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Headline – Lack of budget support to help business rebound amid pandemic concerning for local chamber

TRURO – While no new fees for service or increased taxes were tabled in Nova Scotia’s budget Thursday, the lack of support to assist business rebound is a concern for the local Chamber.

Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce President Matthew Mossman said the budget ‘A Fair and Prosperous Future: Path to Balance,’ missed the mark in addressing support for those best positioned to drive the province’s economy as we continue to navigate a global pandemic.

“We had expected to see increased investment in rural supports such as highspeed internet, more direct support for business, especially in the hardest hit sectors, and greater investments to encourage participation in the workforce by women,” said Mossman “The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected women in the province.”

The president recognizes that the employment gap between pre-COVID-19 and present closed in February, however, women in the workforce were greatly impacted by job losses that have been slow to recover.

“We can learn from this pandemic, identify opportunities and work together to prevent employment gaps of this nature in the future.”

He applauds the new \$12.3 million investment in additional Mental Health programming; however, he feels efforts toward physician recruitment should also have been identified as a priority. Mossman said recent numbers provided to the Chamber by Nova Scotia Health Authority officials, indicate there are about 12,000 people in the Truro Colchester region that do not have an assigned family physician.

“That is a startling number of people on waiting lists in a time when access to health care is top of mind for everyone,” said the President.

He also notes variances from the previous budget year which include a reduction in funding for the Department of Agriculture, about \$1.46 million, Tourism Nova Scotia’s budget was reduced by \$586,000, and the former Department of Business, now the Department of Inclusive Economic Growth, is showing a budget reduction of nearly \$23.4 million, despite the transfer of responsibilities from other departments such as Regional Enterprise Network funding previously managed by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Services, and Housing.



Mossman said those sectors are extremely important to our regional economy. The Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce will be further reviewing the budget in the coming days to better understand the roles and budgets of the new and realigned departments. The Chamber will also seek clarity on the creation of 142 new positions in Nova Scotia's government departments in the past 12 months, about 50 COVID-19 related.

“It is extremely concerning that Nova Scotia is predicting a \$585 million deficit but we are in a better position than many other provinces across Canada,” said Mossman. “Government must remain vigilant in holding the line on taxes and ensuring fiscal responsibility is always front of mind. We must stay focused on economic recovery and ensure our business community remains strong to drive that forward.”

He said the Chamber looks forward to working with the new Department of Inclusive Economic Growth as the government attempts a return to balance in the next four years amid many potential risks tied to the pandemic.

The Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce represents more than 450 members and has been the recognized voice of business in this region for 131 years on economic, political and social matters impacting business.

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