



Prince Edward Island

Speech from the Throne 3rd Session, 61st General Assembly

Delivered November 15, 2001

Madame Speaker and Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly:

I am pleased to welcome you to the Third Session of the Sixty-First General Assembly of Prince Edward Island. It is indeed an honour to deliver, on behalf of My Government, my first Speech from the Throne since becoming Her Majesty's representative six months ago.

Since this Assembly last convened, our world has been forever altered in many respects. The tragic events of September 11 have precipitated much reflection. Freedom and democracy, ideals of this very Chamber, have been ruthlessly challenged. As our sons and daughters are deployed to a far off land in defence of those ideals, we honour their bravery, and await their safe return.

We pay tribute to the many heroes – to the firefighters and police officers, soldiers, emergency workers and volunteers, and to the countless Islanders who opened their hearts during the recent state of crisis.

We are reminded of the selfless commitment of our own Prince Edward Island heroes, particularly our volunteer firefighters – those individuals who risk so much in the name of safe and secure communities. My Government re-commits itself to ensuring that their needs are continually addressed and their service is honoured.

This being the International Year of Volunteers, My Government wishes to recognize all who give of themselves. We thank those who assist our elderly, those who guide our youth, those who look out for the vulnerable, those who aid the infirmed and those who improve their communities.

A Collective Approach

In 1996, Islanders opted for a new direction by placing confidence in My Premier and Government. Since that time, much progress has been made in an effort to make all Islanders fully aware that My Government serves in the best interests of Prince Edward Island and Islanders.

My Government continues to be steadfast in supporting measures which it initiated to ensure that the approach to governing is open, transparent and accountable. My Government renews its commitment to:

- two sittings of the Legislative Assembly annually so that the business of government is directed from this Chamber;
- weekly office hours for Honourable Members to meet directly with Islanders;
- regular town hall meetings so that community concerns can be voiced and considered;

- frequent meetings of the Cabinet outside of Charlottetown so that community leaders are afforded an opportunity to express priorities and discuss issues of mutual interest;
- television cameras in this Assembly so that all Islanders can observe their representatives in this important forum;
- relevant pre-budget consultations;
- the establishment of legislation which gives all Islanders increased access to records and information held by My Government; and
- direct service delivery to Islanders in their own communities via expansion of the Access PEI concept.

Measured Progress

My Government is intensely optimistic about Prince Edward Island's future because of its many achievements in a very short time. My Government is doing what it said it would do, and its plan is working.

We are proud of the fact that more Islanders were employed this year than ever before.

We know that our economy continues to diversify so that over-dependence on traditional sectors is less of a challenge.

Islanders have conveyed their support for My Government's increased investments in health care and education.

Our communities are stronger and more empowered to take advantage of opportunity and independence.

Prince Edward Island is better equipped to deal with financial uncertainty because of My Government's balanced and prudent approach to fiscal management and tax relief.

An Immediate Challenge

The global economy has recently displayed many real signs of stagnation. For the most part, Canadians are exercising increased consumer caution, resulting in a reduced projection for economic growth.

Despite this international trend, Prince Edward Island is clearly demonstrating that our own economy continues to perform well. Retail sales remain strong, housing starts and purchases continue to be solid, labour market participation is robust and sound fiscal management continues to attract investment. Nevertheless, Prince Edward Island's economic health is still largely dependent on the relative performance of our fellow Canadians.

Last month, My Provincial Treasurer received word from her federal colleagues that funding under the Equalization Program will be significantly less than originally forecast

at budget preparation. This reduction in funding is due in large part to the relatively poor performance of the provincial economies in central and western Canada.

In approaching this short-term challenge, however, My Premier and Government are cognizant of the priorities of Islanders. My Government will respect the progress made over the past five years in the areas of collective bargaining, community hospitals and small schools. It is also fully aware that Prince Edward Island is better positioned than most to weather the impending fiscal uncertainty.

Building a Partnership for Growth

Each and every Islander is entitled to the chance to earn a wage and to be a productive contributor to our society. My Government takes this assumption seriously, and continues to develop initiatives to provide Islanders with opportunity in the small business, industry and tourism sectors.

Several initiatives have been, and will continue to be, undertaken to create a spirit of entrepreneurship in Prince Edward Island. My Government firmly believes that the key to a prosperous future is in the capacity of small business to create jobs and opportunity for our province.

The strength of our economy continues to be the growth and development of small business. This past year, the Small Business Employee Support Program created 224 new jobs by partnering with small business. Support for the small business sector will continue to be a high priority for My Government.

Our craft and giftware sector continues to be a major area of focus for growth and business development. Several initiatives, such as the Studio Tour and the Craft Bursary Program, are efforts to strengthen this important sector. My Government will support a Buyers Market that will take place in January 2002 to enhance wholesale purchases of Island products by retailers.

My Government continues to emphasize the development of export markets. Exports from this province increased by 95 per cent since 1996. Our export growth has been among the highest in Canada.

One component of our export development plan includes the planning and execution of trade missions. The primary benefits of these initiatives are the development of business partnerships and the accumulation of market intelligence. However, sales are a more tangible means of evaluating success. Actual and projected sales from mission activities over the last 12 months approaches \$16.5 million.

The tourism industry continues to make a significant contribution to the provincial economy. Preliminary results for the 2001 season indicate both an increase in overall visitation and an increase in tourism spending. Although tourism was generally down across the region and throughout Canada this year, our province was able to outperform its primary competitors. Clearly, our province's tourism strategy is working.

This past year we saw the development of major new tourism attractions on the Island, including Founders Hall on the historic Charlottetown waterfront, the new Rodd Crowbush Golf and Beach Resort in Lakeside and the new Visitor Information Centre in Mount Pleasant.

On October 13, My Minister of Tourism released the *Report of the Signage Review Committee*. This report sets out a plan to remain at the forefront of signage policy in this country. Over the next several weeks, the recommendations contained in this report will be studied, and My Government will formulate an action plan in partnership with industry and interested Islanders.

A second recently compiled report recommends a plan for the revitalization of scenic drives throughout the province. The *Touring Routes Study* outlines a program that will allow visitors to enjoy PEI's natural beauty and to experience the charms of its many rural communities.

An equally important initiative that was carried out this past year was a review of our Provincial Parks system. Our parks are one of our greatest treasures and it has been many years since they were given the attention they deserve. The recommendations to improve our parks system will be examined closely by My Government.

A Culture of Innovation

Despite all that Prince Edward Island has been able to accomplish toward a stronger economic position, we can never allow ourselves to become complacent. In order for our province to succeed within the new economy, we must solidify those things which we do best and aggressively seize emerging opportunities.

Given the uncertainty around the present global dynamic, there is a real need to take stock and plan for the future. Therefore, My Government will establish The Premier's Task Group on Economic Opportunity. This body of 12 of our province's most creative and innovative individuals will report directly to My Premier on new means to create wealth and employ Islanders.

Prince Edward Island has developed into a significant player in the Research and Development Sector of the Canadian economy. A network of over 200 Island scientists in private and public facilities are contributing to the growth and commercialization of research. To take advantage of those emerging opportunities, My Government will create and implement a Life Sciences Development Strategy for Prince Edward Island.

New health research opportunities also create economic benefits for the province. My Government's investments in Island health-research initiatives brought over \$500,000 of national research funding to the province this year. A partnership with the National Cancer Institute of Canada brought another \$200,000 to our province for cancer research.

My Government will continue to provide financial support to the Prince Edward Island Health Research Institute this year.

The Atlantic Technology Centre (ATC), scheduled for opening next year, has peaked great interest from the local and national technology industry. My Government has made, and will continue to make, announcements concerning ATC tenants who will provide employment opportunities for Islanders.

A Healthy Populace

With spending at well over \$300 million a year, Health and Social Services is by far the largest expenditure My Government makes on behalf of, and in the best interests of, Prince Edward Islanders. Over the past five years, My Government has increased annual funding for health and social services by \$55 million, an increase of 19 per cent.

This investment has been made to meet immediate needs, to address critical issues facing the sustainability of the system, and to provide for critical funding in areas identified by the health community and all Islanders.

Construction of a new hospital for East Prince continues ahead of schedule, and the establishment of additional long-term care beds in West Prince will proceed.

A new MRI and enhanced cancer treatment services will be delivered by My Government. Installation of the new services and equipment will require the addition of a 15,000 square-foot expansion to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, as well as major renovations to the provincial cancer treatment centre and diagnostic imaging department.

Human resources are the most important component in the delivery of quality health care. My Government recognizes that the access to quality services is largely dependent on the women and men who care for our citizens.

To assist in human resource planning, a comprehensive Human Resource Supply and Demand Analysis is now being coordinated by My Government. This important analysis will identify supply, demand and training issues over the next five years and provide us with a plan for future human resource needs.

My Government's \$9.5 million Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy continues to produce positive results.

Fifteen new registered nursing positions will be created this year. This is in addition to 28 permanent positions created in 2000-2001.

The Bachelor Degree in Nursing Sponsorship Program will sponsor at least 24 third- and fourth-year students this academic year by providing nursing students with \$2,400 per year for tuition and education expenses.

My Government has approved a four-year plan to increase the number of students admitted to the UPEI School of Nursing. We have supported an additional 14 new seats at the school, bringing the total number of seats to 59, an increase of 31 per cent.

Although we are facing challenges in some areas, our physician recruitment strategy is meeting with considerable success, and strengthening our position in a very competitive physician recruitment market. During this past year, 17 full-time and three part-time physicians began practice in Prince Edward Island.

An additional 34 locum physicians came to the Island on temporary assignments. Contracts have also been signed with five additional physicians who will begin practice in our province before the end of this year, and several more who are committed to joining us in coming years.

The primary care system, namely family doctors, nurses and other health professionals working in family practice settings, is the first line of support to Islanders with health needs. Working with our health professionals, My Government will support and encourage primary care redesign initiatives which provide improved access to health services.

My Government continues to implement a new provincial Disability Support Program to better meet the individual needs of persons with a disability. This is the first program in Canada to remove disability supports from income support programs.

During the coming year, new regional outreach addiction services will be introduced. A provincial Addictions Advisory Committee will also be established to ensure a strong link between addiction services and the community.

Since 1999, My Government's funding for subsidized residents in private nursing homes has been increased by \$2.2 million, which represents an increase of 45 per cent. My Government will continue to assess and address needs within this important component of our health-care system.

The subsidy to Community Care Facility residents was also increased from \$35 per day to \$45 per day effective April 1, 2000, the second increase in two years. Since 1998, there has been a 55 per cent increase in the daily subsidy rate for residents of community-care facilities.

In both private nursing homes and government manors, a comfort allowance is provided to residents whose cost of care is subsidized. This year, My Government increased the monthly comfort allowance from \$82 to \$103 per month. This 20 per cent increase was the first since 1992.

Additional resources will be committed by My Government to implement a provincial diabetes program which focuses on diabetes education and management to address the increasing number of Islanders diagnosed each year with Type 2 diabetes.

A new Supported Adoptions Program will be implemented in 2002 to encourage the adoption of children with special needs who are in the permanent care of the province, and to provide adoptive parents equal access to services that support the developmental needs of adopted children.

My Government is committed to investing in communication and information technologies to improve quality and access to health and social services, and to provide information for planning, evaluation and research.

A Common Client Registry is now in the final stages of completion, linking hospital admitting and discharge systems, pharmacy information systems, billing systems, vital statistics and new case management systems which enable health professionals to develop, monitor and share client-centred care plans.

A new radiology information system is now being established to automate and standardize radiology services. When fully operational next year, this system will provide the infrastructure to acquire and forward diagnostic images throughout PEI and the Atlantic provinces.

Our Commitment to Lifelong Learning

My Government is committed to ensuring that all Islanders, regardless of age, or what special needs they might have, are afforded lifelong learning opportunities. From kindergarten to Grade 12, and from Grade 12 to post-secondary and adult training, our society is heavily dependent upon the ability of our citizens to continually gain new skills and renew existing ones.

My Government considers its kindergarten program to be an important initiative on behalf of Island children. Enrolment increased by 12 per cent during the first year of this publicly funded, community-based program.

As part of our commitment to address the issue of wages for those Islanders who work in the early childhood development field, My Government increased funding to support those important educators.

A cornerstone to My Government's philosophy is a commitment to ensuring quality education for Island students in their own communities. Despite declining school enrolments, the number of approved teaching positions will be maintained for this school year and for the coming two years. Our estimates tell us this initiative will maintain at least 54 teaching positions over the three-year period.

My Minister of Education will be instructing his department, in collaboration with school boards, to develop a plan that will address the issue of class sizes in primary grades. We

want to ensure that our youngest students within the public school system will receive the very best head start in their lifelong learning journey.

This year we have continued our investment in public school infrastructure. Major capital construction projects are underway at Parkdale Elementary, Miscouche Consolidated and the new French school and community centre that will serve the Summerside/Miscouche region. This important program has recognized the needs of communities, and has solidified our educational infrastructure for years to come.

Our partnership with Canadian Heritage ensures quality education and cultural programs are offered to the Island francophone and Acadian community. In addition to existing schools and community centres in Abram Village and Charlottetown, this partnership provides French first language education in Summerside, West Prince and Rustico.

Our Island schools are the envy of many provinces. All of our schools are connected to the Internet and we are making great strides in the area of integrating technology into our school curriculum. Prince Edward Island was the first Canadian province to have every school and library connected to the Internet, and continues to pioneer new IT learning strategies.

This coming fiscal year My Government will, once again, provide an additional \$1 million to the operating budgets of Holland College and the University of Prince Edward Island. This financial commitment represents the final installment of a three-year plan.

My Government recognizes the financial challenges facing post-secondary students in Prince Edward Island. Last year, we created the Island Student Award Program and the Community Service Bursary Program.

The Island Student Award Program provides Island students attending their third and fourth years at the University of Prince Edward Island or their second year at Holland College or Collège de l'Acadie with a \$600 bursary to offset tuition and other academic costs. Since the program was introduced last year, 1,190 Island students have received awards under this program.

The Community Service Bursary Program is also a tremendous success. It provides Island students an opportunity to gain valuable community volunteer experience, while earning up to \$500 in tuition credits. As a result, non-profit organizations are afforded an opportunity to work with youth and increase the services offered to clients.

In recognition of the important role of the student financial assistance program, My Government has negotiated a five-year lending agreement with the Credit Unions of Prince Edward Island. Island Credit Unions have a strong connection with Island communities and we look forward to a successful partnership in delivering this service to Island students.

Many sectors and both levels of government have identified a number of current and future skills shortages within this province's labour market. My Government is working with its federal colleagues in the development of a plan which will take measures to rectify skill shortages, particularly within the trades field.

My Government recognizes the increasingly complex challenges in the area of special education in Island schools. Our new autism consultant is assisting with the development of a provincial autism policy. Our goal is to enhance existing capacity to more adequately address the needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

A provincial Special Education Policy is being finalized that will provide for a continuum of support services so that students with special educational needs can achieve learning results. The policy reflects the philosophy of inclusion and will be implemented by My Government.

Improving literacy levels for all Islanders is a significant priority. My Government has initiated a Literacy Awareness Campaign, as well as a highly successful Summer Tutoring Program for students in grades 1 to 6. The Summer Tutoring Program maintains and strengthens the literacy skills of young Islanders while providing meaningful summer employment for post-secondary students who are considering a teaching career.

Our Traditional Industries – A Productive Partnership With the Environment

Farming, the fishery and forestry are integral contributors to the social and economic fabric of all Island communities, and they will continue to be a strong underpinning of Prince Edward Island's economy in the future.

Policies and programs which have the common goal of improving returns to these industries while protecting and enhancing soil and water resources for present and future generations continue to be advanced.

My Government introduced the province's first Drinking Water Strategy because it understands that access to a clean and safe water supply is vital. This comprehensive plan includes well field protection programs, strengthened environmental regulations and working with municipalities toward better water and waste-water infrastructure protection.

Existing environmental protection legislation will be strengthened and enforced so that future generations of Islanders can enjoy the natural environment with which Islanders of today have been blessed.

Agriculture

Significant progress is being achieved in the implementation of the Food Strategy for Prince Edward Island. In the past year, FOODTRUST of Prince Edward Island was incorporated to provide industry direction and leadership in the production, processing and marketing of safe, high-quality products from sustainable management systems.

In order to support the brand standards which have been established, My Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is currently developing a new sustainable resource policy. Building on the success of the Agricultural and Environmental Resources Conservation Program, the new policy will incorporate a number of sustainable practices including crop rotations, integrated pest management, soil and water conservation and nutrient management planning.

As markets continue to expand for organically produced food, My Government will continue to work with this sector of the industry to develop new strategies that will result in increased organic production. These important initiatives will be expanded and new partnerships created to ensure the sector can achieve its growing potential.

This year, drought conditions resulted in significant concern within our agriculture industry. It is important that our agriculture safety net programs meet the needs of producers who are affected by circumstances beyond their control. That is why My Government will continue to work with the industry and with its federal and provincial counterparts to offer safety net programs which are effective, equitable and affordable.

My Government will continue to partner with Island livestock producers in the development of new products and markets.

Adapting to new economic opportunities requires new approaches to managing and using information, to finding and connecting with market opportunities, and to building communities of interest. FarmNet is one initiative that My Government is pursuing to help our industries identify, develop and use the skills and tools they require for success in this changing economy.

The significant value of any network lies in the people and information at its heart. FarmNet will provide people in the agriculture and agri-food sectors with the platform, information and learning opportunities to adapt to the changing economy, and to innovate the next generation of skills and tools that will be required for future success.

Fruit production in this province continues to expand. My Government is excited about the possibilities these crops offer in an effort to further diversify our agriculture industry.

We will continue to work with industry stakeholders so that emerging opportunities can be seized.

Fisheries and Aquaculture

The fishing and aquaculture sectors are extremely important to our Island economy. Last year alone, landings were in excess of 156 million pounds with a landed value of \$145 million. These industries employ more than 9,000 Islanders and, together with the service sector, contribute approximately \$300 million in overall economic impact.

While, for the most part, Fisheries resources are bountiful, care must be taken and attention must be given to ensure their long-term maintenance and sustainability.

My Government will continue to support the industry in seeking a fair and equitable share of fisheries resources for Prince Edward Island. As well, support will be sought from the federal government to provide a higher level of protection for the Island's fishery.

Scientific research and development will continue to be priorities of My Government. The Lobster Strategy will be proceeded into its third year and comprehensive data will be collected to assist in the management of this fundamental resource.

My Government believes in the value of the aquaculture sector. Therefore, it will work closely with industry and its federal colleagues to research methods to reduce the impact of unwanted species such as green crab, clubbed tunicate and *Codium*. Partnerships have been developed to help prepare the aquaculture industry for a review of mussel and oyster sites in the context of navigation and environmental assessment. This partnership is essential to ensure the shellfish industry continues to provide economic benefits to the citizens of this province.

Forestry

My Government's commitment to sustainable management applies to our forest resources as well. In the coming year, we will complete an extensive corporate land-use inventory. This inventory will provide current land-use information which can be applied to planning in agriculture, forestry, tourism, the environment and to community and urban development.

The *State of the Forest* report will be issued in 2002. This important report will provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of the province's entire forest resource, including its makeup, age and health. The report will be an invaluable tool in guiding the sustainable management of the forest resource, and in the development of new strategic directions.

Increasing wealth-creating opportunities from the forest resource is a priority of My Government. A Public Forest Council, with participation from the private sector, will be established to work with local communities to identify non-timber, value-added opportunities.

My Government will focus in earnest on the economic and employment potential of all provincially owned land. Additionally, the establishment of a program to provide financial and technical assistance for landowners to improve the sustainability, productivity and economic potential of their woodlot will be implemented by My Government.

Communities – A Cornerstone of Prosperity

Since 1996, a new partnership has been cultivated between Island communities and My Government because the benefits, both social and economic, of strong and vibrant communities are immeasurable.

During this the International Year of Volunteers, it is appropriate that we acknowledge the contribution made to our communities by individual Islanders. It should be noted that over the past three years, Prince Edward Island is the only jurisdiction in Canada where the volunteer rate has increased.

In recognition of the tremendous devotion of Islanders to the volunteer sector, My Government will establish a new program called SAVE – Students Assisting Voluntary Endeavours. Every year, for the next three years, three charitable organizations will be provided with the services of a University of Prince Edward Island student. These nine students will work on marketing plans, fundraising, or any other project that will both be educational to the student and assist the volunteer agency.

My Government is committed to the implementation schedule of the *French Language Services Act*, and is pleased to note the recognition of our efforts in the most recent report of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Over the course of the past year, 34 new, community-based projects, with a total value of \$810,000 have been supported. Through its Community Development Fund, My Government will continue to partner in the development of projects which reflect an enhanced position for Island communities.

During this fiscal year, My Government is proud to support, via the Canada-Prince Edward Island Infrastructure Program, 57 initiatives to enhance environmental, cultural, recreational and affordable housing infrastructure in communities across the province. This program reflects a continued effort by the three levels of government in this province to work in partnership toward enhancements in community infrastructure.

Building effective community partnerships on public safety issues is a valuable tool. In the past year My Government has partnered with a number of community groups on projects to advance issues such as bike helmet safety, drinking and driving, seat-belt awareness and proper child-seat safety procedures. This effort will be continued in the coming year as My Government further engages communities on issues such as driver distraction and increased road safety.

In an effort to enhance the natural environment around Island roads, My Government initiated a Highway Naturalization and Enhancement Program which had two successful pilot projects in the Charlottetown and Évangéline areas. Building upon this success, My Government will expand this resourceful program to interested communities across the province.

Our Designated Scenic Heritage Roads provide a window upon the history of our transportation network in rural communities. My Government has developed a Designated Scenic Heritage Roads Strategy to partner with communities in preservation of these roads through best practices in construction, environmental protection and public education.

Through the Island Waste Management Corporation, My Government is implementing its Integrated Waste Management Strategy. This strategy will guide the development of a state-of-the-art indoor compost facility, closure of community landfills across the province and adoption of the Waste Watch Program in every household in the province. This will be of tremendous environmental benefit to present and future generations of Islanders.

Recent tragic events in the United States have placed renewed focus upon the importance of preserving and protecting our hard-fought freedoms. Islanders have served with honour and distinction around the globe both in peacetime and in war. As a small form of recognition and gratitude for this ongoing service, My Government will designate a section of the provincial road network as a Veterans' Memorial Highway to serve as a permanent reminder of the courage and commitment of our Island veterans.

Ensuring a Safe and Just Prince Edward Island

My Government is deeply concerned about the tragic impact of family violence on our Island families and communities. That is why My Premier has directed the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention to review existing response protocols and determine strategies for improvement. The committee will bring their recommendations back to the Premier directly.

My Government has established a working group, including representation from the Premier's Office, the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Health and Social Services, which is working closely with the Premier's Action Committee in conducting public consultations across the province. This process will be used to update the Island's family violence prevention strategy and renew the mandate of the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention.

My Government is committed to providing families with proper information and services especially when faced with legal issues. With that in mind, My Government, through the Office of the Attorney General, will create a refocused family law initiative. Using existing resources, a new family law section will be created within the department to provide programs and services to families in a coordinated manner.

Through implementation of a Provincial Strategy on Impaired Driving, My Government will continue to support efforts including a focus on youth-related initiatives, such as Students Against Driving Drunk. At the same time, other measures, such as increased enforcement, public education, legislative changes and program options, will continue to be assessed and examined.

My Government will update the Provincial Crime Prevention Strategy first announced in 1995, setting out a framework for the prevention of crime and to reduce the fear and likelihood of victimization.

Together with Aboriginal organizations in the province, and with the support of the federal government, My Government will work to implement an Aboriginal Community Justice Program. Emphasis will include increased participation by Aboriginal people and organizations, proactive strategies, as well as cultural awareness training for justice and other government officials.

Conclusion

During this Session of the General Assembly, My Premier and ministers will be advancing a number of important legislative proposals which reflect the collective priorities of Islanders and My Government.

My Government's objectives are the objectives of every Islander. A strong and prosperous economy. Better employment opportunities for all. Access to high-quality social services, including health care and education. A bright future for our children.

Honourable Members, Islanders are a justifiably proud and innovative people. I am confident that the agenda which I have articulated today will contribute in earnest to a proud and innovative Prince Edward Island.

I leave you now to the business of the session, with full confidence that you will favourably discharge your responsibilities.

May Divine Providence guide this Legislative Assembly in all its deliberations.

God Bless Prince Edward Island, and God Bless the Queen.