



More Relief for Businesses Now!

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Nova Scotia finds itself in a unique place in the crazy pandemic world we live in... We, at the time of writing this piece, have one known case of COVID-19 and we are arguably the place with the lowest cases of COVID-19 in North America. That is testament to many smart decisions, and credit can be spread across our healthcare system, government policies, a business community that put the health of Nova Scotians above themselves and a population willing to participate in the proper health protocols.

It is also clear that generally, the rest of the country and the world are not experiencing the pandemic in quite the same way, and that Nova Scotia has become the safest place in North America to reside and do business during this pandemic. Yet Nova Scotians, like the rest of the world, face ongoing fear from social media and international news as we see what is happening outside our bubble. It appears the overwhelming public and political opinion currently, even in our “no cases” world, is to keep the Atlantic Bubble closed and to keep the quarantine period for those arriving from outside the bubble.

As the situation continues to improve in Nova Scotia, we have seen the public health authority modify its orders many times to allow more visitors in long term care homes, to allow transient workers some freedom to interact with their families, to increase the size of public gatherings to 50 without social distancing in certain specific instances and to even allow large sporting events like the Mooseheads games. These are all positive steps.

But are we really taking advantage of the unique situation we find ourselves in? We have some of the strictest guidelines, with masks in public spaces provincially, while masks are not required in our neighbouring Atlantic Bubble provinces. If we assume the bubble is not going to open, and our quarantine remains in place, and we continue to wear masks in public spaces, can we at least do more to help the people and businesses that operate in that bubble? Let us reduce restrictions that are stifling the revenue generating ability of our businesses and particularly our small business that have been most impacted if we have some of the most stringent health protocols in the Atlantic Bubble.

If we plan to maintain the bubble, let's place the testing at the borders to more fully embrace our special place and confirm the health of visitors and perhaps reduce the quarantine by a few days. The Federal government just provided the province with \$140 million for the next six months to support contact testing and tracing, but where is that money being spent with no cases? Are we looking at more effective and quicker response times on testing so that traveller quarantine times could be reduced? Like Nova Scotia, Covid tests are easily accessible in many other provinces, so let's ask people to take a

test and get a negative result before arriving in Nova Scotia to reduce risk. Or could a mobile clinic be established at the airport and other entry points that could reduce the quarantine from 14 to 3 days?

We know that the tourism and hospitality industry continue to reel under the weight of social distancing and as fall comes and patios begin to close, the capacity restrictions on indoor dining could see a flood of business becoming unsustainable. Can we reduce the social distancing space to allow for more tables and for more people to dine out? We can now have 50 people on a stage without social distancing but can't have 50 people in a restaurant without social distancing.

In the downtown core of Halifax many employees both government and private sector have not returned to the office and businesses, hotels and meeting spaces are suffering tremendously. Reducing the social distancing space in offices and elevators could prompt more businesses to return to their offices and get much closer to 100% capacity to provide businesses some clients. After all, we know who these people are and if there is spread, they can easily be contacted through track and trace.

Let's not make the false choice of health or the economy. They must coexist. However, the weight up until now has clearly been on the side of public health as it should have been. With now one known case we should now be able and willing to shift that pendulum. We need to trumpet our success and celebrate the flattening of the curve. And we must help businesses get back on their feet, just as they supported us during the height of the pandemic. We have done an amazing job controlling the pandemic in Nova Scotia – let's reduce the restrictions inside our province for our businesses community and our citizens that gave up so much over the past 6 months. This can be done carefully and responsibly, can be managed within the current protocols, and would have a massive effect on our ongoing economic recovery.

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