

Better deal 2006

The plan you can count on

Darrell Dexter



Better Deal 2006: A Plan You Can Count On

Dear Friend:

I believe that government must be about making life better for today's families.

That is why the NDP took a constructive approach in the legislature. We ended the unfair practice of making seniors pay for their own health care. We won improvements in overtime pay, minimum wage and family leave. We voted for balanced budgets with investment in diagnostic equipment, school breakfasts, new support for people with disabilities, and assistance for low-income diabetics. Much was accomplished, but with a Conservative government the NDP could only do so much. There is more to be done.

The Conservatives have had seven years to keep the promises they made to Nova Scotians. Too often, they broke those promises, coming up with excuses instead of keeping their word. Now, they are making many of the same promises all over again.

The NDP does not make promises we can not keep.

Better Deal 2006: The Plan You Can Count On is the NDP's realistic, common sense plan to make life better for today's families. Leadership is not about being all things to all people, or handing out a promise on every occasion. The NDP is committed to five main goals for Nova Scotia families:

- **Give Families a Needed Break**
- **Reduce Health Wait Times, Starting with Emergency Rooms**
- **Deliver Affordable, Quality Education**
- **Ensure Dignity for Seniors**
- **Live Within Our Means**

This plan outlines the steps we will take to meet those goals.

Better Deal 2006: The Plan You Can Count On does not contain hundreds of promises, or pretend to be a plan for everything that will happen in the next five to ten years. It outlines the NDP priorities — the job that we will get done with your support.

The commitments in this plan can be started within the framework of balanced budgets before March 2008. Many can start right away. All it takes is political will, and a focus on goals that will truly make a positive difference for you and your family.

Leadership is not about creating a better opportunity for your own political party. Leadership is about creating a better life for today's hard-working Nova Scotia families.

You can count on the NDP. Together, we Nova Scotians can make a better life for ourselves and our families.

Darrell Dexter



**Darrell
Dexter**

Leader of the
Nova Scotia NDP



NDP

for today's families

1

Give Families a Needed Break

Remove the HST from home heat and other essentials

Rising heating costs have created real hardship for families, making it difficult to make and meet household budgets.

The Conservatives promised HST relief four times but didn't deliver. Instead, the Conservatives, and the Liberals before them, collected a tax windfall from high heating costs. Rather than ensuring the removal of the HST now, the Conservatives chose to call an election. Their latest promise would not see the HST removed until January 2007.

Consumption taxes like the HST are especially harsh on pensioners and on areas with lower average income, like Cape Breton.

TORY BROKEN PROMISE:

"What we need is to go back and to do this right, and to look at those items that should have been excused taxation because they were simply necessities and to tax them would fall too heavily on the low-and middle-income earners."

— John Hamm, *Halifax Daily News*, January 2, 1998.

The Conservative promise of HST relief was made again in 1999, 2004 and 2006, but never kept.

Asked if the HST should be taken off home heating, Rodney MacDonald said no, the government was doing enough already.

— Interview with Norma Lee MacLeod, *CBC TV*, Thursday, February 9th, 2006.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP will make life better for you and your family by taking the HST off home heat and other essentials once and for all.

"Today's hard working families need a break, and the best break they can get is to have the HST taken off home heating. In Nova Scotia, home heating is not a choice. It's a necessity of life."

Darrell Dexter

To give families a break, the NDP will:

- Remove the HST from home heat and other essentials starting November 1, 2006 — in time to make life better for families at the beginning of this heating season
- Provide 10,000 interest-free loans per year for energy efficient retrofits of homes and small businesses. Homes will be eligible for up to \$10,000 in financing while businesses will be eligible for up to \$25,000, and increase the home repair program by 30%
- Provide families the lowest, fairest auto insurance rates through a public auto insurance plan. The NDP will also remove the unjust cap on compensation, to ensure accident victims are fairly compensated
- Create 2,500 more subsidized child care spaces to expand access to high quality, affordable child care and early childhood education, starting in March 2007
- Provide a \$250 tax credit for every volunteer fire fighter, to encourage and reward those who perform this valuable service for Nova Scotia families
- Ensure safe, quality drinking water by restoring free private well testing
- Support families working in our primary industries by, for example, creating a "Made in Nova Scotia" system of agricultural risk management focused on meeting the specific needs of our provincial agricultural industry, and allowing the Fisheries and Aquaculture Loan Board to finance the purchases of licenses to help young people enter the industry

2

Reduce Health Wait Times, Starting With Emergency Rooms

Free up hospital beds for emergency medical care and surgeries by creating 500 new nursing home beds

Families need to know that health care will be there when they need it, without long waits.

The Conservatives promised to reduce wait times. But they didn't deliver. Wait times for diagnostic tests, surgeries such as orthopedic procedures, and mental health services have reached crisis levels. Life and death wait lists — such as cardiac and cancer — are exceptionally high.

In addition, a lack of nursing home beds means that seniors waiting to enter nursing homes are often forced to wait months in a hospital bed — which lengthens wait times for surgical procedures and in emergency rooms. It costs up to \$1,100 a day to stay in a hospital bed, while a nursing home bed costs about \$150 a day. This isn't the best use of resources. It is also not the appropriate care for seniors.

TORY BROKEN PROMISE:

"During its first mandate, a PC Government will address the critical shortage of hospital and nursing home beds by establishing appropriate criteria for determining the number of beds necessary to provide an adequate level of hospital and nursing home care in each community."

— 1999 Conservative platform.

The Conservatives cut 360 hospital beds, and they cut nursing home beds, creating very long wait times in emergency rooms and for surgery.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP have consistently worked to ensure shorter wait times for surgeries and diagnostic tests. The NDP's successful campaign to have the province cover health care costs in nursing homes made hospital beds available more quickly, by reducing the lengthy financial assessments seniors had to undergo.

Waits in emergency rooms are directly related to a lack of beds for admission to hospital. To further shorten wait times, the NDP will create 500 new nursing home beds within two years. This will provide better care for seniors and be an important step toward freeing up beds for surgeries and in emergency rooms.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP also believe that respect for people who work in the health care system is a good place to start in reducing wait times. For too long, nurses and other health care professionals have been treated poorly by Conservative and Liberal governments. The NDP will treat these people with the respect they deserve, and address issues of working conditions and work-life balance.

"No one should be turned away from an emergency room, wait endlessly for treatment or be treated in a hallway because there are no hospital beds available."

Darrell Dexter

To shorten wait times, the NDP will:

- Free up hospital beds for emergency medical care and surgeries by creating 500 new nursing home beds within two years, in the communities where need is greatest
- Increase emergency room and diagnostic capacity by opening the Cobequid Community Health Centre 24 hours and adding nurse practitioners to the health care team to reduce wait times and help keep frequently closing emergency rooms open in Cape Breton and rural Nova Scotia
- Create a new Medical Specialist Recruitment and Retention Fund to increase the number of medical specialists, such as anesthesiologists, who are key to reducing wait times
- Help ensure patients are ready and fit for surgery by initiating a pre-surgery care program run by doctors, nurses and physiotherapists
- Create Canada's first province-wide screening program for colorectal cancer, and invest in treatments and drug therapies to shorten waits for cardiac and cancer care

3

Provide Affordable, Quality Education

Improve access to post-secondary education by rolling back tuition by 10%

Families want to know that affordable post-secondary education will be available for their children.

The Conservatives promised to make post-secondary education more accessible. But they didn't deliver. Instead, Nova Scotia students pay the highest university tuition in the country — over \$2,000 above the Canadian average. They also receive the least student support in Canada.

Sky-high fees put post secondary education beyond the reach of deserving students from middle and lower income families. Many families in Halifax and Cape Breton find it is cheaper for their children to attend university in Newfoundland, where tuition was rolled back.

The average debt load after an undergraduate degree is projected to reach more than \$45,000 in the next few years. Graduates will pay back the cost of a higher education at least three times over in taxes during their working life.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP will invest in students by reducing tuition fees at Nova Scotia universities and the Nova Scotia Community College by 10%. These tuition cuts will be fully funded by the provincial government. All funds to enable the roll backs will be included in the universities' and community college's base budgets on a go-forward basis.

"Post-secondary education is a critical tool that allows young people to participate in the economy – to build a bright future for themselves and our province."

Darrell Dexter

To ensure affordable post-secondary education, the NDP will:

- Reduce tuition by 10% — by rolling back the Conservatives' 3.9% tuition fee increase this year, and rolling back fees a further 6.1% next year
- Provide additional financial assistance to post-secondary students by restoring provincial debt relief to \$10 million — where it was before the Conservative cuts — and creating a \$5 million Nova Scotia Bursary Program
- Increase workplace training and apprenticeships in the trades, especially for women, by partnering with business, the Nova Scotia Community College and trade unions to create spaces that lead to real jobs

Improve P-12 education by providing resources where they are needed, in the classrooms

Families know how important quality P-12 education is for children to have the best possible start in life.

The Conservatives promised to improve the performance of Nova Scotia students. But they didn't deliver. Because of their chronic under funding of education, Nova Scotia students consistently rank at or near the bottom in national tests in literacy, math, and science. When 71% of Grade 12 students in Nova Scotia failed the 2005 provincial math test, the Conservatives blamed students, teachers and parents. The Conservatives did not accept responsibility for breaking their own promise to invest in education.

TORY BROKEN PROMISE:

"A PC Government will dedicate itself to an education system which is adequately funded, fully focused on the student and the classroom and which will prepare young Nova Scotians to compete in the job markets of today and tomorrow. We are committed to rewarding effort and excellence in our schools."

— 1999 Conservative platform.

The quality of Nova Scotia schools has fallen even further, due to funding cuts and poor leadership from the Conservatives.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP will improve P-12 education by providing resources where they are needed, in the schools and the classrooms that give our students the best learning opportunities.

"Throughout Nova Scotia, schools are a key to the future for today's families and today's communities."

Darrell Dexter

To improve P-12 education, the NDP will:

- Put \$15 million more into the classroom to move Nova Scotia's per student funding toward the Canadian average, including doubling the text book budget for schools
- Make sure no schools will close before September 1, 2008
- Create a province-wide Four-Plus Program, so all Nova Scotia children get an early, quality start for their education
- Hire more speech and language therapists and school psychologists to shorten wait times for these services for special needs children
- Make schools safer by providing resources to address school bullying, make good use of in-school suspensions and build sidewalks to schools where they're needed

4

Ensure Dignity for Seniors

Help seniors stay close to their family and friends by opening more nursing home beds and hiring an additional 100 home care workers

It is important to Nova Scotia families to know that when seniors can no longer live alone without assistance, they will be able to receive help or nursing care close to their families and loved ones.

The Conservatives have cut the number of nursing home beds for seniors. Under the plan they announced on May 10, 2006, they would build no new beds for three years. Instead of more nursing home beds, the Conservatives have given Nova Scotia families seven years of excuses.

In addition, seniors requiring long term care are often sent far from home and family because there are no nearby nursing home beds. Couples may be forced to live apart after a lifetime together. A lack of home care means that seniors are forced to leave their homes sooner than necessary.

The lack of home care and nursing home beds causes hardship for family caregivers. It also increases wait times elsewhere in the health system, because expensive acute care beds are used for patients who would be better served with home care or in a nursing home.

TORY BROKEN PROMISE:

"Our seniors are those members of our community who have contributed to making our Nova Scotian society the wonderful place it is and who now have a right to live their remaining years in comfort, security and with the best possible health and quality of life."

– 1999 Conservative platform.

The Conservatives cut nursing home beds, and their harsh policies are forcing seniors to wait months for needed nursing care, only to be placed in a nursing home that is as much as 100 kilometres from home and family.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP brought to an end the Conservatives' practice of forcing seniors to give up their life savings to pay for health care in nursing homes. The NDP will continue to promote better quality of life for seniors by opening up additional nursing home beds and hiring additional home care workers — to allow seniors to age close to their families and communities.

“Seniors worked their whole lives to build this province. They deserve to know that in their later years they will be able to remain close to their families, friends and communities.”

Darrell Dexter

To ensure dignity for seniors, the NDP will:

- Provide 500 nursing home beds across the province within two years – to help ensure seniors have access to beds close to their families and friends, and to help make it possible for senior couples to stay together when they enter nursing care
- Help 2,500 seniors stay in their homes and maintain their independence by hiring 100 new home care workers
- Eliminate ambulance fees for patient transfers to and from nursing homes
- Create energy efficient seniors housing, starting with 100 homes
- Give seniors a break by cutting Pharmacare co-payments by 50%
- Create safer communities for seniors and their families by hiring 75 new police officers to bring Nova Scotia to the national average, and by supporting community policing

5

Live Within Our Means

Balance the budget and take steps to build a strong, sustainable economy

In order to keep Nova Scotia's economy healthy and deliver new opportunities for Nova Scotia families, the NDP believes it is important to maintain a balanced budget. We supported balanced budgets that implemented key NDP commitments to make life better for today's families.

"Families in Nova Scotia can't just run up debt and charge it to someone else, and the NDP believes the government shouldn't either."

Darrell Dexter

Nova Scotia's economic competitiveness will also be enhanced by improved infrastructure, a strong rural economy, and vibrant arts and culture industries.

TORY BROKEN PROMISE:

"We need a non-partisan plan to improve roads where the need is greatest."

– Rodney MacDonald, *The Oran*, July 2, 1999.

"A PC government will dedicate all taxes raised through motor vehicle licensing and fuel sales to highway construction and maintenance."

– 1999 Conservative platform.

Even in 2006-07, the Conservatives did not propose that the province use all fuel tax revenue to pay for highway construction and maintenance spending in the Department's budget.

But none of this need be at the expense of our natural environment. In fact, a clean, healthy environment enhances Nova Scotia's competitiveness by making our province a desirable place to live, work and do business. This is why the NDP has long sought protection of at least 12% of Nova Scotia's natural habitat.

Darrell Dexter and the NDP believe that Nova Scotia can become a national leader in the emerging area of clean, renewable energy. The economic and environmental benefits of these new technologies present a tremendous opportunity for Nova Scotia families and communities.

"Today's families understand better than ever how important it is to maintain a safe, healthy environment. To achieve this goal, we must ensure Nova Scotia maintains a pristine wilderness, develops and manages a rural economy based on sustainable development, and supports conservation and renewable energy."

Darrell Dexter

To build a strong, sustainable Nova Scotia economy, the NDP will:

- Balance the budget
- Increase the current budget for roads and highways to \$244 million this year by immediately investing all provincial gas taxes in roads and highways — to increase competitiveness and promote tourism and business growth in rural Nova Scotia
- Make Nova Scotia Canada's leader in renewable energy and energy conservation through steps such as ensuring that 20% of the province's power comes from renewable resources by 2010 and enabling households to cut their electricity use by 15%
- Phase out the Large Corporations Capital Tax so that Nova Scotia remains competitive as Saskatchewan and other provinces eliminate this tax
- Ban strip-mining in Cape Breton for three years — to fully consult the community
- Re-establish the arms-length Nova Scotia Arts Council — to show confidence in the economic potential of Nova Scotia's vital arts and culture community



for today's families

ns.ndp.ca

Authorized by Ed Wark, Official Agent for the Nova Scotia NDP