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COMMUNIQUÉ

ATLANTIC PREMIERS AGREE THAT EFFICIENT, SUSTAINABLE HEALTH CARE AND STIMULATING ATLANTIC CANADA'S ECONOMY ARE TOP PRIORITIES

Wolfville, Nova Scotia—Today, the Atlantic premiers reaffirmed their commitment to an enhanced publicly-funded health care system and to seeking federal government cooperation in the area of economic development.

Health Care

Atlantic Canada's premiers agree that the viability of the nation's health care system depends on provincial and territorial governments' ability to effect substantial improvement in health care delivery supported by sufficient federal funding to ensure the future sustainability of health care.

The Atlantic premiers voiced support for the continuing efforts of their departments of health in pursuing numerous initiatives in such areas as common drug review, primary care, health human resources, patient-centred interdisciplinary care and electronic health records.

Premiers directed their health ministers to explore further detailed action planning for the implementation of electronic health records, including means of accessing the \$1.2 billion in federal funding available through Canada Health Infoway, and to report back to them by the end of the summer. Premiers agreed the plan should provide for flexible approaches to innovations and could include a common provider registry, a health surveillance system to track diseases, diagnostic imaging, patient records and computerized waiting lists.

The intent of these initiatives is to ensure access to required health services in the most efficient manner. However, these initiatives represent only part of the solution to the challenge of sustaining a publicly-funded health care system. The federal government must participate in addressing the funding crisis in the delivery of health and social

services through a combination of improvements to the current funding arrangements for health.

Premiers also reaffirmed their support for strengthening the Equalization formula, and called on the federal government to offset the effect of clawbacks caused by census adjustments. Atlantic premiers reaffirmed their support of the Council of the Federation position that the federal government must play a full partnership role by adding \$3 billion to the base in this fiscal year and moving to assume 25% of provincial health and social costs by the end of the decade. The premiers emphasized that any new federal dollars must ensure adequate support of on-going health services before funding any new programs.

The Atlantic premiers agreed to continue aggressive implementation of health care initiatives aimed at ensuring that health services are available on an equitable basis, and to continue to pressure the federal government to provide long-term, sustainable, predictable health and social funding. They look forward to discussing these issues at the next First Ministers' meeting.

Growth, and Prosperity for Atlantic Canada

Premiers discussed ways to accelerate growth and prosperity in Atlantic Canada. They noted that each of the provinces has an economic development agenda and objectives, and discussed collaborative ways to achieve them, including through an improved partnership with the federal government. They noted that all Atlantic regional economic development agreements have now expired, while economic partnership arrangements in other parts of the country have been recently negotiated.

The Atlantic premiers agreed that a renewed cooperative approach with the federal government in the area of economic development is required. This approach should include skills development, innovation, infrastructure, tax competitiveness, energy, and immigration.

The premiers agreed that this renewed relationship with the federal government should be based on the following principles:

- Federal regional economic development policy should be developed in consultation with the provinces;
- The economic development activities of the federal and provincial governments should be complementary and coordinated to maximize resources;
- Funding arrangements should facilitate common Atlantic initiatives and be flexible enough to recognize the unique circumstances of each province through bilateral agreements;
- Effective communication between the provinces and the federal government at both the policy development and implementation stages is necessary to coordinate efforts in economic development;
- An effective federal-provincial partnership must be based on a whole government approach which encompasses regional agencies and other relevant departments.

Atlantic premiers will be seeking an early meeting with the Prime Minister and his Atlantic cabinet to discuss their economic development strategy for the region.

Agrifood Action Plan

At the 9th Session of CAP in February 2004, the Council directed officials to recommend an approach designed to promote the consumption of locally-produced food products. Today the premiers met with Doug Bacon, Chair, and representatives of the Atlantic Farmers Council, regarding the promotion of Atlantic agri-food. The premiers endorsed the efforts of the Atlantic Farmers Council to secure a sustainable future for agriculture in Atlantic Canada.

The Council of Atlantic Premiers tasked agriculture and business development officials to undertake consumer research to determine knowledge and attitudes regarding Atlantic food products as a first step in a closer partnership between Atlantic governments and the Atlantic agriculture industry. They will explore how to provide greater access to institutional and other markets for Atlantic food products.

The premiers directed officials to provide a detailed progress report at the Council's next meeting.

Premiers endorsed the Atlantic Farmers Council's proposal to seek federal funding for an Atlantic Alternative Energy Centre which will facilitate research into alternative energy options, in particular wind power and bio-gas.

Energy

The Atlantic premiers received a report from their ministers of energy outlining significant progress in developing regional solutions to the challenges facing the energy sector in Atlantic Canada. In a series of meetings, Atlantic energy ministers have explored issues related to the integration of renewable energy sources, increased linkages with the New England power grid, and economic development.

The premiers expressed their support for the energy ministers' agenda and commended their commitment to regional collaboration. The next meeting of energy ministers is scheduled to be held in Newfoundland and Labrador in September 2004.

Procurement

The Atlantic provinces have successfully negotiated a unique agreement intended to facilitate trade in Atlantic Canada. The Atlantic departments responsible for government purchasing have adopted a set of Standard Terms and Conditions that will govern the submission and evaluation of vendor submissions in response to Atlantic government tender opportunities.

The harmonization of procedures is intended to reduce and simplify the administrative burden placed on vendors competing for contracts within Atlantic Canada. Copies of the

Standard Terms and Conditions will be posted to the Council of Atlantic Premiers' website and all Atlantic government tender opportunities websites effective June 30, 2004.

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For further information, please contact:

- Chisholm Pothier, New Brunswick (506)453-2144
- Elizabeth Matthews, Newfoundland & Labrador (709)729-3960
- Rob Batherson, Nova Scotia (902)424-6601
- Patrick Dorsey, Prince Edward Island (902)368-4400