

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SPEECH FROM

THE THRONE



At the opening of the First Session
of the Sixty-seventh General Assembly of
the Prince Edward Island Legislature

May 12th, 2023



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

At the opening of the First Session of the
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Introduction

Good Afternoon. Bonjour. Kwe.

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests, and fellow Islanders – it is my great honour as the representative of His Majesty The King, to welcome you to the first session of the 67th General Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

In particular, I want to welcome the new members of this Assembly. Islanders are excited to have you join this chamber and contribute your unique skills and experiences towards the shared goal of representing Islanders and making a positive impact on our province. As you begin this journey, never forget the privilege that has been extended to you by the individuals that you are elected to serve; when you take your seats within the rail of this chamber you are speaking for thousands of Islanders and you must do so with honour, with compassion, and with integrity.

To the returning members of this Assembly: you bring a wealth of experience and knowledge serving in the role as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Regardless of how long you may have served Islanders within this chamber – I hope that today affords you the opportunity to renew your commitment and energy as you embark on another journey of representing the Islanders who have so graciously renewed their trust in you as their elected representatives.

And, as you renew your commitment and energy towards your role as MLAs, my government is doing the same for Islanders.

Renewed Perspective & Renewed Energy

Renewal is a vital aspect of our lives, both personally and collectively. It is about starting fresh, looking at things with a new perspective and finding new ways to tackle old problems. My government has been given the opportunity to bring forward fresh ideas and new perspectives and to renew their approach to governance, while working to create a bolder and brighter future for our province.

However, renewal of perspective is not enough – it must go hand in hand with a renewed energy in order to find success. Energy is what propels us forward and gives us the momentum to achieve our goals. It is the fuel that powers our aspirations and ambitions.

My government will have the energy to drive meaningful change and create a better society for all. This means having the courage to take bold actions and make difficult decisions. This means investing in our people, programs, and

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services. This means fostering innovation and creativity. This means challenging the status quo and always striving to be a leader in our great country. And, most importantly, it means setting ambitious goals and working hard, day in – day out, to achieve them.

And, while my government embarks on this journey, it will not forget the promise they made to Islanders during the most recent democratic exercise – to always engage with our citizens and listen to their needs and concerns. It is only through genuine dialogue and collaboration that we can create policies and programs that truly benefit Islanders. This means building trust and respect and creating a culture of transparency and accountability.

Renewal and energy are not just words – they are essential qualities that we need to embody as a government. My government is committed to embracing them fully and working towards creating a better future for our province. Let us start this journey together, with a renewed sense of purpose and the energy to achieve our goals.

Our Province.

It's no secret, as a province and as a society – we have been through a lot over the past few years. Collectively, for every event or challenge that we faced, we have learned many lessons; some about preparedness, some about resilience, and some about the importance of togetherness. While my government recognizes that there have been challenging days, we still have so much to celebrate as a province.

After a global pandemic brought our economy to a screeching halt in 2020, we have rebounded quicker than any other jurisdiction in Canada and have seen positive economic growth every year since. Our workforce has expanded to a record high of 84,200; at the same time, we are seeing record-low unemployment numbers. Tourism has rebounded to pre-pandemic numbers with all signs pointing to a record season in 2023. The average weekly earnings in our province grew last year and are expected to continue to grow. Sectors such as construction and manufacturing continue to grow, and exports have reached an all-time high of \$2 billion dollars. And, while my government recognizes these are all positive signs – it also recognizes there is still much work to do. But, because of these positive indicators, it provides my government with the ability to make the necessary investments to improve the lives of all Islanders.

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Our Plan.

Representatives from all sides of this house would agree that after spending 28 days connecting with voters from tip-to-tip on doorsteps, at coffee shops, and at kitchen tables there were three topics that are consistently top of mind for many Islanders: healthcare, housing, and affordability. And, while these are very important issues that my government has ambitious plans to tackle, it also knows that it must continue its work on environmental leadership, building a robust education system, expanding our early years sector, supporting our most vulnerable, building resilient and safe communities, growing our primary sectors, expanding our workforce, and planning for population growth in our province.

My government has laid out an ambitious plan for Islanders. A plan that focuses on developing new programs and policies to serve our province not only today, but for years to come. This plan will take time – and in some cases years – to complete, but I am confident that my government will continue to put Islanders at the heart of every decision they will be required to make in the days, months, and years to come to build a brighter, bolder, better future for our next generation.

Our Health.

My government, and every government across our great country and around the world is facing unprecedented challenges when it comes to healthcare. The system we have here in Prince Edward Island and across our country was built decades ago and needs to evolve with the needs of Islanders. How we provide care, where we provide care, and who provides the care, all must be modernized.

My government has embarked on rebuilding our primary care system in 2021 by launching the Patient Medical Homes and Medical Neighborhood model. To date, we have successfully launched Patient Medical Homes throughout the province with overwhelming success; but now more than ever, my government recognizes we must accelerate this new model.

My government plans to fully implement Patient Medical Homes across the province, with the goal to have 30 operational by the end of 2024. This will provide Islanders with access to collaborative, team-based care in communities large and small, rural and urban, right across the province. We will be the first in Canada to implement this model of care province-wide which will make our beautiful province one of the most enticing places for health care practitioners to work.

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This new model of care will provide my government with the opportunity to assign Islanders who are currently without access to care to a Patient Medical Home where they will have access to a team of health care providers.

In order to implement this model, my government will be making record investments in expanding our health human resources team by hiring more nurses, more LPNs, more social workers, and more allied health professionals. In addition, my government will also continue to make investments in technology to make accessing care more efficient including virtual care platforms and expanding the use of the electronic health records system.

While we rebuild our primary care system, we also recognize that other areas of the health care system need change. Additional programs and services to reduce pressures in our Emergency Departments will also be implemented including reducing off-load delays for ambulances, adding care providers and patient advocates to support patients in waiting rooms, and integrating Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners into our care teams. To help recruit future Emergency Department Physicians to our province, we will launch an Emergency Residency program to provide recent medical graduates looking to specialize in Emergency medicine an opportunity to complete their residency in our province. In addition to these advancements, we will also increase resources to our ground ambulance system and our Medical First Responder units across the province to help those in emergency situations quicker.

Central to our entire healthcare system is our health care workforce. Without them – our system can't operate - no matter how efficient and modern it becomes. But, like all jurisdictions around the world, we are experiencing a shortage of healthcare professionals.

First, my government is partnering with UPEI to build a Faculty of Medicine in Prince Edward Island. The construction of the physical space where future physicians will be trained is underway, and my government will be focused on working collaboratively with the health system to build capacity and space throughout the province to ready the system to train medical students and residents throughout the province. These investments and capacity building will take place at all hospitals throughout the province so communities large and small, rural and urban are all afforded the benefit of having medical students training right here in our province.

Next, my government will implement a suite of incentives for individuals who choose to train here on PEI in healthcare related programs such as RCW, LPNs, RNs, and Paramedicine. These programs will include providing free tuition in exchange for a return-in-service agreement. In addition, my government will create earn-and-learn pathways for those looking to advance their skills and

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training and introduce health bursaries for students who pursue healthcare training off Island. And, while training more healthcare professionals is a priority, my government will also simultaneously look at reducing barriers for recognizing credentials from individuals who train abroad and want to work in Prince Edward Island. This will include launching an Associate Physician license and introducing legislation to set specific criteria to recognize licenses from other jurisdictions quicker.

My government will also work to reduce barriers to accessing care. This will include making virtual care through platforms like Maple free for Islanders, expanding access to affordable prescription medication, and creating a portable health benefits program for Islanders who do not have access to private health coverage through their employer. We will also continue to work with physicians to minimize administrative burdens, allowing more time for patient care.

Last, but certainly not least, my government will continue to make upstream investments in Islanders to prevent illness, injury, and chronic disease. These investments will include encouraging active living, making it more affordable for children and youth to participate in sports and recreation, and building resiliency and psychological well-being.

These new initiatives that my government is undertaking are in addition to those investments already underway in the health system to renew and re-tool our health care system to meet the needs of Islanders today and into the future.

Our Homes.

Housing availability and attainability continues to be a challenge in our province. We have seen the highest rate of population growth among provinces right here in Prince Edward Island for six consecutive years. For decades, investments in critical infrastructure like housing have been chronically underfunded. We cannot continue on this path.

Housing is a continuum that includes temporary shelter space, transitional housing, structured housing, rental units, co-operatives, and single households. To ease the pressure on the housing market in this province, my government must make investments in all areas of housing.

To ensure cooperation from all departments, my government has created a Special Cabinet Committee on Housing. This committee will initially focus on finding ways to immediately increase housing starts over the next 24 months to exceed previous record highs. The goal is to restore our vacancy rate to a balanced three percent. This will include public investments and incentives for private developers. My government will also introduce a rent-to-own program

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and a program to assist with closing costs for first-time homeowners in purchasing their own homes.

To incentivize private developers, my government will provide additional funding through the Housing Challenge Fund for financing quick-start housing projects across the province. My government will also work with the PEI Federation of Municipalities to launch an Infrastructure Fund to work with communities outside the capital area to develop construction-ready lots for purchase and use for modular builds.

My government will also continue with its record investment in building, obtaining, and repairing publicly-owned housing across the province to ensure Islanders who call these units home are comfortable and live in an adequate space. And, my government will clear the housing registry by 2025.

Our Future Generations.

Our future generation of Islanders depend on this chamber to make decisions that create a climate for them to live a successful and fulfilling life. Much of that is focused on creating opportunities to learn, develop and grow.

Our childcare system in Prince Edward Island is the envy of the country. We have a quality system delivered by caring individuals who provide care for children during the early years of their life.

My government plans to grow and enhance this system by investing in the centres where care is provided, expanding the system to accommodate the growth of our population, and making it more accessible by expediting the subsidization of the system to \$10 per day for all children before the end of this calendar year. The benefits of these investments may not be fully realized for years and decades to come, but this is an investment that I think we can all agree on and is a positive step forward for our province.

My government will also continue to make record investments in our public education system. Starting with adding additional front-line staff to both our English and French systems. We will also make the necessary investments across the province to renew our school infrastructure through a 25 million dollar School Infrastructure Revitalization Fund in addition to planning for new builds or expansions in communities across the province that are experiencing unprecedented growth in student population.

For post-secondary students, my government will continue to make investments in programs such as the George Coles Bursary to help make their studies more affordable and expand the criteria to capture more students, especially those training in high demand programs.

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Our Land.

As an Island province, we are very connected to our land and have a deep appreciation and respect for it. Whether it's about developing, planning, agriculture, or ownership - how we use our land is an important topic that Islanders want to discuss and be a part of.

My government will create a much-needed land-use plan for our province that will guide decisions for years to come on how we use our land and for what purpose. The creation of this plan will be led by the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities using experts in land use to guide discussions and decisions to ensure we get this foundational plan right the first time.

The land use plan will help support our agriculture sector, primarily through ensuring agriculture land stays in agriculture production. In addition, to ensure the long-term viability in farming in our province, my government will continue to support our farmers by implementing and supporting sustainable practices around soil health, access to water, and adaptation to climate change.

My government will continue to stand up for our world-class potato industry, whether it be in Ottawa on Parliament Hill, or in the Halls of Congress, to ensure that PEI potatoes, in particular our seed potatoes right now, can be traded fairly and compete on domestic and global markets, based on the best available science and not based on politics.

Our Economy.

The past four years have been unsettling times economically, but by all accounts, our province has been able to continue to have economic growth under the most trying circumstances. My government will continue to make the necessary investments, reforms, and policy decisions to continue to foster economic resiliency in our province, not only for our primary industries such as farming, fishing, and tourism, but also for emerging sectors such as bio science and clean technology.

My government also recognizes the important contribution our non-profit and community sector play in our province. They provide important programs and services to Islanders at a grassroot level. My government will continue to provide multi-year funding agreements for the non-profit organizations that offer services on behalf of government to ensure these organizations will focus their time and energy on the clients they serve.

It's no secret, despite record high employment levels, our province is experiencing a workforce shortage in many sectors. While we need to find

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opportunities to grow our workforce, we must also find ways to retain our existing workforce.

To do that, my government will implement a number of tax measures to allow workers to keep more of their hard-earned money. These measures will include: increasing the basic personal exemption amount to \$15,000 over the next four years, increasing the Seniors Tax credit, rolling back property taxes to 2020 assessment rates, introducing a volunteer tax credit, increasing the fitness and activity tax credit, and reforming the income tax system to be more fair.

To grow our workforce, my government has created the Department of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population to foster collaboration between immigration, training future workers, and finding new ways to advance training opportunities within our province. My government, through this new department, will launch new pathways for training for critical sectors such as the trades by reducing training time and creating industry-led mentorship opportunities. My government will also introduce a Workplace Adaptation Fund to assist employers to make workplaces more accessible for Islanders with physical or intellectual disabilities.

Our Environment.

Prince Edward Island has always been an environmental leader; and while successive governments have made progress for our province – we also must recognize that environmental leadership isn't the job of one person or one government. It comes down to collective leadership from individuals, corporations, organizations, and governments at all levels.

In 2022, my government launched the strategy for our province to be the first Net Zero province in Canada. We will continue to make the necessary investments to transition to a cleaner economy and a cleaner environment. We also recognize that taking immediate actions in certain areas such as expanding transit delivery, incentivizing the transition to electric vehicles will allow us to accelerate our transition and ensure we meet our target of Net Zero by 2040.

First, my government will continue to help Islanders in making the transition to heat pumps for heating their homes. The free heat pump program has already installed 5,000 free heat pumps to date. My government is committed to expanding this program, and other programs in the suite of programming that assists Islanders in reducing carbon emissions

My government will also make critical investments in energy production on-Island. We will continue to invest in solar and wind energy, while exploring new opportunities for biomass production as well. In addition to on-Island

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generation, we must also explore storage capacity to store forms of clean energy for consumption after it's produced. We will also work with industry leaders across the country and around the globe to create a Living lab Pilot Project on Prince Edward Island where research, innovation, and infrastructure can come together to create a net zero community.

While we make these investments and innovations, my government also recognizes that climate change is real and is happening before our very eyes daily. We do not need to look back any further than this past Fall and the devastating impacts of Hurricane Fiona. Coastal erosion is happening quicker than anyone ever anticipated. For that reason, my government is launching a 25-year Coastal Management strategy to protect our shores and mitigate against further erosion.

My government was the first province in Canada to launch a Climate Adaptation Plan. Since launching, our federal counterparts have also released their national Climate Adaptation Plan which aligns with the initiatives and tactics required provincially to adapt to the realities of climate change. My government will continue to work with all levels of government to expedite the necessary efforts to ensure as a province we build resiliency against the impacts of climate change now and into the future.

Our Communities.

Our communities are the social fabric that make up our provincial quilt. And like a quilt, each community – or patch – is unique. But no matter if the community is large or small, rural or urban, each community contributes to our province in a unique and important way.

It is the role of my government to support these communities; they all have unique challenges and opportunities and contribute to the social wellbeing of our province while providing Islanders with a place to call home.

In order for our communities to be sustainable long-term, my government will negotiate a fair and equitable funding formula with municipalities to ensure they can continue to provide the necessary utilities and services to their residents. My government will also work with communities across the province to help facilitate opportunities for shared service delivery, regardless of their size, without losing their autonomy and local decision making.

To expedite development in communities across the province, my government has created a new Department, the Department of Housing, Land and Communities to streamline the process of building permits and land development with communities. For far too long there have been challenges around building permits to expedite development and increase the housing

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inventory in our province. With this new Department, the Minister and his team will work vigorously to remove unnecessary red tape to spur development and expedite how we process building permits.

One thing that is common no matter where you live in our province, or our country, is the desire to feel safe in your community. Prince Edward Island for years has had some of the lowest crime rates in our country, that does not mean we do not have our challenges. My government will invest in ensuring that law enforcement is fair and equitable across the province. My government will also implement services such as a domestic violence courts, community legal clinic, and other therapeutic court options to provide the necessary programs and services to Islanders who are experiencing hardship or interacting with the law to ensure they have adequate access to justice in our province.

As a society, we often only think of safety when it comes to our physical environment. However, our society is changing – and rapidly in many respects. Our children and youth socialize and interact in many different formats and using a variety of technology in today’s world. To ensure their safety, my government will start the creation of our province’s first Cyber-bullying Prevention Strategy. This strategy will engage individuals, organizations, law enforcement, children, youth, and parents to create a strategy to improve education of internet safety, prevent cyber bullying, and adequately deal with online harassment no matter what form it takes.

In 2016, the government of the day implemented the Municipal Government Act. This was a product of many, many years of consultation and a complex piece of legislation that reformed how our municipalities operate. While my government has made changes to the Act over the last number of years, we recognize there is still more to do.

With weather events such as Hurricane Dorian and Hurricane Fiona becoming more prevalent for our province, my government will make the necessary investments to build capacity provincially and locally to provide a timely and efficient response during an emergency. But, before that work begins, my government will conduct a thorough review and after-action report of the provincial and local response to Hurricane Fiona to ensure lessons learned and opportunities for improvement are implemented immediately.

To ensure their safety, my government will start the creation of our province’s first Cyber-bullying Prevention Strategy.

Our People.

My government is committed to making life better for all Islanders. As our population grows and diversifies, along with that comes challenges, but my government will continue to put Islanders at the heart of every decision we make to ensure that Prince Edward Island continues to be the best place to live, work and raise a family in our great country.

My government will introduce measures to help aging Islanders stay in their homes longer and live independently with the proper supports. These supports will include: investments in public home care, launching a Partners-in-Care Program, creating a primary caregiver grant, and implementing a Care-in-place Program connecting seniors with enhanced social and health supports.

My government will also introduce new measures to support some of our most vulnerable. This will include a new, centralized site with wrap-around services for those experiencing homelessness. We know that often individuals who are experiencing homelessness also have mental health and addictions challenges. The provision of one centralized site with a comprehensive suite of programs and services will ensure the best opportunity for these individuals to access help and take the necessary steps to living a more productive life in our province.

The culture of our province is something that many of our provincial brothers and sisters are always envious of. As you all know, over time, culture shifts and changes. With population growth, our province has become more diverse which has enriched our culture. Whether it is members of the Acadian community, the BIPOC community, indigenous community, or the 2SLGBTQIA+ community – everyone, no matter who they are, who they love, who they worship, what language they speak, or the color of their skin should always feel proud and comfortable to embrace who they are.

My government is committed to working with organizations, to embrace our historical cultural components to be remembered and reflected on, but also embracing new and emerging cultures to ensuring they feel welcome and safe. To do this, my government will focus on improving education and awareness to foster togetherness and connectivity for all Islanders no matter who they are, their background, their sexuality, their skin color, or their beliefs.

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Our Time.

As a province, we are coming through a period where we have faced an abnormal number of challenges and adversity in a short amount of time. But, like those who came before us, we will continue to persevere by working together.

We cannot live in fear of what we have overcome, instead we must be excited about what lies ahead.

This is our time. Not just for the individuals who are in this chamber – but for all Islanders. This is a time of renewal. This is a time of optimism. This is a time of prosperity.

Collectively, we must seize the moment – and move our province forward to make life better for all Islanders.

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Conclusion

My government has put forward an ambitious plan. A comprehensive plan. And, a timely plan.

It's a plan that doesn't just focus on the challenges, but also on the opportunities. It's a plan that is balanced and responsible.

To accomplish this plan, we cannot rely on one person or one party. It's the job of everyone in this chamber to ensure this plan moves forward and improves the lives of all Islanders. Over the coming days, weeks, months and years, this chamber will hear progress updates on these plans and many others that may not have been mentioned today, but are underway by my government.

These plans need input, they need your scrutiny, and in some cases, need this chamber's approval before they move forward. This is where you – the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island - must always remember to keep Islanders at the heart of every decision you make.

The first session of the 67th Assembly will soon be underway. In addition to the debate and passage of this Speech from the Throne, the Legislative Assembly will be asked to consider the 2023-2024 operating budget – which will begin to operationalize the agenda I have shared with you here today.

I wish all of you good luck and want to thank you for your service to our province.

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

Thank you. Merci. Wela'lin.