

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

For those of you who know me, or have read just about anything that I have ever written, you will recognize that I am a numbers guy.

I like numbers. They are tangible, they are real. For me, numbers transcend ideology. As an accountant once told me, “actual is actual”, the numbers are what they are.

I have been given about ten minutes this evening to tell you a bit about AIMS. To explain what we do, how we do it and, since this is a celebration of success, to show you how I know we are very good at it.

How else would someone like me do that, except through numbers?

But first, your opening lesson about AIMS: We are not all that interested in the past. Or more accurately, our interest in the past is exclusively in how the past can be used to shape and direct the future.

We are about tomorrow's public policy, not yesterday's and indeed, in most instances, not even today's.

That brings us to our first number, the number 4 – The number of Fisher prizes AIMS has won.

The Sir Antony Fisher Memorial Prize is awarded in support of the international think tank movement. Tony Fisher, a successful industrialist, recognized that ideas mattered and that good ideas, well communicated, and readily available to the public and decision makers alike could transform society to the benefit of us all.

Fisher created not only the Institute for Economic Affairs in the UK but also supported the development of a global think tank community to make ideas, good, well researched, evidence based ideas, the cornerstone of human society.

The Fisher Prize, was created in Tony Fisher's name to recognize the best work being carried out by think tanks around the world. This is the most prestigious prize in the think tank community. Nearly 400 think tanks in more than 100 countries world wide are eligible, and a maximum of three prizes are given each year.

Our very first book, *Looking the Gift Horse in the Mouth: The Impact of Federal Transfers on Atlantic Canada*, won our first Fisher Prize.

We followed that with a win for our first serious health policy paper, *Operating in the Dark: The Gathering Crisis in Canada's Public Health Care System*.

*We won again by bringing together two sister think tanks, one in the west and one in Quebec, to explore the harmful effects of federal transfers nationwide and to propose a way out.*

*We won our fourth Fisher for expanding our health policy reach to develop a national alternative to Roy Romanow's defense of the status quo.*

**These victories highlight** lessons two, three, four, five, and six about AIMS:

- We never go it alone when there are partners to be had;
- We are interested in solutions, not problems;
- We focus on quality, indeed award-winning, research
- We believe that effective communications is almost as important as solid research;
- And, we may be IN Atlantic Canada but we are a national entity with international reach.

And yes, there will indeed be a test at the end of the evening about all of this.

This IS after all the education dinner. And well designed tests that assess the curriculum are a key to a good education.

Recall as well, that tests are only as good as our expectations – and we expect the very best from all of you, regardless of where you come from or where you are going.

Speaking of where we come from.

These Fisher prizes also highlight an important lesson about Atlantic Canada that all too often gets missed in public and private discussions. A lesson that lies at the core of what AIMS does. That lesson is that the problems we face here in Atlantic Canada are not all that unique.

There is unhealthy dependence on transfers to be found in other regions of this country and other countries around the globe. ACOA does indeed have a western and central Canadian counterpart.

Taxes are high, or higher in other places – taxes kill jobs in Vermont as effectively as they kill them in Nova Scotia.

Health care costs more and delivers less in communities beyond our borders, but it also costs less and delivers more in still other places.

The lessons we learn here can help them there, just as the lessons they learn in solving their problems can help us – whether it is the cost competitive and highly effective Swedish health care system, or, as in tonight's example, the results driven Florida education system.

Speaking of lessons learned elsewhere. AIMS was a finalist for our fifth Fisher award this past year. We lost to a fellow by the name of James Tooley.

Tooley's work has been profiled in the Economist and it would be very familiar to anyone that has read any of AIMS work on education over the years and indeed, his themes are the themes of Governor Bush:

Incentives matter. Accountability for teachers, choice for parents and high expectations for students make schools better.

Of course, Tooley studied these things at private schools run in back alleys and basements in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Private schools charging literally pennies a day turning out literate graduates with the capacity to haul themselves and their families out of poverty. All this while comparatively well funded public schools operated nearby with empty classrooms and abominable outcomes.

We would have liked that fifth Fisher, but if we had to lose, coming second to Doctor Tooley is okay by us.

Besides we had already achieved the number 5

AIMS fifth major international honour, the Templeton Freedom Prize for Institute Excellence.

Named for world-renowned investment guru Sir John Templeton, who endowed it, this is also a prize for which hundreds of think tanks are eligible world wide. It recognises not excellence in specific projects, but is an overall evaluation of the excellence of a think tank, its organisation, quality and impact.

Our four Fisher Prizes, together with the Templeton Prize, make us one of the most decorated think tanks in the world. And we live right here, with you, in Atlantic Canada.

That success would not be possible without hard work and commitment from some amazing people, and that leads us into our next set of numbers – starting with 6

6 – the number of Chairmen who have stepped up to offer their advice and guidance to AIMS:

- New Brunswicker Cedric Ritchie, former chairman and CEO of the Bank of Nova Scotia;
- Purdy Crawford, former chairman and CEO of Imasco and now with Osler Harcourt in Toronto. Purdy is our Chairman Emeritus, for his outstanding service to the Institute. AIMS would not be what it is today without the matchless support of this fine man;
- Gerry Pond, another New Brunswicker, former President and CEO of NB Tel and now, by his own admission, a serial entrepreneur;
- David Mann, former CEO of Emera, the company that owns Nova Scotia Power, Bangor Hydro and more.
- John F. Irving, our third New Brunswicker, and a person well known to most of you in this room.
- And our current chair, John Risley, a formidable voice on public policy in his own right and a natural fit for AIMS.

From those 6 we move on to 71

71 – the number of regional, national and international community and opinion leaders who have served on our board of directors

Here are the faces of a number of those directors who have served the institute, and are either current directors or are members of our Advisory Council. They include the most distinguished leaders of our business, professional and university communities in the region.

But of course if the Institute were merely a mouthpiece for the interests represented on the Board of Directors, not only would we not be credible – we would be far too predictable and incredibly boring!

That's why we have a formal and scrupulously respected policy that all these distinguished members of our Board have no role to play in the research and publication agenda of AIMS. The Institute's directors only see our publications at the same time everyone else does – the day they come out. So how do we ensure the quality of what we do?

That is the job of the Research Advisory Board, drawn from universities and research institutes in the region and beyond.

12 – 12 by the way, is the number of leading academics who have served on the AIMS RAB in our first fifteen years.

Robin Neill of UPEI (with us here tonight) very ably chairs that research board, which includes many of our finest minds, including Canadian Nobel Laureate in Economics, Bob Mundell.

Beyond our RAB we have our authors, 15-20 is the average number of authors who we have under contract at any one time – with a staff complement of only 5, you can appreciate how critical it is to outsource as much writing as possible – making sure we have both a constant flow of new work and that we do not get caught up in group think or trapped by institutional or personal biases or blinders.

And over 30, is the number of people who have served on that small core AIMS staff over the past 15 years.

Like Robin, our current staff are all in the room this evening and I hope you get a chance to chat with at least one of them before you leave...this is my opportunity to thank them for their contribution to our success.

But before I sit down, here is just a little of the future, just a little about why AIMS is more important for our friends, our families, our neighbours, and our region than it was fifteen years ago.

First, another number – 1996.

That is the year (with all appropriate apologies to our guest this evening for using this reference), 1996 is the year when Bill Clinton famously pronounced “the era of big government is over”.

Well – it isn't over yet, and here are some numbers to prove that:

70% – government spending as a percentage share of Prince Edward Island's GDP  
50% – the percentage growth in the spending by the NS government in the past six years  
25% - the percentage growth in NB spending over that same period  
25% - the wage premium paid in NL to government versus private sector employees  
26% – the average share of our workforce, in every atlantic province, directly consumed by government  
31 Billion – the current total provincial debt in our region, in round numbers  
36 Billion – what that debt is projected to be in just four years time

This is why AIMS is here, in Atlantic Canada and why we are not going anywhere anytime soon.

We all live in a region where the era of big government is decidedly NOT over but where, regardless of what we believe SHOULD occur, the era of big government is about to come crashing down around us – and I make that statement once again, with numerical certainty.

Consider these numbers:

32% - the percentage of our population who will be over 65 by 2046  
300,000 - a recent projection of the expected reduction in the size of our workforce as a result of that shift  
\$5.2 billion – a conservative estimate of the decline in personal tax revenue in AC alone as people stop working and see their incomes fall

If we are going to sustain the quality and standard of living to which we have become accustomed. We MUST find new ways of doing things and we MUST break our dependence on government to do and be all things to all people

And that brings me to our last number – 40%

The NB illiteracy rate.

If we are going to make our workers more productive and find ways to engage the unengaged in our economies – to create opportunity where before, despite our best intentions, there have been only barriers. Then 40% is the number we must attack

And education is the key to that – effective, flexible, sustainable, affordable education for all – and that is what you will hear about after dinner.

Concepts ideas and approaches that AIMS has researched, explored and explained for a decade and a half have been implemented and tested and have succeeded in Florida.

If you, like me, want to see our region grow and prosper in the face of the single largest challenge we have faced in a generation, then I invite you all to work with AIMS in pursuit of similar success here to that which Governor Bush achieved there.

I want to close by thanking you so much for already being part of our effort to build a stronger more self sufficient Atlantic Canada. And to thank you for sharing this evening in celebration of our victories and of our future potential, not merely of AIMS, but of the region of which we are all so proud.

I will now leave you to your dinner, but we will be running a silent slide show that will show you some of the people who have come to be associated with AIMS, as well as just a few of the many ways that our messages of high performance government and greater freedom and prosperity have reached audiences across the country and around the world.