

**Remarks by the Honourable John F. Hamm, MD, MLA
Premier of Nova Scotia
Closing Luncheon – Grater Halifax Partnership *Partners at the Pines*
Digby, NS
October 4th, 2004**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you very much Stephen. And thank you – GHP members – for inviting me to speak with you today.

Partners at the Pines is a great event. Of all the places I'd envision meeting the Greater Halifax Partnership...this one wasn't top of mind.

Mind you -- I've always had a wonderful time whenever I visit the Digby area...this one no exception – this morning I've already had an opportunity to visit with some local sixth graders at Digby Elementary school as well as stop by the Convergys customer contact centre that has emerged as one of the area's big employers.

I hope that each of you, like wise, have had a similar opportunity to explore Digby and enjoy the local hospitality...and that your discussions so far have been productive.

Now it's my turn – so here goes nothing! – standing in Digby – and talking about Halifax's economy!...only in politics they say...

Of course, before talking about economic issues, I like to offer this little disclaimer..that came by way of one of our century's great economists John Kenneth Galbraith

Economics is extremely useful as a form of employment for economists.

It's worth remembering. When we debate the future prosperity of our region. The programs, investments and initiatives – that will keep Halifax growing. We must not limit our discussion to just dollars and cents...to percentages and ratios...

...quite frankly, the impact of our economy is not sterile...it's a question of quality of life. It is economic growth that gives us, as parents and grandparents, peace of mind that our children are going to better schools. It's economic growth that recruits that allows us to recruit more doctors and nurses – invest in new medical equipment – and keep wait times going down.

It's economic growth – that ensures that every Nova Scotian has an opportunity to find a job and raise a family right here at home – that no one has to leave. And it's economic growth that ensures that our province's immigrants – can build the better life they worked so hard for – and can continue to contribute to our province's rich way of life.

From the taxes we pay to the roads we drive on. Encouraging prosperity, investment, exports, rural revitalization and urban renewal – impact us all far beyond the dollars and cents.

I take, as an example, our province's credit rating. Nova Scotians are the beneficiaries of two recent upgrades in our credit rating...including increases from three separate reputable agencies...Dominion, Moody's, and Standard and Poor's.

I'm quite sure I'm addressing an audience all too aware of the impact of an improved credit rating on our province's finances – our province's ability to provide the services that people expect. However – one of my challenges is to make sure that this message goes beyond financial statements and makes it into people's homes.

From the spreadsheets to the bedsheets – if you will.

This is where it's so valuable to have constructive partners like the GHP.

In a world where criticism is plentiful, but constructive participation is often in short supply – your presence in the HRM is a breath of fresh air. The GHP – have always, and continue to look for solutions – not problems – and you spend your time finding partners – not pointing fingers.

As we tackle the challenges facing the HRM – in particular the challenge of attracting and retaining skilled immigrants and ensuring that Municipal infrastructure keeps pace with city growth...your input will be more important than ever.

Nova Scotia has a lot to be proud of. Whether here in Digby. Back in Halifax – or anywhere else there are a lot of hard working people, making big things happen.

In Halifax's case we see it in the KPMG *Competitive Alternatives Survey*, that ranked our capital city the fourth most competitive location to do business out of 98 major centres studied worldwide.

We see it in a regional economy that has created eleven thousand new jobs in the past five years – and dropped the unemployment rate by three percent...not only the lowest in Atlantic Canada – but a lower unemployment rate than Toronto, Ottawa or Montreal.

We see it in a provincial economy that has generated employment growth in every region of Nova Scotia – one that has added 37,00 jobs since 1999. One that has set or tied our all time employment record five times in the past year alone.

We see it in Scotiabank's forecast that we'll double our economic growth

We see it wages and salaries that have increased 4.2 percent in 2003 – well above the national average of 3.3 percent.

And, I like to think, we see it in a provincial government that respects the trust of taxpayers – and has delivered three straight balanced budgets...tax relief for small businesses and the vast majority of taxpayers, and Nova Scotia's first ever debt retirement plan.

That's the quantitative side of the coin. The results – can be felt, on the ground, on the street, and in the world class events that have chosen to come to Nova Scotia.

The World Juniors and Women's World Hockey Championships.

The Brier. Tall Ships and World Acadian Congress.

It can be felt through our opening up of 28 new long-term care beds this past spring – providing security to seniors in need – and reducing the strain on our emergency departments.

It can be felt by our community college students – who will be moving to a new \$50 million dollar campus on the Dartmouth Waterfront – including 1800 seats for local students.

From guaranteeing lower class sizes – to investing every cent of gas taxes in better roads. A stronger economy allows us to make the Halifax area – and all Nova Scotia - - a better place to live.

These days we often hear talk about how the global economy is more and more interrelated...more and more interdependent. The fact is...we don't need to look a continent away to see this principle in action. Our economy – our system of health care – our system of education – they all link together.

To see these links – to follow through on them – takes a significant amount of foresight. Foresight that can only be earned from doing your research...and having a good plan.

This weekend – each of you – by discussing the long-term prospects and challenges in the region are contributing to this kind of effort.

It's a goal that those of us in government share.

In Health Care and Healthy Living. In Education and Energy. Our government has made it a priority to map out our long-term priorities – in writing – through comprehensive strategies.

Economic development is no different. *Opportunities For Prosperity* – our strategy for growth – was developed with the support of GHP members. It's a major factor behind our growth to date – and it continues to guide us to this day.

With a good plan – and the right effort...we can take advantage of every opportunity before us. Where others see barriers to success we see mountains to climb.

There were many commentators who claimed that we could not make minority government work. That we could not lower auto insurance rates. Keep our budget balanced. Reinvest in Health Care. Or continue creating jobs.

Well today Nova Scotians have lower insurance rates. A balanced budget. Renewed investments in Health Care. And thirteen thousand new jobs created in the past year alone.

We've made minority government work – we're still making minority government work because we stick to the basics...Like keeping your word...Looking for common ground...

And always keeping your eye out for partners – for leaders – within the community.

In the Halifax region – the GHP has always provided that kind of partnership – and that kind of leadership.

And today leadership is more important than ever. Whether you're a premier, a business leader – or in any other position where people look to you. In order to show leadership – we need to get things right.

The industrialist Harold S. Geenan had this to say about leadership.

That it *“is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions”*

In attitude – in actions – by coming out to Digby – by brainstorming – by discussing the road to date and the road ahead – GHP members are showing, in concrete terms, that you remain committed to leadership.

As a Premier. As a Nova Scotian. I appreciate this contribution. I hope that the GHP will come out of this meeting stronger than ever.

Thank you for today's invitation. I'd be delighted to take any questions.