

P R I N C E   E D W A R D   I S L A N D

S P E E C H   F R O M   T H E   T H R O N E

Delivered by His Honour  
The Honourable J. Léonce Bernard  
Lieutenant Governor

At the Opening of the First Session of the Sixty-Second General  
Assembly  
of Prince Edward Island

NOVEMBER 12, 2003  
3 p.m.

# **A Future to Build, A Future to Share**

***Honourable Speaker,  
Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:***

I take great pleasure in welcoming you to this 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. September's General Election resulted in an overwhelming number of Honourable Members being returned to this Chamber and I welcome you back and look forward to your continued contribution.

To the new members, I congratulate you on attaining the confidence of your constituents. That confidence is sacred and I trust that it will never be compromised as you carry out your duty in the service of Islanders.

Hurricane Juan's arrival on the eve of election day did not deter dedicated voters across our province from practising their democratic right. While the storm resulted in tremendous destruction, Islanders have remained focused on returning our communities to a state of normalcy.

On behalf of all Honourable Members, I would like to extend sincere appreciation to the hundreds of Islanders who participated in the cleanup and worked to provide and restore important services to Island homes and businesses.

Besides the historic and clear endorsement Islanders gave My Premier and My Government in 2003, this year will be remembered for yet another significant reason.

In July, Prince Edward Island hosted the 44<sup>th</sup> annual Premier's Conference where Canada's leaders had a chance to discuss the common opportunities and challenges that the provinces face. My Government's Premier has been entrusted by his peers to act as the Chair of Canada's Premiers, to initiate a Council of the Federation with a plan to revitalize the Canadian Federation and to lead the provinces and territories into a new era of constructive and co-operative federalism for Canadians.

This new relationship and dynamic will be based on strength through diversity, dialogue and co-operative approaches to common challenges and opportunities. Over the course of this next year, Canada's Premiers will work together to improve health care for all Canadians and address the fiscal imbalance which exists within the federation.

On behalf of all Islanders, I extend best wishes, good judgment and fortitude as the Premier undertakes this important responsibility on behalf of all Canadians.

# **Let's Keep Building a Partnership for a Better Future**

This past year has continued to be very rewarding for our province. Our economy is performing better than at any other point in our history. Prince Edward Island continues to achieve unprecedented levels of growth and prosperity.

Prince Edward Island achieved many records over the past year. More people were employed than at any other point in our history. Record farm cash receipts and fisheries landings were recorded. Despite a global slowdown, tourism revenue has prospered. Manufacturing shipments, international exports and retail sales continue to exceed expectations.

Islanders are benefiting from a stronger economy and a new optimism has emerged.

My Government continues to be dedicated to offering Islanders a direct voice in their government. Prince Edward Island has benefited from more participation and contribution from Islanders. The televised sessions of the Legislative Assembly twice a year continue to be very popular with Islanders. Government MLAs now have weekly office hours, town hall meetings are held across the Island, more Access PEI sites have been added and more government services and information are available online.

My Government has a plan to do more to build on our working relationship with Islanders. More cabinet meetings will be held within Island communities and regular MLA householder reports will be distributed.

The objective continues to be a government open, accessible and guided by the priorities of Islanders. Working together, our economy has grown, our communities are stronger and we are more confident about the future. My Government will continue to build on this important partnership with Islanders.

## **Let's Keep Building Better Health Care**

My Government understands that the foundation of a strong community depends upon its citizens having access to quality health care and social services. The delivery of publicly funded health care and social services is My Government's first priority.

It is My Government's vision for the health and social services system to focus on a partnership approach with communities. Islanders continue to access health services from eight hospitals located throughout the province in addition to a modern network of other health-care programs, professionals and facilities.

Major investments have been made in infrastructure. East Prince and surrounding areas will benefit from the latest health-care technologies and services at the new Prince County Hospital. A 10-bed expansion has been completed at Community Hospital and four new community health centres have been established throughout the province.

As a result of consultation with front-line health-care professionals, emergency services at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital will be revamped to improve service and reduce waiting times.

People, and their commitment to quality, ensure our health and social services system meets the needs of Islanders. Recognizing the pressures on the system because of staffing shortages, My Government has already added 60 front-line nursing positions and 17 doctors to serve Islanders in the past four years.

But like many jurisdictions in Canada and the United States, it continues to be a challenge in attracting and maintaining a sufficient number of professionals to keep up with increased demands.

My Government will continue to implement strategic recruitment programs that partner with communities and health-care professionals to ensure the resources they need to recruit and retain health-care professionals.

In just a few short years, the direction of health care in Prince Edward Island has been transformed from increasing dependency on neighbouring provinces for specialized medical treatment and procedures to establishing these important services close to home.

My Government made the decision to bring cancer treatment services to the Island, and this coming year, 95 per cent of cancer treatments will be carried out in Prince Edward Island at the new Cancer Treatment Centre. This important centre has been equipped with our province's first MRI and Linear Accelerator services.

My Government will ensure that our health-care system is supported with stable funding. The Health and Social Services budget will increase significantly over the next four years. This funding will help regional authorities make longer-term plans for the delivery of health-care services to Islanders.

A new medical equipment fund will be established as a part of My Government's plan to offer more services and attract additional health care professionals to the Island.

A commitment has been made to work with community partners to ensure improved access to health care at the community level. My Government will continue to keep small hospitals open and upgrade them across the province. Further investments will be made to recruit health-care professionals and equipment.

The Provincial Drug Program will continue to be enhanced, so more Islanders will have access to the important medication needed to alleviate illnesses.

My Government understands its important responsibility to those who find themselves in need. With the introduction of the Low Income Tax Relief Program, more than 17,000 low-income Islanders now have their taxes reduced or eliminated all together. Social assistance payments have also increased, so Island families in need can continue to keep up with the cost of living.

My Government will continue with its initiatives to promote healthier living. Smoke-free legislation has been passed, tobacco initiatives have been implemented, a Strategy for Healthy Living has been introduced, cervical cancer prevention initiatives have been promoted, and diabetes education and prevention have been initiated. These programs will continue to be supported.

My Government recognizes that a healthy life begins with a healthy start in childhood. Several initiatives will be implemented as part of our Healthy Child Development Strategy to improve the lives of children. Province-wide screening and assessment for all newborns and their families will be offered to identify potential risk factors and to enhance parenting skills.

My Government will provide funding for the new Partnerships for Children, a program which supports Children Action networks as a community approach to improving child development. Continued support will be ensured for speech language therapy, physical activity for young children, playground safety, elimination of fees for childhood immunization, preschool intervention services, and measuring and improving the quality of our early childhood development and care programs.

To support Islanders with disabilities, My Government is expanding the Disability Support Program by extending the age access limit from 25 to 18 years of age. The Disability Tax Credit will also be increased to alleviate financial challenges.

My Government recognizes the knowledge, skills, experience and leadership that seniors have made, and continue to make, to strengthen our province. Seniors contribute to the wellness of the family, to the economy and to charitable and volunteer organizations in the communities.

A Seniors' Secretariat will be established to further enhance delivery of services to seniors. The Seniors' Home Repair Program will be expanded to help more seniors remain in their homes longer and the Home Care Program will continue to be expanded.

# Let's Keep Building Quality Education

My Government sees the investment in education as an investment in the future of our Island. Our children will be tomorrow's leaders; and we want to ensure that they have the best possible education that is built upon a foundation of achievement, respect and generosity toward others and their community.

My Government wants to support Island adults in their lifelong learning strategies to successfully participate in our changing world. The positive future of Prince Edward Island is directly related to our ability to maintain a well-educated and highly skilled workforce.

When My Government took office, it was realized that extensive changes were required to improve the education of our children. As a result, major investments were made to upgrade, expand or build 65 schools across the province. This initiative is the most extensive school construction and renovation project in Prince Edward Island's history.

Since 1997, \$22.5 million has been invested to build four new schools. An additional seven schools have benefited from major renovations while more than 50 more schools have been upgraded at a cost of \$27.5 million.

More school renovations are scheduled for this next year, including Bluefield High School and Summerside Intermediate, where \$6.4 million will be invested. Also, over the next year, an additional \$1.7 million will be invested in ongoing maintenance and refurbishment in more than 20 schools.

Additionally, the third phase of the School Construction and Renovation Program will continue with \$30 million in new investments. My Government will work with communities and school boards so that projects undertaken give children and youth access to the best facilities and learning environments.

My Government realizes the importance of keeping small schools open in rural and urban communities across Prince Edward Island. These schools are strongly supported by their communities and this dedication has a positive impact on the education of our children.

My Government has implemented Prince Edward Island's first universal, publicly funded kindergarten. Since 2000, \$7.4 million has been invested to ensure the best possible program. Over the next four years, an additional \$1.4 million will be invested, so that wages for instructors can be increased and programming enriched.

My Government understands the vital importance of advancing our elementary and secondary education system to prepare and inspire students to seek higher learning opportunities and to be better prepared for the future.

Education is more than bricks and mortar. The key connection is in the classroom between the student and the teacher. My Government will continue to support teaching professionals in their integral educational role by honouring signed contracts and providing them with the resources they require to provide the best quality education.

My Government's *Investing in Island Classrooms* strategy has been recognized by the PEI Teachers' Federation as one of the most important commitments an Island Government has ever made in the field of education.

This important new initiative will ensure that class sizes on the Island will be among the best in Canada. One-hundred and forty teaching positions will be maintained over the next five years which would otherwise be lost due to declining enrolments. In addition, 40 teaching positions will be added as part of our strategic initiative to improve student-teacher ratios.

More teaching professionals also means improved access to specialized programs, such as, music, art and physical education, enhanced services for students with special needs, an enriched variety of courses offered at intermediate and high school levels and more support for the special challenges of our smaller schools.

In a rapidly changing and competitive world, Island students need to have access to the latest curriculum. The basics of mathematics, literature and science are vitally important to our collective effort to remain at our academic best. That is why My Government has invested significantly in curriculum and will continue to do so. A new language and mathematics curriculum have already been introduced, and implementation of a new science curriculum is currently underway.

Technology is increasingly a vital part of our provincial learning strategy. Investments have been made in purchasing new computers and software to improve access to the Internet. A new division of Technology in Learning and a new Educational Technology Centre have been established to further support teachers and students integrate technology in the classroom. Initiatives like the Grassroots Program will support students in learning Web page development.

My Government supports the requirements of special-needs students, so they will have every opportunity to succeed in life. There is a commitment to increase literacy levels through positive action early in a student's learning. More professionals will be added to our school system and be dedicated to special-needs students. Also, more resources will be deployed to assist professionals in ensuring students with special needs have access to services when they need them.

My Government is strongly committed to post-secondary education and specialized training opportunities, so that students can pursue career opportunities that will enrich their lives and help our province remain competitive in a global economy.

The University of Prince Edward Island has achieved national exposure for its ability to attract national research projects and provide quality education in a small and focused environment. With the support of My Government, UPEI is experiencing unprecedented expansion and growth.

The new Student Centre has been completed within the last year, and the Sport and Recreation Facility is presently under construction. The Atlantic Veterinary College is just beginning a \$30 million capital construction and renovation program, and the National Research Centre is now in the design stage.

My Government firmly believes that a skilled workforce is part of the essential foundation for a prosperous economy. The Atlantic Tourism and Hospitality Institute is world-renowned for its well-trained graduates, the Underwater Welding Program provides a skilled workforce in a very innovative industry, and the Aerospace Industrial Technology Program produced highly trained tradespeople for an ever-expanding sector. An investment of \$3.5 million in the Holland College Marine Centre in Summerside will train Islanders in navigation and marine safety.

My Government recognizes the importance of tradespeople for the growth of our economy. Through the Labour Market Development Agreement, a province-wide trade courses promotional campaign encourages young Islanders to consider the many opportunities in the skilled trades.

A new Trade Futures Program will be developed by My Government to annually provide up to 50 Islanders the opportunity to see the industry first-hand by employing them with experienced Island tradespeople.

The Island Student Award will also be provided in all years of study to students who enrol in a Holland College trade training program deemed to have skilled labour shortages in Prince Edward Island.

My Government will increase funding to both Holland College and UPEI to offset their increased operating costs and to keep tuitions affordable. Financial assistance will also be increased for post-secondary students, so a greater number of our youth can have access to more educational programs. The student limit has been increased by 20 per cent and the student in-study income has been nearly tripled from the present exemption of \$600 to \$1,700.

In acknowledgement of the tremendous generosity of our private sector and the outstanding leadership being provided by UPEI and community leaders to the UPEI *Building a Legacy* campaign, My Government is pleased to present the campaign leaders with a major gift of \$25 million over a 10-year-period to support their magnificent efforts.

We are confident that this major investment in our university will come back to Islanders many times over in terms of quality learning opportunities here in the province; innovative new research opportunities

which create jobs, knowledge and wealth; and important linkages between the university and Island communities.

My Government is committed to raising literacy rates at all levels of the Island population. Through a partnership with the Federal Government, \$1.4 million is allocated annually to the PEI Institute of Adult and Community Education to provide an education to adults seeking to improve their literacy levels. During the past year 1,200 adults received upgrading at 18 sites across the province.

## **Let's Keep Building Better Jobs and Opportunities**

More Islanders are working than ever before. Our economy is performing better than at any other point in our history.

In 2000, My Government introduced a plan for *Bridging Tradition with Technology* to strengthen our Island economy. The plan has been successful in creating jobs, in every region of the province, within traditional and new industries. My Government wants to continue a productive partnership with Island businesses to maintain this positive momentum.

My Government recognizes that supporting small business is key to economic growth, and many programs are in place. The establishment of PEI Business Development Inc. has meant that small-business people have the support of a crown corporation to increase development and create jobs.

The Entrepreneur Loan Program has been increased. Island entrepreneurs are now eligible to receive up to \$50,000 in Government-guaranteed loans to invest in new and expanding businesses.

Since 1997, the PEI Lending Agency has extended more than \$191 million in loans to businesses in all sectors of the Island economy at no cost to taxpayers. In fact, the percentage of write-offs over the past six years would be the envy of any chartered bank.

This access to capital has given Island businesses the opportunity to create more jobs for Islanders. Since 1996, the Island labour force has expanded by more than 10,000 jobs.

Tax-free zones have meant that manufacturing has expanded and business parks are growing. My Government will work with Island entrepreneurs and industry to ensure that new development includes areas of the province that are under-served by new business and industry.

Prince Edward Island continues to be successful with its primary industries, but a solid business strategy builds on diversity to create stronger economic growth over the long-term. My Government has supported adding value to our existing industries and branching out into new ones.

Newer industries include aerospace, information technology and research and development. The aerospace industry employs hundreds of Islanders. The information technology industry has a payroll in excess of \$90 million annually. An important component of My Government's strategy has been the establishment of the new \$22 million Atlantic Technology Centre in downtown Charlottetown and a network of IT centres located in rural areas across the province.

The growing research and development industry employs 200 scientists, and this industry will see tremendous growth as a result of the new National Research Council facility that will be established in Charlottetown.

The Food Technology Centre has been an important contributor to Prince Edward Island's growing reputation as a centre of research excellence. Located at the University of PEI, it supports Island businesses, food processors and innovators. My Government will support the expansion of this facility to deliver more research services.

The crafts industry has become a substantial contributor to the Island economy, with \$30 million in annual revenue. Now, more than 200 craft and giftware shops are located across the province. My Government is a strong supporter of this industry and that partnership will continue.

Prince Edward Island exports Island products to more than 60 countries around the world. Exports have increased from \$350 million in 1996 to nearly \$700 million annually. My Government has been strongly committed to expanding our trade mission program. There have been more than 130 Island companies that have participated in numerous trade missions since 2000, accumulating projected sales in excess of \$60 million.

## **Let's Keep Building a Sustainable Energy Plan**

Prince Edward Island faces a unique challenge of a relatively small population base and high reliance on electrical generation from fossil fuels or purchases from off-Island resources.

Electricity prices have been a constant challenge for our province. To ensure fairness and transparency, My Government will introduce legislation to grant the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission authority to publicly regulate Maritime Electric. IRAC will be legislatively authorized to hold public hearings and approve appropriate rates so that the interests of Island consumers continue to be protected.

The commission will be asked to implement regulatory options that result in a solid public scrutiny of the utility and its operations at minimal cost. Maritime Electric will be required to present long-term plans to IRAC for review and approval. This will include any plans for additional generation capacity.

My Government continues to be committed to developing a “Made in PEI” energy solution that provides cheaper and cleaner energy that will meet the needs of our province. Toward that goal, major investments have been made in wind power.

The North Cape Wind Farm presently generates 19 million kilowatt hours of electricity, supplying electrical energy to 2,500 homes. That capacity will increase to 46 million kilowatt hours or five per cent of the province’s electrical requirements.

My Government will also strive to secure a diversified mix of natural gas and renewable energy. Work will continue on development of a responsible business model which will result in a gas pipeline being constructed to Prince Edward Island from the mainland.

## **Let’s Keep Building on the Success of Our Primary Industries**

Prince Edward Island is richly abundant in natural resources and pristine beauty that enhance the lives of our citizens both for their quality of life and through economic generation. My Government’s goal is to support a healthy balance between developing our resources and managing their sustainability for future generations.

My Government will continue to build on its commitment to the development of sustainable agricultural practices, long-term fisheries management plans and forest resource conservation. The establishment of the new Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, Aquaculture and Forestry, which brings the natural resource industries together in one department, will better focus programs to promote our economy, protect our environment and enrich our society.

These industries will be further strengthened by FoodTrust of Prince Edward Island which will broaden its efforts to market high-quality food products from the land and sea.

### ***Agriculture***

Diversification of the agriculture industry continues to be a priority for My Government. It will encourage the expansion of the beef industry and identify new crop and livestock opportunities.

My Government will continue the Future Farmers program. Efforts will be intensified to offer more training and educational opportunities for those involved in the natural resource industries.

Developing new uses for our products will also be pursued. These include bio-fuels and the development of other products and processes. In particular, new opportunities for the use of natural products for pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals will be explored aggressively with the National Research Council's new Institute of Nutrascience and Health at the University of Prince Edward Island.

In partnership with the agricultural industry, My Government has undertaken a number of initiatives to help protect and enhance the environment as outlined in the Sustainable Resource Policy.

More than 1,200 farms have now completed environmental farm plans. Over \$12 million has been invested to support on-farm conservation projects including manure management, hedgerow establishment and soil conservation. The program has been expanded to include nutrient management planning and integrated pest planning.

My Government will continue to support programs and incentives to reduce pesticide use and financial support is available to farmers who adopt organic production.

Agriculture contributes almost \$400 million in cash receipts annually to the economy of Prince Edward Island. Islanders have an important connection to the farm and what it represents to our province and our social fabric. The products that Island farmers produce enjoy an exceptional reputation around the world.

To add value to our beef industry, a new plant will be established so Island producers can have easy access to a facility to process their products while creating 65 more jobs. Initiatives are taking place to expand and enhance the beef herd in partnership with beef producers.

## ***Forestry***

In light of the findings of the recent *State of the Forest* report, My Government is inviting all Islanders to join in developing a new vision of the future of the forest resource, based on its value to the economy, the environment, the landscape, to recreation and to other forest values. Increased emphasis will be placed on non-traditional forest products and uses.

Land-use management practices have a major impact on the environment. My Government will increase its support for reforestation, provide incentives for the reforestation of high-sloped land, and identify new agri-forest opportunities.

## ***Fisheries and Aquaculture***

In 2002, the fisheries and aquaculture industry contributed well in excess of \$325 million to the Island economy. For generations, Island fishers have reaped the many benefits which the waters off our shores have offered. This sector employs more than 9,000 Islanders annually.

Achievements have been made in the development of the long-term lobster management plan and gaining access to our fair share of fisheries resources. My Government will continue to aggressively represent the issues of Island fishers with the Federal Government.

To ensure the sustainability of the industry and encourage new entrants, a new entrance program to support succession in the fishery will be developed.

Our aquaculture industry in Prince Edward Island now represents \$60 million to our economy. We will continue to work with industry and the scientific community to combat invasive species and secure new technology and methods that will ensure long-term sustainability.

My Government will continue to partner in the development of new markets and increase the range of fish products produced in Prince Edward Island to further increase export sales, improve returns for fishers and secure more jobs.

## ***Tourism***

Prince Edward Island is truly one of the world's great islands. *Travel & Leisure Magazine*, which has a circulation of 4.5 million, has ranked our Island as one of the top 10 in the world. This ranking is based on readers' evaluations of natural attractions, activities and sights, restaurants and food, people and value.

Our tourism industry continues to be a significant economic contributor. Despite a global slowdown in the sector, visitors to our province spent almost \$353 million in 2002, which represented an increase of almost eight per cent over the previous year. This increase was due, in part, to the investment of My Government and its tourism partners in the largest ever campaign in New England, Ontario and Quebec.

Together, My Government and the tourism industry have provided a strong mandate for establishing new standards for growth, refining priorities for product and services and building consensus in the industry for specific strategies to work together to grow the industry.

In response to outstanding issues raised by the industry, coupled with the turbulent global tourism year, Tourism PEI, in partnership with the Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island, has initiated a plan for future growth and prosperity.

As an initial step in this process, Tourism PEI organized a Tourism Partnership Forum with an objective to provide an opportunity for industry stakeholders to come together to discuss and build consensus on the future direction of the tourism industry. This partnership will help frame economic growth and development in the sector for coming years.

Continued marketing initiatives are vital to the success of this industry, as well as, good tourism infrastructure. My Government will continue to make investments in Provincial Parks and Visitor Information centres.

## **Let's Keep Building a Safer Environment**

As Canada's smallest province, we understand the value of our natural resources. My Government is deeply committed to the protection of these resources that support our primary industries and the quality of life to which Islanders have become accustomed.

Working with the agricultural community, major achievements have been made to increase environmental preservation. Buffer zones and three-year crop rotations have been implemented. Pesticide use is more closely monitored and has been reduced, and integrated pest management is now widely practised.

A new Sustainable Resource Policy charting the future direction of agriculture, fisheries and forestry in PEI has been implemented. It involves reviewing current legislation to make it more enforceable, rewarding responsible production practices with tax incentives, introducing cross compliance for program eligibility, and awarding "Select Farm" designations for farmers implementing sustainable practices.

Approximately 57 per cent of Prince Edward Island residents depend on private wells for drinking water and approximately 46 per cent of residences have on-site sewage disposal systems. My Government has strengthened both the Water Well Regulations and Sewage Disposal Regulations to reduce water contamination. Now, a new program will be developed where homeowners will receive financial support for properly decommissioning outdated septic tanks and installing new ones.

Three years ago, My Government implemented a Drinking Water Strategy and so far has invested almost \$1 million to manage, protect and enhance groundwater and surface water resources.

Over the next three years, My Government will partner in the investment of \$45 million to upgrade sewer and water treatment facilities in communities across the Island.

Watershed management coordinators will continue to provide technical support to organizations and community groups involved in conservation and enhancement projects.

My Government invests more than \$300,000 annually in community-led watershed enhancement projects. A Young Environmentalist Program teaches Island youth the importance of environmental protection while lending support to communities to improve watersheds and other sensitive areas. Funding will continue so that more Island communities can benefit from stream enhancement, watershed management and environmental projects.

There are currently more than 15,000 acres under environmental protection so that wildlife and other environmental sensitive species can be preserved for future generations. In exchange for landowners agreeing to designate natural areas, these properties have been exempted from payment of property tax.

Prince Edward Island became the first province in Canada to establish a province-wide source separation waste management system. The objective of this program is to divert 65 per cent of waste away from landfills.

Islanders are to be commended for adapting so well to such an ambitious endeavour. To date, 14 landfills and nine container sites have been closed. It is a responsible approach to waste management and one that is being modeled in other parts of the world.

My Government will continue to enhance the Waste Watch Program to make it more user friendly for Islanders. Improvements include reducing user fees, the establishment of a Waste Watch Community Liaison Committee to provide customer feedback, a Business Support Program to assist businesses in managing and reducing waste disposal costs, and better customer service and flexibility.

Prince Edward Island is taking an active role in curbing climate change. My Government has developed a comprehensive Climate Change Business Plan that will help reverse the environmental impact on water supply, sea levels, agriculture, fish habitat and animal life. Our strategy will support Canada's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmental stewardship comes naturally to Islanders. My Government strives to lead by example and, in cooperation with organizations and communities, will ensure that the latest information on environmental protection programs is accessible to all Islanders.

## **Let's Keep Building Stronger Communities**

The strength of Prince Edward Island is found in its communities. Communities play a vital role in our economic development and our quality of life. By partnering with communities, we bring long-term sustainable growth to our Island. Community-driven initiatives are the most successful; and when each community succeeds, the province succeeds.

That is why My Government has assigned community development officers for each region of the province. The Community Development Bureau has been established to work with communities to support local projects and development. Since the bureau was first created in 1999, My Government has invested in excess of \$4 million into almost 200 community projects. The budget will be increased so more projects in Island communities can be funded.

As our economy grows, it is important to make investments in infrastructure. Over the next three years, My Government will allocate \$7.5 million for the renewal of the Canada-Prince Edward Island Infrastructure Program. As well, \$3 million in each of the next five years will be allocated to the Strategic Infrastructure Program.

My Government maintained its commitment to invest every single cent of the provincial gasoline tax into road construction, bridge upgrades and general maintenance. In fact, more investment was added.

As Chair of Canada's Premiers, My Government's Premier will continue to advocate that the Federal Government establish a National Highways Program so our federal partners, too, can appropriately invest in the improvement of our Island roads and highways.

My Government recognizes the need to make our Island a safe place for its citizens and will continue to work with law enforcement to ensure Islanders feel secure at home and in their communities.

To help families, the Family Law Program will continue to be enhanced to provide families with proper information and services when faced with legal issues.

Important work continues to be carried out by the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention to help stop violence in the home. Additional investment will be made to support victim services and legal consultation.

My Government recognizes the significant contribution and dedication of our volunteer firefighters. In recognition of this commitment, driver licence fees for these important volunteers will be waived effective January 1, 2004.

To honour the proud tradition of service and sacrifice that our veterans have made in defence of our country and freedom around the world, My Government has designated Route #2 as the Veterans' Memorial Highway. Additionally, My Government will introduce the veterans' automobile licence plate, support the Juno Beach Memorial Project, and establish three veterans' memorials along the Veterans' Memorial Highway.

My Government recognizes the contribution that Island Acadian and francophone communities make to the social and economic fabric of our province. The introduction and proclamation of the French

Language Services Act has been a historic step forward and has meant that more services are now offered in the French language by My Government.

My Government will continue to partner with Acadian and francophone communities to advance projects which will have a positive economic, educational and cultural impact.

My Government has a strong commitment to amateur sport and will increase support through Prince Edward Island's first Sport Strategy.

Over the next four years, \$1.9 million will be invested to encourage the development of coaches, athletes and association leaders.

In February 2004, Prince Edward Island will host the Canadian Special Olympics Winter Games. My Government is pleased to support the dedicated volunteers of the host committee of this very important event. Aside from providing significant economic impact, this event will provide Islanders a tremendous opportunity to witness first-hand the exceptional athletic ability of these athletes from across Canada.

My Government has confirmed its intention to host the 2009 Canada Summer Games. This event has the potential to be the largest event ever hosted in Prince Edward Island resulting in significant economic spinoffs and legacies for sport. Over the next 18 months a hosting plan will be developed in concert with various community, provincial and national partners to ensure that these games will be the best games ever.

Culture plays an integral part in the lives of all Islanders. It encompasses a diverse array of individuals, organizations and industries, all contributing to the well-being and quality of life of the province and its communities. My Government will continue to support initiatives which augment the cultural diversity of Prince Edward Island.

Property values in Prince Edward Island have risen over the past number of years. To control increasing property taxes in light of this trend, My Government has capped property taxes to increase no more than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as of 2002. This significant reform will ensure a measure of predictability and fairness.

Automobile insurance is another area where citizens across Canada have experienced increased costs. In June, My Premier spearheaded the establishment of an Atlantic Region Auto Insurance Task Force to review the insurance issue and make recommendations. To complement the work of the Task Force, My Government outlined a comprehensive strategy to immediately protect the Island consumer and ensure affordable access to auto insurance.

In the coming days, legislation will be introduced in this Chamber to formalize My Government's strategy to ensure justified insurance rates and the protection of Island automobile insurance consumers.

***Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members ...***

You will be asked to consider a number of legislative proposals which, if enacted, will serve to improve our province and the lives of its people. As representatives of the citizens of this province, Islanders have placed a tremendous trust in your ability to carry out this duty.

It is my hope that future generations of Islanders look back at the work of this Assembly and celebrate your commitment and foresight in making the important decisions that greatly benefited the lives of the people of Prince Edward Island.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.