

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Atlantic Premiers Act to Strengthen Regional Collaboration

Sussex, NB (May 16, 2011) – The Council of Atlantic Premiers agreed today to strengthen collaboration between their provinces with new actions to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of government services, sustain vital health care services and build on the region's potential as a producer of clean and renewable energy.

Premier David Alward was joined by Premier Darrell Dexter of Nova Scotia, Premier Robert Ghiz of Prince Edward Island, and Premier Kathy Dunderdale of Newfoundland and Labrador, who was welcomed by her colleagues to her first CAP meeting.

Premiers' collaborative action is a tangible commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Maritime Premiers (CMP) and the ongoing initiatives of the Council of Atlantic Premiers (CAP). On May 25, 1971, the Premiers of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island founded the CMP, with the aim of providing more effective services to their citizens. Over the years, Atlantic premiers often met informally in addition to CMP, and Atlantic initiatives were undertaken. In 2000, Newfoundland and Labrador joined with the three Maritime provinces to establish CAP, which provides a forum for fostering regional collaboration within Atlantic Canada and the development of positions on key national issues.

Premiers also discussed certain national programs such as the upcoming renewal of significant federal transfers and shipbuilding, and agreed that the needs of Atlantic Canadians must be addressed.

Regional Collaboration

Premiers committed to work together to improve public services to their citizens while lessening duplication and reducing costs to taxpayers. Joint procurement is one tangible way that provinces can work together to improve public services. The Atlantic provinces have for many years cooperated on public purchasing in a number of areas, including school bus tendering and courier services, resulting in significant savings to taxpayers. Premiers directed all ministers, where appropriate, to identify and pursue joint procurement opportunities, and explore the viability of partnering in public purchasing with other Atlantic provinces.

Premiers noted the ongoing efforts of the region's liquor corporations to reduce costs through collaborative actions. Atlantic liquor corporations currently provide joint tendering of international freight from consolidation to delivery and are collaborating on marketing and promotion of the responsible use of alcohol. Premiers encouraged further dialogue among the liquor corporations to continue to enhance regional cooperation.

Energy

Atlantic Canada is positioned to be a leader in the development of clean, renewable electricity to meet the needs of Canadian and US power consumers. Premiers urged the federal government to continue to work with provinces to promote development that will unlock the region's potential as a producer of renewable energy. Through the Atlantic Energy Gateway initiative, the Atlantic provinces are exploring ways to more fully integrate their transmission systems. Studies are currently underway on system integration, project financing, market opportunities and regulatory issues. Premiers acknowledged the federal government's support for the Atlantic Energy Gateway initiative and they look forward to reviewing its findings.

Premiers discussed a number of projects which will advance the development of renewable energy in the region and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including Phase 1 of the Lower Churchill hydroelectric development, PEI's Energy Accord, designed to bring stable energy prices to the province, its 500 MW Wind Energy Plan and the Northumberland Strait cable transmission project, the agreement between Emera and NB Power to explore the transmission link between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, as well as other New Brunswick energy initiatives. In its initial findings, the New Brunswick Energy Commission has identified potential opportunities for regional collaboration in the energy sector, and New Brunswick looks forward to working with its Atlantic partners in advancing these opportunities.

Atlantic premiers discussed the unique opportunity these developments provide to move towards a more integrated Atlantic transmission system, to build a modern, efficient and clean renewable energy grid that will maximize employment and economic benefits for the region.

Premiers welcomed the Prime Minister's election commitment to support renewable energy projects which are economically viable, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide significant long-term regional and national economic benefits. Premiers support these principles as a basis for moving forward with renewable energy projects in Atlantic Canada.

Premiers called on the federal government to fulfill the Prime Minister's election commitment to provide a loan guarantee or equivalent financial support for Phase 1 of the Lower Churchill development. Premiers also called on the federal government to approve Prince Edward Island's application under the Green Infrastructure Fund for the Northumberland Strait Cable Project.

Premiers urged the federal government to continue to work with provinces to promote projects that will unlock the region's potential as a producer of clean and renewable energy.

Sustaining Health Care

Premiers today signed a Memorandum of Understanding for collaboration in providing timely and effective access to cardiac artery bypass graft surgeries. This agreement guides referrals so that patients requiring this surgical procedure will receive timely access to appropriate care. This is a key example of how collaborative action can be used to improve the efficiency of health care services for all Atlantic Canadians.

Sustaining health care for the long term will require innovative programs and a renewed emphasis on health promotion, illness prevention and chronic disease management. Premiers discussed key issues in sustaining health care services and directed their health ministers to identify tangible opportunities to achieve efficiencies and improve services through collaborative actions, reporting to them at the next CAP meeting.

Atlantic premiers noted that cancer rates in the region are among the highest in Canada. They endorsed research efforts to determine the impact of genetics, the environment, and behavior on the prevalence of certain cancers. Premiers challenged Atlantic Canadians to participate in the Atlantic Partnership for Tomorrow Project (PATH), the largest study of its kind in the region's history.

Federal Transfers

Premiers agreed that Canada's system of transfers from the federal government to provinces and territories is a defining characteristic of Canadian federalism. All jurisdictions benefit from transfers that support vital health care and social services and enable provinces and territories to deliver the services Canadians deserve. Premiers agreed to work together to champion a system of federal transfers that strengthens the Canadian federation and achieves Canada's constitutional objectives. This will be an important element of discussions toward renewing important transfers, including the Canada Health Transfer (CHT), Canada Social Transfer (CST), and Equalization, which are due to expire in 2014.

As premiers advocate for stable, adequate and predictable federal transfers, they will also show leadership in addressing cost pressures in health care and social services through innovative solutions.

Families

Premiers discussed the importance of policies that support Canadian families. They agreed that it is important for all governments to focus on early learning, childcare, and the need for improvements to maternal and parental benefits under the Employment Insurance program.

Shipbuilding

The Atlantic provinces have a long and proud tradition of shipbuilding. Premiers noted the federal government's current initiative to modernize Canada's navy and coast guard fleet is a historic opportunity, which has the potential to revive and strengthen the shipbuilding industry in this region. Premiers support the federal government's objective, fair and transparent procurement process. Premiers urged the federal government to maximize the potential for new shipbuilding activity in Atlantic Canada under the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy. They stated it is vital that the benefits of new shipbuilding initiatives are maximized across each of the Atlantic provinces, realizing that subcontractors in other parts of Canada will benefit.

Immigration

Atlantic Canada is facing demographic challenges not faced by other regions of Canada, including an aging population and projected population decline. Meeting these challenges and addressing the workforce skills shortages that will arise as a consequence of these makes it important that Atlantic Canada be well positioned to recruit and retain immigrants. Premiers again called on the federal government to remove the cap on Provincial Nominee Programs.

Regional collaboration is a key element in recruiting needed skilled workers. Since 2005, officials of the four provinces have been working with their federal counterparts through the Atlantic Population Table (APT). Funded jointly by federal and Atlantic Canada governments, the APT has been instrumental in marketing and recruitment efforts to meet the region's workforce needs. The funding agreement supporting the APT is due to expire in January 2012 and premiers urged the federal government to renew this Memorandum of Understanding so that the important work of meeting Atlantic Canada's immigration objectives can continue.

Research and Development

To continue to grow and prosper, Atlantic Canada must expand its capacity for research and development that will foster innovation and create new jobs and long-term economic growth. Over the last two years, the four provinces have invested over \$200 million in innovation and R&D support. The federal government is a key partner in building R&D capacity in the Atlantic provinces and there are opportunities for both levels of government to work more closely to ensure our collective R&D investments are better aligned and tied to results. Premiers recognize that more focused efforts are required to continue to build R&D capacity in the private sector. Premiers emphasize the need for national R&D support programs to be more responsive to Atlantic provinces' priorities and strengths, as well as tailored to regional and provincial conditions.

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