

Unlocking Our **POTENTIAL**

BUDGET 2025-26



Budget Address



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Madam Speaker

It is a privilege and honour to present the 2025-26 budget for the province of Nova Scotia. I want to thank my colleagues and government staff who have all worked so hard to deliver this budget!

Madam Speaker

I am looking to the future with hope and optimism.

My main reason for optimism is the people of our great province. Our citizens are dedicated to our families and our communities.

With our work ethic and skill that I know we can capitalize on the opportunities before us.

Not only do we have many opportunities in this Province, our government is actively and energetically pursuing them to help us solve the pressing problems we now face.

I know Nova Scotians will join us in our push to unlock the promise of these opportunities, and we will create a generational economic success story.

We will find new sources of growth, wealth and prosperity in new sectors like critical minerals ... wind ... and hydrogen. But our traditional sectors are filled with potential and promise.

Farming ... forestry ... and fishing.

Farmers are using new tools and technology to grow more food.

Forestry professionals are pushing into new markets for biomass and soon could be helping produce sustainable aviation and other fuels.

Fisheries is one of our most important industries and we have invested in technology and equipment to help them become more productive while cutting fuel costs.

I'm proud to say this budget will increase funding to crack down on the illegal fishery.

Our fishers work hard ... risking life and limb ... to bring their catch ashore. We want them to know we have their back.

We are focused on supporting the traditional sectors that built our economy.

It's why this budget funds a new trade action plan.

The threat of U.S. tariffs continues to loom over us. We don't know what will come ... but we are ready to respond.

... it is clear we are entering a period of heightened uncertainty ... and heightened risk.

This budget provides a contingency for tariffs as recommended to us.

Tariffs will hurt our economy ... the Canadian economy ... and the economy of the United States.

We were the first province to release our retaliatory measures ... and we are standing strong with Team Canada against the tariff threats.

Our response will not just be focused on retaliation ... it will focus on building a more resilient and independent Nova Scotian.

That starts by diversifying our markets and finding new, predictable, reliable, and stable trading partners.

We must support more businesses here and trade more with our Canadian neighbours.

Finding new markets ... both foreign and domestic ... means more places to sell our resources and products around the world.

We have more resources than crops, trees and fish. We have a wealth of underdeveloped resources.

Critical minerals ... wind ... hydrogen ... These industries are full of potential.

If we want our economy to grow, we must encourage new sectors and investment to come here.

Outright bans on sectors discourage this investment and; therefore, stunt economic growth.

These bans - outright bans - are lazy policy.

The bans we have in place make it impossible to have important ... but hard ... conversations.

We need to have conversations about uranium and natural gas, too. This means lifting bans and avoiding outright bans in the future.

Combined, these sectors present transformative potential. If we get it right, these sectors will add billions of dollars to our economy, new jobs through rural parts of Nova Scotia, and will lift families out of poverty.

Municipalities will benefit, too. Many municipalities are looking for more revenue to offer better services or lower taxes.

Rural communities will see their population stabilize and even grow ... protecting their tax base while improving the quality of life in their communities.

More resource wealth will mean more supports for you ... for your families ... your neighbours and your friends ...

It will mean more wealth, more prosperity, and a brighter future.

First, we must unlock this potential.

These sectors will bring good-paying jobs to Nova Scotia. No longer will our people have to head west for jobs!

The economic potential is massive.

That's why this budget makes investments to better prepare us for the opportunities in offshore wind and critical minerals.

Let's start by discussing critical minerals.

Our Province has lithium deposits and it is crucial for batteries in electric vehicles, electronics, clean tech and energy storage systems.

Its demand is forecast to surpass one million metric tons by 2025.

In North America, specifically, lithium demand is predicted to skyrocket by 2030.

The massive increase in North America is exciting and worrying. It is exciting because it shows a commitment to clean growth, clean tech, and renewable energy.

It is concerning because Western countries are not building or approving mines to access our stockpiles of lithium. This leaves us dependent on other countries.

Foreign countries are starting to place export bans on lithium - this would put our economy and our clean transition at risk.

Cobalt is something identified by our critical minerals strategy. Its demand is expected to roughly double by 2030, predominantly driven by battery applications, especially for electric vehicles.

The global market for cobalt could double by 2035.

Our copper supplies will also be of growing interest around the world.

Copper demand is expected to increase from 21.4 million tonnes in 2019 to 39 million tonnes by 2040, according to some projections.

The transition to electric vehicles is driving the demand.

Between 80 to 100 kilograms of copper is needed for each electric vehicle.

Nova Scotia has a 300-year history of mining. Communities grew around mines.

Our connection to mining is so strong that neighbourhoods are still referred to using the name or number of the historic mines around them.

Today's mines are not the mines of old. Nor are the jobs. The average salary in mining is over \$100,000 per year.

Just imagine the difference that kind of pay cheque can make. Now, imagine a home with one person working in a mine and another in a mill.

That family's life is infinitely better because of our resources.

Empowering families is how we unlock our province's potential.

Forestry, fishing and farming ... mining and critical minerals ... sustainable fuels and hydrogen ... and our ample supply of wind.

These sectors can position us for growth. These sectors will bring jobs ... opportunities ... and prosperity to our people

The growth and jobs that come from seizing these economic opportunities are how we lift more people out of poverty.

Is it any wonder that we have a persistent poverty problem while we ban sectors and chase away business opportunities?

Is it any wonder we have a housing problem when ... for too long ... It was too hard to build quickly.

Is it any wonder our economy is one of the lowest performing ... in North America?

For too long, governments have defaulted to, “No.”

And for too long, special interests captured the regulatory and policy process. They did so at the expense of their fellow Nova Scotians.

We are here to say the culture will ... and must ... change.

This government is here for Nova Scotians’ interests ... not the special interests.

Embracing a growth mindset will lead to a growing economy. It will allow us not only to provide more tax relief and improve services ... it will let us keep making historic investments in infrastructure.

The 2025-26 Capital Plan will invest more than \$2.35 billion in healthcare facilities, housing projects, roads and schools... helping build and sustain communities for generations to come.

We invested over a billion in health infrastructure and equipment. Building modern health care facilities with the latest equipment improves health care while making it easier to attract health care workers - like doctors and nurses.

Nova Scotians were clear ... they wanted us to invest in affordable housing.

This year’s Capital Plan delivered.

The plan continues to support the More Housing, Faster plan with investments that include \$47.4 million for new public housing units – the first new funding for public housing construction in more than 20 years.

This includes \$10.6 million toward an additional 242 units. Another \$31.6 million will go to modernize and repair existing public housing.

We want to keep making these types of investments ... but we have no interest in taxing you more.

That means economic growth must become the mission of the government.

Only by growing our economy can we grow revenues without asking you to pay more.

This budget makes our commitment to lowering taxes crystal clear.

The sales tax will drop ... the first sales tax cut since it was increased 2010. It means we will have the lowest sales tax in Atlantic Canada.

The basic personal amount will increase. And bracket creep comes to an end.

These tax changes will return hundreds of millions of dollars to the wallets of hard-working Nova Scotians. It will mean about a \$1000 more in every family's pocket

The Canadian Taxpayer's Federation said, "Tax cuts are great news for Nova Scotians ..." And we agree.

Other governments talked a big game on tax cuts ... this government delivered.

This government is doing more than simply cutting taxes to make life more affordable.

We are cutting taxes while increasing minimum wages increase and eliminating the tolls on the MacKay and Macdonald bridges. The tolls will come off on April 1st 2025.

We are also continuing the rollout of our school lunch program.

This program has already served over two million meals to Nova Scotian students. It will ensure no child needs to focus on both math and their empty stomach.

Our support also extends to small businesses. We are cutting the small business tax rate to ensure they can invest more in their people and businesses.

The opposition opposed our proposed tax cuts.

Higher taxes are their policy ... not the policy of this government.

Our Government is bringing in multiple tax cuts and tax changes to help Nova Scotians keep more of their hard-earned money.

Because that is how we help unlock our province's potential.

These are things we can only keep doing if we grow our economy.

New programs or further tax cuts cannot be sustained without new sources of revenue ... new revenue that doesn't mean taking more out of your wallet.

Failing to grow our economy is also hurting our health.

In Nova Scotia, people living in lower income neighbourhoods live 10 years less ... on average ... than their fellow Nova Scotians who live in higher income areas.

Lower-income Nova Scotians suffer from chronic illness at a greater rate than those living in higher income neighbourhoods.

Allowing special interests to control policy has kept too many Nova Scotian families locked in the cycle of poverty.

When we give small groups a veto over development, it costs years off the lives of our fellow Nova Scotians.

How can we be okay with that?

Better incomes lead to longer and healthier lives. It means more time with grandchildren, more opportunities for the next generation and less pressure on our healthcare system.

We dedicated our first term to health care ... and we remain committed to improving access to it.

We reduced the Need a Family Practice Registry list massively in our first term.

That progress will continue.

It will continue because of the new medical school at Cape Breton University, a nursing school at Acadia University ... and because of the new international assessment clinic.

The investments we made in term one ... and will continue to make in term two ... will drive down wait times and make it easier to get the care you need.

More doctors ... more nurses ... more investment in health technology ... that is coming in term two.

Also, our government will fund a universal shingles program ...

This means Nova Scotians 65 years of age and older will get access to the vaccine free of charge.

We will continue to support women's health by creating Canada's first Menopause Centre of Excellence.

But programs alone won't solve our health care woes.

We also must make it easier for people to be healthy. That starts by getting serious about growing the incomes of Nova Scotians.

We will never solve the challenges of our health care system if we don't remove the obstacles to better health.

The biggest of which is poverty.

We cannot unlock our province's potential if we allow poverty to hold too many of fellow Nova Scotians down.

More growth, better jobs, lower taxes, and better services come with a growing economy.

Better health and less chronic disease comes with a growing economy.

When we stop listening to special interests and focus on the interests of Nova Scotians, we can support one another and unlock our province's potential.

I want to address the naysayers head on.

Our government is not afraid to debate these issues.

We believe our stance is principled and justified - both economically and morally.

First, is the idea that export markets are bad.

The opposition and special interests argue we should not export our resources. That would ignore our moral responsibility to help in the global fight against climate change.

The world needs more critical minerals to aid in the electrification of heating and transportation ... not less.

Second, the opposition and special interests try to justify bans by arguing companies showed little interest in our resources.

This is misguided and short sighted.

Why would anyone come to invest in a province where outright bans on industry exist? Saying lack of demand so far justifies continuing these bans is irrational and illogical.

It is also short-sighted as much of the growth in demand is still to come. The opposition say they are serious about the Paris Accord. Well, its pledges will drive massive increases in future demand for Nova Scotia's minerals.

If the opposition and special interests have their way, we will simply watch this opportunity pass us by.

And in 10 years ... When demand is sky-high, we would have all watched other parts of Canada and the U.S. as they profited.

We cannot ... in good conscience ... use clean tech while refusing to mine its building blocks.

There is hypocrisy at the heart of the opposition to our plans.

We want lumber ... but special interests don't want us harvesting here.

We want solar panels and electric vehicles ... but special interests don't want us to mine the building blocks of this technology here.

This attitude forces us to rely on others ... and forces democratic nations to rely on supply chains full of human rights and environmental abuses.

When we refuse to mine cobalt here ... it is mined elsewhere ... and frequently in places with fewer protections for the environment and workers.

It happens in places where child labour is widespread and children are exposed to toxic dust.

Forced labour ... low wages ... violence and environmental damage.

When someone says use it but don't mine it ... that's the outcome.

I look forward to these debates and discussions over the course of our second term.

To the people of this Province, I want you to know that we are here for you. For your interests.

The outsized weight of special interests and the professional protestor class ends.

We are ready to stand up for you ... for your families ... for the hope that our children can have a better life than ours.

We want prosperity for this generation and for every generation that follows.

We want a province that is resilient and self-reliant ...

We want to wake up one day no longer needing equalization payments ...

There will be a chorus of voices who try to prevent this from happening ...

Special interests will say, “No” ... they will try to block opportunities for their fellow Nova Scotians.

However, I refuse to give in to the draw of pessimism and cynicism that has taken over in too many corners of our province.

A democracy needs critics and critical thinkers, but at some point we need to stop criticism for its own sake. Being a perpetual contrarian accomplishes nothing, but expends much oxygen.

That’s not how we move our province forward.

I’m reminded of a Churchill quote:

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Despite the many challenges we face, I am someone who sees opportunity in difficult times.

I firmly believe ... as does our Caucus and our premier ... that the opportunities outnumber the challenges.

We want to open up to resource development ... to unlock our province’s potential ...

We want to open new markets for trade ... to unlock our province’s potential ...

We must do these things to build a strong economy and a stronger ... more independent ... and more resilient Nova Scotia.