

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 12, 2005

## COMMUNIQUÉ

Mill River, Prince Edward Island – Premier Pat Binns chaired a meeting of the Council of Atlantic Premiers attended by Premiers Bernard Lord, Danny Williams and John Hamm. This was the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council since it was established in May 2000.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss skills training and post-secondary education and prepare for the upcoming First Ministers' Meeting on Aboriginal Issues.

### **Skills Training and Post-Secondary Education**

The August meeting of Council of the Federation spelled out a clear commitment by provincial and territorial leaders to increase investment in human capital through focused investment in post-secondary education and skills training. The Atlantic premiers support a federal-provincial funding strategy that will allow governments to provide similar training opportunities in all provinces, while providing the flexibility for provinces to address individual priorities.

The Atlantic premiers were briefed by their Education Ministers on the Council of the Federation meeting of Education, Labour Market and Finance Ministers that took place recently in Quebec City. The Atlantic premiers recognize the importance of entering a new partnership with the federal government that will position Canada as a global leader in education and training while also closing the existing gap between Atlantic Canada and other provinces in infrastructure and research and development funding. They noted that the Prime Minister, however, has yet to act on his June 2004 commitment to increase post-secondary transfers directly to provinces and territories.

### **First Ministers' Meeting**

The Atlantic premiers discussed the upcoming meeting with their provincial counterparts, the Prime Minister, and Aboriginal leaders. This meeting will consider new initiatives for Canada's Aboriginal peoples in key areas of health, education, housing, economic development, and relationships.

The premiers agreed that this First Ministers' Meeting represents an important opportunity to begin closing the gap that exists between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of the Canadian population in these areas. Premiers will continue to urge the federal government to ensure that it meets its constitutional and fiduciary obligations to Aboriginal peoples. They emphasized that any federal-provincial collaboration must include adequate and long-term sustainable funding.

Premiers stressed the importance of ensuring that all actions in response to these issues reflect local circumstances and needs and that the approaches used to collaborate with the Aboriginal communities should build upon existing agreements and multilateral consultation processes.

Premiers agreed that they will continue to consult with Aboriginal groups in their provinces in preparation for the First Ministers' meeting. They also noted serious concern with Aboriginal health outcomes and, in particular, with the high incidence of suicide in Aboriginal communities.

### **National Transportation Strategy**

Atlantic premiers support the Council of the Federation initiative to develop a National Transportation Strategy. In doing so, premiers encouraged their transportation ministers to complete the development of a regional multi-modal transportation strategy.

### **Fiscal Imbalance**

Atlantic premiers reaffirmed that while supporting the work of the Council of the Federation Advisory Panel on Fiscal Imbalance, established last spring, they continue to support a return to the ten-province standard, comprehensive revenue coverage including all natural resources within the Equalization formula, retention of the representative tax system, and elimination of artificial ceilings on the program. Premiers agreed to continue advocating this position to the federal government.

### **Immigration**

Atlantic premiers discussed the importance of immigration to the region. Premiers are concerned that proposed changes to the regulations under the *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act* will have an adverse effect on the region's ability to attract and retain business immigrants. The premiers call on the federal government to extend the current program for 5 to 7 years.

### **Gas and Oil Prices/Home Heating Support**

Atlantic premiers are concerned about the impact of the rising prices of gas and home-heating fuel on their citizens. They discussed provincial initiatives to address this situation and endorsed the work of the Atlantic Energy Ministers' Forum in developing a regional energy efficiency marketing and awareness campaign to educate Atlantic Canadians on actions individuals can take to lower energy consumption and reduce costs. They will continue to look for opportunities for further collaboration.

Atlantic premiers acknowledge the recent initiatives introduced by the federal government and stressed that the federal government should continue to play a lead role in addressing this national issue.

### **Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative**

Atlantic premiers again discussed the proposed Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, an American regulatory proposal that would require all US citizens and foreign nationals to present a passport or other secure document when entering the United States. They are concerned that the implementation of such a regulation will have significant negative impacts on Canadian and American citizens from our border communities as well as tourism and commercial trade.

Atlantic premiers will write to the US Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff to stress how crucial it is that our borders allow for day-to-day life to continue while, at the same time, fully address our heightened security concerns.

### **Atlantic Prosperity Partnership Framework**

The Atlantic provinces continue to engage the federal government for a renewed partnership for Atlantic regional economic development. Economic development activities of the federal and provincial governments should be complementary, coordinated to maximize the impact of resources, and delivered through cost-shared bilateral agreements. They noted that federal and provincial officials have been meeting to discuss an Atlantic Prosperity Partnership Framework.

Premiers directed their ministers responsible for economic development to meet with the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and to finalize the proposed Atlantic Prosperity Partnership Framework for ratification by the Atlantic premiers and the Prime Minister. The premiers reiterated their intention to meet with Prime Minister Martin on this issue.

### **Building on Progress: Atlantic Action Plan 2005-08**

The Atlantic premiers released their Atlantic action plan, *Building on Progress*, in June 2005. The plan outlines how the provinces are working together to enhance the provision of quality and efficient public services and foster a more competitive regional economy.

Premiers noted collaborative initiatives in the areas of environment, education and training and procurement. They announced that the Atlantic provinces will undertake the *Atlantic Provinces Driver's License and ID Card Project*, which will provide enhanced and up-to-date security features for driver's license/identification cards (DL/ID) while achieving significant economic savings through the joint procurement process. This will allow each province to use the same security features while retaining the unique card characteristics of their jurisdiction.

### **World Junior Championships in Athletics**

Atlantic premiers expressed their support for the City of Moncton's bid to host the 12<sup>th</sup> World Junior Championships in Athletics in 2008. They noted that Athletics Canada has also endorsed the bid in obtaining this important international sporting event.

### **Commonwealth Games**

Atlantic premiers also expressed their support for Halifax's 2014 Commonwealth Games bid. They noted that the development of sport and youth activity through such an event will have a beneficial impact throughout the region.

### **Shrimp Tariff**

Atlantic premiers fully support the efforts of the Atlantic provinces, the shrimp industry and the federal government in their efforts to address the excessive 20 per cent tariff on Canadian shrimp entering the European Union. They are encouraged that a working group of representatives from the federal government, provinces and industry have a firm mandate and timelines to make recommendations on how to overcome this significant impediment to the Canadian shrimp industry.

**Promoting Atlantic Canada**

Building on the success of a communications mission to Toronto last year, the Council agreed that the Atlantic premiers will organize a further mission to Calgary on November 23. The premiers plan to meet with business leaders and the media to communicate the message that Atlantic Canada is a competitive region for new investment.

**Premier Hamm's Retirement**

Premiers Binns, Lord and Williams used the occasion of this meeting to personally acknowledge the announcement of Premier Hamm's retirement as leader of the Nova Scotia Progressive Conservative party. Premier Hamm's colleagues thanked him for his contribution to his province for the past 12 years and praised him for his commitment to regional cooperation as an original signatory to the 2000 agreement establishing the Council of Atlantic Premiers. Premiers Binns, Lord, and Williams noted that Premier Hamm always provided an informed and insightful perspective to discussions at the regional and national level and congratulated him on his legacy of achievement during his six years as premier of Nova Scotia.

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