

Growth for all Nova Scotians

Prebudget submission to the
Government of Nova Scotia

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About the Canadian Taxpayers Federation

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is a federally incorporated, not-for-profit citizen's group dedicated to lower taxes, less waste and accountable government. The CTF was founded in Saskatchewan in 1990 when the Association of Saskatchewan Taxpayers and the Resolution One Association of Alberta joined forces to create a national organization. Today, the CTF has 235,000 supporters nation-wide.

The CTF maintains a federal office in Ottawa and regional offices in British Columbia, Alberta, Prairie (SK and MB), Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic. Regional offices conduct research and advocacy activities specific to their provinces in addition to acting as regional organizers of Canada-wide initiatives.

CTF offices field hundreds of media interviews each month, hold press conferences and issue regular news releases, commentaries, online postings and publications to advocate on behalf of CTF supporters. CTF representatives speak at functions, make presentations to government, meet with politicians, and organize petition drives, events and campaigns to mobilize citizens to affect public policy change. Each week CTF offices send out Let's Talk Taxes commentaries to more than 800 media outlets and personalities across Canada.

Any Canadian taxpayer committed to the CTF's mission is welcome to [join at no cost and receive issue and Action Updates](#). Financial supporters can additionally receive the CTF's flagship publication The Taxpayer magazine published three times a year.

The CTF is independent of any institutional or partisan affiliations. All CTF staff, board and representatives are prohibited from holding a membership in any political party. In 2019-20, the CTF raised [\\$4.8 million](#) on the strength of 31,655 donations. Donations to the CTF are not deductible as a charitable contribution.



Executive Summary

The pandemic has affected government finances across Canada and Nova Scotia is no exception. Budget 2020-21 was supposed to be the province's fifth consecutive balanced budget, but, as reported in the Fiscal Update last December, Nova Scotia's finances continue to suffer from its consequences.

With its projected \$55 million surplus replaced with a \$779 million deficit, the government of Nova Scotia must prioritize the economic recovery and well-being of taxpayers and future generations lest it wastes its many years of fiscal prudence and discipline.

To this end, next year's budgetary challenge will be to find the right level of budgetary savings to ensure Nova Scotia's long-term financial sustainability, while implementing the right combination of policy actions to help the local economy recover.

This will take a mix of efficiency measures within government to bring the budget closer to balance, and use tax cuts as fiscal stimulus to help the local economy recover. The

measures outlined below seek to do that, with a roughly two-to-one ratio of efficiency savings to fiscal stimulus.

- Cutting all income tax bills to boost household disposable incomes.
- Replacing business subsidies with business tax cuts for a broad-based economic stimulus.
- Reducing government employee compensation by 15 per cent.
- Cutting elected officials' pay.
- Eliminating the Yarmouth Ferry Operating Grant to avoid wasting taxpayer dollars on money-losing projects.
- Implementing a gainsharing program to find savings.

With these proposed measures, we are confident that Nova Scotia will emerge from this crisis in a strong financial position and once again deliver a balanced budget for taxpayers for in the near future.

Measures	Fiscal Stimulus	Budgetary Savings
Cutting all income tax bills to boost household disposable incomes.	\$337.9	
Replacing business subsidies with business tax cuts to stimulate the economy.	\$177.2	\$177.2
Reducing government employee compensation by 15 per cent.		\$657.2
Cutting elected officials pay to lead by example.		\$0.9
Eliminating the Yarmouth-Maine Ferry Operating Grant		\$16.3
Implementing a gainsharing program		NA
Total per category	\$515.1	\$851.6
Net budget impact:		\$336.5
Projected surplus (deficit) from the December fiscal update:		(\$778.8)
Projected surplus (deficit) following the implementation of outlined recommendations:		(\$442.3)

All numbers are in millions.

Using fiscal stimulus for a bottom-up recovery

Cutting all income tax bills by \$337.9 million to boost household disposable incomes

Estimated impact: \$337.9 million in fiscal stimulus

Despite a \$186.6 million decrease in revenue and increased spending due to the pandemic, the government equally increased spending on subsidizing specific industries, as well as by implementing new programs¹. However, the best way to support economic recovery is to give taxpayers the means to drive that recovery.

It's important to note that economic research is very clear about the link between tax relief measures and economic growth.^{2 3 4}

One of the many tools with which governments can bolster consumer confidence is by increasing household incomes through tax relief. By taking less cash out of taxpayers' pockets, governments can boost household incomes and grow the economy.

Even before the pandemic, local household disposable incomes in Nova Scotia were already sitting 10 per cent below the Canadian average before the pandemic.⁵ There is a clear relationship between household disposable income and household consumption,^{6 7} and between consumer spending and GDP growth.

By using 50 per cent of the budgetary savings outlined in this document to provide a broad-based tax relief, the government would be in a position to lower all current income tax bills by 11.7 per cent, thus directly reinjecting \$337.9 million dollars into the local economy.⁸

Taxable Income	Provincial Tax Bill	Proposed Tax Savings	Tax Bill with Proposed Tax Cuts
\$30,000	\$1,510	\$340	\$1,170
\$50,000	\$4,482	\$1,008	\$3,474
\$70,000	\$7,713	\$1,735	\$5,978
\$90,000	\$11,074	\$2,492	\$8,582

Source: Intuit TurboTax Calculator and authors' calculations

¹ <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/2id=20201217002>

² https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/09_effects_income_tax_changes_economic_growth_gale_samwick.pdf

³ <https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/how-do-taxes-affect-economy-long-run>

⁴ <https://taxfoundation.org/what-evidence-taxes-and-growth/#~:text=In%20sum%2C%20the%20U.S.%20tax,a%20higher%20standard%20of%20living.>

⁵ <http://www.rbc.com/economics/economic-reports/pdf/provincial-forecasts/provtbl.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.econ2.jhu.edu/people/ccarroll/papers/cos-wealth-effects-literature/papers/macklem.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/emehss-17/25874812>

⁸ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/budget-forecast-notices/Budget-Forecast-Update-December-2020.pdf#page=12>

Replacing business subsidies with business tax cuts to stimulate all industries

Estimated impact: \$177 million in budgetary savings and fiscal stimulus for local businesses.

The current recession is affecting the entire province's economy. Given this reality, a targeted governmental approach favouring specific sectors or specific companies does not reflect the needs of Nova Scotia's economy.

It is also important to note that subsidies are not the most effective tool for governments to attract business investment. Instead, governments should focus on creating the right business environment to attract job creators. When job creators decide where to relocate or expand, their primary focus is usually on long-term profitability rather than one-off subsidy packages.⁹

Other factors, such as regulatory burdens, workforce education, and availability of transportation infrastructure, lead to market access having a much bigger impact on decisions to locate in one jurisdiction rather than a one-off financial aid packages at taxpayers' expense.¹⁰ Subsidies merely act as icing on the cake for job creators who have already analyzed the risks and potential returns in establishing a viable location for their investment project.

Economic research found no statistically significant relationship between business subsidies and economic growth or per capita GDP levels.¹¹ What is clear, is that the level of corporate taxation, compared to competing jurisdictions, affects a company's productivity, and ultimately its bottom-line and pace of growth.¹²

Provincial general corporate tax rates	
Canadian Jurisdiction	General corporate tax rate
Prince Edward Island	16%
Newfoundland and Labrador	15%
Nova Scotia	14%
New Brunswick	14%
Canadian provincial average	12.6%
Manitoba	12%
Saskatchewan	12%
British Columbia	12%
Quebec	11.6%
Ontario	11.5%
Alberta	8%

Sources: Provincial government websites

Competitive tax rates attract job creators and direct investment.¹³ Lower tax rates also contribute to lowering the cost of capital for job creators, thus increasing their ability to re-invest in their company.

Compared with other provinces, Nova Scotia's corporate tax rate puts the province at an investment disadvantage, with a significantly higher rate of 14 per cent versus the 12.6 per cent national average.¹⁵

⁹ https://www.mercatus.org/system/files/farren_and_philpot_-_policy_brief_-_amazon_hq2_the_story_so_far_-_v1.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/cohen-1.pdf>

¹¹ <https://medium.com/concentrated-benefits/florida-man-seeks-a-quarter-of-a-billion-dollars-6bb6fe36a96e>

¹² <https://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/41997578.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/41997578.pdf>

¹⁴ https://files.taxfoundation.org/legacy/docs/TaxFoundation_FF477.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/businesses/topics/corporations/corporation-tax-rates.html>

Replacing business subsidies with corporate tax cuts would have an added advantage: reducing the economic distortion associated with targeted financial measures.¹⁶ Nova Scotia's economic recovery should not be based on growth expectations in a few targeted sectors, but rather by a broad-based growth of its economic pie and the associated employment and incomes that come with it.

Nova Scotia collects \$396 million in corporate tax revenues while spending over \$177 million¹⁷ subsidizing natural resource and economic development subsidies. Eliminating such subsidies would allow the province to reduce its small business tax rate by 1.1 percentage point, and its general corporate rate by 6.3 percentage points.

	Current Provincial Corporate Tax Rates	Proposed Rates
Lower Rates	2.50%	1.40%
Higher Rates	14%	7.70%

The province should replace these subsidies with an equivalent tax cut in the general and small business corporate income tax rates. Lowering the corporate tax rate from its current 2.5 per cent¹⁸ to 1.4 per cent for small businesses and lowering the general corporate tax rate from 14 per cent down¹⁹ to 7.7 per cent will provide an estimated \$177 million in economic stimulus for local businesses. Cutting corporate subsidies not only represent a significant budgetary saving, it can also be used to provide a much needed tax break for Nova Scotian businesses.

¹⁶ https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/fe2eafaa-f355-462f-b515-15ad4a8f5e74/the-inefficiency-of-targeted-tax-policies-april-1997.pdf

¹⁷ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/public-accounts/2020/2020public-accounts-volume-1.pdf#page=118>

¹⁸ <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/businesses/topics/corporations/provincial-territorial-corporation-tax/nova-scotia-provincial-corporation-tax.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/businesses/topics/corporations/provincial-territorial-corporation-tax/nova-scotia-provincial-corporation-tax.html>

Controlling government spending to ensure financial sustainability

Reducing government employee compensation costs by 15 per cent

Estimated impact: \$657 million in budgetary savings.

Expenditures related to employee compensation continue to present a significant cost for Nova Scotian taxpayers with the salaries and benefits of provincial government employees costing an estimated \$4.32 billion for 2020²⁰. This represents 35 per cent of the province's overall expenditures²¹. To put this cost in perspective, Nova Scotians spent more in government employee salaries and benefits than it brings in from personal income taxes and corporate income taxes in 2020.

Prior to the pandemic, provincial government employee wages were on average 17.4 per cent higher than the average wage offered by other employers, when adjusting for education²².

This calculation excludes pension, and other non-wage benefits afforded to government employees which ultimately contribute to the province's higher compensation expenditures. For example, Government employees have higher enrollment numbers for Registered Pension Plans in comparison to private sector employees. Data from Statistics Canada^{24 25} show a 91 per cent pension enrollment rate for all government employees in Nova Scotia, compared to only a 20 per cent enrolment rate for private sector workers.

	Nova Scotia labour market	Composite labour market adjusting for education of provincial employees	Provincial government employees	Government employee premium
Average Employment income²³	\$42,096	\$ 49,914	\$ 60,444	17.42%

Source: Statistics Canada and authors' calculations.

	Total employment (2019)	Employees with Registered Pension Plans	Percentage of Employees covered by Pensions
Government sector	114,600	103,982	90.73%
Private sector	351,400	68,942	19.62%

Source: Statistics Canada

²⁰ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/public-accounts/2020/2020public-accounts-volume-1.pdf#page=89>

²¹ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/public-accounts/2020/2020public-accounts-volume-1.pdf#page=17>

²² <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=112127&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=124&ID=0&VNAMEF=&VNAMEF=>

²³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/98-400-X2016358>

²⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410002701>

²⁵ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1110013301&fbclid=IwAR2pwhk1uSgWqQ2ufZRkqz6ZY53z8ZL1pEdaP0SOX6g-H9f0IGFYSPGT7o>

Government employees also tend to be covered under a defined benefit pension plan²⁶ unlike their private sector counterparts which tend to be covered by defined contribution plans. Defined benefits pension plans generally shift the investment risk to the taxpayer, as opposed to defined contribution pension plans where employees are responsible for pension contributions.

Government employees also enjoy other benefits such as earlier retirement, and better job security compared to the average private-sector employee²⁷. These non-wage employee benefits overwhelmingly favour government employees over their private sector counterparts and, while there is no direct compensation cost associated with them, they are still part of the economic calculations that individuals make and should be taken into account when looking into compensation data.

Given the province's deficit, Nova Scotia must make significant reductions in spending to avoid future deficit spending and increasing debt. With government employees already benefitting from a 17.42 per cent wage premium before the current crisis and their compensation being such a large line-item in the province's budget, it is clear it cannot be left untouched.

In order to close the gap between government and private sector compensation, the government of Nova Scotia must implement an immediate 15 per cent reduction in the cost of government salaries and benefits.

This will reduce the estimated costs for government salaries and benefits from \$4.4 billion to \$3.7 billion, saving Nova Scotia taxpayers an estimated \$657 million by the end of the fiscal year. These savings can be used to provide much needed tax-relief for taxpayers.

\$ in thousands	Total cost	With proposed reductions
Salaries and Benefits	\$4,381,405	\$3,724,194
	Savings:	\$657,210

Source: Government of Nova Scotia, Public Accounts and authors' calculations.

²⁶ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200813/t001b-eng.htm>

²⁷ <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/comparing-government-and-private-sector-compensation-in-canada.pdf>

Cutting politician pay to lead by example

Estimated impact: \$910,841 in budgetary savings.

Political leaders worldwide recognized that governments had to show leadership and solidarity with their constituents in the face of the pandemic. Many political leaders voluntarily cut their pay to show that they were not exempt from the sacrifices they were asking of their constituents. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern sparked a global trend when she announced a voluntary 20 per cent pandemic pay-cut for her and her cabinet ministers²⁸.

In Canada, Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister reduced his base salary by 25 per cent²⁹ while he negotiated for reduced hours and temporary layoffs for government employees to redirect funds towards essential services such as health care. Halifax Mayor Mike Savage voluntarily cut his salary by 20 per cent³⁰ as his municipal government moved to cut 1,480 positions to deal with budgetary shortfalls from the pandemic.

Nova Scotia must make significant expenditure reductions, namely expenditures related to government administration and compensation costs. Similarly, the province's political leadership should not be immune to wage reductions in times of economic hardship.

Total compensation for the members of the Legislative Assembly, including salary premiums paid to opposition leaders, government whips, house leaders, and caucus chairs, costs taxpayers \$4.6 million. MLAs who have ministerial, parliamentary secretary and parliamentary assistant-level positions benefit from additional compensation at the cost of \$946,891³². Excluding travel and accommodation perks, Nova Scotians spend \$5.7 million on salaries paid to MLAs.

Additionally, Premier Stephen McNeil's top-up of \$112,791, for a total of 202,026\$ **[THIS MUCH]**, continues to hold its place as the highest salary top up among all Canadian premiers.³³

Members of the Legislative Assembly should lead by example and take a 15 per cent reduction on base salaries and a 20 per cent reduction for leadership position premiums, including members of the cabinet, the leader of the opposition, and the house leadership.

Voluntary changes in compensation for the political leadership in the province will save Nova Scotian taxpayers about \$911,000. This will signal to taxpayers and government employees that government leadership is not exempt from the pandemic's economic burden.

Salaries Paid to Members of the Legislative Assembly					
	Members' Salaries	Statutory Salaries	Committee Pay	Whips, House Leaders, and Caucus Chairs	Minsters' Salaries
Total Cost	\$4,465,593.07	\$146,552.60	\$17,016.43	\$94,554.00	\$946,891.25
Total Cost (With Reductions)	\$3,795,754.11	\$117,242.08	\$13,613.14	\$75,643.20	\$757,513.00
Grand total in salaries:					\$5,670,607.35
Grand total with reductions:					\$4,759,765.53
Savings for taxpayers:					\$910,841.82

Source: Government of Nova Scotia, Public Accounts 2020

²⁸ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-coronavirus-politicians-pass-temporary-law-for-own-pay-cuts/EEPZBFROPNIZE7SZCWIZVE4FXE/>

²⁹ <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/manitoba-premier-takes-pay-cut-as-he-seeks-public-sector-cuts-during-pandemic-1.4905764>

³⁰ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-mayor-taking-cut-to-190k-salary-during-pandemic-1.5534267>

³¹ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/public-accounts/2020/2020public-accounts-volume-3.pdf>

³² <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/public-accounts/2020/2020public-accounts-volume-3.pdf>

³³ <https://globalnews.ca/news/4979159/mcneil-largest-top-premier/>

Eliminating the Yarmouth-Maine Ferry Operating Grant

Estimated impact: \$16 million in budgetary savings for the fiscal year, and millions more in potential savings.

With health-care and social expenses on the rise due to the pandemic,³⁴ Nova Scotia must find savings in other areas. One such service is the infamous Cat, or Yarmouth ferry, that links the province to Maine.

Since its reintroduction in 2015, the Yarmouth-Maine ferry has become a bottomless money-pit for Nova Scotians, costing an estimated \$32 million in taxpayer-funded subsidies from 2015 to 2018³⁵. The total cost of subsidies for the Yarmouth Ferry has since doubled, adding an additional \$34 million by the end of fiscal year for 2021, despite two years of idled service and zero commercial trips^{36 37}.

In the six years since its reintroduction, the province has, on average, spent \$11 million every year on the Yarmouth ferry via the operating grant and one-time expenses such as the \$8.5 million³⁸ Bar Harbour renovations in Maine. If the government of Nova Scotia allows the ferry to continue to be a bottomless pit for taxpayers. In recent years, the cost of the operating grant has steadily increased to reach \$16.3 million in 2020-21.³⁹ To save Nova Scotians an initial \$16 million for 2021-22 and potentially tens of millions more in the future, the government must cancel the Yarmouth-Maine ferry operating grant and leave the operations and financing of this ferry service to private-sector operators.

	Number of commercial trips	Annual Yarmouth Ferry subsidies
2019-2020	0	\$17,800,000.00
2020-2021	0	\$16,300,000

Source: Nova Scotia Finance and Treasury Board and Global News Canada

³⁴ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/budget-forecast-notices/Budget-Forecast-Update-December-2020.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.taxpayer.com/news-room-archive/shut-down-or-sell-the-yarmouth-ferry>

³⁶ <https://globalnews.ca/news/6595917/nova-scotia-subsidy-maine-ferry-2020/>

³⁷ <https://globalnews.ca/news/7113709/covid-concerns-nova-scotia-cancels-yarmouth-maine-ferry-service-for-2020/>

³⁸ <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20190320004>

³⁹ <https://globalnews.ca/news/6595917/nova-scotia-subsidy-maine-ferry-2020/#:~:text=The%20subsidy%20for%20the%20Yarmouth,it%20was%20reintroduced%20in%202016>

Implementing a gainsharing program to incentivize government employees to propose cost-saving measures

Estimated impact: unknown

Cost-saving measures within government can come from major restructuring initiatives as well as simple logistical changes on day-to-day operations. Whether these measures improve government structures on a division or a departmental level, any cost-saving measures that can save taxpayer dollars should be explored.

Gainsharing programs have worked in the private sector and can be adopted to suit government organizational structures. Gainsharing is a pay-for-performance program that awards employees with pay incentives if they help the organization generate cost savings.⁴⁰

Jurisdictions in regional and local governments also adopted similar programs and benefited from savings eventually shared between the local government, government employees, and taxpayers⁴¹. Within one year of launching its pilot gainsharing program, the municipal government of Baltimore saved more than \$950,000⁴².

The Nova Scotia Treasury Board Secretariat should implement a directive to incentivize government employees to share any cost-saving ideas, and reward cost-cutting measures through a gainsharing program. Such incremental savings make service delivery more efficient, and marginally lower its cost.

⁴⁰ <https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/gainsharing-program>

⁴¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1998/03/26/md-counties-try-productivity-bonuses/2ed5418c-50db-431c-837c-97c47c776799/>

⁴² <https://mayor.baltimorecity.gov/news/press-releases/2019-02-15-mayor-pugh-announces-savings-over-950000-city-gain-sharing-plan>

Conclusion

Before the pandemic, Nova Scotia had a robust and growing economy, with marginal gains in population and the lowest unemployment rate in 45 years. While last year's budgetary projections had the province on-track to run its fifth consecutive balanced budget, the pandemic has turned those projections into a \$778.8 million deficit for 2021-22.

With the province's debt expected to \$16.8 billion by March 31, it's crucial for Nova Scotia to look at its expenditures and find where efficiency savings can be achieved to avoid ballooning interest payments.

Employee compensation has to be addressed to bring the budget back to balance, as it takes a bit more than one out of every three dollar the government spends, at \$4.3 billion. It's also important for legislators lead the way and show they are not exempt from such compensation reductions. The reductions outlined in this submission with regards to employee and legislators' compensation represent a significant \$658 million in potential budgetary savings.

It is also clear the government is not in a position to subsidize money-losing programs. Subsidies to the Yarmouth-Maine ferry have cost Nova Scotians dearly and keep costing millions of dollars, with the operating grant set at \$16.3 million for this year and recurring savings in future years.

Given COVID-19's impacts on all sectors of Nova Scotia, as well as the relative ineffectiveness of business subsidies, replacing the province's business subsidies with business tax cuts would empower Nova Scotian businesses of all size to participate to the province's economic recovery.

Using half the savings outlined in this submission, the government could also reinvest in local economic growth by cutting personal income tax bills by \$377 million. This money would go a long way towards boosting consumer spending and helping the local economy recover not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up.

The proposed measures will put \$515.1 million back in Nova Scotians' pockets and help save \$851.6 million in government operations. This would not only help kickstart the local economy, but would also deliver \$336.5 million in structural savings to the government, resulting in a lower deficit at \$442.3 million for 2021-22, instead of the current \$778.8 million deficit projection.

⁴³ <https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/budget-forecast-notices/Budget-Forecast-Update-December-2020.pdf>

⁴⁴ https://notices.novascotia.ca/files/public-accounts/2020/2020public-accounts-volume-1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0RnPi06Vholo-YZeZKTI3SB5IieFjPAVc7Txe1wRrbK8_V_CVcYmS5hM#page=89