

Prince Edward Island Speech From the Throne

**Delivered by
His Honour The Honourable Gilbert R. Clements
Lieutenant Governor**

**At the Opening of the
Second Session of the Sixtieth General Assembly of
Prince Edward Island**

November 12, 1998, 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my honour, on behalf of her Majesty the Queen, to officially open the 2nd Session of the 60th General Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Monsieur le Président, députés de l'Assemblée législative, j'ai l'honneur, au nom de Sa Majesté la reine, d'annoncer l'ouverture officielle de la seconde session de la 60^e Législature provinciale de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard.

PEI's 125th Anniversary

This year has marked the 125th anniversary of Prince Edward Island's entry into Confederation. It has been a year for celebration – a year to recognize our achievements and to take pride in our contributions to Canada during those 125 years – a year to rejoice that we are part of a country that is acknowledged as the best in the world.

Approaching the Millennium

As My Government looks ahead to a new century and a new millennium, it has reflected on how to preserve and sustain the things that we value most about our Island – while strengthening our capacity to participate fully in the national and global economy and society. Much progress has been made toward these goals during the past two years. My Government has enhanced PEI's health care system. It has made long-overdue investments in the education system. It has given Islanders and communities a greater voice in the affairs of the Province. It has fostered economic development and jobs in every part of PEI. It has restored the fiscal health of the province. Much has been achieved – and more will be done in the years ahead.

My Government will continue to build a vibrant, prosperous society and economy. It will do so through a strategic approach which differs sharply from the “bigger is better” path of previous governments and of other jurisdictions. This approach has caused centralization, rural and community decline, relentless increases in farm size, dependency on commodity and mass markets, instability and vulnerability to external forces. PEI will lead the way down a better path

– a path to the future, not the past – a path which takes account of the forces which will shape growth, development, and prosperity in the 21st century.

Adding Value to Products/Services

Prince Edward Island is already noted for the excellence of many of its products. Significant gains have been made in recent years in adding value to raw products. My Government will accelerate the move up the value chain from commodity production and mass market products, to high value-added, unique products and services across the range of industries and business sectors. Small- and medium-sized enterprises will have a central role to play in this shift to premium quality, niche products and services.

The value-added, top quality strategy will contribute to and be reinforced by establishing a unique identity for PEI – the “PEI brand” – based on the quality of our environment, sustainable production methods and excellence of products and services. This identity will enable PEI to stand out and to succeed in an intensely competitive global marketplace.

Knowledge Economy

In the past two years, PEI has positioned itself to thrive in the knowledge-based economy of the new millennium. Our existing economic sectors and our public sector offer a wealth of opportunities for knowledge-based economic growth. New opportunities are emerging as well in fields such as information technology. To realize these opportunities, and to compete effectively, we will invest in Islanders, through strong educational systems, a world-class infrastructure, an effective technology base, and a positive climate for new ventures and entrepreneurship.

Regional Cooperation/Federal-Provincial Relations

My Government places emphasis on regional cooperation and is concerned by recent actions that threaten a well-established, sharing relationship. Given reductions in federal transfers, such regional cooperation is more important than ever. While insisting on the right to protect the best interests of Islanders, My Government will pursue efforts to improve greater Atlantic cooperation.

We are mindful of the role the federal government can and must play in ensuring comparable levels of services across Canada. As the national financial situation improves, we will seek federal support to restore funding for services such as health care and support for development initiatives. It remains the commitment of My Government to work for a strong and united Canada.

Fiscal Responsibility

Prince Edward Island is becoming increasingly self-reliant. Through decisive action and responsible management of the Province’s finances, My Government has tamed the \$55 million deficit with which it was confronted two years ago. In an era of globalization, and a national climate of political and economic uncertainty, we will further build our capacity to take our own

path. My Provincial Treasurer will continue to emphasize prudent, responsible fiscal management. Strategic action will be taken to protect PEI's jurisdictional freedom to act, to take greater charge of our future, and to maximize our control over key resources.

Investing in Communities

To fulfil this strategy, My Government will invest in Island industries and Island communities for today – to achieve further wealth creation and employment opportunities. We will invest in Islanders for tomorrow – through a high quality, responsive, relevant educational system to prepare our children for their future and to allow all Islanders to engage in the learning so critical to our society. My Government will also invest in preserving and enhancing the environment and natural resources so critical to our economy and our quality of life. It will balance these investments by continuing to support the delivery of high-quality services to ensure a just, caring, equitable and healthy society. These actions and services will continue to be guided by the principles of fairness, openness, accountability and fiscal responsibility upon which My Government was elected to office.

Core Industries

Mr. Speaker, across the spectrum of our long-established industries and in every part of this province, PEI's economy is strong. We have seen growth in agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, manufacturing, processing and technology. Growth in our established industries has been so strong, in fact, that pressures are emerging on our environmental quality and our social fabric. By increasing our emphasis on high-quality and value-added niche products and services, we will ensure the sustainability of our resources, while at the same time generating more wealth from these endeavors.

Our resource industries of agriculture, forestry, fishing and food processing continue to be the core of our economy. Taken together, they account for a far greater share of our economy than in any other province – triple the national average. They are also woven into the social fabric of PEI, and especially of our rural and coastal communities. Throughout our history, these industries have shaped the Island in a way that defines our identity and way of life.

Food Strategy

These industries, which have been the heart of PEI's economy throughout its history, hold new potential to create wealth and opportunities for Islanders. To realize this potential, My Government will undertake a Food Strategy to sustain our resource base, to derive more value from it, to move toward high-quality, year-round jobs, and to develop the human capacity necessary to achieve a diversified, specialized, high value-added food sector. This Food Strategy will include a marketing initiative to build global recognition of the "PEI brand." The Island will be marketed worldwide as a producer of premium-quality food produced in a clean environment, from sustainably managed resources.

Mr. Speaker, the recent challenges facing the hog industry are an example of the impact national

and international factors have on local producers. By focusing on niche markets, the Island industry has the opportunity to lessen the impact of such pressures; and My Government is supporting efforts to achieve such a solution. Overtime, an effective Food Strategy will provide a more consistent return for producers.

Sustaining Our Natural Resources

The Food Strategy is founded on the quality of our soil and water resources. My Government will protect and enhance these resources, to ensure that they continue to yield products of outstanding quality, not only in our time but for our children and grandchildren. Sustainable management of our resources is also of growing importance to consumers, particularly in the niche markets we will pursue. Environmental responsibility will form a central theme of the “PEI brand” marketing strategy. Already we have demonstrated leadership by a commitment to a province-wide, source-separation waste management system.

We can set an example of excellence in sustainable resource management through implementation of the recommendations of the Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship. In so doing, My Government will ensure that our vital primary sectors can live and work in harmony with their neighbors – the many Islanders who live in rural areas. My Government has already taken action on many of the recommendations. In the coming year, we will work with the agricultural industry and the public to set up a Farm Practices Review Board and to develop codes of practice for crop and livestock production as described in the *Farm Practices Act*. Work will continue to monitor soil quality, using a system installed earlier this year. To reduce soil erosion and restore the pastoral beauty of our landscape, a Hedgerow Replacement Program will be launched, using seedlings from the Provincial Nursery, planted by students at a nominal cost to farmers.

Crop Production – Adding Value

My Government believes that a successful future in crop production must be based on high-value crops which can be grown on relatively small acreages, and which employ large numbers of people. An example of this approach, is our support for the production and processing of cauliflower in the southern Kings and Queens region. We will continue to support such crop opportunities through a variety of initiatives.

Forestry Code of Practice

Our forests make a vital contribution to the quality of our environment, the beauty of our landscape and the economy. To ensure that these roles are balanced, My Government has supported the work of the Forest Partnership Council to develop a Forest Code of Practice. My Minister of Agriculture and Forestry will now work with the council to implement the Code of Practice to ensure responsible harvesting, targeted at mature and over-mature stands. Reforestation with superior quality seedlings will be promoted to restore the quality and health of our forests and make them a productive resource for future generations.

Knowledge Transfer and Biotechnology

In the food sector My Government will invest in knowledge creation and knowledge transfer as key elements of our strategy. Innovation and research will enable us to develop the high-value products demanded by our global markets. It will help us to manage and protect the resource base which is the source of our wealth, and to produce food in harmony with other rural land uses. In the long term, it will support our shift from selling what we grow, to selling what we know.

We are fortunate to have in PEI the strongest grouping of food science research labs east of Montreal. This bioscience capability is a critical asset in an era of growing pressure on the global food supply. My Government has identified biotechnology as an economic priority, and has supported the establishment of the Belvedere Life Sciences Research Group to foster cooperation among those facilities, and to pursue international research opportunities.

My Department of Agriculture and Forestry has been a leader in the development and marketing of knowledge-based products and services. Its subsidiary, Solanum Inc., has recently received national recognition for innovation in public administration, for its work with Monsanto Corporation to develop and market potatoes resistant to the Colorado potato beetle. The department is developing an international potato school to provide training in PEI's application of potato technology, further underlining our leadership in this area. My Government will support the establishment of a chair for swine research at the Atlantic Veterinary College to support the industry's move toward production of high-quality, high-value breeding stock for international export. My Minister of Fisheries and Tourism will continue to support the Aquaculture and Fisheries Research Initiative and the development of the Lobster Health Research Center at the Atlantic Veterinary College.

The Fishery – A Cornerstone of Our Communities

The fishery is the cornerstone of PEI's coastal communities, and provides 10,000 jobs to Islanders. My Government will continue to support this vital sector through many avenues. Programming and marketing support for value-added processing will be strengthened. My Minister of Fisheries and Tourism will represent the interests of Islanders to the federal government, aggressively pursuing fair access to fishery resources, increased support for the promising aquaculture sector, and a supportive regulatory climate. Initiatives will be undertaken to foster strong industry organizations in the fishery. Work is in progress to revitalize the aquaculture leasing system, to expand and diversify the industry, and to move to more value-added aquaculture products.

Quality Tourism Products

Our tourism sector has played a growing role in our economy over the past decade, surging to record levels with the opening of the Confederation Bridge. This year, our tourism industry has built on those gains, assisted by the increasing diversification and quality of PEI's tourism products, our growing popularity as an international golf destination, and effective marketing by a

government-industry partnership. So far in 1998, visitation is up two percent over last year's record 57 percent increase. Revenues increased by six percent, and employment is at an all-time high, at almost 21,000 jobs.

Extending the Shoulder Season

My Government will take action to further strengthen the vitality and impact of the tourism sector across PEI. Particular emphasis will be placed on increasing shoulder-season activity. Every week added to the season improves the bottom line for tourism operators, enabling them to invest in product upgrading and staff training, and to provide better employment opportunities for Islanders. In support of these goals, My Government will extend its shoulder-season support for provincial parks, increasing both the length of the opening period, and the number of parks included. The days and hours of operation of Visitor Information centers will be extended.

We will extend our support for marketing, with emphasis on shoulder season tourism. We will also continue our efforts to ensure convenient, affordable transportation access to PEI, building on the success of our recent agreement with Signature Travel to provide direct value-priced flights from Toronto to PEI.

PEI's Unique Culture

Visitors are attracted to PEI not only for its pastoral beauty, but also for our way of life. Cultural tourism is a growing sector of the industry, and PEI has much to offer. A strategy will be developed to build on this strength, working in partnership with the cultural industries. Increased emphasis will also be placed on attracting events and conventions to PEI, as one of the highest-value aspects of the tourism industry.

Target Marketing and Tourism Products

Recognizing that tourism is a global industry and that international visitors are a growing market, My Government will increase the use of bilingual and universal signage throughout the province.

Parce que mon gouvernement reconnaît que le tourisme est une industrie mondiale et que les visiteurs étrangers représentent un marché en croissance, nous allons augmenter la signalisation bilingue et universelle dans la province.

These initiatives will be carried out in partnership with other sectors to extend the "PEI brand" to our tourism sector. Images of high-quality, sustainable, environmentally responsible food production will strengthen and complement the images upon which our tourism industry is founded. In turn, the million-plus visitors who come to PEI every year will form a core market for the Food Strategy.

Diversifying Our Economy

Our strategy to increase value-added in our primary industries will build on the achievements of

PEI's growing manufacturing sector. Expansion and diversification, particularly in the areas of aerospace and food processing, have made PEI a national leader in export growth, while contributing an increasing number of high-quality, year-round jobs. To ensure that these benefits are felt in every part of PEI, My Government will undertake a review of business parks, with a view to expanding business opportunities throughout the province. Particular emphasis will be placed on assisting small- and medium-sized enterprises to develop and market high-value specialty products.

A Climate for Growth – Supporting Small Business

To compete and succeed internationally, businesses need a favorable climate, efficient affordable transportation links, and access to reliable low-cost energy sources. Further measures will be undertaken in the coming year to streamline and integrate regulatory systems. Government's lending services will be focused on responding more fully to the needs and concerns of PEI's vital small-business sector.

Buying Where We Live

My Government believes that it is important to invest in ourselves. We intend to become more self-reliant by purchasing more goods and services locally. For example, we recently rebuilt a school bus which is 11 years old. We are now evaluating this project, with the intention of expanding the concept. We intend to conduct additional projects which will displace imports.

Transportation – Moving Goods and People Safely

As an export-based economy, competitiveness is vitally dependent on our capacity to move goods and people quickly and safely. The transportation system has a direct impact on economic and community development. My Government will invest in the quality, safety and efficiency of the province's highway system. The Confederation Bridge has improved access. Northumberland Ferries will increase the number of daily trips in the peak season, and the company is considering the addition of a third ferry. It is a further example of how hard work and partnership can turn a challenge into an opportunity.

The Island has more kilometres of road per capita than any other jurisdiction in the country. The majority of the traffic is carried by 25 percent of the highway network. In order to ensure safety as traffic levels increase, My Government will develop appropriate design and construction standards.

In order to meet the transportation needs into the 21st century, My Minister of Transportation and Public Works is developing a comprehensive transportation plan aimed at improving the department's computerized Pavement Management system; evaluating the Highway Access Regulations; establishing dedicated truck routes; establishing policies relating to the utilization of our highways as biking and pedestrian corridors.

Diversifying Our Energy Supplies

My Government will place emphasis on securing access for Island businesses to the safe, clean, affordable energy supply which will become available through natural gas development in Nova Scotia. We will seek the support and assistance of the federal government in ensuring that the natural gas pipeline is extended to PEI, and will explore the opportunities it provides to diversify our electrical energy supplies.

Information Technology – A Growing Sector

My Government will take action to tap the enormous promise of the new economy. We have positioned PEI to be a leader. Our telecommunications infrastructure is the best in North America. Our schools were the first in Canada to be fully connected to the Internet. Our network of Community Access Program sites provides opportunities for all Islanders to use and learn about information technology. The Computer and Home Internet Purchase Project assisted thousands of Island families to purchase Internet-ready computers, opening new doors of opportunity for them and their children. The PEI government website continues to win national and international acclaim.

The Knowledge Worker Demand Survey demonstrated that the industry is in a strong period of growth, and forecasts an additional 900 jobs over the next three years. In recognition of this sector's rapid development and tremendous potential, the Ministry of Technology and Environment was established in July of this year. To ensure that the industry's potential is attained, My Minister of Technology and Environment will work in partnership with the Information Technologies Association of PEI to develop a strategy for the growth and diversification of the industry.

Focused Support for Economic Development

As our economy grows and expands into international markets, it becomes more and more complex. When My Government took office, it found a centralized bureaucracy in the economic development area, working in isolation from other parts of government. This structure did not fit the new realities of the economy and of the marketplace. Nor did it fit the operating philosophy of this government to work in partnership within the system and with the community. Accordingly, this past summer, My Government took action to develop a new and more appropriate structure.

The new structure recognizes the growing diversification of PEI's economy, and emphasizes the priority which My Government places on economic development. It gives a greater voice in Cabinet to the economic development function, and in particular to key sectors of PEI's economy such as Tourism and Technology. Sector-specific functions such as marketing are being restored to line departments to allow strategies and supports more geared to the needs and opportunities of individual industries. Other specialized functions such as lending are being provided in-depth expertise through greater involvement with Provincial Treasury. In support of the renewed enthusiasm of communities, Community Development officers will be located in each Regional Services Centre. A Community Development Bureau in the Department of Development will coordinate a team approach at the community level.

Development – A Shared Responsibility

Underlying this new structure is a recognition that every part of government has a vital role to play in economic development. Education provides a trained labour force; the departments of Environment and of Community Services provide a stable and efficient regulatory climate while ensuring the protection of our environment; the Department of Health and Social Services promotes the healthy society which is integral to a thriving economy.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this structure recognizes and fosters the linkages between economic development, social well-being and environmental quality. It stands in sharp contrast to past approaches to development, and I am confident that it will provide the collective leadership to realize PEI's potential more fully than ever before.

Economic development is essential to every Islander, and it is essential to us as a society. For individuals and families, it provides jobs – the basis of their economic security, dignity, health and hope for the future. For our society, it creates the wealth we need to care for our vulnerable, educate our youth and reinvest in our future. This government took office, Mr. Speaker, amidst predictions of an economic downturn in 1997. Instead, the economy grew; and it has grown significantly again this year. Not only has the economy expanded; it has also diversified, providing greater employment opportunities.

My Government is mindful that not all Islanders have benefited from the growth in quantity and quality of employment. Structural changes in our economy mean fewer opportunities for some. Many productive, hard-working Islanders have found it more and more difficult to gain employment. At the same time, changes in the Employment Insurance program have reduced their incomes and increased the cost of training and upgrading. Because of this traditional reliance on seasonal employment, these changes have had a more dramatic impact on Islanders.

Promoting Dignity and Self-Worth

My Government has invested strongly in providing opportunities for many of those Islanders, and it will continue to do so. By investing in employment, we benefit our communities and our industries, while building skills, maintaining labour force attachment, preventing dependency, and promoting the dignity and self-worth of Islanders.

My Minister of Health and Social Services has taken the number of Islanders reliant on Welfare Assistance to an eight-year low. We are proud that our province has the lowest rate of family poverty in Canada. My Government has taken initiatives to further promote the well-being of lower-income Island families. The PEI Child Care Benefit will reduce the number of children in poverty by enhancing child care programs, enabling more parents of lower income families to work. The PEI Family Health Benefit will enhance child health and ease pressures on families by assisting lower income families with the cost of prescription drugs.

Accountable Hiring Practices

While government-supported employment brings many benefits, My Government is determined to enhance the impact, accessibility and strategic use of these investments. During the past months, work has been undertaken to review government's approach to creating casual and subsidized employment; and action will be taken in this legislative session to implement the results of that work.

Casual employment has long played a dual role in our province. It has helped provide needed services, and it has played a social role by providing many Islanders with work experience and income. A review of the public service has identified approximately 300 casual positions that should be part of the classified civil service. In some cases, these positions have been filled for over a decade by the same individuals, without access to the same benefits as their colleagues. These positions are being classified, and will be filled through a competitive hiring process carried out by the Public Service Commission. To ensure fair access to these opportunities, amendments to the *Civil Service Act* will be introduced during this session of the Assembly.

Matching Jobs, Skills and Needs

Work has been underway to review My Government's investments in employment in the private and community sectors. The aim is to develop employment which strategically helps Island employers and non-profit groups, while using resources to lever investments from federal and other partners. Integrated community-based processes will be put in place to promote access by Islanders to those opportunities and to match people with jobs that best fit their skills and needs.

Public Input on Employment

Last spring, Mr. Speaker, My Government supported a resolution of this House to hold an Employment Summit in the fall of 1998. The intent of this summit was to involve a broad cross-section of Islanders and groups in proposing actions and strategies to improve employment. My Minister of Development announced his support for the summit, through an independent five-member panel under the auspices of the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI. The panel will hold public meetings across the province later this month and has been asked to submit its report in December.

This initiative is an expression of the importance that My Government places on openness and public involvement.

Our Children, Our Future

I have spoken of the investments that My Government will make to help our diverse economic sectors compete and succeed, and to ensure that all Islanders share in the benefits of growth through productive employment. I turn now to the investment that we must make for the longer term – the most important investment that we can make as a society – our investment in our children.

Education is a priority for this government. As PEI enters the new century, our future as a

society depends on the ability of our people and our youth to master the process of learning and to continue to develop life skills. Regardless of whether they find their place in the vanguard of new industries or in transforming our traditional industries, these two abilities will enable our people, and our province, to succeed.

Healthy Learning Environments/Safer Transportation

Long-overdue investments are being made in the safety and integrity of school buildings through the multi-year School Capital Repair Program. The new Athena Consolidated School is in place, construction is underway in Montague, planning is in progress for a new school in West Royalty, and a host of other improvements have been completed or are planned. These investments benefit not only our children but all Islanders, as our schools increasingly become a community resource for lifelong learning. Our children will travel to and from school more safely through the upgrading of the bus fleet and the addition of flashing amber lights on all school buses.

Technology and Secondary Curriculum Reform

While overcoming the neglect of the past, My Government is also preparing for the future. A province-wide broadband network has permitted our schools to be linked to the Internet. Buildings and technology provide the environment and tools for children and youth to learn. Even more important, however, is what our children learn and how they learn it – through quality curriculum and quality teachers. My Government is placing emphasis on these areas as well. Resources were provided to the education system to hire an additional 30 teachers' aides, and a review of special-needs education has recently been completed. My Minister of Education will table government's response to that review this session. Recognizing that our youth are graduating into an increasingly demanding labour market, My Minister of Education is seeking input from educators and parents on a proposal to increase the graduation requirements from secondary school. Even more significantly, My Minister has recently issued a report on "Senior High School Transitions," proposing significant changes to the senior high school curriculum.

The report recognizes that the general senior high program has changed little since its introduction in the 1960s. Accordingly, the proposals focus primarily on major changes to the non-university preparatory curriculum, to make it more meaningful and appropriate to the needs of students. The proposed new Grade 10 to 12 programs promote student access, by providing the necessary preparation for, and linkages to, further education, the world of work and responsible citizenship. My Government will consult widely on these proposals, which affect the future employment and well-being of more than half our youth.

Education and Training Strategy

As well, to ensure that our educational investments provide the right training to our labour force, My Minister of Education has initiated work on a long-term, comprehensive education and training strategy. The strategy will focus on a wide range of education and training issues in PEI, and will draw upon partnerships with the educational system, employers, community groups and Islanders at large.

My Government believes in a strong public education system. To this end, the Department of Education will introduce legislation to amend the *University Act* and allow the University of Prince Edward Island to offer a graduate degree in education. The Master of Education in Leadership and Learning program was approved recently by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. This initiative shows support for UPEI by enabling the university to continue to be competitive, responsive, dynamic and creative. By investing in teacher training on the Island, we are truly investing in the future development of Prince Edward Island.

Premier's Council on Youth

Youth should have a voice in these decisions on economic development, employment and education. My First Minister sponsored the Premier's Forum on Youth, drawing together young people from across PEI. As a result of that forum, the Premier's Council of Youth was formed, providing a united voice and capacity for joint action to the many youth organizations and groups in the province. I am pleased to note that the founding president of the Youth Council is currently serving as one of the five members of the Employment Summit Panel.

Health Care for Islanders

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined action in the area of jobs and education. I turn now to My Government's third priority – our health care system. In this area, My Government has met and even exceeded most of its commitments. We said that we would keep every hospital open and we have done so. Moreover, we have launched a planning process with broad community participation to construct a badly needed new hospital for Prince County. We said that we would support and strengthen front-line services and front-line staff and that will be a key priority for this session. We said we would enhance cancer treatment and work is being completed on the new Provincial Cancer Treatment Centre at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Helping Those in Need

Mr. Speaker, we have restored funding for three-month prescriptions under the Seniors' Drug Cost Assistance Plan, extended coverage of drug costs for needy families and for Islanders stricken with multiple sclerosis. Through a partnership with others in the health care system, most physician vacancies have been filled. One million dollars is committed to share the national costs to compensate hepatitis C sufferers infected by tainted blood. We have helped Islanders most in need by removing the GST rebate from the calculation of entitlement to social assistance, and we have maintained rates at more compassionate levels than most other Canadian provinces.

In the coming months, My Minister of Health and Social Services will complete a review of Emergency Medical Services. In conjunction with federal, provincial and territorial partners, a long-term plan to address the needs of Canadians with disabilities is being developed.

Support for Seniors

We owe our senior citizens respect and gratitude for all that they have given to us over the years.

To give a greater voice to seniors' concerns, priorities and wisdom, My Minister of Health and Social Services has established the Seniors' Advisory Council, and is planning an array of activities in the International Year of Older Persons 1999. Work will be undertaken to build awareness among Islanders of the aging process, to dispel myths, to promote senior-friendly Island communities and to prepare for an aging population. A significant step has already been taken in the employment of a Geriatrician. A provincial framework on aging will be developed to identify present and future health needs of seniors and ensure that they are met.

Healthy Child Development Strategy

We must ensure appropriate services and support and a caring, respectful environment not only for the elderly, but also for the youngest members of our society. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the early childhood years have a critical and lifelong impact on individuals, affecting their capacity to learn, to care for others, to support themselves and to participate in society.

My Minister of Health and Social Services is partnering with other sectors of government to develop and implement a long-term Healthy Child Development Strategy, and is working with her counterparts across Canada to develop a National Children's Agenda.

Addictions

To support our commitment to preparing Island youth for a healthy future, increased focus will be placed on early intervention and prevention programs. During this session, details of a Provincial Tobacco Reduction initiative will be announced by My Ministers of Health and Social Services and Education.

Addictions, in all forms, have a negative impact on our society and communities. Addiction programs for women and adolescents will be improved, and emphasis will be placed on addressing gambling addictions through public education and prevention. My Government's plan for Addiction Services will also be announced.

Health Care Governance

Government wishes to encourage active community input in the governance of the health care system while ensuring the most efficient use of health care funding and placing increased emphasis on front-line services. The Governance Model will be announced during this session, and work will begin on a long-term strategy for health care.

Vibrant, Healthy Communities

My Government is providing leadership to promote economic growth and diversification, high-quality year-round jobs, and outstanding educational and health care systems across the province – the foundations upon which thriving, vibrant communities are built. This is the fourth priority of My Government: helping communities prosper. Every resource of government serves this goal.

Customer Service in Communities

Action has been taken to revitalize the Regional Services centers. In Summerside, a pilot project to provide fast, efficient, responsive services to Islanders has proven successful. Over 100 provincial government services are available at a single counter. Customer surveys indicate that well over 90 percent of Islanders served at the Access PEI pilot center are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality and level of service. In the coming year, My Minister of Development will expand the Access PEI service to other Regional Services centers. Action will be taken as well, to provide a broad array of one-stop government services at selected single-service sites outside the major centers.

911 – Emergency Response System

Although PEI's communities are among the safest in North America, My Government places priority on making them even safer. My Minister of Community Services and Attorney General has reached an agreement on the implementation of a 911 emergency response system throughout PEI. As demonstrated too often over the years, seconds can make the difference between life and death. The 911 system will make that difference for some; and for all Islanders, it will safeguard their health and their homes more fully than ever before.

Francophone Summit

Acadian and francophone Islanders are an integral and valued part of our society, culture and economy. The community of Wellington has shown national leadership in tapping the benefits of new technology for education and economic development. My Government has taken action to ensure that these and other francophone achievements will be showcased to the world during the upcoming Francophone Summit in Moncton. My Government will employ a coordinator to ensure maximum benefit to Prince Edward Island and the Francophone community from the Francophone Summit. In partnership with the federal government we will seek to improve a variety of services to the francophone community and in this session will table the French Services bill.

Les Acadiens et francophones de l'Île forment un élément important de notre société, de notre culture et de notre économie. La communauté de Wellington a pris les devants au plan de l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies dans les domaines de l'éducation et du développement économique. Mon gouvernement fait le nécessaire pour s'assurer que les réalisations des Acadiens et francophones de l'Île seront présentes au prochain Sommet de la Francophonie, qui se tiendra à Moncton.

Community Schools

Schools and hospitals are sources of pride and community identity wherever they exist. An exciting initiative is underway in the Southern Kings region to make these facilities even greater resources to their communities. Through the Recreation 2000 pilot project, a partnership of health and social services, schools, the justice system and communities is working to increase the

use of schools by community groups.

Celebrating PEI Culture

Resources will be invested, as well, in cultural and creative expression. PEI's vibrant and distinctive culture is finding growing expression in theater, music and art. Our culture defines who we are, how we see ourselves, and how others see us. In a world where boundaries have less and less meaning, and where educated workers are in demand everywhere, our Island culture and way of life become more valuable than ever. Our culture also offers growing opportunities for economic development through cultural tourism and through the development of creative content for the rapidly growing multimedia industries.

Population Growth – Planning for the Future

My Government believes that as we enter the new millennium, it is an important time to engage Islanders in a discussion regarding our population base. The growth encouraged by completion of the Confederation Bridge, a province-wide broadband network, more equitable energy costs, tax changes, targeted job creation initiatives, and the recognition that Prince Edward Island is a very desirable place to live, suggest the need to examine population-related issues. We will ask Islanders to consider the level of growth which could be encouraged by government policy with special consideration of factors such as: growth in both rural and urban areas; annual rates of growth desired; types of economic activity preferred; the impact on institutions and services. The results of this discussion will lead to the formation of a population strategy for the new millennium.

Financial Accountability

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the measures already noted, My Government will bring forward a number of legislative proposals for the consideration of all Members of the Assembly.

The Public Accounts and reports of the various departments and agencies of government for the year ending March 31, 1997, will be tabled. The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year which begins April 1, 1999, will be presented for your consideration; and you will be asked to appropriate the funds for the services and payments required by this Assembly.

At the beginning of this speech, Mr. Speaker, I spoke of our first 125 years as a province – of our celebration of what we have achieved, and our contemplation of what was needed. As we look ahead to the coming century, our future is bright with promise. By transforming our traditional economic sectors and building new industries, based on the knowledge and skills of our people, we can assure our future as a healthy, vibrant and caring community.

Monsieur le Président, j'ai parlé, au début de mon discours, de nos premiers 125 ans en tant que province – nous avons célébré nos réalisations et réfléchi à nos besoins. L'approche du prochain millénaire nous ouvre de belles perspectives d'avenir. Avec la transformation de nos secteurs économiques traditionnels et la mise en oeuvre de nouvelles industries basées sur le savoir de

notre population, nous pouvons garantir notre avenir en tant que collectivité saine et dynamique.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, may Divine Providence guide your deliberations.