

Moving Nova Scotia Forward

Let me begin by thanking _____ for his kind introduction. In addition I want to thank IPAC for inviting me to speak at the fall luncheon series. I appreciate your interest in attending particularly when Frank McKenna, former Premier of New Brunswick, is speaking at the Junior Achievement event at the same time - tough competition.

It is an interesting opportunity for me to speak to and dialogue with IPAC members so early in my tenure as the Deputy Minister to the Premier and Head of the Public Service. I am new enough to my position to be able to share my vision for the public service and just maybe new enough that you will not be disappointed in me if I do not have all the answers.

Let me begin by saying that I am a believer that public service is a calling. I did not always believe

that to be true. In my own case at the roots of my career I was the "accidental public servant". I came to the Nova Scotia public service as a 20 something youth worker with a wife and two children. I was looking for employment that gave me benefits, regular hours and a living wage. What I found was challenge, opportunity and I believe the true value of public service.

I am first and foremost a proud public servant. I believe passionately in the public service profession, its importance to stakeholders whether at the municipal, provincial or federal order of government and the immense satisfaction an individual can have in a public service career. I hope each of you can look at your career, wherever it may be, and say the same thing.

In order to move the government agenda forward, and to move Nova Scotia forward both economically and socially, it requires people and

commitment. As public servants, it is our responsibility to ensure we do that. As leader of the Public Service in Nova Scotia, it is my responsibility to help put the conditions in place to ensure that the people and the commitment required to move Nova Scotia forward come together. There has been much discussion around public service renewal. Perhaps it is time to re-brand that concept, to talk about it in a different context. The world in which we live and compete is a dynamic one. Our public service must be dynamic as well. It's about policy capacity, continuous learning and keeping an evergreen public service.

Premier Rodney MacDonald has been speaking to Nova Scotians and others about a new Nova Scotia. Not new in sense of only tomorrow but what we have today. A Nova Scotia that has had five consecutive years of balanced budgets and a commitment to a debt management plan that will see us begin to pay down our significant net

direct debt. A Nova Scotia which strives to maintain and improve the business climate to encourage growth in our Nova Scotia entrepreneurs and attract new ones like RIM (Blackberry) to our Province. A Nova Scotia that creates the education and training opportunities to position our youth to stay in Nova Scotia and apply their trade in a growing workforce. A Nova Scotia focused on growing the economy to generate the wealth required to maintain and improve our treasured education health and social safety net programs.

You might be asking yourself why I started this presentation with references to our Premier's message to Nova Scotians. In fact I do so because the Premier's message on behalf of the duly elected government is the direction to the public service. It is the governments job to set the direction for the Province - to identify what is important.

It is the public service with a focus on the governments priorities for the people of Nova Scotia that helps the province get there. It is a public service that analyzes, assesses and recommends complementary public policy for government consideration and who develops and implements the programs that will support the governments vision for the province.

The reality in our democratic system is that the public servant works in the interest of the public by serving the duly elected government.

Therefore I can not stress enough how important the Premiers vision is to a well directed and focused public service.

Specifically today I want to speak to you about two key themes which depending on how we deal with the challenges they present may well dictate the future of the Nova Scotia Public service and to a degree the future of Nova Scotia over the next twenty to thirty years. These themes are

an ever greened public service and growing our policy capacity and excellence.

Let me begin with an evergreened public service. I'd like to use an analogy about trees to emphasize my point.

In a forest there are two types of trees hardwoods and softwoods. The Hardwood or deciduous trees lose all their leaves in the fall and completely replace their leaves in the spring. The softwood or coniferous trees constantly replaces its needles ensuring that it has a mix of new (young/fresh) needles and older (experienced needles).

Our public service today is more typical of the hardwood tree. In the 60's and 70's through retirement and growth in the public service we recruited many people to the public service, the baby boomer. Now some 30 to 35 years later we are faced with a graying of the public service.

The average age of civil servants is 46 years. In the case of senior managers, it's 50 years. In fact, there are 900 working Nova Scotia civil servants who are eligible to retire at this very moment, and that number continues to grow.

That should mean lots of opportunity in Nova Scotia, right?

It's probably no surprise to you that when I meet young professionals and immigrants, they repeatedly tell me: "You may think there are opportunities, but have you tried to get into the civil service lately? It's tough."

More statistics explain why this is:

It's been described as a "grey ceiling." We are finding that when civil servants become eligible to retire, they don't leave for several years after their magic number comes up. I admit to being among this cohort. And that is not necessarily a

bad thing.

In fact, of those 900 people on the eligibility list today...30 of them have been eligible since 1999.

This has meant that the size of the employee cohorts in the succeeding generations has been significantly smaller meaning that we neither have a sufficient supply of experienced middle generation ready to assume senior leadership roles and our intake of 20 somethings is minuscule.

We have allowed ourselves to become the hardwood tree waiting for the leaves to fall to recruit a diminishing youth talent pool, while most other public and private sector organizations are facing the same dilemma. The question is: how do we balance the value of those who are contributing in the last few years of their career, and increase the leadership talent in those mid-way through their careers, while recruiting

talent for the future?

To use the tree analogy, how do we transition from being a hardwood tree to that of a softwood tree.

I believe there are four key areas we should address within government to increase the likelihood for success.

First, we need to listen to our employees and prospective employees.

What makes them happy and productive? Is it more responsibility? Family-friendly policies? Healthy workplace initiatives? Recognition? Or, how about good ol' respect and empowerment?

A month or two ago, the list of Canada's Top 100 Employers was published. The author of

that annual rating said today's companies have to be well rounded in how they compete for skilled and professional talent. Employers must be flexible and responsive to workers' needs and offer a work environment where they feel valued, respected, challenged, and encouraged to balance work, life, and community interests.

Our organizational flexibility to embrace progressive, employee-focused policies and programs that address the needs, wants, and aspirations of young talented individuals will be key.

The second key area is to create real, open-door, opportunity.

We need to find more ways to create the entry points at a variety of levels and types of positions, so that when people retire, those who take their place are ready to lead.

There are challenges to doing this, but again, we should be thinking creatively about solutions.

This means better succession planning, formalizing mentorship programs, training and development, secondment opportunities, orientation, more student and internship programs, and shadow opportunities.

We have many of these things underway, however, I believe we need to make a committed and concerted effort on doing more, and gaining buy-in from all levels of the organization and our unions to make them work.

Third, we must demonstrate leadership.

The way to grow and improve the organization is to grow and improve each employee. I am a

strong believer in potential. Every day I work to develop my own, and I encourage those around me to do the same.

It is no longer about just managing people and programs. It is about motivating, creative problem-solving, engagement, and empowerment in your work environment.

We must establish a culture and environment that encourages the development of leadership. Your position may give you authority over staff and accountability for program, but it is your leadership that breeds commitment and motivation in your team.

And having strong leadership will help advance my fourth and final area for Nova Scotia's success.

We must define our vision with clarity.

Every public sector organization must have a vision. For the new Government of Nova Scotia it is "Building for Families, Building for the Future". For the public service of Nova Scotia it is "to contribute to a prosperous, healthy, self-sufficient Nova Scotia by delivering high-quality public services" - Success through people.

I believe most public servants are passionate about making a difference.

These are often the employees who see the bigger picture, who buy into the vision, and who know how their work contributes to the advancement of that vision.

People want to work where "innovation," "passion," and "energy" are the norm rather than the exception...where people value respect, integrity, diversity, and accountability.

Sounds like a great place to work, and, it's up to those of us who are in leadership positions to set that vision, and help make it clear for everyone.

These four areas will help create the winning conditions that a public service needs to attract, retain, develop and advance talent. These conditions are essential to assure our citizens - the taxpayer - that they can count on a highly skilled, dedicated and accountable public service.

Some of you may have attended the speech given by the Federal Clerk, Kevin Lynch, to the Dalhousie School of Public Administration on September 15, 2006. The title of his remarks was "Why Public Service Renewal Matters."

I encourage each of you to read his speech, which is available on the Government of Canada's Clerk's website. It speaks to many of the same issues I

have raised, in the federal public service context.

I believe the message of public service renewal that Mr. Lynch left us with is just as compelling in the Nova Scotia civil service context.

In all public service organizations we will only truly become evergreen organizations through the development of our people.

The readiness of the public service to respond to the complexities of the administration of government in the 21st century is also significant- I refer to policy capacity and excellence.

What is policy excellence and policy capacity? I believe it can be summed up in three categories: the professionalism of the public service, the linkages within the policy community and the involvement of everyone in policy development.

Let me address these in order.

Professionalism

I spoke earlier of the reality of our democratic system where the public servant works in the interest of the public by serving the duly elected government. A professional public service is integral to this goal. As public servants our political masters expect, and the public should as well, two things from us. The first is non-partisan professional advice and the second is honest and fair implementation. Policy excellence speaks to the professional advice we give.

Policy excellence requires leadership and strategic visioning. Leaders are at all levels of government, or any organization for that matter. We need to ensure our leaders have the information and tools they need to create and support an environment conducive to policy development. We need to understand the

importance of strategic long term visioning and create an environment to support it.

I'm sure many of you in this room enjoy a good policy debate, as I do. Policy debate is essential to good policy development. What is essential to a good policy debate, whether it is at the bureaucratic level or political, is facts. If we can agree on the facts, we can debate the policy.

Linkages with policy community

This leads me to my second category, linkages with the policy community. I talked also about the challenges we face in today's dynamic environment. Chances are when we are confronted with a policy issue or policy gap, someone else out there has as well. Perhaps they found a solution, perhaps they are still looking for one. We cannot know unless we have connections with each other to discuss policy issues, whether that is in an open forum like so many that have

been sponsored by IPAC (or Dal) or just a chance to discuss things one on one through contacts we have made in the many networking opportunities such as this.

My point is this: policy excellence and policy capacity are improved by creating and sustaining a culture of working collaboratively both within and outside of government. We, as leaders, need to increase and take advantage of policy networking opportunities not only across government but between governments and with academia.

Investing in these linkages within the policy community is just that, an investment. It's an investment that will reap a return. But it's not necessarily an monetary investment. It's an investment of time and of people. You have all taken time out of your busy days to be here today at this event sponsored by IPAC. Monetarily it's a small investment, from a

networking perspective, I hope at least, it has big returns for you.

Let me give you an example of the kinds of returns I am talking about. The Province of Nova Scotia has a long relationship with the School of Public Administration at Dalhousie. I'm sure many of you in this room hold a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Dal. As a matter of fact, tomorrow I will be delivering a similar message to students there.

How has this relationship paid off for both? Well, let's take the example of a Senior Policy Analyst working for Treasury and Policy Board. In 1999 he was one of the first 25 individuals to enter the Masters of Public Administration (Management) program at Dalhousie. He completed the program successfully along with his colleagues. Today, he is not only a Senior Analyst with the Province, he is teaching his 5th class in the MPA program. He will tell you, the

synergies created by sharing knowledge and experience with his class and the refreshing attitude his students share with him has been a tremendous benefit. These are the kinds of linkages we need to encourage.

The involvement of everyone in Policy

I have been speaking today in the context of policy excellence and policy capacity. There may be those of you who work in program areas that think I am not talking about you. This brings me to my final category. The fact is, I am talking to everyone. Everyone is involved in policy. Policy and program folks can learn so much from each other. In fact they should.

Program areas can and should be a feeding ground for policy capacity. Policy and program shops have a unique opportunity to coordinate and harness the research capacity across government

in order to identify gaps and plan strategically for future government needs.

When I spoke about the ability to provide professional, non-partisan advice and honest and fair implementation, the two are not mutually exclusive. They are in fact necessities of each other.

Policy development is one of the factors that uniquely differentiates us from the private sector. Policy capacity is our ability to align structure, process, staffing and competencies in a way that achieves quality policy development.

Conclusion

How do I tie and ever greened public service and policy capacity and excellence together. I believe that one of the only ways we will recruit, retain and develop the kind of leaders we will need in this century to ensure we deliver the high quality

of public services expected by our citizens is by creating the culture which demands policy excellence, creative thinking and challenges convention when it comes to the development and delivery of public services. Thinking outside the box while respecting the tenets of our democracy will be essential.

There are challenges to moving forward, however, we must demonstrate the leadership that will enable the Nova Scotia public service to create our own winning conditions and to be the best we can be.

That means creating a workplace where every employee feels valued and sees the path to achieving her/his full potential; where the workplace contributes to an individual's well-being, economically and personally; and where teams of people work cohesively on creating solutions that serve our families, communities, and economy.

On any given day, we would agree that the municipal, provincial, and federal governments are competing for the same talent.

However, at the end of the day, I believe that forums like this one, will serve us all well. For if someone chooses 'public service,' we all win.