

September 3, 2020

All Party Leaders
New Brunswick General Election 2020

Re: Economic Concerns & Your Perspectives on Charting a Course for New Brunswick Prosperity

Dear Party Leaders,

The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce (ACC) wishes to thank you for your willingness and commitment to lead the province of New Brunswick. The list of challenges facing New Brunswick are significant and the task ahead of you, should you become our next Premier, is certainly a daunting one.

The obstacles you will face are growing in their intensity, including population challenges, rising debt and deficits, limited access to qualified workers and workforce development, the cost of the public sector, and stymied private-sector growth—all of which have been exacerbated by the potency of COVID-19 globally. Seemingly overnight the pandemic eviscerated economies and demonstrated the importance of a strong, vibrant private sector.

As you chart your course for the province as a candidate to lead New Brunswick, we have gathered some critical feedback from our new bilingual, digital insight community, [Atlantic IMPRESSIONS](#)—a growing community of CEOs, executives, leaders, entrepreneurs, business owners, and professionals from urban and rural communities in all sectors across Atlantic Canada.

In a recent outreach to the insight community conducted between August 24 – September 2, 2020, we asked the New Brunswick members about their concerns and where our next government should focus to improve the province's economic conditions. The results of this outreach and engagement can be viewed here: <https://na2.visioncritical.com/i/stories/shared?id=404f0940-e403-42fd-b07e-ac2a01190cf6>.

We want to draw your attention to a few of the highlights and ask for a response on how you would address these concerns and issues as Premier of New Brunswick. In turn, we will share your leadership perspectives with our 38 member chambers representing more than 5,600 businesses in the province.

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority, 80%, are concerned with economic recovery related to COVID-19. This is followed by a majority who have concerns related to how government collects and uses tax revenues, including: taxes (68%), healthcare (63%), education (56%), tourism (54%), debt reduction (51%) and public sector reform (44%).

These primary concerns are followed closely by immigration (44%), red tape reduction (44%), jobs (41%), natural resource development (39%), and labour/talent acquisition (39%).

While 83% of respondents completely/somewhat agree the government should focus on growing the economy through attraction of private sector investment, when asked how to improve economic conditions, the majority indicated three key areas: generating economic growth (78%), immigration (56%), and creating efficiencies through technological improvements (51%); followed closely by healthcare reform (49%) and education (44%).

Finally, just over half of the community (54%) indicated it is time for the Federal Government to end the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). This reinforces what we learned from our inaugural insight community outreach with our COVID Business Impact Survey. In addition to experiencing a reduction in revenues (74%), increased costs (57%) and an increase in HR issues (48%); respondents reported labour shortages (10%), staff concerns about returning to work (30%), and staff concerns with their hours impacting federal benefits (8%).

We know the road ahead is filled with overwhelming challenges, made only worse by the effects of the pandemic. But as we have demonstrated over the past several months, the Chamber network is a strong partner and can be relied upon to work with you and your team to be part of the solution.

On behalf of our network of 38 Chambers and 5,600 businesses in New Brunswick and the Atlantic IMPRESSIONS community, we respectfully request to hear your plan to address the concerns and issues raised herein so we can help inform the decisions they make on September 14, 2020.

In service to the business community, we look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Cordially,

Sheri Somerville
CEO, Atlantic Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Blaine Higgs, Leader, Progressive Conservative Party

Kevin Vickers, Leader, Liberal Party

David Coon, Leader, Green Party

Kris Austin, Leader, People's Alliance

Mackenzie Thompson, Leader, New Democratic Party