



NS Chamber to provincial government: “Do more with less”

The Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce released their pre-budget submission to finance Minister Graham Steele today and the advice was focussed on the bottom-line. “Gov’t must be smaller, more effective and achieve less costly delivery of government services” and “has to find ways to do more with less just as business does every day” was the central message from the umbrella group that represents all 32 local chambers of commerce in the province.

President Chris Atwood said that “We built this document as a follow up to our submission last year and found that government was unable to deliver on balancing budgets or reducing debt”. Atwood went on to say that “We have the largest tax burden in the country here and we feel that it is a barrier to growth and therefore government must do more to control spending as businesses must do every day or they go out of business”.

The provincial chamber outlined areas where costs could be reduced such as eliminating the excessive number of school and hospital boards, eliminating rebates on electrical energy and home heating for those families over \$40,000 of income, reworking public pensions so that pension issues are resolved, not by a taxpayer bailout but by the beneficiaries contributing more for their own benefit and/or accepting less benefits and not getting into businesses such as road paving.

The Chamber also suggested that municipal tax burden on the business community needed to be examined in light of businesses paying, on average, three times that of a residential property owner. For example, in the Town of Antigonish, \$250,000 of residential assessment attracts \$2,325 in residential taxes but a business with the same level of commercial assessment means a commercial tax of \$6,175. Other concerns, such as the elected numbers are just the tip of the iceberg when one considers the administration staff to support 55 municipal units and the replication of services 55 times over for garbage pick-up, police and fire services, sewer and water services and recreation.

“The real question is not just how much government can we afford but how much effort, how much of every tax dollar must be diverted to administration and cumbersome inefficient delivery systems rather than the actual delivery of services?” Atwood said.

“We will be watching closely on budget day for significant progress in lowering the cost of government” Atwood said.

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