September 15, 2020

The Honourable Derek Bennett  
Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Municipalities  
Minister Responsible for the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board  
Registrar General

Dear Minister Bennett:

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Environment, Climate Change, and Municipalities and Minister Responsible for the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board. As you advance activities in the interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I am confident that you will work to ensure the delivery of effective environment and climate change programs that meets our goals, while ensuring that our communities are strong and vibrant places to live. Your department is essential for ensuring our environment is managed in a sustainable manner, and our communities have the tools they need to support community capacity.

This year has been marked by economic and social turmoil not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but around the world. But with great challenges come great opportunities. Through focused efforts I know that we will overcome these challenges and emerge as a stronger, more caring, more compassionate, and more diverse province. Future generations will judge us not based on the size of the challenges we faced but on how we have solidified the financial, social, and economic foundation of our province. Our Government has a responsibility to respond swiftly, decisively, and effectively. The time for action is now.

The economic status quo is no longer acceptable. We need to move away from the well-worn economic cycles of boom and bust and foster an economy that is diversified and sustainable. We need to reinvigorate our economy to harness the great potential that lies in our technology sector, our world-class arts sector, and every other sector from oil and gas to tourism, from fisheries and aquaculture to forestry and agrifoods. I know that the people of our province work hard in these and other sectors and the Government must work equally as hard for the people.

Our work to create a robust, stable economy will provide a firm foundation to ensure the delivery of vital social and other services to residents of the province. Our Government must always be mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and must ensure that quality social services are available and accessible to Newfoundlanders and
Labradorians. To ensure our Government is meeting this need, a Gender-Based Plus Analysis must be integrated into all policies and proposals.

The business of government must also advance from the status quo. We need to reimagine how government works so that it works for the people. This change is long overdue and it will be transformational.

In particular, I am tasking you to work with your colleagues in Cabinet, with all members of the House of Assembly, and with your departmental officials to advance the following priorities.

Work with Indigenous and local populations around the Muskrat Falls Reservoir to provide oversight of methylmercury monitoring programs and develop health-related information. Please continue to work with each of the Western, Central, and Eastern Regional Service Boards to implement the Regional Water and Wastewater Operators Pilot Program. Work with the Government of Canada to explore a flexible and cost-effective approach to implementing federal wastewater effluent regulations that is responsive to the unique needs of communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. You will monitor the ongoing review of the environmental assessment process, and develop a drinking water quality action plan.

I expect you to advance initiatives that will allow our Province to meet net zero emissions by 2050 including the implementation of the five-year Climate Change Action Plan, which is designed to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, stimulate clean innovation and growth, and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Prioritize increasing electrification opportunities within the province, including working with the Government of Canada to expand opportunities for the low carbon economy, home energy savings, and energy efficiency. I ask you to work with the Minister Responsible for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to deliver the Home Energy Savings Program to help make homes more affordable and fight climate change.

We must develop new municipal legislation to ensure an effective and modern framework for municipal governance. You will support regional collaboration in a manner that engages communities and ensures a local voice for all residents. Together, we will continue the annual Premier’s Forum on Local Government to provide a venue for community leaders and key municipal organizations to discuss issues of concern for municipalities, and work with municipalities to create the building blocks for communities to better deliver municipal services, protect the environment, and encourage economic activity.

Please continue the work on flood risk mapping on the Humber, Exploits, and lower Churchill Rivers to help assist government, communities, and emergency management partners to better anticipate and respond to possible flooding events. Finally, I ask you to collaborate with the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology to continue work on a Natural Areas System Plan.
I trust that you will be collaborative, honest, respectful, and transparent in your role as a minister. I also expect that you will hold yourself to the highest standards of ethical conduct and act at all times with integrity. Individually and collectively, we have a responsibility to seek out the best advice and the best ideas and to implement actions only in the interests of the people of our great province. We must be guided by evidence and research, and take into account diverse perspectives as we make our decisions.

We cannot change our past but we can shape our future. It is our job to build the bright future that our province and its people deserve.

Yours truly,

DR. ANDREW FUREY
Premier