

CFIB Leaders Survey

Small businesses are the backbone of the economy in Prince Edward Island. As the province approaches the upcoming election, it's important to understand the priorities and plans of the political leaders when it comes to supporting small businesses. This survey is designed to gather the opinions of the political leaders and to learn more about their stance on important issues that affect small businesses in PEI.

1. How will your government prioritize small businesses in its policy decisions?

Our PC government knows how vital a strong small business sector is for our province and that is considered when our government makes decisions and investments that will assist Island small businesses.

That's why a re-elected PC government will invest in growing the housing supply to support our continued population growth; making the tax system more fair for workers so that they can keep more of what they earn; improving access to public transit to assist labour and consumer mobility; create more pathways to employment through apprenticeships, upskilling, and better access to international skilled workers to fill gaps in the workforce; and reduce red tape in permitting.

2. What steps will your government take to encourage Islanders to shop locally?

Our PC government understands how important it is to support local businesses and producers and has led several campaigns to encourage Islanders to shop more locally. These include pandemic support campaigns, industry specific supports such as the potato industry, staycation promotions, post-pandemic promotions, and encouraging more local procurement opportunities.

A re-elected PC government will continue these efforts and lead by example by modernizing government procurement policies to prioritize local products and services.

3. What policies will your government put in place to further reduce the tax burden on small businesses?

Our PC government recognizes, values and respects the importance of our small business sector to the health of our Island economy and the growth of our province. Our PC government demonstrated this by establishing the lowest small business tax rate in Atlantic Canada at 1% and delivering a suite of support programs for small businesses during the pandemic.

A re-elected PC government will maintain that competitive tax advantage for Island small businesses and work with sector partners to explore potential further competitive tax advantages for Island small businesses. Partnership for Growth with *Workforce 2030*, an industry-led project to quantify and forecast PEI's future labour market requirements.

A re-elected PC government will also increase the Basic Personal Tax Exemption to \$15,000 over the next four years, building on increases made over the last four years. This will allow Island workers to keep even more of what they earn. Additionally, a re-elected PC

government will increase the Seniors Tax Credit by 40%. This, along with increases to the Basic Personal Tax Exemption, will allow older Islanders in the workforce to keep more of what they earn also.

4. How will your government ensure that the realities of small businesses are reflected in employment standards to ensure fair balance and reasonable flexibility between employers and employees?

Our PC government recognizes and respects the valuable contributions that small businesses make to our province and recognizes the need to ensure a fair and flexible balance between the needs of employers and employees.

Currently there is a comprehensive review of the *Employment Standards Act* underway involving key stakeholders, workers, employers and Islanders. The recommendations from this review will help guide the path forward to improve support available for Island workers.

5. What is your plan to reduce government red tape for small businesses and citizens?

Our PC government has taken several steps to reduce government red tape for small businesses and citizens including more flexible hours at Access PEI, use of telehealth services to shorten wait times, creation of the Pharmacy Plus program to improve access to care, and offering more services online.

A re-elected PC government will build on these steps by enhancing delivery of government services with new Access PEI locations in Charlottetown and Cornwall; expanded use of apps like Maple and Skip the Waiting Room to access care and book appointments; streamlining of permitting processes and timelines to incentivize development; and further adoption of government services available online.

6. Will your government introduce mandated employer paid sick leave for employees?

Our PC government recognizes and respects the valuable contributions that workers make to the delivery of public services and to the health of our economy.

Adding 10 paid sick days, as has been proposed in legislation from opposition parties, would involve significant costs and any enhancements to the number of legislated paid sick days would require consultation between workers, employers and government to fully understand its economic impacts. Our PC government voted to defeat that bill because it would short circuit a comprehensive review of the *Employment Standards Act* underway involving key stakeholders, workers, employers and Islanders. The recommendations from this review will help guide the path forward to improve support available for Island workers and Island small businesses.

7. What will be your government's plan to address skills shortages?

Addressing skill shortages in our workforce is perhaps the greatest economic challenge that our province faces. Over the last four years our PC government has worked to recruit and retain workers in areas of the workforce experiencing pressure and have worked with our post-secondary institutions on flexible solutions to meet this challenge.

A re-elected PC government will:

- Grow the workforce to 90,000 jobs by 2026;
- Continue to support Partnership for Growth with *Workforce 2030*, an industry-led project to quantify and forecast PEI's future labour market requirements.
- Establish a \$10 Million Dollar Upskilling and Re-Skilling Fund to work with employers to create unique opportunities to get more people into the workforce through mentorship and training opportunities by working with sector champions;
- Fund sector and industry groups to develop online training platforms for professional development, upskilling, and to allow for quicker onboarding of new graduates and employees into critical roles;
- Work with the federal government to find expedited routes for international skilled workers to join our province's workforce either on a temporary basis or permanently;
- Provide internship opportunities for post-secondary students to work with sector and industry groups to get practical work experience with multiple companies or organizations in the same field;
- Work with groups like the Construction Association of PEI, unions, and local contractors, to launch and expand existing programming to expose more Islanders to career opportunities in the construction industry, recruit more skilled workers for the construction industry internationally, and expand vocational training opportunities and mentorships to forge more pathways to careers in the skilled trades.

8. What is your position on eliminating the tolls on the Confederation Bridge?

Our PC government knows that transportation access is an important factor for Island businesses which impacts their competitiveness, be it by land, sea, or air.

A re-elected PC government will establish a working group with the federal government to reduce Bridge and Ferry tolls to \$20. A re-elected PC government will also provide \$1 million to help the Charlottetown Airport Authority add more flights and improve regional connectivity.;

9. What is your government's plan to reduce the cost of doing business in PEI ?

A re-elected PC government will build on these steps by enhancing delivery of government services with new Access PEI locations in Charlottetown and Cornwall; streamlining of permitting processes and timelines to incentivize development; further adoption of government services available online; and create a Portable Health Benefits Program to provide health, dental, and medication insurance for workers who may not be employed full-time, year-round, or those facing barriers to insurance coverage like seasonal workers, contract employees, and gig economy workers.

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell business owners about your plans for the province?

Despite the uncertainty of events over the last four years our PC government has been there for Island small business owners. Our province's employment has increased to 84,200 jobs on PEI, an all-time high for our province. We are seeing the lowest annual rate for unemployment in our province's history at 7.6%. There have never been more tourists visiting our shores. We've had more housing starts in the last four years than ever before since joining Confederation. We've increased spending in social programming by almost 20% to help our most vulnerable.

These are notable accomplishments but for our province to continue to thrive we need a resilient and robust economy to drive growth. Our PC government will work to make the needed investments and partnerships to improve access to health care, enhance our schools and skills training programs, strengthen our energy grid and infrastructure; create more housing options to better manage population growth, and develop strategic and competitive advantages for our province to thrive into the future,