

The Tyranny of the Status Quo in a Debt-Ridden Province such as Newfoundland and Labrador

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Moya Greene and the Premier's Economic Recovery Team released "The big reset," described by its authors as "a transformational plan for the province that attempts to tie all aspects of the economy and society together to meet some of the biggest challenges and opportunities ever faced by the province." With 338 pages for the main report and 67 pages for the executive summary, it is a long, comprehensive report, containing nearly 80 distinct categories of recommendations and approximately 190 specific recommendations or recommendations on subthemes. One or more of these recommendations will impact all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in some form or another. They will cut across, directly or indirectly, all aspects of the economy, governance structures, fiscal interactions, and the broader social and cultural environment. If recommendations of the report are adopted unaltered, then the implied transformation will move the province dramatically away from the status quo.

A significant number of commentators have either criticized or lauded various aspects of the report. In this context, it is important to appreciate that some of this criticism or support emanates from individuals, whose job it is to represent the interest of their constituents (unions, businesses and/or professional organizations). Sometimes their special interests will be at odds with adopting policies and recommendations that are optimal from the perspective of the province as a whole. In fact, the Greene Report has noted this phenomena in the province's past fiscal history.

Given the breath of areas covered by the recommendations and their significance to particular interest groups, it is not surprising that the Greene report has engendered strong reactions. If nothing else is gleaned from the Greene report, it should be clear that having accumulated nearly \$50 billion in debt for a population of slightly more than one-half a million people, the status quo is no longer sustainable, nor should it be acceptable. Furthermore, it ought to be clear that unless and until we, and all of our special interest groups, work collaboratively and collectively toward transforming Newfoundland and Labrador, the tranny of the status quo will dominate and special interests will trump the public good.

Acknowledging these realities should be the starting point for full-blown policy discussions, informed by the Greene report. We need constructive solutions of how to move forward effectively, efficiently, and fairly. We need a full discussion of the options, the objectives, and the constraints which affect Newfoundland and Labrador's ability to move forward to a more sustainable economy. Simply suggesting that "I like this" or "I don't like that" is no longer helpful.

The end result of effective consultation should be one which develops of a set of policies that transitions Newfoundland and Labrador into a province in which the potential of future Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are realized to their fullest extent. We want the province to be the best and first choice for young people of where to live, work and raise their families.

While your specific recommendations will likely differ from those in the report, it is important to recognize the important contribution that "The big reset" can, and will, make to evolution of public policies within Newfoundland and Labrador. How we react to and help strengthen the framework outlined in the Greene report will define our future - it can be one in which prosperity and sustainability prevail or one in which narrowly defined, self-interest and complacency dominate the debate as we

tumble over the fiscal waterfall. The jury is still out on whether responsible government is still possible in Newfoundland and Labrador on a go-forward basis. We live in hope, but we must plan for the future.