

# Prince Edward Island Speech From the Throne

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

At the Opening of the  
First Session of the Sixtieth General Assembly of  
Prince Edward Island

March 5, 1997

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my honour on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen to officially open the 1st Session of the 60th General Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Monsieur le président et membres de l'Assemblée législative, au nom de Sa majesté la Reine, j'ai l'honneur de déclarer la première séance de la soixantième assemblée générale de la Province de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard officiellement ouverte.

This opening marks a number of historic events. It was 150 years ago that the first legislative session was held in this Assembly, and since that day this building has not only been an integral aspect of the political life of Prince Edward Island, but housed the meetings that led to the founding of Canada. This has earned Province House a special place in the history of our country. A number of events will mark this anniversary.

My Government will seek to honour the role of this building in the history of our province by ensuring that the Legislative Assembly it houses will be the focal point of decision making in our province.

In that regard a number of changes will be made to improve past practises. The legislative process will be further strengthened by the holding of a fall session. Amendments will be introduced permitting legislative committees to meet intersessionally so that they may more effectively deal with the concerns of Islanders. Government is committed to the introduction of televised coverage of the

Assembly, affording those who elect government an unprecedented opportunity to observe their representatives dealing with the responsibilities of elected office. For the first time in this province, and for the first time in Canada, the actual voice proceedings of the Legislative Assembly will be available on the internet. Members of the Assembly will also be asked to deal with more matters through non-partisan debate and discussion.

This building stands as a symbol of our heritage of responsible government, My Government will honour that heritage. This building stands as a reminder of the vision and commitment of those who gathered here in 1864 to lay the framework for a great nation. My Government will honour their vision.

My Government remains firmly committed to the unity of Canada. We believe the strengths of this country are sufficient to permit the aspirations of all Canadians to be achieved within the context of a united Canada, and we are prepared to work in partnership with other provinces and the Federal Government to achieve that goal.

Mon gouvernement s'engage toujours fermement à la question de l'unité canadienne. Nous croyons que ce pays possède les forces qui permettront aux Canadiens de réaliser leurs aspirations dans la contexte d'un Canada uni et nous sommes prêts à travailler avec d'autres provinces ainsi qu'avec le gouvernement fédéral afin d'atteindre ce but.

The primary objective of My Government is a stronger Prince Edward Island within Canada. We will work cooperatively with the Federal Government in pursuit of social and economic development. We will aggressively pursue provisions of adequate financial transfers to protect health care and education and to improve infrastructure which will expand opportunities in the areas of transportation and information technology. Such measures will enhance our traditional industries and prepare us to meet the needs of the future.

After more than one hundred years, the system of dual member districts has been replaced by single member districts. The number of members has been reduced from 32 to 27. It is the most dramatic change since the Legislative Assembly Act of 1893. Today, in name as in practise, each member of this Assembly is truly equal and united in a common responsibility of providing good

government to Islanders.

On July 12 the Hillsborough River will be named a Canadian Heritage River. The first in the province, and only the second in Atlantic Canada to receive such a designation. We are grateful for the volunteer efforts of so many people who helped realize this goal.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, another event of great significance will take place this year. The Confederation Bridge will officially open. This signals a new era in Island transportation. It affords the opportunity to expand our economy, and to take full advantage of new opportunities while preserving what is important to our Island way of life.

My Government will work in partnership with the Island business community to take maximum advantage of the Confederation Bridge. The construction of the Bridge is testimony to the ability of Islanders. The project will be completed on time and on budget with much of the work conducted by residents of this province. It is also an example of effective public-private partnering.

The Gateway Village also opens this year, and will serve as a fitting welcome to Prince Edward Island. Based on a turn-of-the-century street scape, it features a year round exposition pavilion offering a view of the Island's rich heritage and culture, a new Visitor Information Centre with interactive kiosks, food and retail services, and during the summer months live performances and craft demonstrations.

The ferry service between Borden-Carleton and Cape Tormentine has been the transportation lifeline of our province. My Government wishes to pay tribute to the hundreds of men and women who, over the decades, have worked to provide, maintain and expand that service. The Gateway Village will offer visitors an overview of the history of travel across the Northumberland Strait from the early days of the iceboats, through the modern icebreakers, to the Bridge itself.

The opening of the Bridge is an end to the year round ferry service that has been so much a part of our lives. To those employed on the Marine Atlantic service, it is also the end to a source of employment. My Government will work with the community of Borden-Carleton in continuing efforts to foster development.

My Government is pleased that a commitment of additional funding for docking facilities for the Northumberland Ferry service has been achieved. We place great value on the continuation of this service. It is a vital economic link for communities in eastern Prince Edward Island and a valuable partner in tourism across the Province.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, My Government is disappointed that cuts to federal programs and changes have such a negative impact on our province.

We are faced with maintaining programs while federal funding is being significantly reduced. This is especially true in the area of health care and education. Other sectors of the economy, and individuals are also feeling the effect of federal changes. My Government wishes to work in partnership with the Government of Canada in delivering services to Islanders, but we will not hesitate to stand up for the interests of Islanders, and for the rightful place of this province as a full partner in Confederation.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, government cannot ignore the fiscal reality of the Province. For too long, mismanagement and misplaced priorities, poorly planned initiatives and lack of meaningful input, have marked the decisions of government. This has resulted in unprecedented levels of debt that rob valuable dollars from programs. It is time for a more responsible approach.

The past cannot be changed, nor can it be forgotten. Many of the matters this General Assembly will be asked to consider, become all the more necessary and, in some cases, more painful because of decisions made in the past. My Government will be guided by fiscal responsibility, but we will not permit a fiscal focus to stand in the way of delivering needed services to Islanders.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, My Government believes Prince Edward Island has the people and the resources for a better future. We possess a deep belief in the ability of Islanders. It is no longer a question of what government can do for individuals, but what, by working together, we can do for all Islanders. Government must be a facilitator of progress. It must respect people. It must seek to involve people regardless of age, income level, or geographic location.

Islanders spoke on November 18, 1996, for a new partnership -- not just a change in who

operates government, but a change in the way government operates. My Government will deliver on that new partnership. It is our intention to ensure Islanders are not only consulted, but directly involved in setting the course that will lead us into a new century.

Progress has already been made. Government members have established regular office hours to ensure accessibility and accountability to the people they represent. Government Members, whether or not they serve as members of Executive Council, have been assigned additional responsibilities relevant to the issues faced by Islanders. The size of the Cabinet has been reduced to nine members. Realignment in departments have been made to reflect the priorities of Islanders. New partnership agreements have been signed with the Federal Government in the area of economic development and the knowledge economy.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, as we go through this period of rapid change, it is important that government be guided by priorities. It is essential that the provision of government services reflect the priorities of Islanders. My Government is committed to the priorities of health care, education, community strengthening and job creation.

Education is an investment in people. That investment helps prepare Islanders for the future and ensures that they have the skills to adapt to a rapidly changing world. The investment is repaid in many ways, most directly by individuals who are better prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow. It is the key to opportunity for our young people. My Government appreciates the contributions of the University of Prince Edward Island and Holland College to our province. To facilitate better planning, we will provide multi-year funding commitments to Island post-secondary institutions. We will also aggressively explore new partnering opportunities that support the development of our educational facilities while fostering linkages with other sectors of our economy.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, the magic of education is the effective interaction of people. Ultimately, it comes down to the connection between student and teacher, and we applaud the motivation and dedication of teachers who strive to make that connection with every student every day. In support of those efforts, My Government will place priority on classroom enhancement.

To assist in that effort, My Government will increase the funding allocated for special needs children in the school system. We will partner with the Teachers' Federation in offering improved

training to teachers, especially in the area of new technology.

My Government recognizes the important role of parents in education. Parents are the primary educators of their children. When those children enter the school system, parents become partners in the education process. My Government recognizes the need for community support of our educational facilities, and we want to ensure a more effective partnership among all those involved in education. Our priority will be to maximize the resources available for education support in the classroom, while ensuring the education system responds in a timely manner to the changing demands of a rapidly changing world.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, we live in an age of tremendous advances in technology. My Government is pleased with the leadership demonstrated by the Department of Education in advancing the use of technology.

We recognize that many schools have limited access to new technology, and, while not a replacement for education, it can be a valuable support. My Government will ensure that every Island school has access to the internet and that all schools and educational facilities are interconnected, so that all students and teachers gain access to valuable new information and technology skills.

The environment in which our young people learn is important. Many factors, including the facility itself, influence the environment. We recognize that many educational structures are at an age when the demand for repairs and upgrading will increase. My Government will implement a School Capital Repair Program which will provide more regular and consistent funding for necessary school repairs. In the short term, it will focus on meeting priority health issues such as air quality. Initiatives will be undertaken to address the need for improvements in the bus fleet to ensure safe transportation for our children.

My Government is prepared to invest in our communities and educational facilities. We will call for proposals for the replacement of Athena School in Summerside. We are impressed with the success and benefits of public-private partnering in the construction of school facilities. Recent projects in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have received strong community support. We will pursue this type of partnership in the replacement of Athena.

In the renovation or construction of schools, My Government will focus on the potential of

multi-functional facilities. We recognize that schools represent a substantial investment and, therefore, they should be utilized to the maximum.

Through improved design and community involvement, schools can be the centre of community activities. This is not only important to the best utilization of the facility but to its utilization by the community. My Government will maintain small schools and will work with the School Boards to determine the most appropriate method to achieve this goal.

My Government will implement the policy framework put forward in the Strategy for Adult Literacy/Education to ensure a continuation of learning opportunities for adults. The learning process never ends, and we must be prepared to facilitate lifelong learning.

The most lasting contribution a government can make to the benefit of Islanders is the fostering of a climate in which job creation can occur. Being unemployed represents a hardship to individuals, families and communities. Changes to federal programs, such as Employment Insurance, increases the pressure on Islanders and fuels the demand for more effective employment. My Government recognizes that government alone cannot create jobs. Building employment requires partnerships.

No one program will generate the significant increase in employment necessary to keep pace with the demands of the labour market. Flexibility will be key. If the opportunity is consistent with our operating principles, it is better to have government adapt to the business opportunity rather than having business adapt and conform to the programs of government. We have no hesitation in stating that the challenge is immense, but by working in partnership with Islanders, we believe much can be accomplished. Development is a process, and the process must involve people. Government cannot foster meaningful development without the input and support of people.

Many of the traditional barriers to development have been diminished. Technology ensures that we have a level playing field with the rest of the world. Energy rates are becoming more in line with regional averages. The Confederation Bridge offers improved transportation for goods and services. Training programs can be quickly adapted to meet new needs. We have a highly motivated work force.

We want to invest in Islanders. My Government will support the development of small business. We believe the real winners in the business community are those small and medium sized business operators who invest their own time, money and energy in support of a business dream. We

want to work with such Islanders and encourage others to follow that dream of owning their own business.

My Government wants to create opportunities for young Islanders, increase private sector investment, foster sustainable employment and enhance our quality of life.

The Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism will focus on eight key sectors: small business, tourism, information technology, biotechnology, food production and value-added processing, energy exploration and diversified manufacturing.

A major need for small business is access to capital. We are exploring several avenues to access capital for small business, and My Government is committed to improving access to low-cost capital for small business enterprises.

The co-op program being launched at the University of Prince Edward Island and the programs of Holland College, offer new opportunities for youth. Programs in support of new entrepreneurs will be enhanced. We will ensure that training programs provide needed skills that lead to meaningful jobs, and have a long-term positive impact on the labour force and the economy.

My Government is negotiating with the Government of Canada for a new partnership in the delivery of human resource development services to Islanders.

It is the objective of My Government to pursue an agreement that assists in tailoring programs to meet the specific needs of Islanders, and leads to employment.

There have been many concerns expressed about the development policies and practises of the previous administration. We want to ensure that government is receiving good value for its business investments. A review of the programs and services of Enterprise PEI will be carried out, to ensure it is meeting the policy objectives of government and to ensure it responds in a fair manner to the business community.

We will focus on job creation at the community level, recognizing that long-term, meaningful employment is important to the health and viability of Island communities.

In all sectors of the economy we will build on the success that exists.

We will reach out into new areas of development in the resource-based sectors of agriculture and fisheries. We will build on the reputation of the Island as a high-quality food producer. My Government sees great potential in the expansion of the food industry into new products.

My Government is seeking to further develop the Souris Food Park by attracting new businesses to the community.

In conjunction with the Food Technology Centre, we will establish the Food Products Development Fund to assist clients in the development and testing of new products.

The Equity Investors Program will be expanded to include more sectors. Red tape will be reduced.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, the selling of knowledge-based expertise can benefit Islanders. My Government is committed to the creation of job opportunities and investment in our research and development infrastructure. We will support the establishment of the Belvedere Life Sciences Research Group, a new company comprised of our key research institutes, including the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Research Station, the Centre for Animal and Plant Health, the Food Technology Centre, the University of Prince Edward Island, including the Atlantic Veterinary College, and the provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry. This company will focus on accessing international research and development opportunities in food production, food health and diagnostics, and technology.

My Government sees important new opportunities arising from the opening of the Confederation Bridge. While it is generally expected the main benefit will be to the tourism industry, we see potential for many small businesses which will now be able to more easily market their goods and services off-Island. Combined with tax advantages resulting from the decision not to harmonize the P.S.T. and G.S.T., the Island can have a marketing advantage. My Government will work in partnership with business to ensure the opportunities are maximized. We see our role as fostering partnerships in the business community, that demonstrate the benefits of co-operative efforts.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, one of the most significant opportunities for the Island economy is in the area of information technology.

My Government is pleased to provide leadership through the Knowledge Economy Partnership.

This agreement will facilitate joint efforts between the Federal and Provincial Governments, as well as advance our technology capability. The need to enhance the abilities to adapt to, and take advantage of, the opportunities the knowledge economy affords, is being increasingly recognized by both government and the private sector. But there is also a critical social dimension to this transition to the knowledge economy -- involving education and training, social and community development -- and creating individual opportunities often lacking in strategies that focus on economic objectives.

My Government is pleased that, through a partnership with Island Tel Advanced Systems, our province will be a national leader in the development of a broadband communications system. This achievement is a visible demonstration of the ways in which the Island can be an international leader in innovation.

Islanders place enormous value on our health care system and take pride in the high-quality services that have been established over the years. Existing hospitals will be maintained because of their importance in providing health care services to Islanders, and their contribution to community identity and development.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, My Government is committed to maintaining important health care services on the Island. For the hundreds of Islanders in need of cancer treatment, some level of treatment services must be provided. Dr. Temple Hooper has generously, and in line with his history of exemplary service to the public, agreed to continue his practise until the end of 1997. In an effort to improve equipment and services, and attract needed professionals, My Government is planning for the enhancement of oncology services.

My Government is pleased to announce that during the next fiscal year, we will be moving to introduce a Provincial Mammography Breast Screening program. Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women and the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women. Mammography is the most effective method for detecting early breast cancer.

The Women's Institute must be commended for their contribution in supporting the establishment of this program. Through their fund raising efforts, a new stereotactic mammography machine will be purchased for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, Islanders have expressed dissatisfaction with the administrative structure of the health care system. In spite of the hard work of many people in the

health care system, we heard concerns that structural reforms have made it more difficult to deliver high quality health care and social services. We heard concerns that accountability of the system to the elected representatives had been seriously weakened. We heard that Islanders want the system preserved and strengthened, that they want priority placed on front-line services, and that delivery systems should support and strengthen communities in every part of Prince Edward Island.

My government is committed to community involvement in health care. Since November, we have been reviewing the health system and we have found many of those concerns to be well founded. In this Session of the Legislature, we will take action to preserve and enhance the health care system. We will table legislative amendments to disband the Health and Community Services Agency and assign its powers to the Minister. Through these measures, my Minister of Health and Social Services is taking action to provide clear leadership and direction, and to restore accountability and fiscal responsibility to the delivery of health care and social services. This Government believes in community involvement in the health care system, and we are committed to building a new partnership with communities to achieve that involvement. Over the coming months, the Minister of Health and Social Services will consider whether modification in the scope, role and responsibilities of regional authorities is needed to enhance the effectiveness of community participation in the health and community services system.

The scope of health care has been broadened to take in many areas and services. My Government does not believe the health care system should be operating Correctional Services. The administration of Correctional Services will be assigned to the Department of Community Affairs and Attorney General.

The bond of trust between the patient and medical practitioner must be ensured. My Government will introduce an extensive overhaul of the investigation and discipline system of the Medical Act, with special features to control the danger of sexual abuse of patients. The changes will reflect the recommendations of the public.

Seniors are the fastest growing segment of the Island population. By the year 2011 Prince Edward Island will have the highest per capita population of seniors over 85 years of age. This presents added challenges to the health care delivery system. The time to prepare is now. My Government will establish a Seniors Advisory Council this year. The Council will advise government on issues of concern to seniors and represent the interests of seniors. Government will continue efforts to obtain the services of a geriatrician.

The Department of Health and Social Services is consulting with the P.E.I. Pharmaceutical Association on the appropriate changes to the Seniors' Drug Cost Assistance Program. We anticipate that changes to the program, which better reflect seniors' needs will soon be implemented.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is essential that government be fair to all Islanders. My Government is committed to removing the GST rebate from the calculation of entitlement to social assistance.

Strong communities are essential for the future of our province. Each time a community does well, whether it be hosting an event or developing a business, it benefits our province. It is the objective of My Government to focus the resources of government in helping communities prosper. My Government has established a new Department of Community Affairs to focus the resources of government in helping communities and to assist communities in developing plans for social and economic development.

Community values contribute a great deal to society. They are a resource in dealing with problems such as violence. They are a source of strength to individuals in times of crisis. Communities are where special needs can best be addressed, where volunteerism is fostered, and a spirit of support and cooperation built. We want to ensure rural and urban neighbourhoods are good places to live, raise a family, and enjoy a quality of life. They are what make our province so unique and special.

It is important for government to ease access to its services. As a pilot project, My Government will implement a one-stop shopping concept for government services in the City of Summerside. This initiative is designed to improve community access to government services and programs.

Government will improve the delivery of French language government services and programs, and contribute to the development of the Acadian and Francophone community. Such actions enhance the quality of services and contribute to economic development and tourism opportunities.

Action will be taken on a strategy plan for government involvement in the arts and cultural industries.

The plan for sports development will be advanced.

The family farm is the basic unit of Island agriculture and the cornerstone of many rural communities across the Island. My Government will promote new crop and livestock production in

order to diversify our agriculture industry.

The sustainable use of our natural resources is a major priority of My Government. As the use of our land and water resources intensifies, we need to ensure that we follow best use practises. All Islanders have a role to play in balancing economic, environmental and societal needs. Ultimately, it will be the collective action of each of us that will ensure our resources are preserved. It cannot be left to others, nor can it be left to government.

My Government has asked the Round Table on Land Use and Stewardship to report this fall, so that the report of that group may be presented to a fall Session of the Island Legislature for action.

The forest industry is an important part of our economy. The harvesting and processing of our forest resources provides new opportunities for rural communities. One of the key goals of My Government is to work with the industry to renew our forest resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

To protect our Crown forest resources, a system of provincial forests will be proclaimed. These will be managed in perpetuity for the protection of wildlife habitats, timber reserves and water quality.

This year the Department of Agriculture and Forestry will sign a Forest Partnership Agreement with representatives from all sectors of the forestry industry. This agreement will be the first of its kind in Canada, and will provide the opportunity for the industry to become full partners in addressing the issues facing the Island's forestry resources.

Prince Edward Island has long enjoyed an international reputation for the quality of its seed potatoes. One of the major objectives of My Government is to develop new and expanded markets for our seed industry. This will be achieved through improvements in seed quality, based on the latest developments in tissue culture and biotechnology research.

Initiatives will be taken to expand the hog industry in the coming year. There is increasing demand for our high-quality genetics, and My Government will work with the dairy and beef industries in the production and marketing of more high quality, high value breeding stock.

My Government acknowledges the tremendous contribution that the fishing and aquaculture

industry provides to our Island economy. The fishery holds the opportunity for new product development that will expand the range of products offered, present new marketing opportunities and generate additional employment for Islanders.

The opportunities in aquaculture will be explored.

The fishery contributes to the livelihood of thousands of Islanders. It is a resource that is generous to our province, and we must protect and enhance it. My Government will work in partnership with the Island industry in an effort to foster a strong and united voice for the people who make their living from the fishery. We will strongly advocate the views and needs of our fishing industry regarding management decisions of the Federal Government.

The tourism industry is not only a leading employer in our province it offers the potential for expansion. The opening of the Confederation Bridge will be a spring board in fostering continued growth of the tourism industry. My Government will foster a closer working relationship with all aspects of the industry, building on the partnerships that have been developed and exploring the opportunities for new partnerships.

Government has provided the land and buildings necessary for the establishment of the Atlantic Tourism and Hospitality Institute on the Charlottetown waterfront. This facility will greatly enhance the ability of Holland College to market its hospitality programs and, in so doing, to re-enforce the reputation of our province as a leader in the hospitality sector.

My Government welcomes the National Park initiative at Greenwich. It ensures the protection of a very special part of our province and expands the National Park presence on the Island.

In an effort to broaden the development opportunities associated with the Links at Crowbush Cove, My Government will invite proposals for private sector development in the area, including accommodation facilities.

In seeking to expand the tourism shoulder season, we will work in partnership with the industry to address labour market needs.

Work on the Hillsborough Bridge will see substantial improvements to the eastern entrance to the bridge, and by the spring of 1998, the new four lane bridge will be operational. Work will also

be completed on the Pinette Bridge.

My Government sees potential in the further development of Island ports, and we will pursue such initiatives while insisting the Federal Government maintain its historic responsibility for the maintenance of port facilities.

A five year initiative to improve and upgrade Highway 113 will be undertaken, to facilitate traffic flow between Montague and Wood Islands.

Government will enter into a new Infrastructure Agreement with the Federal Government to provide additional funding for needed community infrastructure. Many Island communities took part in the last such program, and we are pleased to partner with other levels of government in this initiative.

Operations of the Department of Transportation and Public Works will be restructured to achieve a more effective and efficient highways management system.

Procurement services will be more efficiently managed, with the implementation of a fully accountable process in the selection of construction management services.

My Government is committed to fairness. New guidelines covering tendering, the issuing and awarding of contracts, and the expenditure of government finances will be implemented.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, there are many Islanders who work hard to make a living, pay their bills and contribute to the quality of the communities in which they live. These individuals are often categorized as 'ordinary' Islanders, although their efforts and the challenges they successfully meet are far from ordinary. It is the intention of My Government to be ever mindful of the realities of life for many working Islanders.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, in addition to the legislative matters already outlined, My Government will submit more than 60 pieces of legislation for the consideration of the Assembly.

The Public Accounts and the Reports of departments and agencies for the year ending March

31, 1996, will be tabled. The Estimates of revenues and expenditures for the coming fiscal year will be presented for your approval.

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, My Government is humbled by the confidence that has been placed in it by Islanders. We welcome the challenges that are before us, for they also represent opportunities for our province and its people.

Monsieur le président et membres de l'Assemblée législative, que la Divine Providence vous guide dans vos délibérations.

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