



## FROM PROVINCE HOUSE TO HOME

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Kings West

Many Nova Scotians are wondering why our government has been silent regarding a response to the downturn in the global economy and the provincial economy.

.....Manufacturing shipments are down by over 14% from last year.

.....unemployment has gone up 0.6 points in one month and is now 8.8%

.....for the past three months we have had over 10% increases every month in the number of bankruptcies

Nova Scotians are feeling it in their pocketbooks and they are losing their jobs. This government refuses to have a substantive debate on this issue by staying out of the legislature and they refuse to put forward an updated business plan. In addition they have not provided Ottawa with an infrastructure priority list, and they seem committed to be the last province to introduce a budget.

We know that District Health Authorities and School Boards are trying to prepare their budgets but they do not know what amounts will be flowing to them respectively. School Boards are trying to determine how many health professionals they need in their facilities. Both provide essential services to our public and cannot be compromised because of political reasons. It seems that this government is taking a “business as usual” approach to this current year with the timing of forecasts and the presentation of the budget.

Many Nova Scotians have been hearing mixed messages from the Premier and his cabinet on whether or not Nova Scotia would be running a deficit for the 2009-2010 budget year. However, many Nova Scotians are unsure of going further into debt and forcing another generation to pay for a government’s failure to make necessary tough choices, irrespective of the political implications.

So this is a year unlike any other in the past two decades and the people I meet are looking to government for leadership. The first step is having MLA'S back at Province House debating a business plan; directing Ottawa's stimulus package and giving Nova Scotians a timely budget. It is generally agreed that a government's budget is both a political document and a financial one.

In October, government was provided with enough information and warning that the coming recession would impact our province and we needed to prepare and plan. During the fall session of the legislature this advice and warning was not heeded. In fact our premier buried his head in the sand and said the recession would not impact our province and if it did, it would be well into the future. Our neighbouring provinces of PEI and New Brunswick went into overdrive to have an action plan implemented early in 2009. In those provinces, tenders are out and work will begin in early spring on projects that will have short term employment benefits and long term health and well being impacts for its citizens. That's right, PEI managed to put together a capital plan in November and New Brunswick announced its \$661 million capital plan in December.

It looks like last Friday's announcement is what we are going to receive for incentives and support to reduce the hurt that more and more of our citizens are experiencing. The \$175 million Industrial Expansion Fund for job retention and for new capital is not to be dismissed outright, it is needed and will have some value. However, we are seeing it distributed in election style nuggets with the cabinet making the call and therefore lacking transparency. Don't look for a document that will clearly outline how the province and our lives will be the beneficiaries over the next decade.

I believe Nova Scotia needs a budget and the sooner the better. Waiting another two months or more for the fiscal document that can deliver confidence and direction is simply wrong in the present climate. Nova Scotians need their MLA's engaged in a spring legislative session now and the finance minister delivering the government's plan. We could and should be doing more for those we represent ----think of the energy wasted implementing KENO, a plan that should not go forward.

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