

# **NOTES FOR REMARKS**

**Hon. Murray Scott  
Minister of Justice**

*2006 Nova Scotia Police Boards Association/  
Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association  
Annual Joint Conference*

**Thursday, September 28, 2006  
Sydney, Nova Scotia**

*Check Against Delivery*



## ***Introduction***

- Good afternoon.
- It's great to be together with so many colleagues from law enforcement and police boards.
- I know many of you in this room from my two decades in law enforcement.
- Since coming to the Justice Department, I've had the pleasure of connecting with you in another way.
- The last few months have reinforced my belief in the need for a strong connection between police and community.
- I also bring the thoughts and best wishes of our Premier and my colleagues in government.

- From day one, we have considered safe and healthy communities a key priority.
- We've demonstrated this through several key pieces of legislation and platform commitments, dedicated to building stronger, safer communities.

### *Importance of Community*

- That's one of the reasons I was so pleased to see this year's conference theme.
- Why is the topic of community safety, health and well being so important?
- Because communities and their residents are at the foundation of our province.

- Seniors should feel safe, businesses should not be targeted, families must be able to raise their children without fear.
- We are increasingly dismayed by media reports of street crime, particularly the behaviour of a small number of out of control youth.
- We also know communities are experiencing the negative impacts of illegal drugs, especially in schools, and the resulting property crimes and theft.
- At the same time, we know that community members can take ownership and an active role in identifying both problems and solutions.
- But we know communities can't do it alone, and must be supported in their efforts.
- That is why your conference is so timely.

- We need to ensure communities are at the heart of our efforts, because we know some of the most effective initiatives are community driven, with community ownership.

### ***Minister's Task Force***

- Earlier this year I announced the creation of a Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities.
- The goal of the Task Force is to look at community programs, government services, legislation and policing best practices across Nova Scotia and in other jurisdictions.
- We want to identify and promote programs and initiatives that are making a positive impact in communities.

- Right now, many government departments, municipalities, police agencies and organizations across the province are actively promoting community safety and development.
- The Task Force will identify ways to support these efforts to make improvements, and to address situations that have a negative impact on their neighbourhoods.
- This Fall, we will invite the cooperation and assistance of law enforcement, community leaders, school officials, and others.
- Our goal is to take this input, along with a review of successful programs and legislation , to consider how we can compliment and enhance our existing programs.

- The end result will be a provincial crime prevention strategy developed through community consultation and locally driven crime prevention action plans.
- We recognize that strong and safe communities result from a mix of social, economic and enforcement factors.
- Therefore our efforts are taking a two-pronged approach: significant and serious enforcement, coupled with programs that address the root causes of crime.

## *Supporting Communities to Address Crime*

- A key highlight of our efforts is the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.
- Under the act, complaints from community members can result in court orders to close locations that are home to prostitution or illegal liquor, drugs, or gaming.
- They can also register their concerns about buildings that are unusually fortified.
- To implement this work, a new investigation unit is being established to follow up on complaints from across the province, and to work with community members on their concerns.

- This act allows communities and the new investigation unit to work together to push criminal activity out of their neighbourhoods and away from their families.
- I've spoken with many of you about this new act and investigative unit.
- I am confident that it will be an important tool in fighting crime, for both law enforcement and community members.
- We are now working to put the new investigative unit in place, and I expect the act to be proclaimed early in the New Year.
- Once in place, Nova Scotia will be the only province east of Manitoba to have this kind of support for communities and law enforcement.

- This initiative goes hand in hand with other provincial action to address crime and improve the safety of Nova Scotians.

### *Additional Officers*

- One of the key elements of our platform was the addition of new police officers in Nova Scotia.
- We know that fighting crime, and the root causes of crime, takes feet on the street.
- Over the next four years, we will add 250 new police officers in Nova Scotia, starting in 2007.
- We are now consulting with law enforcement on the best way to distribute these new officers.

- We are committed to making you an active part of these discussions.
- We need your input to make sure we get the most from this substantial investment in safety.
- Earlier this year we encouraged the federal government to hold similar consultation on their policing initiatives.
- I feel very strongly about the importance of including local law enforcement in these discussions.
- I will take this message to the federal Minister again in talks later this Fall.

## *Tackling Illegal Drugs*

- Another key area of concern among Nova Scotian communities is the growing impact of illegal drugs and resulting criminal behaviour.
- As you know, the illegal drug trade is an enemy to healthy communities.
- During the last session of the House we passed drug legislation that will provide more tools in the fight against drugs.

- The *Act to Combat the Production and Use of Illegal Drugs* will allow government to regulate the
  - storage;
  - transportation;
  - distribution; and
  - sale of ingredients, materials and equipment used in the production and use of illegal drugs.
- We have seen the devastation caused by crystal meth occurring in Western provinces and the impact other illegal drugs have had in Nova Scotia.

- This legislation will allow us to put strict controls in place while introducing new penalties.
- The bill also requires people to notify authorities if they become aware of the loss or theft of certain ingredients, materials or equipment.
- Fines under this legislation range from \$2,000 to \$50,000 dollars.
- Of course, this is in addition to any charges under the criminal code.

- This legislation is an important step. But we know other measures are needed.
- We are working with our partners to create a comprehensive drug strategy tailored to meet the needs of Nova Scotians.
- The strategy is focusing on
  - prevention;
  - enforcement;
  - reduction of harms;
  - and treatment.
- As you know, a great deal of work is underway to prevent and address illegal drug use in Nova Scotia.
- We know that you are working hard on this issue.

- A Nova Scotia drug strategy and new legislation will tie these efforts together.
- It will help us make sure we're doing all we can do act on our current needs and prevent the problems being experienced by other provinces.
- Regulations are required for this legislation, and we hope to have proclamation by the New Year.

### *Addressing Youth Crime*

- Too often, drugs are at the root of youth crime in our province.
- It is so disturbing to see these reports, particular those that are increasingly violent, and often randomly directed at innocent community members.

- Perhaps this issue is the one that speaks most directly to the importance of community involvement in finding solutions.
- We know that strong enforcement is critical in dealing with youth crime.
- At the Department level, we've had to dramatically adjust our programming at the youth facility, to deal with the much shorter sentences imposed by the courts following implementation of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.
- The limited availability of incarceration under the Act, has also help push us forward in developing new community based services.

- With this Spring's budget we announced the creation of a new attendance centre for young offenders in the community.
- Initially based in Metro Halifax, this new service will provide "one stop" access for programs to rehabilitate young people in conflict with the law.
- The centre will provide counseling, addictions, educational and vocational programming under one roof.
- This approach allows for a team approach among the professionals and the intensive supervision the young people need to make sure they complete their programming.

- We're essentially taking the programs that have been successful in Waterville, and adapting them to work in the community.
- However, like you, we know that sometimes incarceration is necessary.
- While the Y-C-J-A may work for the majority of youth, there are situations where young people must be sentenced to protect themselves and others in the community.
- For some time we have been calling on the federal government to make the necessary changes to the Y-C-J-A.
- I was pleased by the response when I raised this issue with federal Justice Minister Towes in May.

- I believe the need for change is recognized, and I know I have the support of many of my provincial counterparts.
- This issue will be raised again at federal-provincial Justice Minister's meeting in October, and I hope to report back to you soon on the progress we are making.
- Also drawing attention on the issue of youth crime is the Nunn Commission.
- We are expecting the commission's report this Fall, and will be providing a comprehensive response to the recommendations in that report.
- During the commission, we heard about what is working and what needs improvement.
- The testimony reinforced the need for discussions like you are having during this conference.
- The issues are deeply imbedded in the community, and there is a need for all partners to come together to ensure

we are addressing youth crime on two fronts:

- enforcement measures that protect the community; and
  - community and government services that support families.
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- The Nunn Commission has provided an opportunity to accelerate and augment what's already in place, while pinpointing any gaps that need to be filled.
  - We have been working with our colleagues in Health, Health Promotion, Education and Community Services, to identify how we can address the issues raised during the Nunn Commission.

- Collaboration among all of these government departments is key to an effective government response.
- Ultimately, it takes healthy people to have healthy communities.
- Our goal is to make sure we're provide appropriate, accessible services to support people in doing what they need to do to raise healthy families.

### ***Police and Peace Officer Memorial Day***

- I believe that police are a pillar of a healthy, safe community.
- The job comes at great personal risk.

- Unfortunately, those who put their lives on the line sometimes make the ultimate sacrifice.
- Earlier this year our government passed the *Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day Act*.
- This act designates the third Sunday of each October as a special day to commemorate peace officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty.
- These officers and their families deserve our recognition every day.
- However an annual designated day will make sure we properly acknowledge their service and commitment to their fellow Nova Scotians.

- I want to thank the Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association for their leadership in supporting this designation
- The act will be proclaimed shortly, and this year we will commemorate our fallen officers on Sunday, October 21.
- In October we will be announcing the day to media and placing ads in local papers/
- We will be encouraging all Nova Scotians to take the time to reflect on the important service and sacrifice of Nova Scotia's police and peace officers.

## *Closing*

- I appreciate this opportunity to meet with you today, and to highlight some of our government's efforts to improve community health and safety.
- Many of you have played a part in making these initiatives happen, and we continue to need your vision, input and support.
- There are strong links and partnerships between communities and police.
- This event is a good demonstration, with both of your associations holding a joint conference.

- I know that, right across this province police departments, officers and board members are reaching out to connect with community members and leaders.
- Whether it's a reading program, walking a beat, supporting Special Olympics, or holding community meetings.
- No one is closer to community, and the police are perfectly positioned to respond and point out where province can make improvements.
- I want to close with a quote I read in Tuesday's Chronicle Herald, which I think perfectly sums up what we are all working toward.

- It was made by a Dartmouth resident, following a community meeting with Chief Beazley.
- She said: “I think it’s a circle - it has to be the community, it has to be education, it has to be mental health. All of these issues have to come together so the problems are addressed as a group.”
- I think she put it very well - we can make things better, but we have to do it together.
- I want to congratulate you all for keeping safer, stronger communities so high on the agenda.
- And I want to assure you that you have the commitment of this Premier, this Minister and this government.
- Together, I am confident that we can keep our communities and the people who live in them safe and healthy.
- Thank you.