

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COMMUNIQUÉ

Summerside, P.E.I., December 8, 2008 - Atlantic premiers met today in Summerside, Prince Edward Island for their regular Council of Atlantic Premiers' meeting. At the top of their agenda was a call to the federal government for increased and accelerated infrastructure funding in light of the current global economic slowdown. Premiers expressed confidence in the economies of the four Atlantic provinces and reaffirmed their commitment to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the region. Premiers will continue to work collaboratively to provide Atlantic Canadians with high quality and efficient public services.

Premier Robert Ghiz chaired the 16th Session of the Council of Atlantic Premiers which was attended by Premier Rodney MacDonald of Nova Scotia, Premier Shawn Graham of New Brunswick, and Shawn Skinner, Minister of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Economic Competitiveness

Premiers discussed specific actions to ensure that their provincial economies are well positioned for economic growth and to enhance the economic competitiveness of the region.

- **Atlantic Gateway** – The Atlantic Gateway represents a significant opportunity for the four provinces to enhance their transportation infrastructure while stimulating the economy. Each province has identified its unique initiatives and premiers encouraged the federal government to begin funding projects as soon as possible. They stressed that Atlantic Gateway funding should be accelerated and be given the same priority as other sectoral investments.

Premiers are pleased with the federal government's commitment to the Atlantic Gateway and the recent appointment of the Honourable Peter MacKay as Minister for the Atlantic Gateway. They also recommended that the federal government create a dedicated Atlantic Gateway Fund under the direction of Minister MacKay. Premiers committed to identify priorities and to accelerate projects which will help to stimulate economic activity in the region.

- **Resource Industries** - Premiers discussed the significant impact the current economic climate is having on resource industries in the region. They shared insights into the effects on resources industries, in particular the agriculture, fishing and forestry sectors and possible regional approaches to improve outcomes. Premiers committed to work collaboratively to support research and development, remove trade barriers and expand trade into new and emerging markets. Premiers call on the federal government to be a proactive partner with them in these areas.

Premiers encourage their ministers to finalize an Atlantic Memorandum of Understanding on Agriculture. They directed ministers to develop an inventory of federal and provincial programs with a view to optimizing efforts within the region, identifying potential areas of harmonization, and maximizing benefits to the Atlantic provinces.

- **Promoting Atlantic Canada** - Atlantic premiers also discussed the importance of continuing and enhancing efforts to promote Atlantic Canada and are exploring opportunities to expand trade and business partnerships in the country. In the new year, premiers will lead a business mission focused on expanding trade, business opportunities, and partnerships between the four Atlantic provinces and Alberta.

As they continue to work within the Council of the Federation and with the federal government to address the impact of the global economic and fiscal situation on Canada, Atlantic premiers support short- and long-term economic goals through strategic investments in key infrastructure projects and new trade opportunities that create jobs in the four provinces and position the economy for a robust recovery.

Atlantic premiers look forward to the First Ministers' Meeting on January 16, 2009, as premiers and the Prime Minister take the opportunity to work together to strengthen Canada's economy.

Energy Corridor

Atlantic premiers encourage the federal government to make a major investment in electricity transmission infrastructure in the Atlantic region. The creation of a green energy transmission corridor through each of the Atlantic provinces would provide the critical eastern anchor to Canada's energy superpower profile. In addition to its impact on greenhouse gas emission reductions, enhancing transmission infrastructure in the region will also allow greater development of intermittent resources such as the region's attractive hydro, wind, and tidal regimes. The substantial federal infrastructure investment would also provide stimulus to the economy in these challenging economic times.

Environment

The Council of Atlantic Premiers remains committed to mitigating and adapting to climate change. Premiers are working within their own provinces and regionally on energy efficiency and renewable energy. The federal Eco-Action Trust, together with provincial commitments, is an important tool in supporting these efforts which have provided significant environmental and economic benefits to the Atlantic provinces. The premiers congratulated the federal government for their commitment to this beneficial program. Based on the success of the Eco-Trust and the need for action to stimulate the economy, Atlantic premiers are calling on the federal government to continue this program beyond the existing timeline and seek increased funding.

Affordable Housing

Housing is a major determinant of a society's quality of life and is directly linked to an individual's health and well-being, educational achievement, social connections, success in the labour market and poverty alleviation. The Atlantic provinces are facing critical challenges in maintaining existing social housing structures and responding to new demands for social housing.

Premiers affirm that they are united in their desire to engage the federal government in reestablishing a partnership to provide affordable social housing in Canada. Premiers are encouraged by recent commitments by the federal government to renew housing agreements which are set to expire on March 31, 2009. Premiers called on the federal government to work with provincial ministers responsible for housing on the broad range of housing issues facing the country.

Atlantic Cooperation

Atlantic premiers remain committed to working together in strategic areas in order to achieve efficiencies and enhance services for Atlantic Canadians.

- **Atlantic Veterinary College** – The Atlantic premiers signed a new \$97.9 million five-year Atlantic Veterinary College Agreement. The College is dependent on financial support from all Atlantic provinces and is the only veterinary school in Atlantic Canada. Premiers believe strongly in educating our students in the region and are confident that the Atlantic Veterinary College is committed to excellence and innovation in teaching, research and service to the entire Atlantic region. The Atlantic Veterinary College provides undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education in the field of veterinary medicine
- **Health Promotion and Wellness** – Atlantic premiers recognize the serious and growing impact of chronic disease on citizens and on the health care system. Premiers expressed concern that incidence rates of many chronic diseases are higher in the four Atlantic provinces than in other parts of the country.

Atlantic premiers received an update on the collaborative work by ministers responsible for health promotion. Premiers acknowledge the work of ministers and officials in achieving significant progress on collaborative wellness initiatives, specifically focused on children and youth. These initiatives are aimed at improving the health and wellness of Atlantic Canadians, while reducing pressure on the health care systems. Premiers thanked ministers for hosting a successful forum on wellness, held in PEI in November, with key stakeholders to share information and discuss wellness collaboration options.

- **Poverty Reduction** – Premiers directed ministers to continue their work on identifying best practices, sharing information and identifying areas for Atlantic collaboration in poverty reduction. Premiers called on the federal government to develop a national poverty reduction strategy to work in concert with provincial efforts to prevent and reduce poverty. Newfoundland and Labrador extended an invitation for provincial ministers to attend a national symposium on best practices for poverty reduction and labour force participation in April 2009 in St. John's.
- **Changes to the Justice System** – Premiers discussed the recent and pending changes to federal criminal legislation which are expected to result in a substantial increase in costs to provincial criminal justice systems. While premiers recognize federal jurisdiction for criminal legislation, the provinces are responsible for administration. Atlantic premiers called on the federal government to provide all operational and capital cost increases associated with the implementation of their legislative changes.

2009 Canada Summer Games

While in Summerside today, premiers met with the President of the Host Society for the 2009 Canada Games. More than 6,000 volunteers will be required for the Games which will be held in Prince Edward Island in August 2009. Individuals from across the region are encouraged to apply for these volunteer opportunities at www.2009canadagames.ca

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