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Hon. Premier McNeil  
One Government Place  
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Dear Hon. Premier,

The dedication to address COVID-19 by so many Nova Scotians, front line health care and essential workers and our businesses who have been forced to close their doors or significantly limit their operations, must be commended. We have seen tremendous personal sacrifice.

But now, many are struggling to survive and are concerned about what the future holds. As they see restrictions being relaxed, they have more and more questions. Certainly, their biggest concern is “opening” society and shops in a safe manner that protects both patrons and employees and provides the best opportunity to keep the curve flat.

As you know, I remain committed to working with your team in any way you deem necessary. In fact, you will remember that on April 17, I offered that, whenever you feel it appropriate to turn attention toward reopening the economy, I would be there to help. At the time, I suggested a virtual, all-party committee, including community and business leaders from both rural and urban Nova Scotia. While I have not heard back from you, I thought it may assist you to share some thoughts on the types of measures that should be put in place to provide re-opening supports.

As a province, we must prepare for what’s next, including the following actions as a part of Nova Scotia’s economic reopening. These steps will help to restore economic activity while keeping Nova Scotians safe:

- Establish the “Get Going Grant” to provide eligible businesses a grant up to \$2,500 to stock up on necessary PPE, plexiglass and other protective equipment;
- Fill in gaps in the wage subsidy and extend the program provincially to cover anyone who is truly working for the business, including independent contractors;
- Fill in gaps in the CERB and extend the program provincially to cover owner/operators whose income comes from dividends from their small business as opposed to drawing a “salary;”
- Commit provincial funding to summer day camps so parents can work; and
- Provide short-term commercial rent relief with a no eviction backstop (for evictions related to COVID-19).

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The biggest concern I hear, overwhelmingly, from small business owners relates to rent. In many cases they haven't been able to reach an agreement with their landlords that recognizes their COVID-19 reality. Often, that is because the landlord was either unwilling or unable to enter into a rent deferral agreement or the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program.

Nobody wants to lose these businesses and, as a result, I ask you to consider the following options to improve their chances of long-term survival:

- Any landlord of a Qualified Business under the Rent Deferral Support program (provincial), that hasn't already, must reach an agreement with its tenant by June 1 or be forced to enter the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program (CECRA);
- The province must lobby the federal government to extend eligibility criteria of the CECRA to correct the obvious oversight that limits eligibility to those businesses that have experienced at least a 70% decline in pre-COVID-19 revenues, when 50% is a more reasonable measure;
- The province must lobby the federal government to extend the CECRA to September 1 so that businesses have some runway to resume operations after opening; and
- The province must lobby the federal government to ensure that any mortgagee of a landlord participating in CECRA must waive 50% of the interest on the affected mortgage for the period of participation.

Our businesses have worked diligently, along with all Nova Scotians, to support the government in the fight against COVID-19. As time has passed, their concerns are mounting over how they will deal with the economic crisis that looms ahead.

While keeping Nova Scotians safe is always the priority of the PC Caucus and the businesses we are hearing from, these measures will help to give business owners and staff confidence that every precaution is being taken to reduce the likelihood of future spreads and that they will have businesses to come back to.

I trust that these suggested measures will compliment or improve existing plans and will give Nova Scotians the confidence to begin to get back to some level of normalcy.

Nova Scotians are looking for leadership on how life begins to return to normal. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on these ideas and next steps.

Yours truly,



Tim Houston  
Leader, Progressive Conservative  
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