year plan with projections based upon living within our means; paying down the debt; and sustainable tax relief for all Nova Scotians.

The Liberal Plan allows for a 3% increase in program spending at a cost of \$168 million compared to the Conservative budget tabled just prior to the election that called for an increase in spending in 2006-07 of \$399 million.

"The budget presented by the Conservatives and subsequently accepted by the NDP," said Francis MacKenzie, "calls for increasing the number of public servants -- not including nurses, doctors or teachers -- by 608 new positions. We will not accept that without review."

MacKenzie also pointed to the Conservative party and NDP plans that expensed \$34 million for the removal of the HST on home heating in 2006-07 but not subsequent years. "They will have to reduce revenues by \$75 million per year or increase spending by the same amount," said MacKenzie.

Promising that fiscal prudence will be a top priority, MacKenzie presented a plan that calls for:

Assumptions:

- Revenue to Grow by 5% annually (revenue growth will slow due to economic conditions * but it is expected the Federal government correspondingly will increase transfer payments). Revenue growth over the past four years - 4.7%; 13.2%; 9.2%; 8.2%)
- Core Program Spending (programs in place in 2005-06) * projected cost increases to be at or slightly above inflation to allow for salary increases and operating cost increases * allowed for a 3% annual increase. (Program spending increases over the past four years * 7.6%; 7.3%; 9.2%; 5.0%)
- If revenue growth does not reach the projected 5% - a Liberal government will reduce spending across the board by the required amount to ensure we have a surplus of \$70 million.

- Any surplus to debt reduction with a minimum commitment to pay no less than \$70 million per year.
- New program spending under Liberal platform will not exceed the difference between revenue growth * less debt servicing and core program spending * "living within our means"
- The Liberal Plan calls for a reduction in consulting as recommended by the Auditor General. Currently the Conservatives spend \$140 million per year, the Liberal plan calls for a 50% reduction, saving \$70 million per year.

Key Spending Priorities:

- Tax relief for all Nova Scotians
- Reduce annual tuition costs; increase qualifying level for student loans; provide incentives for graduates to stay and work in Nova Scotia.
- Creation of Seniors and Long Term Care Ministry * focus on keeping people in their homes as long as possible; freeing up hospital beds and giving seniors a voice at the Cabinet table
- 1000 new childcare spaces and a \$5,000 per child tax credit for households with a stay at home parent.
- Rebuild 1,750 kilometers of secondary roads
- A minimum of \$70 million per year committed to debt reduction.

"The only detailed data and meaningful comparative assumptions available for all three parties," said MacKenzie, is Fiscal 2006-07. The PC budget/platform called for a base of \$399 million in new program spending versus 2005-06."

Liberal Plan \$376.8 million

NDP Plan \$399 million (budget) + \$38.5 million = \$437.5 million

PC Plan \$399 million (budget) + \$114 million = \$513 million

A Liberal government will help industries be more competitive on the world market and have improved access to the Nova Scotia market

Industry: We will help companies to compete in the world market and at home.

All is not well in our rural economy in Nova Scotia. I am concerned, as we all should be. This is no time for government to pretend a solution will simply appear.

Fishing, farming, forestry and tourism are the fabric of rural Nova Scotia. Many of our communities were founded on these industries and continue to rely on them. They are by far the largest employers and Nova Scotians who live in rural areas know their importance to their livelihoods.

My concern after traveling this province for 19 months is - what is the impact to all Nova Scotians if we do not soon see a strengthening in our primary industries. The strong Canadian dollar has had a powerful and negative impact on their survivability. We have seen the early impacts of this new reality - with the closures of fish plants in Cheticamp, Glace Bay and North Sydney. As well, we have seen the closure of Shaw Wood in Cornwallis Park. And we are all gravely concerned about the potential impact of a closure of Stora - this will have an impact felt across our province and will impact far more than the 600 workers at the mill.

When companies close in rural communities - their workers usually have one of two options - to leave the community or enter the social assistance roles. What obviously occurs - is when these workers stay in Nova Scotia and are not able to find a job - is that they go from being a contributor to the tax base to a consumer of tax revenues. We all lose in Nova Scotia. Our primary industries employ approximately 70,000 people. Each time we have 100 people enter the social assistance ranks costs taxpayers approximately \$1.2 million per year in direct assistance.

We are known worldwide for the quality of our Atlantic lobster, and Oxford blueberries, and the bountiful hospitality of our tourism industry. However, in the recent past our fishing, farming, forestry and tourism industries have suffered more than other sectors. They will not be able to sustain many more years of high debt, small margins, a strong Canadian dollar and government neglect. We as Nova Scotians are all going to have to make a concerted effort to buy and support their products. They are high quality and while they may be occasionally priced a bit more than imports to the province - we must adopt a community of looking after and supporting our own. If we don't; we will all pay a bigger price. A Liberal government will put into place several measures to help these industries become more competitive on the world market and have improved access to the Nova Scotia market. We will also take other measures for rural Nova Scotia to be addressed later in the week in our economic development platform.

We will introduce legislation that will permit targeted sectors to hire those able and interested on social assistance to work up to 10 weeks per year. These workers will not have their earnings clawed back from their social assistance payments.

This measure is specifically designed to help offset the seasonal shortage of labour during peak demands that frustrates businesses while helping families reliant today on social assistance so that they might improve their situation through their work – and possibly gain a new skill.

We will also

- Give Nova Scotians the ability to transfer license of a farm, mill or woodlot, to a direct family member without triggering capital gains provincially.
- We will conduct a comprehensive review of the decision to eliminate outsourced crop specialist services.
- Under the Liberal Energy plan – we have made a provision for helping farmers and businesses with financial assistance for co-generation and alternate energy such as wind, solar and bio-energy.
- Under the Liberal Environmental plan – we have committed \$1 million per year for four years for research on bio-energy solutions using crops grown by Nova Scotia farmers. We must fully assess potentially opportunities for both our environment and hopefully helping our farmers by identifying new opportunities.
- Also under the Liberal Environment Plan is a commitment to spend \$1 million per year on liming assistance for agriculture lands and watercourses – we believe it is important that we increase the productivity of our lands and improve the acidic levels in our water for fish habitats.
- We will invest 34 million over the next four years to help our primary industries improve their access to the market and price stability.

A Liberal government will make every effort to strengthen and expand the hog, beef and crop industries by:

- Ensuring we help them work through their near term challenges and immediately embark upon developing a long-term plan by the end of this calendar year.
- Annual price stabilization support for the beef, hog and growers for up to four years during a restructuring of their industries.
- We will create a Nova Scotia “brand” of beef, pork and produce reflective of the quality of our products.
- We will make every effort to help assist farmers achieve greater access to the Nova Scotia market.
- Retailers who support Nova Scotia products will be given preference on opportunities to bid for government food contracts.
- Farm assistance will be made earlier in the year when farmers need it.

- The future of food production in Nova Scotia must also be supported by a research and product development strategy that includes the functional foods and nutraceuticals at our universities and a Food Development Centre. A food safety program must be developed. It will provide an added level of assurance to support the made-in-Nova Scotia brand. Government must also develop initiatives designed to expand organic farming in our province.

Our fisheries sector also needs more attention.

- We will immediately review the feasibility of a lobster cannery in southwest Nova Scotia.
- We must assist clam diggers re-seed depleted beds – and ensure we have a sustainable basis for small processors
- We will continue to work to find a solution for succession planning (capital gains) and fishing licenses being accepted as collateral with the Federal Department of Fisheries.

A Liberal government will re-investment some of the tax revenue - \$100 million from sales taxes alone - from the tourism industry to strengthen the revenue base of the tourism industry.

- We will offer low interest loans up to \$50,000 to rural operators with more than 5 rooms for renovation of existing facilities, \$5,000 per room.
- We will engage in a new marketing approach with increased emphasis on marketing the "Nova Scotia" experience, concentrating efforts on the rest of Canada and Europe.
- We will capitalize on our strengths of nature-based tourism, adventure tourism and agri-tourism as methods to stimulate increased visitors.
- A Liberal government will initiate a program leading to the creation of a new convention facility in downtown Halifax as tool to draw large conventions. We will also campaign to encourage them to bring their families and spend extra time exploring our province to experience the REAL "Nova Scotia."

Attracting tourists here is part of the challenge. We also must find ways to make it easy for them to travel to Nova Scotia. For example, we will aggressively work to find replacement for the Scotian Prince and other passenger ferry landings. Our goal must not solely focus on where any new passenger ferry lands as long as it is at a Nova Scotia port. And, we will improve the roads they – and we all – travel on in the province.

Among other initiatives a Liberal government will seek to find the financial support for five new tourism destination projects each year for three years that can be self-sustaining. The initial capital cost will be through a joint funding effort from all three levels of government.

My immediate ask of each and every Nova Scotia is to seriously consider spending a portion of your vacation travel budget in Nova Scotia this year – this is an issue that Nova Scotians can help by supporting our local operators. A Liberal government cares about the survival of rural communities and the industries on which they depend. We will strengthen the foundation upon which this province has been built. This is what Nova Scotians want. This is what we will do.

We will manage the healthcare budget, guarantee access within set time frames and more

Health: We will guarantee timely access, set up specialty clinics and more.

The Healthcare budget continues to balloon without a corresponding improvement of the system. Improving healthcare is a big job. It's a job we are prepared to tackle.

A Liberal government will begin by managing the healthcare budget. We will not take money out, but we will use the money being spent on healthcare more effectively.

We have taken a bold first step by separating functions pertaining to seniors out of the Ministry of Health – including homecare, long-term care and pharmacare. This division of responsibilities will allow two separate entities that are smaller in size to work on creating more efficiencies while maintaining or improving care. Our focus must be on moving seniors out of the hospital into proper care facilities – including their home – that are more conducive to their lifestyle. This will ensure seniors are in a proper yet lower cost environment - freeing up needed hospital beds for medical procedures.

On healthcare - we will start with a healthcare guarantee. Liberals believe that Nova Scotians have a right to timely healthcare. There is no excuse for a government to allow its citizens to suffer in pain or have their health deteriorate. A Liberal government will guarantee access to medical procedures within set time frames. We will work with the medical community to establish acceptable timelines. If we are unable to deliver those vital medical procedures in a timely fashion within our healthcare system, a Liberal government will provide the resources to send the patient to another jurisdiction to have the procedure. That is our guarantee: improve the system to meet the needs of our citizens and not let Nova Scotians become victims of a system that doesn't meet their needs. A Liberal government will also create specialty clinics that will ease the burden on our hospitals. These clinics will be there for Nova Scotians who have a fracture, need stitches, or routine medical tests.

Under a Liberal government, hospitals will focus on acute care.

We will work with the medical community to reform primary healthcare and establish community health centres that provide 24-hour care. Our goal is to properly provide care to patients in clinics reducing the demands on hospitals. These clinics will provide a wide range of services delivered by the most appropriately qualified professional in a multi-team environment.

A Liberal government will follow the very successful model operating in other provinces by establishing these primary care teams. A \$37.5 million dollar investment over four years will help ensure more Nova Scotians have access to the medical care they need, when they need it.

A Liberal government seeks to create up to 10 primary care teams throughout Nova Scotia. These multi-disciplinary primary care teams with each member having his or her distinct role in providing care. They would include physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dieticians and pharmacists. These teams would be organized to provide the level of care a patient requires 24 hours a day. We are facing a shortage of healthcare professionals in our province. A Liberal government will streamline the accreditation requirements for qualified foreign doctors and nurses.

We will also work with post-secondary institutions to increase enrollments in nursing and medical programs.

Many Nova Scotians in rural parts of the province requiring medical treatments must travel great distances to access their care. Traveling to and from these appointments can be costly. A Liberal government will not have Nova Scotians go without necessary medical treatment because they cannot afford the traveling costs associated with that care.

That is why a Liberal government will create a rural travel assistance fund to reduce the transportation and accommodation costs associated with treatment when local care is not available. Further, we will provide residents of Cumberland County with medical passes for travel over the Cobequid pass – these passes can only be used for medical visits.

A Liberal government will also cover the costs associated with catastrophic prescription drugs. We will place these life-saving drugs under the public insurance program.

The costs of treating cancer and other life-threatening illnesses can be insurmountable to some families.

We will also put under the public insurance program the services required for immediate post-hospital homecare and palliative care.

Under a Liberal government, people requiring care will be placed in the environment most appropriate to their needs. We will focus on home care, long-term care, self-managed care and palliative care.

A Liberal government will invest an additional 90 million dollars in homecare over four years as part of our seniors ministry. Nova Scotians want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, and we want to help them. We must provide our seniors with more options than just focusing on nursing home beds. We will provide the supports needed to do that.

A Liberal government believes that providing Nova Scotians with appropriate medical advice when they need it will help keep us all healthy.

That is why a Liberal government will commit \$14 million over four years to create a toll-free Healthline staffed by nurses. Nova Scotia is one of the very few areas not offering such a service for basic medical advice and in cases when many seek an opinion of what is suggested. The models in use throughout Canada have proven to be effective in improving care and reducing costs to the system.

A Liberal government will also implement safety measures to help protect our health professionals from the dangers associated with their jobs. We will commit to follow a safe needle program as part of the \$26 million in funding for workplace safety. Our medical staff members are stuck with used needles several times throughout their careers. This is particularly the case for nurses. We want to protect them from the risks associated with a needle mishap. A Liberal government will also invest in the health of our youth.

We will commit \$35 million over four years to create a comprehensive child and youth mental health strategy that provides therapy services in a variety of clinical areas.

We will also provide 500 insulin pumps over three years for children with Type 1 diabetes. As a father of a Type 1 diabetic I am aware of the improvements to their lifestyle – my family will not access this funding.

A Liberal government will establish a tax credit for physical programs. It will be all-inclusive and available for people of all ages. Whether Nova Scotians want to participate in sports, dance or get fit at a health club, a Liberal government will provide them with the assistance to be active and maintain a healthy lifestyle. A Liberal government will also commit to increasing the age for children's dentistry under the public system from 10 years of age to 12 years with a goal to achieve 16 years of age.

A Liberal government will manage healthcare and put the resources where they should be.

- We will hire more doctors and nurses
- We will create safer work environments for our providers
- We will make our hospitals more effective
- We will properly utilize our healthcare professionals
- We will make our province healthy and ensure everyone has access to a healthy lifestyle

Spending Highlights (New Spending)

2006-07 fiscal \$7,250,000

Four years \$90,900,000

Seniors Ministry and Continuing Care

2006-07 fiscal \$50,500,000

Four years \$285,000,000

We will boost in-class resources, help children with special needs, reduce bullying and more

Education P-12: We will help students, teachers, schools and those with special needs.

Primary education, as its name suggests, provides the platform on which all future learning takes place. So, just as a house with a poor foundation will require ongoing maintenance and repair, children who do not have a good grounding in basic learning strategies and language skills will be restricted in what they can achieve year after year, for the rest of their lives.

The most common advice given to struggling students is, "You must try harder." In fact, we believe that when it comes to our education system, government must try harder.

Quality classroom teaching has the most influence on successful outcomes for students. While there will always be students who need specialist teaching at some stage of their literacy journey, most students will become successful in reading, writing and math if they experience high-quality teaching in their everyday classrooms. Let me be quite clear, the problem in our schools is not the inadequacy of our teachers. It has everything to do with the inadequacy of the resources available to them.

A Liberal government will invest \$26 million in working with our children early on in the elementary grades to assess areas for improvements and increased

support. This will be through engaging more professionals trained in the areas of identifying areas of concern in our young and taking helpful actions.

A Liberal government will provide an additional \$29.5 million over four years to boost the in-class resources to specifically address the unacceptably low literacy and math scores.

And we will do more. A Liberal government will invest in providing the much needed additional assistance for children with special needs including Attention Deficit, Dyslexia and related learning disabilities.

We have earmarked \$38 million over four years in pilot funding to assist children with specialized education to address their special education needs and an additional \$2 million per year in funding to work with children with Autism in Nova Scotia.

As well, a Liberal government will commit \$14 million in new money over the next four years for new textbooks for our schools.

Many school boards have worked to improve the nutrition in schools in response to manifest problem of childhood obesity. Their actions will pay great dividends over the years in reduced health risks associated with obesity. But improved nutrition is only part of the answer. We must tackle as well the increasing problem of our sedentary society. A Liberal government will introduce compulsory physical activity in grades P-9 so that children can, at an early age, develop the healthy habits that will follow them throughout their longer lives. School systems apply various descriptors to determine students at risk of failing or dropping out. Classroom teachers find themselves working with students in need of serious interventions and at times feel ill-equipped to work with such youngsters. In fact, for many students the problem is not the lack of ability or interest in learning but the subject matter and academic career orientation. We will address the void currently found in students not interested in the academic world in Grades 10-12 and invest \$54.5 million over the next four years on vocational education.

The Liberal government introduced the very successful Nova Scotia Community College and we will build on that model in two ways. We will move to integrate courses at the high school level with programs that lead to trades, skills and applied science programs at the NSCC. As well, we will continue to encourage integration of courses at the college with those at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College and other institutions so that students who have successfully complete a diploma program at NSCC have the option of continuing their education at a first rate applied science or technical institution.

Our goal is to increase the number of students graduating by 10% within three years.

Our schools are facing a great transition in the coming years with a large number of teachers due to retire. This is projected to result in teacher shortages. A Liberal government will work with NSTU to explore the feasibility of creating an internship for new teachers – a two year B Ed involving one year at university and one year in the classroom with pay and under supervision. The cost to implement this initiative will be \$16.75 million over four years.

Ironically, the other challenge facing the early education system is the declining enrollments in certain areas which because of the funding formulas being tied to enrollment threaten many schools. A Liberal government will commit to setting minimum funding limits to guarantee adequate resources and fair approaches to efficient use of those resources.

We will review and adjust funding at least twice per year rather than the annual system that currently penalizes schools that have a large influx of students after September.

We will assess using the school buses and buildings with the intention of more efficient use of these resources. For example, many believe that school buses may be used effectively and efficiently to meet transportation needs of seniors' and others in the community when not required for school programs.

Last week I spoke about bullying -- a common problem that greatly affects the school environment and student learning. Some people view bullying simply as a "rite of passage," but this anti-social behavior is a form of harassment that can result in life-long emotional, physical, and academic consequences. In Nova Scotia schools under a Liberal government, bullying will not be tolerated. But saying that places an onus on government to develop adequate resources for teachers, school administrators and parents to effectively deal with the problem. That is our commitment. A Liberal government will do what must be done to make all children free from the distress caused by schoolyard bullying.

Spending highlights

Initiative	2006-07 (Millions)	4 Years (Millions)
Internship Program	\$2.5	\$16.75
Literacy and Math	\$6.0	\$29.5
Overcoming Learning Disabilities	\$1.0	\$38.0
Vocational, Skills and Trades	\$2.0	\$54.5
Early Interventions	\$2.0	\$26.0
Textbooks	\$2.0	\$14.0
TOTAL	\$17.5	\$186.75

We will make Nova Scotians safer by addressing the workplace, troubled youth, new drivers, car theft and more

Safety: We will make Nova Scotians safer.

Whether we are at work or out in our community, Nova Scotians must be safe and feel safe. In some way, at some time over the past few years, each of us has had reason to question whether enough is being done to assure our safety – on the job, in the home and on the streets of our communities.

Some of us have family members who have experienced a work-related injury, while others have faced vandalism or had our personal safety violated. Liberals believe that with the proper commitment from government, we can improve the safety of all Nova Scotians.

We will begin by investing 26 million dollars over the next four years to reduce work-related accidents and improve workplace safety.

Nova Scotia has some of the highest workplace injuries in Canada.

A Liberal government will make the workplace a priority. We believe that along with employers, we have a responsibility to keep employees safe on the job. We also recognize that workplace safety will result in fewer lost workdays, which will make our businesses and industries more productive and more competitive. We believe it is a far better use of tax dollars to try and reduce incidents, rather than deal with the consequences of an accident. And, that is good news for all Nova Scotians.

A Liberal government will also increase personal safety in our communities. We will strengthen our public transportation with increased safety measures for taxi drivers. We will achieve this by providing assistance for the installation of alert lights, video cameras or shields in their vehicles.

A Liberal government will also make our roads safer for pedestrians. We will install red lights at crosswalks to make them more visible for drivers. We will also reduce the speed limit in school zones to 35 kilometres per hour across the province.

We will help young drivers afford safe driver programs by allocating 50 per cent of the revenue collected from impaired driving fines to the fees associated with these programs.

A Liberal government believes that all youth should have the resources they need to make the right choices.

Too many of our youth have fallen through the cracks in recent years because of inadequate programs for our young people – particularly our vulnerable and at-risk children. We will commit 4.5 million dollars over four years for counseling and programs for our youth in conflict with the law.

We will also fund after-school programs in community centres and schools – including youth centres and YMCA's . This is a 26 million dollar commitment over four years.

We understand that children need care and guidance to make to the right decisions. We also understand that for single parents, sometimes providing that on their own can be difficult -- especially when they don't have the financial resources that are sometimes needed to provide that direction.

That's why a Liberal government will increase the number of maintenance enforcement officers in our province. Children should not go without. Children deserve support to set them on a positive life path.

A Liberal government will ensure children and their single parent will get the resources they need to do just that.

Liberal's believe that nothing is more important for a child's well being than a sense of security, whether they are at home or at school.

A Liberal government will address schoolyard bullying. We will enact programs that have been recommended by educators and parents. A Liberal government will do what must be done to make all children free from the distress caused by the schoolyard bully.

But Nova Scotians are also concerned about youth crime in our province. Our candidates are hearing that concern on doorsteps in all parts of the province. A Liberal government will enact youth crime legislation that provides greater protection to at-risk children. This legislation will also provide greater parental responsibility for children who commit property crime.

We will also appoint a special counsel on organized crime to recommend new legislative and policing measures.

A Liberal government will also seek the cooperation of the federal government to strengthen firearm offence penalties, prohibit conditional sentences for violent crime and strengthen the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

We have all heard the tragic stories of teen auto theft in our province.

A Liberal government will introduce tougher penalties for car thieves and drivers fleeing police in stolen vehicles.

We will adopt an aggressive strategy to engage Nova Scotians.

A Liberal government will encourage Nova Scotians to learn more about car theft and provide them with information on options to protect their vehicles, such as approved immobilizers. These immobilizers have been effective in other jurisdictions in deterring car theft.

But we will not stop there. We understand that to protect Nova Scotians and make them feel safe in our communities, we must provide additional resources to prevent crime and penalize offenders.

Under the Conservatives, Halifax became the violent crime capital of Canada. According to Statistics Canada, our province's capital has the second highest rate of victimization in the country.

A Liberal government will make Nova Scotia a safe province again.

A Liberal government will spend 60 million dollars over the next four years to support an additional 200 police officers, RCMP and other enforcement personnel.

A Liberal government will take preventative measures to ensure our communities are safe.

Jurisdictions across North America have experienced the affects of crystal meth in their communities. Without the proper precautions, Nova Scotia will experience the same level of crisis. Fore-warned should be fore-armed.

A Liberal government will implement a strategy that includes measures to restrict the supply and production of crystal meth. We will work with police and other agencies to develop a public awareness campaign on the dangers of the drug. And, we will contribute additional resources for the treatment of crystal meth. We understand Nova Scotians are troubled by the increased rates of crime in our province. We understand their concerns about safety at work. And we know they want to protect their children from crime and from a life of crime.

A Liberal government will act.

A Liberal government is committed to making this province safer – at home, at work and in our communities.

Spending:

Police/Enforcement Officials -- \$60 million over four years

Youth Counseling – Conflict with Law -- \$4.5 million over four years

After School Programs -- \$26 million over four years
Workplace Safety -- \$26 million over four years

A new approach to funding for municipalities

Municipalities: We will offer a new approach to funding.

There are 55 municipalities in Nova Scotia -- local governments working very hard to address the wide variety of community services funded through property taxes. These services are essential to every Nova Scotia community.

Liberals believe property taxes should pay for property services -- like roads, policing, water, wastewater and recreational facilities. We do not believe our municipalities should have to collect tax to fund provincial responsibilities, like education, housing and correctional facilities.

That is why a Liberal government will have a new approach to funding for municipalities. We endorse the proposal by the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities that recommends a significant change in the way the provincial and municipal funding formula is structured.

Over five years, a Liberal government will completely eliminate municipal levies for education.

We will eliminate levies for correctional services, over the same period.

And we will eliminate public housing levies that divert municipal funds from much needed infrastructure improvements and local service delivery.

We will assume 20 per cent of the financial responsibility in each year of the five-year plan starting in 2007-08 as proposed by UNSM. The total cost of this funding transfer will be 183 million dollars per year.

In return, the municipalities will be required to spend the savings on road improvements, including subdivision roads. This money must be in addition to current municipal budgets for road repairs and upgrades.

Liberals believe there is a fundamental flaw in the current formula which sees property taxes pay for provincial responsibilities.

A Liberal government will be fair and take responsibility for our obligations. This fairness will extend to all aspects of governing, including property owners facing severe assessment increases.

The inequity in property assessment values in Nova Scotia has been the topic of much discussion. Many seniors find themselves in a position of having to sell their family home because they can no longer afford to pay their property taxes. Waterfront property has faced some of the most dramatic jumps in property assessment value. Some homeowners are facing 10, 20 and even 30 per cent increases in one year alone.

I have heard stories of homeowners who have been forced to sell homes that have been in their families for generations. Homes that have been the scene of family reunions, grandchildren running across the lawn and perennial flowers planted by those no longer with us.

This assessment shock has got to end. There has to be a determined and diligent effort to find a solution to make the system fair.

We will do just that.

A Liberal government will immediately freeze property assessments for five years at the current 2006 level.

During this time, we will develop an alternative tax structure program that can be fairly administered.

If inflation rates become a burden on municipalities, they will have the ability to adjust tax rates to make up the difference. However, inflation has been relatively stable over the last number of years and is not expected to rise much over the next four to five years.

Property owners will not have to worry about applying for this freeze. Assessments will automatically be capped or held to its current value while the new tax structure is developed.

New housing and construction will be assessed based on the 2006 valuation year to maintain consistency with existing properties.

This new approach will also save Nova Scotians money. During the five-year restructuring period, properties will not be assessed every year. This will also eliminate costs associated with the huge number of appeals that Service Nova Scotia must now review on an annual basis.

A Liberal government will also take a new approach to community funding. In every community in our province many projects and get overlooked. Sometimes it's because they don't fit into provincial programs. Other times it's because community groups don't have the resources, capacity or knowledge of the assistance that is available.

For many small communities across the province, decisions appear to be made in the legislature or in government offices far away from their home.

As Liberals we care about all community initiatives no matter how small. We know they are important to our communities. And we know the great work that community organizations are doing to improve the quality of life for Nova Scotians.

To recognize that effort, a Liberal government will provide funding for community initiatives that are important and yet never seem to have a source for funding. It is usually these priorities that go unfunded and create other challenges in a community.

Totaling eight million dollars in year one and increasing to \$26 million dollars by year four, this initiative will cost 67 million dollars over four years. Over the 52 constituencies, the monies will be distributed fairly and based upon project importance.

The fund will support projects focused on the environment, recreation, insurance for community volunteer groups, seniors, veterans and legions and those with disabilities.

It could be used to repair walkways, clean-up rivers, beaches, parks and trails. Volunteer boards throughout Nova Scotia will review funding applications. Strict guidelines for transparency and monitoring will be developed and put into place. A Liberal government will care about every community in our province. We believe all regions of the province deserve equal attention for community identified priorities and projects.

A Liberal government will deliver a fair and balanced approach for everyone – our municipalities, our communities and every property owner in our province.

Meaningful assistance to students and universities, and strong encouragement for graduates to stay

Education: We will give meaningful assistance to students and universities.

The greatest threat to a prosperous Nova Scotia is the consequences that will result as graduates leave our Province.

Without them, we will not have the workforce to provide the services we need to function as a society. We will not have the people to contribute the tax dollars we need to support our growing number of seniors.

Without an educated workforce, we will not be able to grow our economy and create new business opportunities. We need students to stay in Nova Scotia so we can encourage new business to locate here.

Without young graduates, our rural communities will have to deal with no workers, fewer volunteers, no taxpayers, and no young adults to support our primary industries.

Families will continue to be separated because of necessity – our young will go where there is a job – not just any job, but a job that can help them pay off their crippling student debt load. Mortgage sized debts at age 24 with no opportunity or ability to pay will continue to drive our young people out of Nova Scotia. Many wonder where the jobs come from – well, we as Liberals understand more than any other party that our province is about to enter a new reality for the first time in our memories.

We are about to experience the beginning of the retirement wave of baby boomers. Many experts are now stating we are about to experience a labour crunch. Namely, there will be more jobs available than people to fill them. We will also come under competitive threat from other regions in Canada and the US whereby they will come and try to steal our labour by offering promises of a new life. They will do this because they too will need educated young people.

As Nova Scotians, we invest approximately \$70,000 to educate a student from Primary to Grade 12 – we then, as taxpayers, invest another \$210 million in post secondary funding. And then we don't do a proper job in looking after our investment, namely keeping more of our young in Nova Scotia. That must stop. We are going to protect our investment by continuing to invest beyond high school--- into university or college---- and continue to invest as graduates enter the workforce.

We need to invest today or we will pay a premium in the future.

A Liberal government is needed now to confront this challenge. Five platform bullets as offered by other parties are not enough to convince me that they have a handle on our future challenges. They ignore this reality and we can no longer sit idly by and watch our young people leave Nova Scotia.

Today's statement is about our long-term sustainability and survivability of our communities. It is about the prosperity of Nova Scotians.

We are asking Nova Scotians for a mandate based on our ability to face our challenges head on - We can't gloss over them and pretend they do not exist. We can't wait any longer. . .

If Nova Scotians accept our party to form government I cannot think of anything more critical than keeping our young here to help us build a future – without them, there is no future.

Tuitions at Nova Scotia's universities are \$2,000 above the national average. A Nova Scotia university education is the least affordable in Canada and United States. These statistics are staggering, yet are the reality in what young Nova Scotians face when making decisions about their future.

Liberals want to make the options for high school graduates more encouraging.

Liberals want to make a Nova Scotia post-secondary education affordable again. We have listened to the concerns of students and their families. We have listened to the concerns of our universities.

A Liberal government is ready to act.

A Liberal government will begin by providing 120 million dollars over four years in tuition fee assistance for Nova Scotians attending a university. The assistance will be provided to the student's university upon completion of each year of study. Assistance will begin at \$600 for the academic year 2006-07 expanding to \$900 in 2009-10.

Building on the Liberal tradition, we will also provide the same assistance to students who choose to attend a community college. The Liberals introduced the community college system to Nova Scotia and we will strengthen that system by supporting its students.

Young Nova Scotians deserve a future with opportunities in their own province. They should not have to leave their home communities in search of employment.

A Liberal government wants to help all Nova Scotia graduates build a career and a life in Nova Scotia. We recognize the province's future economic success depends on the talent of our educated youth. Unless we address this issue, our young people will continue to leave our rural communities and our province. That is why a Liberal government will provide an incentive for new post-secondary graduates who remain in the province to work and build their careers.

A Liberal government believes rewarding those who choose to stay and help build our future.

We know our graduates want to stay in the province but are lured out west with higher paying jobs and lower taxes. A Liberal government wants to make Nova Scotia a place where graduates can find meaningful employment and incentives that make sense for our youth.

Under a Liberal government, each new graduate who decides to work in Nova Scotia will receive a fully refundable provincial tax credit for 10 years. This program will assist graduates beginning in September 2006.

It provides a fully refundable \$2,000 tax credit for university graduates and a \$1,000 credit for community college graduates. We believe that any tuition plan needs to address our community college students and graduates.

Based on the national average, Nova Scotia has a disproportionately high university enrolment when compared to the community college system. This is creating a trades skills shortage in our province.

A Liberal government is committed to supporting more young Nova Scotians to enter the trades. The Liberal tax credit will make it more affordable for new trades people to use their skills in our province. This is good news for our youth and good news for our economy.

A Liberal government will also assist recent graduates. Individuals who graduated between January 1, 2004 and September 1, 2006 - will qualify for 50 per cent of the tax credit, if they are working in Nova Scotia.

And, of course, this tax benefit will be available to immigrants who come to Nova Scotia to attend university and find employment here after graduation.

Liberals also know how committed parents are to making sure their children have a solid education that prepares them for the future. We also know the financial pressures that come with that commitment.

That is why a Liberal government will make student loans more assessable and take the financial burden off many families. Families should not have to choose between soccer camp for their 12-year-old and tuition for their university-ready child.

Under a Liberal government, families with incomes below \$125,000 will be eligible for student assistance.

This commitment, combined with our tuition rebate and tax credit program will make post-secondary education more accessible, more affordable and more attainable for Nova Scotia's youth.

Our post-secondary plan does not end with providing help to students, recent graduates and their families. A Liberal government will also provide assistance to universities.

Our universities are crumbling. The leadership at our post-secondary institutions has been telling the Conservative government for years they needed resources

to maintain their infrastructure. And today, our universities are years behind in deferred maintenance costs.

Liberals believe we must make universities healthy and safe environments for our students and their employees.

That is why a Liberal government will commit 70 million dollars over four years to provide infrastructure assistance. Under the Conservatives, students paid the price with high tuitions for Tory neglect of our universities.

As Liberals we know we can do better. And we will do better. Our plan puts forward a plan that will provide relief for our post-secondary students and for their parents. It also gives new graduates the break they need to build their futures in Nova Scotia and contribute to the future success of our province.

The Conservatives have failed our students; our universities and their lack of support will destroy our economic future.

The NDP offer a Wal-Mart style Roll Back Plan. But instead of everyday low prices they offer every day low expectations.

Don't you think students deserve more?

Liberals do . . . Liberals believe our province deserves the support of our the best and brightest and a Liberal government will support them in return.

Highlights:

- Family income under \$125,000 qualifies for student assistance
- Fully refundable tax credit of \$2,000 per university graduate; \$1,000 per community college graduate
- Students who graduated between January 1, 2004 and September 1, 2006 qualify for 50% of tax credit
- Completion Bonus – 2006-07 \$600; 2007-08 \$700; 2008-09 \$800; 2009-10 \$900

Balanced social programs for working families, early learning and childcare, housing and more

Social Programs: We will create balanced programs for all Nova Scotians.

One of most important responsibilities of a government is to find a balance between economic programs and providing its citizens with social programs that improve their lives.

The Conservative government's inability to find this balance was one its greatest failures.

We all remember the community services minister telling people on social assistance – people who were having difficulty paying their bills -- to eat pasta. We are also familiar with the Conservative policy of stripping single mothers of social assistance while they attend university.

A Liberal government will commit to creating a Nova Scotia that benefits all Nova Scotia.

We will begin by helping working parents.

We believe parents need all the support they can get, especially if one is a stay-at-home parent.

A Liberal government will provide a provincial tax credit to support families with a stay-at-home parent. We are not encouraging a parent to stay at home but recognizing those that stay at home.

Our plan will assist 22,000 families with 26,000 children with a tax credit applicable to those who use the spousal amount (\$6,140). We will provide a \$5,000 tax credit per child up until age 14.

This translates into a tax credit that provides a family of four with one income of forty thousand dollars, a saving of eight hundred and eighty dollars. That's a fresh idea!

A Liberal government will invest a further 85 million dollars over four years for early learning and childcare. This funding will provide childcare workers with resources and with respect.

This money will ensure training and standards for childcare centre operators, caregivers and educators. And, it will ensure appropriate wage standards for our childcare professionals.

Over four years we will add at least 1000 new places; \$23 million in expansion grant funding; and \$24 million in increases to operational funding. In the first year (fiscal 2006-07), we will

- add 400 more portable places at a cost of \$2,400,000
- provide \$4.3 million in expansion grant funding
- increase the available operation funding to day care centres for salary enhancements, child care stabilization and equipment grants by \$5 million
- provide an additional \$1million for the Sound Start Program

- add an additional \$1million to expand the Home Visitation Program currently provided by Public Health Nurses and volunteers across the province. Public Health to provide suggestions to either expand or enhance current programming.
- maintain commitment to the current pre-primary program however the \$750,000 would be used to pilot a program in day care settings in order to allow for an appropriate evaluation next year.
- make an additional \$550,000 available to currently existing organizations (i.e. Boys and Girls Clubs) to expand After-School Programs in areas where very little programming exists.

A total of \$15,000,000 in new money for the first year.

For the remaining three years we will increase the number of places by 200 each year with corresponding expansion grant funding and operational funding increases.

We entrust our children to these individuals – to care for them, to protect them and to teach them. In return, we must show them we respect their role in our communities and recognize the important work they do every day.

A Liberal government will be committed to getting a better childcare deal from Ottawa. We will push the federal government to take a meaningful role in providing childcare spaces.

We agree with Nova Scotia parents: \$1200 does not cover the costs of providing adequate childcare for their children.

The Conservative government failed to provide Nova Scotians with affordable housing. In fact, they failed to access much of the resources available to them from the federal government.

A Liberal government will reduce the waiting list of 5000 people seeking affordable housing in our province. We will access the 9 million dollars available in federal funding and we will contribute the provincial portion. The result will be 18 million dollars of funding for people needing affordable housing in Nova Scotia.

We will provide funding for rent supplements for those who need assistance. Not everyone wants or needs to leave the place they currently call home to find affordable housing. Some just need a measure of support to make ends meet. A Liberal government will provide nine million dollars in assistance to match the nine million dollars in federal funding during our first two years in office to that end. That's a fresh idea!

A Liberal government will recognize the different housing needs of all Nova Scotians. That is why we will create a central intake registry for the province's housing requirements.

We will include public housing, but also the unique needs of co-operatives and non-profits agencies. A Liberal government will ensure that regardless of the need, every Nova Scotian will have access to housing that meets their needs. We will also make sure Nova Scotians with disabilities have the resources that allow them to continue to live independently.

A Liberal government will provide eight million dollars over four years to ensure this measure.

- We will create a wheelchair program for seniors who live independently.
- We will expand the Dial-A-Ride program.
- We will provide additional funding for the Community Assistance Program.
- We will provide funding for landlords to build wheelchair accessible apartments and housing units.
- And we will fund an accessible transportation pilot project in a rural region of our province where Dial-A-Ride is not available.

Nova Scotia's auditor general has reported that the Department of Community Services is not performing well. We agree. The systems and controls used by the department are inadequate. We agree that duties, reviews and approvals must be reorganized.

A Liberal government will immediately correct this. We will make the department effective. We will ensure it delivers better controls. Most importantly, we will make sure it provides help for those who need it.

We want to encourage individuals on social assistance who want to expand their opportunities. That is why a Liberal government will not punish single mothers on social assistance who want to upgrade their education. Single mothers who want to return to school will not lose their benefits. That's another fresh idea!

Liberals believe that a government should help Nova Scotians improve their lives, not put up barricades that prevent them from fulfilling their dreams.

We recognize that Nova Scotians want to work; they want to make a contribution to our province. We want to give them that opportunity. Every individual should have the chance to take part in our economy.

A Liberal government will be committed to making sure every Nova Scotian has the ability to take part in our society. Liberals believe every Nova Scotian has that right and we will make sure opportunities exist to make it possible.

It is what Nova Scotians want, and it is what a Liberal government will do.

We must demand less of our environment

Environment: We recognize that we can't ask more of our environment.

The quality of our environment is intrinsic to our quality of life. Nova Scotia's environment supports our health and well-being, our recreational activities, our economy and the attractiveness of our country as a place in which to live, visit or invest.

We are fortunate in Nova Scotia, that our younger generation has set such a positive example for us.

They know how important it is to recycle, compost, reduce waste and control energy. They do it everyday without even thinking. We should take that lead and build on it.

A Liberal government is ready to do just that. Liberals believe the best policy for our environment is to demand less of it.

As Liberals we have talked about energy conservation. We know how important it is to lessen our dependence on fossil fuels – essentially imported energy. We must do this not only to reduce the price we pay for fuel, but also to keep the air we breathe clean.

That is why we can't support the Conservative and NDP proposal to remove the Provincial portion of the HST on heating fuel. It is an anti-conservation policy. It does nothing to encourage responsible use of dwindling resources. Rather than throw away \$75 million on a regressive policy that rewards those who consume the most, we propose to help those who most need that help.

A Liberal government will begin by offering up to \$2,000 in retail tax rebates for the purchase of fuel-efficient and low emission vehicles. Nova Scotians want to do their part to protect our environment. A Liberal government wants to help.

Acid rain affects eastern Canada at an alarming rate. Our ecology is susceptible because our water and soil systems cannot fight the damaging consequences of acid rain.

A Liberal government recognizes we must reduce the impacts of acid rain. It's a fact that acid rain stunts crop and tree growth, not to mention the negative affects on our wildlife, our ecosystem, and our waterways – including our salmon and trout habitats.

Acid rain's devastation is far-reaching. It lowers productivity in fisheries, forestry and agriculture. And that translates into fewer jobs in some of our province's most important industries.

That is why a Liberal government will spend one million dollars per year for four years for a liming program for agriculture and watercourses -- with a minimum of 20 per cent earmarked for watercourses. Many believe this will pay significant dividends for such a small investment and we agree.

Farmers who participate will receive assistance for trucking costs and a rebate for the cost of lime.

Nova Scotia gets a failing grade when it comes to our protected areas. We stand four percentage points below the national average.

A Liberal government is committed to reaching the national goal of 12 per cent. Nova Scotians want to explore their province and know that our wildlife and ecology is being protected. The Conservative government has let Nova Scotians down when it comes to protecting our wilderness. A Liberal government will correct that.

A Liberal government believes there is work to be done to clean up watercourses, beaches and roadsides. A Liberal government wants to enhance conservation programs already in place and implement a new one.

We will commit one million dollars per year to hire students and those on social assistance to form a Green Team. From May 1st to September 15th, students and physically-able individuals on social assistance can take part in a cost-sharing grant program to help clean our many beaches and roadsides -- and we'll ensure that social assistance will not be affected by participation in the program. Our province relies on traditional energy forms at a rate 480 per cent higher than the national average. Liberals believe that must change.

That is why we will create a pilot project to develop approaches and methods that encourage small and community-based renewable power projects.

The focus will be on wind, solar, biomass and hydro. A Liberal government will work to ensure renewable energy projects have proper access to the power grid and will be compensated fairly to allow their business plans to attract the required capital investment. Let me be clear -- we will take the necessary measures to ensure alternate energy producers have access to the grid and will be fairly compensated -- if necessary, we will move to fully deregulate energy generation. The pace we are moving at is far too slow -- it must and will be accelerated. Energy security is a new term we will focus our efforts towards -- namely government actions and policies to ensure we have access to reliable and

uninterrupted sources of energy at a reasonable price. We will commit \$1 million per year for four years into research on new solutions for energy from biomass.

The Liberal Energy plan released in October 2005 delivered a number of critical measures to protect our environment. Taking the HST off of home heating does nothing to encourage conservation or alternate forms of energy generation.

Further, it will likely just shift the tax burden elsewhere. Giving tax relief on home heating actually rewards those using the most – the most. Those that cannot afford or need to spend on purchasing larger amounts are least rewarded – certainly those that have found alternate ways to use less oil and electricity actually do not benefit – the Conservatives and NDP are actually punishing those for achieving the desired goal and reward those that are doing the exact opposite of what we must do in Nova Scotia to achieve energy security.

HST removal on home heating is in direct violation of environment enhancement.

The Liberal Energy Plan has focused on 3 key principles – helping those that really need help – those on lower and fixed incomes; conservation; and alternate energy development. Our goal is to reduce our dependence on imported oils and gas.

We will also invest \$10 million per year in public and mass transit improvements throughout the province – while helping people move around; a critical goal is reducing negative impacts to the environment.

A Liberal government will create an Office of Energy Efficiency – focused on helping Nova Scotians become more energy efficient. This office will work with Nova Scotians to help in directing the \$15 million available to residents and the \$15 million available to businesses in our energy plan for conservation solutions and installing alternate forms of energy generation.

The Liberal Energy Plan is designed to achieve two critical goals – energy security and environmental improvements. Our plan is based upon measures that will help Nova Scotians for many years - by doing it right the first time – we must stop the quick fix approach to government solutions. Tinkering with consumptions sales tax does not produce the desired benefit.

A Liberal government will be responsible with our environment and make sure it is healthy for the generations to come.

We believe these initiatives are good start.

Seniors deserve respect

Seniors: We will give more help to the people who made this province.

Seniors are a vital part of every community across the entire province. They have worked hard all of their lives contributing to our society, and making this province a place we can all be proud of.

A Liberal government will preserve their dignity and give seniors the respect they deserve.

A Liberal government will provide seniors with all the services and information they need – in a clear, efficient and timely manner.

A Liberal government will create a new Ministry for Seniors and Continuing Care, immediately.

Seniors helped to build this province and deserve a voice at the cabinet table to find solutions to problems facing them now.

Our aging population needs help with Health Care delivery, pharmacare costs and homecare issues.

The Conservatives would like seniors to believe they have addressed seniors needs in their election budget, but the Conservatives help is little and all years off in the future.

The Liberal Team does not believe that Seniors should have to wait for up to ten years before relief is at hand.

The new ministry would take over certain functions that are now handled by the Department of Health the Department of Community Services.

This combining of services to seniors will give more focus to the key priorities for seniors.

The creation of a Ministry of Seniors and Continuing Care will be responsible for

- Homecare
- It will be responsible for long term care requirements for all Nova Scotians – including managed care, assisted living, nursing homes and palliative care.
- It will oversee the pharmacare program
- The new ministry will also be responsible for accessible transportation for seniors.

- And affordable housing for seniors.

There are many demanding issues facing the 160,000 seniors here in the Nova Scotia. They are unique and require special attention to all aspects. Seniors will be cared for in a respectful manner, with delivery focused on meeting their individual needs.

This new ministry will also be given the mandate to deal with one of the most pressing priorities in our society today – effectively managing long term care. We will not separate husbands and wives. Couples who have lived together for 30, 40 or even 50 years simply should not be separated in their years where senior care is required.

In addition, we will make every attempt to accommodate seniors as close to their local community as possible, to ensure their family members are able to visit as much as possible.

The Liberal team believes that seniors should be treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

Over the next four years, we will dedicate \$285 million more than allocated to seniors in the 2005/06 budget, starting immediately.

We will focus on measures that will keep people in their homes as long as possible -- including increased home care, increased transportation assistance, respite care for family members who are providing assistance in the home and other assisted living programs and recreation and fitness programs designed specifically for seniors.

We will provide pharmacare coverage for seniors in palliative care in their home.

We will increase the number of nursing home beds in the province and improve access to public housing – particularly in seniors manors designed specifically to meet the needs of seniors.

There are a number of other aspects of our platform of fresh ideas that will be of great benefit to seniors. Initiatives like the increased personal tax exemption and other tax relief policies and assistance with home heating costs for those who need it.

They should not have to wait for improvements to come bit by bit in a ten-year plan. Seniors need help now.

Creating this new Ministry for Seniors and Long Term Care is a small price to pay for their life of dedication and hard work.

A fresh fiscal approach

Fiscal: We will be responsible, and helpful to those in need.

Nova Scotians work hard for every dime they earn. Providing for the basic necessities of life has become a major stress factor in far too many Nova Scotian homes.

It's government's responsibility to help -- responsibly.

The Liberal team will guarantee a minimum debt-repayment of \$70 million each year as a budget expenditure. In addition, surplus revenue after planned program spending will be also directed to debt reduction.

Our team also brings a fresh fiscal approach in dealing with personal taxes. Tax relief -- increasing the Basic Personal Exemption tax credit available to every tax-payer.

Nova Scotia has had the ability to set its own tax credits since introducing a tax on income in 2000. While other provinces have increased their tax credits, the Conservatives chose not to.

Nova Scotia cannot afford to fall behind any longer. Over the next four years a Liberal Government will increase the Basic Personal Exemption to federal levels. This will be a tax savings of \$70 for a family (or individual) in year 1 growing to \$350-500 for a family in year 4.

And in addition, to protect these tax savings from being clawed back by inflation, a Liberal government will index the tax credits to inflation rate.

This will be done immediately in contrast to 5 years down the road as the Conservatives have promised.

The Liberal plan will keep these tax savings permanent and sustainable for all hardworking Nova Scotians.

Parents want the best for their children. But after the bills are paid, for many there is little left over.

A Liberal government would help relieve this stress by increasing deductions for Nova Scotians with children and index the spousal tax credit to the cost of living. So as inflation goes up, so will your tax deduction.

Our Liberal team will work responsibly towards sustainable tax relief for middle-income earners. We will review our ability to reduce the middle income tax rate of 14.95% to a goal of 12%.

In managing household finances, everyone's debt level is always a priority. Nova Scotia as a province should not be any different.

We have a growing debt that currently stands at 12.4 billion dollars. This debt costs taxpayers approximately 900 million dollars a year.

A Liberal government will assess the value of new approaches to managing that debt, to determine whether any savings can be had.

A 1% drop in our debt-servicing rate translates into \$125 million in savings. Those savings are worth looking for.

\$125 million dollars buys a lot of day care spaces.

It buys a lot of new books for schools, and it can provide a salary for many new doctors.

A Liberal government knows how hard Nova Scotians work to stretch every dollar earned. Balancing your cheque book requires restraint and prioritizing your spending.

A Liberal government would do the same with your tax dollars.

Our tax plan is responsible, sustainable and provides relief immediately. Nova Scotians deserve a break, and a Liberal government recognizes what has to be done to give them that break and to make it last over the long term.

Good government starts with being open and honest

Accountability: We will make government open and honest.

Today is about an important announcement, one that will be imbedded in our policies – openness, honesty, transparency and accountability.

Good government starts with being open and honest with Nova Scotians. It starts with good people, and includes guidelines that we can all follow. With stronger accountability measures – policy development becomes more transparent.

Over the past several months Nova Scotians have witnessed how the Conservatives have handled giving out tax-payers money to private business.

The time has come for a change. The time has come for more accountability.

A Liberal government will provide legislative measures to guarantee that every dime of tax-payers money given to business is in the best interest for Nova Scotia.

To start, protocol for ministers to follow once they have identified they are in a conflict of interest will be legislated into the Public Employees Disclosure Act.

It will be a clear process to follow, so each minister knows exactly their parameters in every case. For example ministers who are in conflict will not be permitted to receive briefings on how the particular case they are in conflict with, is progressing.

Members of the Legislature will also be permitted to make a formal request for an investigation by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

We will conduct an economic impact assessment on all contracts more than \$250,000 to ensure we achieve the best value for Nova Scotians and Nova Scotia companies .

All information regarding business loans more \$250,000 will be reported to the legislature's Public Accounts Committee or a special all-party committee. This information will be provided in camera to protect the confidentiality of negotiations at the same time providing full disclosure to the all party committee. This is important because it will ensure that tax payer's dollars are being spent wisely. This disclosure may prevent loans to government friendly companies. Also a Liberal government will to bring government to the people of Nova Scotia. Cabinet meetings will be held quarterly in a different region, with a briefings held in the host community.

Also the Premier and/or Ministers will meet with municipal councils at least once a year.

We will have community hall meetings regularly on a rotating basis. We will to be accountable to the people.

We want to be as open as we can, so that the process of government is fair and equitable to everyone.

A fundamentally new approach to energy

Energy: We have a fundamentally new approach.

*Delivered at the House of Assembly
1 p.m.*

Today, I am releasing a document that is - in part - a discussion paper that puts some context around the energy price dilemma we in Nova Scotia find ourselves in.

But, more importantly, this document outlines a Liberal strategy that, when enacted, will signal a fundamentally new approach to energy development, energy use and energy as an economic tool in Nova Scotia.

As the government of the day prepares its second or third energy strategy - I've lost count - it's important to remember their previous attempts have done little to cushion Nova Scotians from the shock of the present oil or gas prices. Nor have they, in any way, prepared the province for what is becoming the new global energy reality. That reality is the alarming and unpredictable volatility in the price of non-renewable fossil fuels.

The government made some motherhood statements about alternative energy sources and conservation, but never had the will or imagination to encourage either. The current gas price crisis has refueled the old idea of price regulation. They are dreaming if they think we can build a wall around Nova Scotia and keep our prices lower than the rest of the world. Ask our neighbours in PEI. It doesn't work.

As winter approaches, I am certain the government will roll out another program to help low and some fixed-income Nova Scotians bear the price increase. I am not critical of that approach, as our energy strategy calls for up to \$15 million in relief for low-income Nova Scotians and seniors on fixed incomes in the 2006-2007 winter.

But this province needs energy strategies that do more than save folks from literally freezing in the dark.

What is needed, is a long-term coherent strategy that will:

1. Cushion Nova Scotians, to the greatest extent possible, from the shock of extreme volatility in the world energy market;
2. Position this province as a leader in energy conservation, renewable energy development and clean energy innovation;

3. Encourage and increase energy-related research and development at our universities;
4. Foster growth in an almost forgotten sector of our economy – the innovators who offer alternative energy solutions;
5. Provide new economic opportunities in rural and coastal regions, through development of wind, wood and clean-coal energy sources; and
6. Meet our moral obligations to future generations through environmentally sound energy development.

As I said a moment ago, immediate action is needed to help Nova Scotians who are facing heating cost increases that could range from \$300 to \$400 per tank.

First, the province needs to sit down with the federal government - today, to ensure that any provincial program works in concert with soon-to-be-announced federal home heating assistance. Otherwise both levels of government will be wasting dollars on administration, when in reality, every dollar will be required by people in real need.

There is no question that governments will need to help people through the crisis this winter.

It is in our approach to the issue, over the long-term, where a Liberal Government will differ from the current government.

As we point out in our paper, the only viable long-term solution is to reduce dependency on oil and gas. Government, industry and individuals must work collectively to find and implement alternative and renewable energy solutions.

To that end, our plan will, earmark at least \$15 million, and we would expect the federal government to match our investment, to:

- Retrofit homes for energy efficiency;
- Rebate the provincial HST on new home construction, up to an \$8,000 maximum, provided those new homes were equipped with renewable, sustainable or high-efficiency energy systems.

In addition to helping families and individuals, another \$15 million - and we also anticipate this amount as a match of federal funds - to invest in Nova Scotian companies developing new and innovative energy saving technologies.

These measures will include:

- Opening access to power transmission lines to competition, at a reasonable cost;
- Grants, tax credits and/or low cost loans to support business and industry, including farms, that implement co-generation facilities for their own consumption, and access to the provincial power grid for any surplus;

- A 10-year corporate tax holiday for companies in Nova Scotia who develop and manufacture alternative energy solutions;
- Making the provincial government a model energy user, through innovations like use of hybrid vehicles in the provincial fleet; and
- Offering incentives to municipalities, hospitals and universities to implement alternative energy and conservation solutions.

Our strategy does not end with these very substantial and far-sighted measures. While it may appear that during the past six years, Nova Scotia's dreams of becoming a net oil and gas producer have turned to dust, we believe exploration activity can be revitalized and will yield results. The geology has not changed. In terms of return on investment, development of energy resources has never been more feasible.

So, why is there such a lull in activity? That is actually a better question for the minister of energy, but positive and proactive relationship with the sector, starting with an attitude that we ought to work with, not against companies involved in oil and gas exploration and development, would be a good start.

If you read our strategy paper, you will no doubt notice that our plan calls for considerable study. Research and study is required before we will take action in a number of areas. This is necessary, frankly because the groundwork has been neglected. These measures will include:

- A full review of the oil and gas taxation structure, to determine if it is fair
- A detailed cost/benefits analysis of open competition in the electricity sector;
- A cost/benefits analysis of increased coal-fired power generation, based on clean coal technologies; and last, but certainly not least;
- Working with the other two levels of government, determine the viability of subsidized public and mass transit, as well as the viability of offering tax incentives for the purchase of hybrid or other highly efficient vehicles.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have offered the highlights of the Liberal Energy Strategy. There is much more in the document.

Nova Scotians who hear us, or are able to read this document for themselves will agree that what we are offering today is not the same, tired old government rhetoric. This is a new, aggressive approach that can take Nova Scotia to a more secure and reliable energy future. It is a collaborative approach that does not seek villains to blame for our current crisis, but rather, looks for partners to share in our solutions.

Our plan looks to the future, to a Liberal Government in 2006. For now, as opposition, we plan to act.

And this is why the Liberal Caucus will introduce a bill in the coming sitting of the House opposing any additional rate increase hearings by Nova Scotia Power. Our legislation will not allow the energy supplying monopoly to apply for increases twice in one year, and will delay the current application for rate increase from even going to hearings until April 2006.

Our ideas are in this document and now in the hands of Nova Scotians. I look forward to exploring our economic and energy future with Nova Scotians. I am confident that the strategy paper we are releasing today represents a valuable contribution to that exploration.

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