

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – December 6, 2006

COMMUNIQUÉ

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador – Premier Danny Williams chaired a meeting of the Council of Atlantic Premiers (CAP) attended by Premiers Shawn Graham, Rodney MacDonald and Pat Binns. This was the 13th meeting of the Council since it was established in May 2000 and the first meeting for Premiers Graham and MacDonald.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss immigration, energy, harmonization of rules and regulations for small- to medium-size enterprises, and a strategy to engage the federal government in a partnership for Atlantic regional economic development.

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women and 89th Anniversary of the Halifax Explosion

Premiers began their meeting with a moment of silence recognizing the 17th anniversary of the Montreal massacre and the 89th anniversary of the Halifax explosion.

Atlantic Gateway

Premiers welcomed the recent federal announcement of funding for gateways to Canada. Premiers directed the development of a joint approach to a broadly based Atlantic Gateway Strategy to take advantage of this opportunity to benefit each of the four provinces and Canada as a whole.

Fiscal Imbalance

Premiers discussed the federal government's approach to economic and fiscal policy, including the status of the federal government's commitment to resolve fiscal imbalance. Premiers encouraged the federal government to table proposals on all aspects of fiscal imbalance as soon as possible to provide provinces with ample opportunity to respond and prepare their budgets. As a first step, premiers called on the federal government to address Equalization and the Canada Social Transfer. Premiers believe that Equalization should be returned to a formula-driven program that reflects the constitutional principle upon which it is based. Premiers also noted that the federal government has committed to ensuring that no province is adversely affected by changes to Equalization. Premiers support the restoration of the Canada Social Transfer (CST) to 1994-95 levels plus an appropriate escalator to ensure base cash funding grows annually, in support of post-secondary education and other social programs.

Immigration

Immigration is increasingly important to the economic, social and cultural development of the region as we face an aging population, population decline and emerging skills shortages; however, last year the Atlantic provinces representing 7.2% of Canada's population, attracted only 1.4% of Canada's new immigrants. Atlantic premiers note federal settlement funding, used to help integrate and retain immigrants in their new Atlantic communities, has not kept pace with other regions in Canada when considered on a per-immigrant basis. Premiers direct their ministers responsible for immigration to work with the federal government on an Atlantic immigration framework and ensure that our immigrants have access to the same level of services as immigrants in other regions of Canada.

Energy

Premiers agreed to pursue the development of an Atlantic energy framework to position the region as a leader in energy conservation and generation. Premiers directed their energy ministers to develop an inventory of potential collaboration projects and identify high-level topics of interest for regional collaboration. The framework would build upon the work of the Atlantic Energy Ministers' Forum which has been active in the areas of energy efficiency and awareness, renewable energy, and research and analysis of the electricity sector.

Promoting Atlantic Canada

Given the robust economy in Alberta, Premiers discussed the possibilities to expand business opportunities and partnerships in Alberta. Premiers will lead a mission there early in the new year. Premiers plan to meet with business leaders, media and Atlantic Canadians living in several Alberta communities including Fort McMurray to deliver the message that Atlantic Canada is a competitive region in which to do business.

Harmonization of Rules and Regulations for Small- and Medium-size Enterprises (SMEs)

Premiers re-affirmed their commitment to reduce red tape and streamline rules and regulations to encourage economic growth, increase the competitiveness of SMEs, and attract investment to the region. While progress has been made with the implementation of the Atlantic Procurement Agreement, Atlantic Provinces Standard Terms and Conditions for goods and services, and Atlantic Harmonization Trucking Strategy, premiers recognize that more opportunities exist to improve the region's competitiveness. Premiers acknowledged the importance of working with stakeholders towards continuously improving the business environment, and have directed their ministers to consult with Atlantic stakeholders to target key areas in which opportunities exist for additional harmonization, and/or streamlining of regulations.

Atlantic Regional Economic Development

Premiers reaffirmed their commitment to promote the long-term economic competitiveness of the Atlantic region and to joint action on key competitiveness issues and opportunities. They call for a true partnership with the federal government which

reflects the priorities of all Atlantic provinces where economic development activities are coordinated, complementary, and delivered through cost-shared bilateral agreements. To expedite this, premiers are requesting a meeting with ACOA minister, Honourable Peter MacKay, and federal regional ministers, Honourable Loyola Hearn and Honourable Greg Thompson early in the new year.

Atlantic Premiers' Walking Challenge

Premiers agreed to participate in the 2007 Atlantic Premiers' Walking Challenge initiated by Premier Graham, a four-month event where they will wear pedometers and log their step count. The challenge is to walk through the equivalent of the four Atlantic Wonders (Confederation Bridge, Gros Morne National Park, Fundy National Park, and the Cabot Trail) by the end of the challenge. The total of all four selected Atlantic Wonders equals 544 km or 652,800 steps. By participating in this event, the premiers are leading by example and demonstrating the importance of physical activity to overall wellness.

Premiers Report on Progress on the Council of Atlantic Premiers' Action Plan

The premiers received a progress report on the implementation of their *Building on Progress: Atlantic Action Plan 2005-08* adopted in June 2005. Premiers noted progress in a number of sectors:

- *Health* - provinces are taking steps to integrate the use of electronic health with diagnostic imaging picture archiving and communication systems as Atlantic Canada is a recognized leader in this area;
- *Government procurement* - the region continues to pursue joint procurement tendering opportunities, building upon the examples of the Atlantic drivers' license project and the school bus procurement project which achieved savings in excess of \$1.7 million in 2006-2007;
- *Education* - premiers noted that the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) continues to focus its efforts in the areas of supporting program implementation and improving student performance, in addition to addressing post-secondary infrastructure and maintenance needs. CAMET will announce a number of classroom and teacher resource materials and provide an update on a federal-provincial-universities-college partnership to address campus infrastructure renewal; and
- *Transportation sector* - provinces are harmonizing over-dimensional loads, and common escort driver training guidelines which will benefit the regional trucking industry by reducing government red tape.

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For further information, please contact:

Marie-Andrée Bolduc, New Brunswick (506) 453-2144

Elizabeth Matthews, Newfoundland & Labrador (709) 729-3960

Sasha Irving, Nova Scotia (902) 424-6600

Patrick Dorsey, Prince Edward Island (902) 368-4400