

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Atlantic Premiers Working Together for a Strong Atlantic Economy

White Point, NS (April 29, 2013) – Atlantic premiers are working together to strengthen the regional economy and create jobs, while providing training opportunities for Atlantic Canadians.

Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter chaired the meeting and was joined by New Brunswick Premier David Alward, Prince Edward Island Premier Robert Ghiz, and Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Kathy Dunderdale.

The Atlantic region is an attractive location for investment and job growth. There are numerous major investment projects either in progress or in the near future in Atlantic Canada that will result in significant jobs and revenue. Improvements to apprenticeship and training will ensure that Atlantic Canadians are ready to fill new jobs, while supporting small- and medium-sized businesses that will be part of the supply chain serving these projects. Premiers today agreed, through the Atlantic Workforce Partnership (AWP), to harmonize apprenticeship programs across the region and deliver online training to small- and medium-sized businesses. Atlantic Canada's work to harmonize apprenticeship programs will make the region a national leader in the delivery of critical skills training.

The progress of the AWP is further evidence of the responsiveness of Atlantic provinces to their labour market needs and job training, an area of provincial responsibility. Premiers noted significant concerns with the recent unilateral decisions of the federal government regarding skills, training and employment supports, including changes to labour market agreements and Employment Insurance. Premiers expressed concerns regarding the announced Canada Jobs Grant, particularly the ability of small- and medium-sized businesses to participate in the program. Redirecting \$300 million of the \$500 million allocation from provincial programming supported by the Labour Market Agreements to the Canada Jobs Grant reduces the range of programming for skills and labour market development presently delivered by provinces. Premiers direct their labour market ministers to meet with their federal counterpart and seek clarity on the design of the program. The federal government has recognized that provinces can opt out of programs in areas of provincial jurisdiction with full compensation. Premiers will consider if the program meets the needs of the provincial economies and labour markets, and whether the provinces will participate in the program or opt out with full compensation.

The federal government has made changes to the Employment Insurance program, which are now being felt by workers, communities and employers. These impacts are most acutely felt in seasonal industries, which make up a significant portion of the Atlantic economy. These changes were introduced without consultation or shared analysis, and therefore without a full understanding of the effect of the changes. Atlantic premiers urged the federal government to suspend the changes to the program pending the completion of an evidence-based approach. Atlantic premiers will be launching a pan-Atlantic consultation and research initiative to fully understand the impact of recent changes. To inform this work, premiers call on the federal government to share with them relevant Employment Insurance data. Initial results of this work will be shared with the Council of the Federation at their meeting in July and finalized mid-fall.

Premiers reiterated their concern about federal job cuts which are having an impact on Atlantic Canada. Atlantic premiers are seeking a commitment from the federal government that no province is disproportionately affected by these and any future cuts.

Atlantic premiers welcomed the recent announcement of federal infrastructure dollars. They noted the need for infrastructure investments to be strategic and responsive to the needs of each jurisdiction. Provinces are in the best position to determine their infrastructure priorities and it is important federal infrastructure funding provide the flexibility to meet each jurisdiction's circumstances. Premiers called for assurances from the federal government that base funding allocations for each province and territory will be provided at or above the level, and along the same terms, as the 2007 Building Canada Plan.

The Council of Atlantic Premiers recognized the fundamental importance of energy security and open and non-discriminatory cross-territory transportation and transmission of energy. They agreed that continued work on a Canadian Energy Strategy is important and needs to support a goal of efficient movement of energy resources East-West for the benefit of all Canadians, helping meet Canada's future energy needs and increase energy exports.

Premiers agreed today to enhance the Atlantic Procurement Partnership, which will improve buying power in the region. Given the significant public expenditures in health care, Atlantic premiers directed health ministers to identify opportunities to improve services while saving money through joint purchasing. Premiers committed to explore joint procurement opportunities on purchases of \$500,000 or more. Premiers expect this partnership will result in significant savings to taxpayers as well as provide opportunities for Atlantic employers to provide services on a region-wide basis.

Premiers recognize that growing local economies also means competing abroad in traditional and emerging economies. This fall, Atlantic premiers will lead a delegation of businesses and educational institutions to Brazil, one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the largest economy in South America. A number of opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between Atlantic Canada and Brazil have been identified, including: information and communications technologies; oil and gas; life sciences and biotechnology; ocean technology; aerospace and defence; education; and agri-food and seafood.

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