

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

**SPEECH** FROM  
THE **THRONE**



At the opening of the Second Session  
of the Sixty-sixth General Assembly of  
the Prince Edward Island Legislature  
February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SPEECH FROM  
THE THRONE



Delivered by  
The Honourable Antoinette Perry  
Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island

At the opening of the Second Session of the  
Sixty-sixth General Assembly of the  
Prince Edward Island Legislature

February 25th, 2021



# Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and guests joining us virtually; welcome to the Second Session of the Sixty-sixth General Assembly of the Prince Edward Island Legislature. It is my great pleasure to share with you the policy and program initiatives my government has chosen to pursue on behalf of the people of Prince Edward Island over the tenure of the next Session of this Assembly.

Much has changed since last I had the opportunity to address this Chamber. One member has chosen to retire after having devoted many years as a representative of the people. I'm sure all members join me in wishing him the best in his retirement from this assembly.

Two new members have joined our number, and I extend a warm welcome to the members for districts 9 and 10. Both members have already had the benefit of witnessing the operations of the legislature: the cut and thrust of political debate, the careful consideration of legislative proposals, the thoughtful allocation of the province's financial resources, and of course the holding to account of the Executive Branch of government.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all members of the Legislature of the gravitas of your responsibilities. In doing so, I ask you to regularly recall the oath that you swore upon your admission to this chamber; to represent and advance the greater public good. I pray that consideration of, and adherence to, this principle will guide your deliberations and debates over this and coming sessions of the assembly.

## The Disruption of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The greatest changes since last I was here, of course, are those imposed by the current global pandemic. This year marks the 170th anniversary of responsible government in this province. I follow in the footsteps of many representatives of the Crown, both Governors and Lieutenant Governors, who have had the privilege of summoning the Assembly. But I can say with some confidence, that I am the first of Her Majesty's representatives to wear a mask into the chamber.

We are fortunate, on Prince Edward Island, to be able to gather in this Assembly. Other of our sister provinces are not so fortunate or, at least, not to the extent we are able. But I hasten to add that our good fortune is not a function of luck. Since the COVID-19 outbreak was first declared a pandemic, we have been under the professional and thoughtful guidance of the Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Heather Morrison, and our dedicated team who has worked tirelessly to keep us safe.

On behalf of all Islanders, I want to thank Dr. Morrison and all the frontline workers who have kept us fed, comforted, and safe during this unsettling time. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who put themselves in danger to accommodate our needs: the doctors, nurses, long term care attendants, first responders, early childhood educators, truck drivers, farmers and fishers, store clerks and service workers, police officers, public servants, teachers, bus drivers and so many others.

These and many others have done their part to ensure the rest of us are able to maintain some degree of normalcy in our lives. Because of them, and because of the faithful adherence to public health protocols on the part of all Islanders, we are in an enviable position to make a speedy recovery from this pandemic.

Our province has been well supported through our partnership with the federal government with historic contributions to Island families and businesses during a time when they were most needed. We will continue to collaborate closely with our federal partner in the health and economic recovery from the pandemic.

*... we have been under the professional and thoughtful guidance of the Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Heather Morrison, and our dedicated team who has worked tirelessly to keep us safe.*

*... and because of the faithful adherence to public health protocols on the part of all Islanders, we are in an enviable position to make a speedy recovery from this pandemic.*

## Growing, Adapting, and Moving Forward

In anticipation of that recovery process, my government some months ago, created the Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth. The Council's mandate was to solicit the input of community leaders and citizens and to recommend to government, measures to facilitate a timely economic and social recovery.

The Council's report will be tabled in this session of the Legislature. Indeed, many of the initiatives outlined in this Speech from the Throne, are inspired by the recommendations of the Council and the many Islanders who submitted their ideas and suggestions.

I want to thank the members of the Council for their dedication to the betterment of our province and for their commitment to grass-roots democracy and representation.

As the security and confidence assured by our vaccine regimens take root and grow, we must turn our attention to our recovery, to assessing lessons learned, and to minimizing the risk of similar disruptions in the future.

To that end, my government outlines today, the broad elements of a plan for sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation. The initiatives underlined are the result of broad consultations with Islanders, business and community leaders, as well as members of this Legislative Assembly on all sides of the House.

*As the security and confidence assured by our vaccine regimens take root and grow, we must turn our attention to our recovery,*

*The initiatives underlined are the result of broad consultations with Islanders, business and community leaders, as well as members of this Legislative Assembly on all sides of the House.*

# A Sustainable, Inclusive, and Innovative Health Care System

The events of this past year have underlined for each of us the vital importance of health. Without personal health and well-being, all our other efforts and achievements stand for naught. And while this is the case for each of us individually, so too is it the case for us collectively. No public policy issue is more critical to our community than a robust and responsive health care system. In this chamber, issues related to health care dominate our thoughts, our debates, and our budgets.

But despite its predominance in our personal and public lives, and despite the efforts and intentions of our health care professionals, many of us remain frustrated with our health care system. From the perspective of patients, accessing the system for certain services is seen as complex and time consuming. From the perspective of practitioners, too many resources appear to be spent on acute care and illness treatment rather than wellness and illness prevention.

My government has adopted a model of health care which will move the primary focus of care from acute and long-term care toward community-based care. The new model will enable the delivery of health services to be more efficient and closer to home through medical homes and medical neighborhoods.

Change will not happen overnight. The process is designed to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

The first step in the evolutionary process will see the creation of three new primary care homes. Islanders assigned to primary care homes will have quicker access to the appropriate health professional. The primary care home approach will foster greater communication between patient and medical provider, and between the medical professionals who make up the teams. It will also serve to enhance collaborative case management, particularly for patients with complex needs.

Our experience over the past year has proven the usefulness of remote and virtual options in health care delivery. Accordingly, the new model will employ more virtual care options in circumstances where a physical visit may be unnecessary. During the pandemic we learned, for example, that a virtual visit with a doctor or nurse practitioner is often a more timely and effective form of assessment following hospitalization or other forms of medical intervention.

*The new model will enable the delivery of health services to be more efficient and closer to home through medical homes and medical neighborhoods.*

*Change will not happen overnight. The process is designed to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.*

Much of the transition to the new model of care will be accommodated by a secure and integrated electronic medical records management system. This has been an initiative of successive governments; and my government has already begun the implementation of the system. This will greatly enhance the ability of the medical community to respond in a holistic and timely manner to Islanders' health care needs.

Another lesson from our experience with the pandemic is our new awareness and appreciation for companionship and community. We are not meant to be isolated with our thoughts or our worries. This recognition is not an admission of weakness, but rather an affirmation of the complexity of the human condition. And, in many cases our mental health – which is such a vital part of our overall health – gets adversely affected.

In recognition of this, my government will introduce a five-year, \$10 million dollar Community Mental Health and Addictions Fund. This new spending is intended to help community partners deliver new mental health and addictions services in PEI.

My government will also introduce a single point of access for mental health and addictions services. Islanders will have access to a 24/7 service to help navigate the system and ensure the person is receiving appropriate and timely attention.

In addition to these major initiatives in health care, my government will continue its investment in developing the next stage of the new Mental Health Campus and the implementation of the Mobile Mental Health Units.

And to ensure that attention to our mental health has parity with our physical health, my government will establish the PEI Centre for Mental Well-being made up of representation from the many community partners engaged in the delivery of mental health services. The Centre will provide government the essential feedback and guidance to ensure our mental health services are responsive to the needs of the community.

Health human resources are critical in the delivery of quality health care services in our province. Prince Edward Island has a long history of providing education and training for the health care professionals that we rely on. The Charlottetown Hospital, the Prince Edward Island Hospital, the PEI School of Nursing, Holland College, Collège de l'Île, and the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), all provided a local option for quality education for a wide range of health care providers.

*... a five-year, \$10 million dollar Community Mental Health and Addictions Fund.*

*... a single point of access for mental health and addictions services. Islanders will have access to a 24/7 service to help navigate the system ...*

*... establish the PEI Centre for Mental Well-being made up of representation from the many community partners engaged in the delivery of mental health services.*

*... expand the Registered Nursing program at UPEI and the Licensed Practical Nurse program at Holland College for Island students ...*

*... immediately establish a \$5 million dollar fund for the recruitment of nurses and nurse practitioners ...*

*... \$2.5 million dollar Retention, Mentorship and Training Fund for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners ...*

Today, Holland College and UPEI provide high standards of education and practical training for our nursing professionals. But even with programs at capacity, we continue to experience problems in recruiting health professionals.

My government announces three initiatives to address this issue. First, it will establish a working group made up of representatives from Holland College, UPEI, Health PEI and nursing professionals. The working group will collaborate to expand the Registered Nursing program at UPEI and the Licensed Practical Nurse program at Holland College for Island students wishing to pursue a career in health care on Prince Edward Island.

Secondly, my government will immediately establish a \$5 million dollar fund for the recruitment of nurses and nurse practitioners over the next five years. The fund will provide student debt forgiveness for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners while they live and work in PEI.

Thirdly, my government will establish a \$2.5 million dollar Retention, Mentorship and Training Fund for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners currently working on Prince Edward Island.

In addition, my government will embark on a process to redevelop the nursing strategy that will strengthen our system to be more resilient in this highly competitive environment for health human resources. Government will also develop an evidence-based proactive forecasting model for the health system that will enable leadership to identify and anticipate human resource and clinical service needs required to best serve Islanders in the future.

During the pandemic we witnessed the devastation that the virus can wreak on vulnerable communities, particularly the elderly. And while our seniors have been spared from the most dire ravages of the virus, we nonetheless, must take action to improving health services for seniors so as to be prepared for future viral threats.

During this session of the House, my government will present for your consideration, the elements of a comprehensive Seniors Health Strategy, embracing existing and new programs designed to ensure the safety and well-being of our senior citizens. The strategy will focus on safe care at home and closer to home. The objective is to prevent hospital admissions whenever possible, and to enable earlier discharges in those circumstances where hospitalization is required.

Implementation of this strategy will encompass several new programs, as well as the expansion and enhancement of many programs already serving our elder citizens.

Expansions and enhancements will be made to our Care at Home Program which enables virtual long-term care. Programs such as Mobile Integrated Health, Caring for Older Adults in Community and at Home, and our Restorative Care Program will all be expanded and enhanced. These programs are designed to assist our seniors with the transition from acute care to home. My government will also be developing and piloting two new programs: An At-Home Respite Program, and a Multidisciplinary Dementia Team.

We are blessed, here on Prince Edward Island, to have both public and private long-term care facilities that provide comfort, care and dignity to our seniors in their final years of life. But conversations and consultations with residents, family members, and staff, have identified areas where services and programming can be improved.

My government will introduce nurse practitioners into the care teams for private long-term care facilities. Further, in response to concerns expressed by residents, family and staff, my government will be adjusting staffing assignments at our public long-term care facilities to achieve a better balance between day and night-time shifts. This will ensure residents' medical and comfort needs can be promptly attended, regardless of the time of day.

*The objective is to prevent hospital admissions whenever possible, and to enable earlier discharges in those circumstances where hospitalization is required.*

*We are blessed, here on Prince Edward Island, to have both public and private long-term care facilities that provide comfort, care and dignity to our seniors in their final years of life.*

# A Commitment to our Children and Families

We have learned a great deal from our experiences of the past year. Many of the initiatives outlined in this address are a direct response to those lessons learned.

We have learned that we must do better for our children and families. We saw that women were disproportionately impacted by the shuttering of the economy. Women are heavily employed in the service sector, tourism industry, and front-line services. These are all areas of our economy most impacted by the shutdown.

Women often carry the responsibilities of caring for children and family members. During this pandemic, many women who were employed had to consider the issue of childcare, with some making the difficult decision to leave their jobs in order to care for their children. Others were forced to manage the complexities of remote-working while caring for their children, and still others had to balance working (often at reduced hours), against the cost of childcare.

As Islanders, we are proud of our early learning and childcare system. Indeed, we are known nationally as leaders in this field. And, as leaders, we now recognize there is still room for improvements and these improvements must be accelerated.

To that end, this Government will enter negotiations with our federal government to make significant provincial and joint federal/provincial investment as we aggressively rollout an expansion plan for early years education in 2021.

Prince Edward Island is co-chairing the work on a national early learning and childcare system that will benefit our children, their families, the early childhood sector, and our labour force.

My government's objective is to increase access to childcare by adding an additional 300 childcare spaces this year. This measure will constitute the first steps toward a universal model with a fixed rate for early childhood centres, with the objective to provide our children a strong and healthy start to their educational path in a consistent, caring, and safe learning environment.

An important part of the success of this plan will be the availability of qualified and credentialed staff. As part of the budgetary process, you will be

*... we are proud of our early learning and childcare system. Indeed, we are known nationally as leaders in this field.*

*... increase access to childcare by adding an additional 300 childcare spaces this year.*

asked to approve additional allocations for the continued professional development of our early childhood educators, as well as measures to improve their wages, in parallel with their enhanced training and credentialing.

The improvements in early childcare that have been outlined will also allow us to move forward with our universal Pre-K Program in the fall of 2021.

Taken together, our efforts at improving early childcare and our universal Pre-K program will provide a seamless introduction to our children's educational journey. It will launch our children into the school system with the best chance of success in meeting both health and educational goals. We can proudly say that Prince Edward Island will continue to reap the benefits of these investments for generations to come.

In addition to these measures in the early years, my government will continue to invest in the public school system to create learning environments in which our children feel safe and supported. Additional investments have been made and will continue to be made to add more front-line resources such as school counsellors, student well-being teams, and autism consultants to support the unique needs of children and their families.

The new School Food Program has proven to be widely successful and popular with students, parents, and educators. Providing access to healthy, locally sourced, locally prepared and affordable meals for students ensures they have the nutrition needed to learn and helps them to develop life-long healthy eating habits.

Over the past year, students at all Island schools have had access to healthy, nutritious lunch options, and we are committed to continuing these efforts by formally establishing a non-profit organization to make further progress with this program.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, my government worked hard to continue to deliver healthy meals to students who needed them the most while they were at home. This summer, my government will partner with community organizations to continue this initiative in an effort to reduce food insecurity in our province.

In addition to raising our children to be good citizens and leaders of tomorrow, our education system is also charged with providing employable and marketable skills in a rapidly changing world.

We want to ensure our high school and post-secondary students are better supported and prepared for employment opportunities and success upon leaving school.

*... will continue to invest in the public school system to create learning environments in which our children feel safe and supported.*

*The new School Food Program has proven to be widely successful and popular with students, parents, and educators.*

*... will partner with community organizations to continue this initiative in an effort to reduce food insecurity in our province.*

*... create a School-to-Workforce Transition Team and establish a permanent framework to support our student's early work success and contribute to a more highly skilled and sustainable workforce ...*

*The Clean Tech Science Fair will encourage our youngest minds to tackle the challenges of climate change, energy use, robotics, and artificial intelligence.*

*Coordinating our efforts in workforce preparedness and transition will be the role of the new Agency for Workforce Development.*

Working with our public school system, post-secondary institutions, community, and industry, we will ensure greater awareness in schools of non-traditional paths, trades, educational opportunities, and labour market needs.

The Province of Prince Edward Island will create a School-to-Workforce Transition Team and establish a permanent framework to support our student's early work success and contribute to a more highly skilled and sustainable workforce for our province.

As part of this initiative, my government will build on the success of the Science and Heritage Fair concept to introduce a new initiative for Junior and Senior schools. The Clean Tech Science Fair will encourage our youngest minds to tackle the challenges of climate change, energy use, robotics, and artificial intelligence.

As a further incentive to engage young Islanders and harness their ideas, my government will introduce a UPEI & Holland College challenge fund that provides seed money to help develop enterprise solutions, and the creation of new clean technologies.

Coordinating our efforts in workforce preparedness and transition will be the role of the new Agency for Workforce Development. At the core of the Agency and dictating much of its programming profile will be a labour market information unit that will closely track PEI's labour market needs and trends. This unit will give employers and potential employees access to a timely and accurate snapshot of labour market job market opportunities specific to Prince Edward Island. Our current reliance on national data fails to recognize issues unique to the Island such as scale, seasonality, and geography.

The Agency will work in tandem with our post-secondary institutions on the education and training development of workers, including increasing co-op and workplace training initiatives to allow for a better integration of training and work. Identifying those sectors with existing labour pressures and potential opportunities, the Agency will work with employers and labour groups to create immediate and unique solutions in specific sectors.

This initiative will result in more and enhanced opportunities for Island workers, through education, training and jobs which will allow everyone more opportunities for advancement in work and life.

# Investing in Clean Technology

The people of Prince Edward Island recognize the importance of our environment. With challenging coastal considerations, extreme weather events, and with natural resources that are both complex and fragile, Islanders are very much attuned to the impacts of climate change.

Prince Edward Island has an established reputation in renewable energy and climate action. Our leadership in wind energy has been forged over decades, and we continue to build our capacity across the province in this valuable sector.

Energy from waste and bio-fuel provides heating to more than 150 public buildings throughout PEI, including our hospitals and many of our schools. Since 2018, Efficiency PEI has supported the installation of more than 13,000 new heat pumps, and now 98% of new homes built in PEI are using clean energy. It is through these innovations that Prince Edward Island has been able to see its per capita carbon emissions decline by 27.5 % since 2005. This kind of climate action is essential to protecting our province's environment for generations to come.

But we all know that even more innovation is needed. Tackling climate change now and in the future will require our best ideas, ingenuity and enterprise. We need viable, long-term solutions in areas such as transportation and agriculture to meet our target as the first province in Canada to reach net zero.

In order to advance this objective, my government will embark on a strategy to build PEI's Clean Tech sector, supporting PEI-based companies to develop and deploy competitive, clean technology solutions. Our aim is to encourage leading-edge development that will help solve some of our most pressing environmental challenges: climate change, clean air, clean water, and clean soil.

Features of the strategy include the creation of a specific loan portfolio valued at \$50 million dollars to assist new businesses and existing businesses adopt and develop clean technology solutions.

The strategy will also establish three tax-free development zones that will provide opportunities for Clean Tech businesses to cluster and take advantage of common services and supports so that they can accelerate their work.

My government will use its tax system to advance clean tech business interests by establishing an equity investment grant that will provide a rebate to anyone investing in an approved PEI Clean Tech firm.

*Tackling climate change now and in the future will require our best ideas, ingenuity and enterprise.*

*Our aim is to encourage leading-edge development that will help solve some of our most pressing environmental challenges: climate change, clean air, clean water, and clean soil.*

*The PEI Energy Academy will extend applied training, research, and early-stage development in energy innovation.*

*... with this initiative, Prince Edward Island will once again show the rest of the world that "small is possible."*

*When Islanders feel safe, there is a greater confidence and purpose in how we go about our daily lives.*

*Working with the Chief Public Health Office, we will introduce new initiatives and programs to help those most vulnerable Islanders.*

Becoming a leader in clean technology requires investment in research and development. To that end, my government announces two new initiatives.

The first is the introduction of a \$10 million dollar fund over the next 5 years specifically earmarked for research and development projects in the Clean Tech Sector.

The second initiative is the establishment of the PEI Energy Academy and Eco-Innovation Park.

Working in partnership with Holland College and the UPEI Canadian Centre for Climate Change and Adaptation, these two facilities will seek to grow our expertise and demonstrate ecological and economical practices as a baseline for sustainable futures.

The PEI Energy Academy will extend applied training, research, and early-stage development in energy innovation. The Eco-Innovation Park will be connected to local and regional industry, education, and culture. Together, these two initiatives will foster a community dedicated to innovation and collaboration by accommodating a range of education and enterprises in eco-centered research, development, and manufacturing.

This is a bold step for Prince Edward Island. It challenges us to be world leaders. But that is not new territory for us. In the 1980's, the Institute of Man and Resources placed Prince Edward Island on the leading edge of research and development in the alternative energy field. My government is confident that, with this initiative, Prince Edward Island will once again show the rest of the world that "small is possible."

## A Safe Place to Live, Work and Raise a Family

Throughout the pandemic we have learned that people's sense of security and safety increases with public confidence. When Islanders feel safe, there is a greater confidence and purpose in how we go about our daily lives. PEI continues to be regarded as a safe place to live, work, and raise a family. We know that families come in all shapes and sizes and we recognize that grandparents in particular can play a larger role in raising our children and we will work to support that.

We can always do better. My government will introduce measures for harm reduction for those who are in a challenging time in their lives. Working with the Chief Public Health Office, we will introduce new initiatives and programs to help those most vulnerable Islanders.

Every Islander deserves to live their life free of violence and physical or mental abuse. However, we know that isn't always the case and far too many of our children, family members, friends and neighbours continue to live in fear. My government commits to working across political parties and departments and with the Child and Youth Advocate in the development of strategies to combat gender-based violence, family violence, sexual violence and harassment.

In addition, government will explore new therapeutic justice options for those in conflict with the law. These initiatives will ensure that individuals have the proper supports for representation, treatment and rehabilitation.

## A More Equitable and Inclusive Island

This past year, events that happened far beyond our borders, and right here in Prince Edward Island, reminded us of glaring social justice imbalances, and the need for meaningful cultural change.

Thousands of Islanders demonstrated their support and commitment for equality at Black Lives Matter, the largest march that has ever occurred in this province. It was a show of force and a sign of solidarity. It was a statement that change is needed, that we must do better as a province and a community of people.

Government has listened. And will continue to listen. And we will act. There is work to be done for those whose voices are still not being heard. Our Island truly thrives when everyone is treated equitably.

In partnership with the PEI Council for People with Disabilities, my government will support taxi, cabs and rideshare operators to retrofit their vehicles to ensure adequate fare-based travel options are available for those with a physical disability.

We must continue to apply gender – and diversity – based analysis to policy and key decisions within government to ensure that a gender bias is not inherent in content, access or delivery.

Further, starting immediately, new programs will be launched to provide under-represented populations with the recognition and support they deserve.

A micro-loan program for under-represented populations will be established to provide Islanders who identify as BIPOC, indigenous, women, 2SLBGTQIA+and youth, the necessary assistance to start their own business and chart their own course in life.

*... development of strategies to combat gender-based violence, family violence, sexual violence and harassment.*

*Government has listened. And will continue to listen. And we will act.*

*A micro-loan program for under-represented populations will be established to provide Islanders who identify as BIPOC, indigenous, women, 2SLBGTQIA+and youth, the necessary assistance to start their own business and chart their own course in life.*

*... making our province a leader in celebrating and supporting the diversity of gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression.*

*... partnership with vocational schools such as the Atlantic Police Academy to fund seats for under-represented groups and visible minorities.*

*... celebrate and preserve the native language, to ensure our first peoples have a voice in significant issues, and to commit resources to create wealth and independence ...*

*... invest in programs and services to further preserve and enhance the French language, culture, and education ...*

*Prince Edward Island has always been open and welcoming to those who, for economic, religious, political, or personal reasons choose to leave their homeland in search of a new life.*

My government is working in partnership with Pride PEI and PEERS Alliance to assist in making our province a leader in celebrating and supporting the diversity of gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression.

We will also establish a partnership with vocational schools such as the Atlantic Police Academy to fund seats for under-represented groups and visible minorities. It is essential that our institutions and agencies reflect the diversity of our community. We must ensure that our policing agencies are reflective of the society they service and are community focused. We will evaluate our policing model in this province to ensure it is reflective of the people and addresses the concerns of the community. Government will work with our police agencies to focus on crime prevention measures and programs, and to explore alternative approaches to punishment and rehabilitation.

My government continues to strengthen its relationship with First Nations. We will work with First Nations leadership to celebrate and preserve the native language, to ensure our first peoples have a voice in significant issues, and to commit resources to create wealth and independence in our Mi'kmaq communities.

As an Islander of Acadian descent, I took great pride in participating in the 2019 Congrès Mondial. The Congrès was a great success and a credit to the Acadian and Francophone community of the province.

My government continues to invest in programs and services to further preserve and enhance the French language, culture, and education across the province. In this regard, the Commission scolaire de langue française is a vital partner. The significance of its role will be reflected in government's budgetary commitment, and evident in measures like the building of a new school for the Evangeline area.

As our population diversifies, our culture also diversifies and evolves. Prince Edward Island has always been open and welcoming to those who, for economic, religious, political, or personal reasons choose to leave their homeland in search of a new life. Today's immigrants, like my ancestors and yours, seek merely to improve their condition and build new lives. This province must always be a warm and loving place - a home - for every person who chooses to be here.

# Enhancing our Community

I have already referred to the Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth. More than 1,100 ideas were shared with the Council by Islanders from across the province.

Chief among the concerns raised and the suggestions made was the desire to mitigate poverty. Many groups and individuals cited the desire for some form of basic income support. My government will continue to work collaboratively with our federal partners to explore this and other options to eliminate systemic poverty in our province.

We know that housing costs constitute a large part of household expense, and any effort to address poverty must strongly factor the cost and appropriateness of our housing options. My government continues to make investments in expanding and improving our social housing options, in both public and private domains. Our vacancy rate across PEI has gone from less than 1% to almost 3%, but we know that much of this is due to the pandemic. Fewer students and tourists have reduced the pressure on housing in the province.

We must use this temporary reprieve from a chronic housing shortage to work with private developers, communities, non-profits, and entrepreneurs, to continue to build our housing supply, while reducing barriers to home ownership for Islanders.

My government is also committed to expanding our knowledge of societal well-being in our province. Central to this, is the development of a broad set of PEI Well-being Indicators. Government has partnered with UPEI through the Institute of Island Studies, to undertake a multi-year research project of this nature. This work aims to assess what is truly important to Islanders in relation to their overall well-being.

*... work collaboratively with our federal partners to explore this and other options to eliminate systemic poverty in our province.*

*... make investments in expanding and improving our social housing options, in both public and private domains.*

*... expanding our knowledge of societal well-being in our province.*

# A Cleaner Environment

Of equal prominence in the input from Islanders shared with the Council, were concerns about our natural environment. In response to these concerns, Members of the Legislature will, this session, be asked to consider policy, program and budgetary proposals related to:

- Encouraging a greater use of electric vehicles;
- Expanding our energy efficiency programs with a particular focus on assisting low-income islanders;
- Assisting municipalities in becoming more sustainable;
- Implementing a food waste reduction strategy;
- Introducing measures to reduce single use plastics;
- Implementing an Island-wide public transit system and increasing our commitment to active transportation;
- Implementing a soil health strategy;
- Introducing free energy audits for farmers to assist in reducing energy consumption; and
- Increasing our level of protected land to reach our goal of 7%, with full intention of moving to 10%.

In addition, my government will have an open call for communities and non-profit organizations to submit infrastructure projects that include an applied net zero and climate change lens, to the Infrastructure Secretariat.

In this year, we will make further adjustments in carbon pricing in keeping with the federal Pan-Canadian Framework. Our commitment is to return every dollar collected through a price on carbon, back to Islanders, and to support Island families and businesses to become more efficient in their energy use.

These and other measures which my government has already implemented will move us closer to our net zero goal.

*... return every dollar  
collected through a price  
on carbon, back to  
Islanders ...*

# A More Resilient Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the greatest disruption to the global economy since the Second World War. Fractured supply chains, interrupted production cycles, lost employment opportunities, and shattered consumer confidence will all take time to heal. And like our recovery after the war, our recovery from this devastation will require the intervention of government.

The work of the Premier's Council for Growth and Recovery made clear two areas of our economy which deserve special consideration. The first area demanding our immediate attention is the tourism sector and its related businesses such as accommodations, conventions, food and beverage services, and cultural events.

We all recognize that 2021 will be a stabilizing year for our tourism industry. Government will be there to support the sector and help steady the ship. We will focus on a local campaign, working to re-open the Atlantic Bubble, and, as our vaccine programs result in immunity over time, opening to travelers from the rest of Canada.

In order to assist our tourism operators to prepare for the 2021 season my government will introduce a special Activation Fund designed to assist operators with the up-front capital costs of re-opening for the season.

Government will also be supporting a Dine-In incentive intended to assist local restaurants, particularly in those days of the week when traffic is slower and the cost of operation is higher. In partnership with the industry, Government will also enhance and expand the Canada Food Island Gift card program.

My government is also working with the federal government and the Charlottetown Airport Authority to develop a recovery strategy for air travel to our province. During debate on the budget you will be asked to approve a \$1 Million Dollar Fund from the province to jump-start this recovery process.

The second area on which we must focus our efforts is on employment, in particular the need to transition people from emergency supports back to meaningful employment.

*... assist our tourism operators to prepare for the 2021 season my government will introduce a special Activation Fund ...*

*... working with the federal government and the Charlottetown Airport Authority to develop a recovery strategy ...*

*Agriculture has long been a key economic driver and an industry that is part of our Island identity.*

*... initiatives focused on agricultural greenhouse gas mitigation, merit-based erosion control, and buffer zone buyback and restoration as a start.*

My government is committed to working with our post-secondary institutions, sector councils, employers and labour groups to support training for employment in areas of our economy, such as construction and food processing, which were able to survive or even thrive during the pandemic. This will entail the revamping of our current Skills PEI and Innovation PEI programming to be more responsive to the needs of industry, employers and potential employees.

Agriculture has long been a key economic driver and an industry that is part of our Island identity. Climate change is impacting our farming industry, and while my government has an aggressive climate action plan – we must not sit idle while this important sector is at a critical point. My government will not turn its back on farmers, instead we will work with them, side-by-side, in establishing sustainable measures that include soil health, access to water, expanding buffer zones to protect our waterways, and reviewing land requirements and crop rotations. New programs will be launched to support these initiatives focused on agricultural greenhouse gas mitigation, merit-based erosion control, reforestation, and buffer zone buyback and restoration as a start.

For decades, people in PEI have raised questions and increasing concern about land use policy. Land has always been one of the most precious resources that we have in our province. My government has initiated a complete review of land use and land protection. In this session an interim report from the Land Matters Advisory Committee will be tabled as we together consider the future path for sustainable land use in our province. We are expecting the full proposed amendments to the Lands Protection Act and The Planning Act to be tabled in the fall 2021 sitting.

The seafood industry in PEI has shown tremendous resiliency over the last year. My government will continue to support the seafood and aquaculture industry to ensure that when the demand for world class seafood around the world soars, we are able to respond accordingly and meet that demand.

In addition to the many measures just outlined, Members of the Assembly will be called upon to consider an ambitious legislative agenda, with both government-sponsored and private member proposals. Members will consider:

- *Government Reorganization Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Architects Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Engineering Profession Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Insurance Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Designation of Beneficiaries Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Jury Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Planning Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Marriage Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Real Property Assessment Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Regulated Health Professions Act;*
- *Missing Persons Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Change of Name Act;*
- *An Act to Repeal the Blind Workers' Compensation Act;*
- *An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act;*
- *Temporary Foreign Workers Protection Act;*
- *Interpretation Act;*
- *Gunshot and Stab Wound Reporting Act; and*
- *Provincial Court Act*

Members will also be asked to assess several options for the implementation of School Board Elections, to ensure greater transparency and greater community and parental oversight of our public education system. At the same time, government will also embark on renewing the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to provide greater public confidence and more accountability for government.

... options for the  
implementation of  
School Board Elections  
...

## Conclusion

My government has laid out an ambitious program of innovation and progress. It is a program designed to pursue the objectives and aspirations of sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation.

We are coming through a difficult time. But we are fortunate in that we are emerging with our spirit and our determination undiminished. In the example of those who came before us, we have and we will continue to persevere. We have faced comparable upheavals before, and together we survived, just as together we will survive our current challenge.

As is tradition, I leave you with this prayer: May Divine Providence guide your deliberations, and may you be imbued with a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness for the privilege of living in, and providing direction to, this beautiful and generous land we call home.