

2024

Nova Scotia2024 Provincial Election Questionnaire: Background**Retail Council of Canada:**

Retail Council of Canada (RCC) is a not-for-profit, industry-funded association representing retailers of all sizes and formats, including department, grocery, pharmacy, specialty, discount, and independent stores as well as quick service restaurants and online merchants. We speak for an industry that touches the daily lives of Nova Scotians in every corner of the province.

Nova Scotia Retail Facts:

- Retail is the largest private sector employer in Nova Scotia, representing over 65,000 employees, and \$3 billion in total annual compensation paid to retail employees.
- Nova Scotia retail employee's average total hourly compensation is \$27.07 per hour.
- Nova Scotia retail employee's average hourly earnings is \$21.81 per hour.
- With hundreds of retail locations across the province, retail trade accounts for more than \$21 billion per year in Nova Scotia (more than \$13 billion in core retail). The quick service restaurant sector contributed over \$2 billion to the Nova Scotia economy and was also one of the province's top employers.

Retail Realities:

- The retail sector provides a broad range of employment opportunities, from first-time skill development jobs to highly professional positions.
- Retail is a highly competitive sector, with traditionally low profit margins. Controlling costs is a high priority for retailers, as small cost increases can have a significant impact on a retailer's bottom line and business viability.

Retail's success in Nova Scotia is driven by increased investment, strong consumer demand, as well as sensible and focused policy and regulation by the provincial government.

Nova Scotia 2024 Provincial Election Questionnaire

Retail Council Survey

- On behalf of Retail Council of Canada members, we are asking all major political parties about their views on issues that are important to retail and quick service restaurant businesses, employees and our customers.
- We publish the answers on our VoteRetail.ca website, and encourage all retailers, quick service restaurants, employees and customers to visit the site to understand the parties' positions on issues impacting our industries.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

We thank you for taking the time to answer the following questions:

1. Retailers are resilient and despite unprecedented challenges brought on by supply chain issues, inflation and increased competition from e-commerce entities, Nova Scotia's retailers continue to fight to remain a viable and essential element of the province's economy.

Despite these challenges, the retail sector provides an over \$21 billion boost to the provincial economy, and over 65,000 jobs. But unlike other key sectors, the Nova Scotia government has not developed a sector strategy to ensure that government policies are aligned to support the industry and enhance its competitiveness.

- a. If elected, will your party work with the Retail Council of Canada to develop and implement a retail sector strategy? This strategy would be similar to the strategies that have previously been developed for other economic sectors and would ensure Nova Scotia's retail industry continues to prosper?

Yes ✓ No

Comments We recognize how important the retail sector is to our provincial economy. A Nova Scotia Liberal government would certainly work with the RCC towards a strategy for its prosperity.

2. The increase in dramatic weather events across Atlantic Canada is evidence that governments need action plans to mitigate the impact of climate change on critical infrastructure in the transportation sector. Most products sold in retail stores across Atlantic Canada arrive via truck and to a lesser extent, via rail. Many of the trucks and rail cars delivering retail product to Atlantic Canadian stores must travel through parts of Nova Scotia, to reach their destination. As Nova Scotia's highways and rail systems are a vital part of the Atlantic Canada supply chain, the Nova Scotia government is aware of the climate risks to areas like the Isthmus of Chignecto (connecting Nova Scotia and New Brunswick). While local, provincial and federal governments have worked together to complete a feasibility study of the climate risks to the Isthmus of Chignecto, governments appear to be at an impasse in ongoing debates over jurisdiction and the proper path forward. RCC appreciates the recent announcement from the current provincial government that it will take unilateral action to

begin the process of addressing this important infrastructure challenge. Nevertheless, this is only a first step in what must be a multi-step solution. While jurisdictional arguments continue between governments, each passing year seemingly increases the risk of storm surge flooding the Isthmus of Chignecto and rendering the Trans Canada Highway and the CN Rail line impassable. Given that this is the only viable land transportation route between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, lack of government action will have a significant impact on the economies of each Atlantic Province.

- a. If elected, will your party commit to work together with all levels of government to plan and implement timely solutions to the climate change challenges – like sea level rise at the Isthmus of Chignecto - that could severely impact the retail supply chain in Nova Scotia and across the Atlantic region?

Yes No

Comments Tim Houston is holding up work on the Isthmus of Chignecto as a political stunt. These issues are more important than politics, and directly affect all Nova Scotians. A Nova Scotia Liberal government would work with all levels of government to focus on addressing climate change challenges in a timely manner and protecting our province, including the retail supply chain.

- 3. Retail employees (and their customers) are on the front line of increasing threats to their safety as a result of both organized retail crime as well as prolific and often violent offenders who use a range of dangerous weapons and tactics. Retail employees also face complex interactions with those dealing with mental health issues and drug induced behaviours. RCC has begun the execution of a coordinated strategy to address these issues in collaboration with police agencies, retailers, community groups and other key stakeholders.

- a. If elected, will your party support RCC’s initiatives with the Department of Justice and join other key stakeholders at the table in an effort to ensure a coordinated response to retail safety and crime?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government would ensure adequate funding for the criminal justice system, allowing for a more effective prosecution and rehabilitation process. We would support RCC in ensuring that retail workers in our province are protected from violent crimes in their workplaces.

- 4. Many RCC members have generous paid and unpaid sick leave programs. In recent years, there has been a push for provincial governments to increase worker access to paid and unpaid sick leave by modeling the federal government’s program. However, with the ever-increasing cost and staffing pressures on businesses, the reality is that not all Nova Scotia businesses are financially able to offer paid and unpaid sick leave at the same levels offered to federally regulated industries, like

Canada's banks. The Nova Scotia government did not implement paid sick leave but did mandate an unpaid sick leave program for 2025 that models the federal program. For many businesses, it will be financially difficult to backfill positions for the number of weeks that will be granted to workers under the Nova Scotia government's program. Businesses support sick leave programs for workers but it should be noted that most provinces do not mandate paid sick leave. In addition, most provinces offer unpaid sick leave at levels which are much lower than what will be seen in Nova Scotia.

- a. If elected, will your party commit to making **no** additional changes to sick leave provisions in the province?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government is supportive of workers having access to sick leave to recover from illness without having to be concerned about losing their jobs.

- b. If you answered *No* to the last question: If your political party believes there is a social imperative for a significant and expensive initiative like introducing paid sick leave or additional increases to the number of unpaid sick days, will your party commit to offering such support through a government-funded program?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government will support the retail industry in other ways, ensuring that businesses have the capacity to offer sick leave when it is required.

5. The provincial government should take steps towards the liberalization of alcohol sales in the province. RCC appreciates the social challenges that government would face in taking such steps thus, retailers understand that such change could take time. However, provinces like New Brunswick have demonstrated that a step-by-step approach towards the liberalization of alcohol sales can benefit producers and retailers while avoiding public misconceptions surrounding such actions. New Brunswick's step-by-step approach in allowing the sale of beer wine and ready-to-drink beverages in retail stores has not had a negative impact on government jobs or government coffers. In fact, the approach has helped local producers.

Nova Scotia retailers could help the government achieve levels of success in the sale of beer, wine and ready to drink products (RTD), similar to those seen in New Brunswick. There are craft brewers and vintners across Nova Scotia who could benefit from the opportunity to sell their product in retail stores.

- a. If elected, will your party commit to implementing a responsible, step-by-step approach that leads to provincewide sales of beer, wine and RTD in retail stores.

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government will commit to having further conversations with stakeholders about potential future provincewide sales of beer, wine, and RTD products in retail stores.

6. Nova Scotia has established a predictable model for calculating annual minimum wage adjustments based on the Consumer Price Index. The approach helps ensure politics are removed from the process, and that minimum wage increases are balanced fairly between the interests of employees and employers. Nova Scotia's model also mandates a review, every year to ensure that the province's wage remains competitive within the country. This approach provides businesses with predictability and allows them to plan for the cost increases throughout their salary scale that result from minimum wage increases.
- a. If elected, will your party commit to maintaining the current model of determining annual minimum wage adjustments through a formula that is linked to the change in the CPI for the previous year?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government would maintain the current model of determining minimum wage adjustments based on the Consumer Price Index, preserving a predictable adjustment schedule for Nova Scotians.

7. Competitive tax rates are an important tool for governments to attract and retain businesses while encouraging consumer spending. Nova Scotia's commercial tax rates are generally competitive within Atlantic Canada while the province's Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) is equal to that in the other Atlantic provinces. However, in the lead up to the Nova Scotia election, multiple parties have promised to lower the provincial portion of the HST. In addition, Prince Edward Island recently lowered its small business tax rate to 1% while Nova Scotia's small businesses continue to struggle with the costs of doing business while competing with retailers from all over the world.
- a. If elected, will your party pledge to not raise corporate taxes (small and large businesses) or the provincial portion of the HST during your mandate so as to maintain Nova Scotia's competitive tax position within Atlantic Canada?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government will lower the small business tax to 1% and lower the provincial portion of the HST to 13%, maintaining competitiveness within Atlantic Canada and delivering savings to Nova Scotians.

- b. If elected, will your party commit to lowering the small business tax to 1%?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government will reduce the small business tax rate to 1% and raise the income threshold for the preferential rate to 700K.

c. If elected, will your party commit to lowering the HST during its mandate?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government is committed to lowering the HST to 13%.

8. Given the small size of each Atlantic Province, it is imperative for each provincial government within the Atlantic Region to work together and harmonize initiatives with proven best practices from across Atlantic Canada. It is particularly imperative for such harmonization to occur with policies related to solid waste regulations. A regionally harmonized approach avoids public confusion, reduces red tape and makes it easier for businesses to meet environmental mandates throughout the Atlantic region without creating needless administrative challenges.

a. If elected, will your government take action to harmonize policies related to solid waste regulations across Atlantic Canada?

Yes No

Comments A Nova Scotia Liberal government will support the standardization of policies related to solid waste regulations in Atlantic Canada.

RETURN SURVEY TO:

We would ask that you please return this survey as soon as possible to:

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Further Inquiries:
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