

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND SPEECH FROM THE THRONE



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

April 5th 2016

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SPEECH FROM
THE **THRONE**



Delivered by
The Honourable H. Frank Lewis
Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island

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

April 5, 2016
at 2:00 p.m.

Building for Sustained Prosperity

Introduction

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and all Prince Edward Islanders, welcome to the second session of the 65th General Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

As Her representative, I bring greetings on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen and extend my best wishes to all members of this Assembly in the work that is ahead of you in this session and this year.

In June of last year, I had the pleasure of being in this Chamber to commence the 65th General Assembly. Following the general election of May 4, 2015, My Government set out an ambitious, multi-year agenda around the themes of People, Prosperity and Engagement. The agenda committed to working together across the Island and across this House to build greater opportunity for all residents of our province.

Over the course of the past ten months, we have accomplished much in this spirit. Notably, My Government has:

- Provided enhanced supports for lower-income Islanders by increasing tax credits and further increasing supports for low-income housing and for the seniors safe at home program;
- Made medications more accessible by introducing the Generic Drug Program;
- Launched a major renewal of the education system to place more focus on front-line delivery and student achievement;
- Introduced new features of transparency and accountability to government, including the appointment of the first Ethics and Integrity Commissioner; and
- Worked with community and government partners to welcome 200 Syrian refugees to Prince Edward Island.

Following the general election of May 4, 2015, My Government set out an ambitious, multi-year agenda around the themes of People, Prosperity and Engagement.

In this session, My Government will continue to advance its agenda of building increased opportunities for engagement and prosperity for all parts and people of Prince Edward Island.

My Government is committed to growing our population and workforce so more Islanders and new Canadians can live, work and thrive in Prince Edward Island.

In our General Assembly, we have enacted 45 pieces of legislation over the course of the first ten months. My Government has introduced a White Paper on Democratic Renewal, with a special committee of this Assembly doing significant work in engaging Islanders on electoral reform. The Standing Committees have been rejuvenated. The discourse and debate in the House has been robust and collegial. The work of governance has been active and productive.

In this session, My Government will continue to advance its agenda of building increased opportunities for engagement and prosperity for all parts and people of Prince Edward Island. We have made significant strides in the first ten months, and we look forward to the work that lies ahead of us.

Our work in this session will be focused on growth and rejuvenation of our population and communities, on building prosperity for an increasing number of Islanders, and engaging Prince Edward Islanders as we continue to modernize government.

Focusing on our People

Prince Edward Island's people are our greatest asset and My Government's greatest focus. As the people of this province thrive, so do our communities and our Island as a whole.

We know one thing for sure: Prince Edward Island is the greatest place on earth to call home. My Government is committed to growing our population and workforce so more Islanders and new Canadians can live, work and thrive in Prince Edward Island.

Growing our Working Age Population

In recent years, the overall story of the development of Prince Edward Island's population has been positive: since 2007, our province has led the Atlantic Provinces in population growth, driven in particular by strong international immigration. The influx of new Canadians has contributed to our province in many ways – socially, culturally and economically. Our population is both larger and more diverse than it was a decade ago.

At the same time, we witness too many younger Islanders leaving the province for education and work opportunities, and many wishing to return. As a consequence, our working age population has been decreasing since 2013.

Sustainable economic growth relies upon the ability to increase our population, expand our skills, and grow our workforce. A talented and growing workforce is an asset and pillar of our continued success and prosperity. During the coming year, My Government will put in place a comprehensive long-term strategy to *repatriate, recruit and retain* a skilled and talented workforce in Prince Edward Island.

My Government will begin a dialogue with expatriate workers and entrepreneurs by hosting networking events in Ontario and Alberta and by launching new marketing initiatives to entice Islanders to return home. We will collaborate with the Federal Government, our post-secondary institutions, and the private sector to bring our young people back to PEI.

A new WorkPEI.ca website will be launched to match job seekers with local employers. This new site will include an interactive job board to connect Island businesses with potential employees and provide information on the latest programs and services available in Prince Edward Island.

We will continue to work with local communities and organizations to retain both skilled Islanders and skilled new immigrants. A new mobile App will be released to provide students and parents with access to scholarship, bursary and related information to encourage Islanders to study at home.

We will develop a Transition to Employment pilot project aimed at strengthening the relationship between our more than 900 international students at PEI post-secondary institutions and Prince Edward Island employers. This project will include the creation of the International Student Employer Liaison Office to support the transition of international students into the Island labour market when their studies are completed. And we will expand eligibility of the Graduate Mentorship Program to international student graduates to retain skilled employees while growing our population.

My Government's overall target is to grow the population of Prince Edward Island to 150,000, and to do so as early as the end of 2017 - Canada's 150th Anniversary.

During the coming year, My Government will put in place a comprehensive long-term strategy to repatriate, recruit and retain a skilled and talented workforce in Prince Edward Island.

In this year, we will support the creation of 1000 employment opportunities for students to obtain employment with non-for-profit, public and private sector employers.

My Government's focus on a renewed approach to education is fundamental to achieving long-term prosperity for current and future generations of Islanders.

Enhancing the Workforce

Growing the population requires an equal focus on job growth and retention in all sectors. Particular emphasis will be placed on building job experience opportunities for young Islanders and new entrants to the labour market, providing them with the ability to thrive on Prince Edward Island.

In this year, we will support the creation of 1000 employment opportunities for students to obtain employment with non-for-profit, public and private sector employers.

In our core sectors of farming, fishing, food processing, and tourism, My Government will advance opportunities for young Islanders and other labour market entrants through existing and new programs, including the successful Future Farmer and Future Fisher initiatives. 167 new farmers have started through Future Farmer, including 55 in the past year, with the majority new to farming. 155 Future Fishers have started in the lobster fishery. All of these individuals – and their families – are part of the ongoing rejuvenation of these industries.

In new and emerging sectors, we will work closely with employers and educators to provide active support for job placement and training, including with young, first-time or returning workers who are seeking to establish themselves on PEI.

Encouraging Education and Entrepreneurship

My Government's focus on a renewed approach to education is fundamental to achieving long-term prosperity for current and future generations of Islanders. In this year, My Government will fully enact the changes to our system of education announced in late 2015. We will advance more community engagement in education across our province, will privilege front-line services for our learners, and set in place a new focus on student success. In this Session, we will specifically consider a new *Education Act* that enables this rejuvenation.

Working with our educators, we will seek the best means to equip our young people to be prepared for the new opportunities afforded by the changing nature of traditional economic sectors and the growth of new sectors. To provide better insight for our young people into the growing world of technology, we will introduce a new pilot that provides instruction in coding to students in our schools.

We will build opportunities for our young people to develop their own businesses and social enterprises. A new Start-Up Zone, initially in Charlottetown, will be launched to provide budding entrepreneurs with a business model and a workspace and support to turn those ideas into new businesses. Modeled on the successful Digital Media Zone at Ryerson University in Toronto, the Zone will help accelerate the start-up culture on PEI, ignite growth, and provide opportunity for young Islanders to build their own enterprises on the Island.

We will work to provide the necessary environment for the provision of seed capital for start-up ventures so that entrepreneurs have the early support they require to succeed.

My Government will work with UPEI, Holland College and Collège Acadie to maximize opportunities for their graduates, including the growing contingent of students from international locations, to stay and work on PEI and contribute to economic and social development in our province. Our post-secondary institutions provide our island access to the world. We will develop multi-year funding arrangements with our post-secondary institutions to support longer-term strategies for higher education, skills and workforce development.

And we will continue to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable to Island students through improved access to student loans and the continued support of the George Coles Bursary.

Improving Health and Wellness

Healthcare services for Prince Edward Islanders represent the most significant area of government expenditure. In the past year, My Government has improved access to primary healthcare for our residents. More family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, paramedics and other health professionals are providing more service. More medications are available. More than 10,000 Islanders have signed up for the new Generic Drug Program. A new ambulance has been introduced in Eastern Kings.

The new Youth Recovery Centre and Strength Program in Summerside and the enhanced day program in Charlottetown are providing much needed mental health services for the youth of our province.

We will build opportunities for our young people to develop their own businesses and social enterprises.

We will develop multi-year funding arrangements with our post-secondary institutions to support longer-term strategies for higher education, skills and workforce development.

My Government is committed to continuing investments to front-line services that improve health access in Prince Edward Island.

My Government is committed to continuing investments to front-line services that improve health access in Prince Edward Island. We will increase the number of nurse practitioners, expand their scope of practice, and develop a rural recruitment program to enhance access in rural settings. Additional specialists in high need areas will be added.

To better support patients and visitors, we will address parking arrangements at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital by putting in place the best solution possible.

The Women's Reproductive Health Centre will be established this year, providing a range of reproductive health services to Island women.

New Community Health Advisory Councils will bring community engagement and perspectives more consistently to the development and delivery of healthcare services across the province.

Prince Edward Island's first Youth Mental Health Day Treatment Program will open this spring, supporting 50-60 Island youth each year. This initiative is part of the comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, which will be enacted this year.

With an aging population and an increasing number of seniors needing care, My Government has initiated a review of the continuum of home care, community care and long-term care services.

Supporting All Islanders

A cornerstone of effective public governance is how all parts of the population, including the most vulnerable, are being supported. In its first ten months, My Government has implemented new tax, health and housing supports for the lowest-income residents of our province. We are committed to continuing to find and implement the most effective means to support our vulnerable people and to provide them with as much opportunity as possible to succeed.

We will engage key stakeholders and the public in a conversation about a strategy to reduce poverty in Prince Edward Island. Working with our federal partner, we will consider the best means of income and program support for our Island population.

My Government will continue to provide support for the housing needs faced by Islanders. More support will be provided for rent supplements, home renovations and home supports for seniors.

In its first ten months, My Government has implemented new tax, health and housing supports for the lowest-income residents of our province.

As My Government works to ensure a more prosperous future for all Islanders, we are greatly encouraged by a number of measures in the recent federal Budget, and are committed to working in partnership with the Federal Government to help implement its measures in a timely way and to coordinate related Provincial activities and initiatives.

The new Canada Child Benefit will bring an estimated \$21 million to Island families with children starting later this year, and this will rise to \$25 million next fiscal year. To maximize the positive impact of this measure for families, we will review our income-tested programs for families, and modify them as required to ensure that the full Canada Child Benefit remains in the hands of families.

We know that the early childhood years are the foundation of a prosperous future. Prince Edward Island is recognized across Canada and internationally for its work to transform its early childhood system. Accordingly, we welcome the Federal Government's initiative to work collaboratively with provinces and territories to develop a National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, and we look forward to contributing our experience and findings to this work.

Access to post-secondary education is vital to the future of our youth and the development of a skilled, productive workforce. Earlier this year, My Government announced a number of measures to enhance access, including increases in the weekly amount of loan and future indexing to inflation; a doubling of the grace period before repayment begins, and a Student Loan Rehabilitation Program to help struggling graduates bring their loan back into good standing.

We welcome the additional federal measures to assist post-secondary learners. The increases to the Canada Student Grants will provide additional grants to Island students next year, allowing them to reduce their borrowing. As well, the increase in the Federal student loan repayment threshold from \$20,000 in income to \$25,000 will provide an annual benefit of about \$1M to Island students. Taken together with the Province's longer grace period, this will provide significant help to new graduates.

To maximize the positive impact of this measure for families, we will review our income-tested programs for families, and modify them as required to ensure that the full Canada Child Benefit remains in the hands of families.

Growing our Economy

One of My Government's most important tasks is to help grow the PEI economy so that more Islanders can prosper here, both economically and socially. The future strength of our province and our communities lies in how we adapt to the changing nature of the world economy, and to the part that Prince Edward Island does, and can, play in the global marketplace.

The challenge may be greater for us against slower economic growth nationally and internationally. However, Prince Edward Island and Prince Edward Islanders have always done well when faced with such challenges.

In recent years, Prince Edward Island has enjoyed increased measures of prosperity. Our economy is growing, and that growth is bringing greater promise for many Islanders.

In 2015, our province was an economic leader:

- For the second year in a row, we led Canada in export growth and were one of the leaders in manufacturing shipment growth;
- Prince Edward Island was the national leader in wage growth, and total labour income for our residents exceeded \$3.1 billion, an historic high;
- Regionally, we led the Maritimes in per capita GDP and population growth.

The economy of our province is on the right track, and My Government will continue to focus on positive overall economic growth, job creation and export development so that more families can prosper across the Island.

Over the next several weeks, our farmers will be in the fields and fishers on the water for another season. 2015 was an exceedingly successful year in our primary resource sectors, led by the great work of those who work in these industries. With their leadership, and with the right partnership by My Government, we should look forward to more growth, innovation and export development in these core parts of our provincial economy.

In recent years, Prince Edward Island has enjoyed increased measures of prosperity. Our economy is growing, and that growth is bringing greater promise for many Islanders.

2015 also featured strong performances by key economic sectors of aerospace and advanced manufacturing, bio-sciences and pharmaceuticals, and tourism. The diversity of the PEI economy remains a vital advantage as we seek to grow even more. My Government will continue to take a balanced approach of supporting our traditional sectors while developing possibilities in new and emerging areas of economic activity.

Our focus will continue to be on growing exports in all sectors. In 2015, exports from Prince Edward Island exceeded \$1.3B. Our trade balance has been improving since 2011. Through the Sales PEI effort, and working with leaders in the Island business community, we will increase our profile, build our reputation as “Canada’s Food Island” and reach into key markets, including the US, Europe and Asia.

We will continue to engage the business community on how to best advance growth and prosperity. For over a year, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has rated business confidence in PEI above the national average. Our initiatives to reduce red tape and our joint efforts with the governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to align regional regulations have been widely applauded.

Renewing Infrastructure

The ability to meet prosperity opportunities in and for Prince Edward Island is considerably improved through an active partnership with the Government of Canada on infrastructure investments. Recent federal budget commitments that support specific economic, social and green infrastructure provide an opportunity for significant renewal over the coming years.

My Government has engaged its Federal partner on the areas of priority for our province: transportation, energy, water and wastewater, and social housing. A focus will be on building the transportation infrastructure needed to get Island products to export markets, and on putting in place energy developments which will serve Islanders for generations.

We will emphasize the increased development of renewable energy, as well as work to mitigate against the effects of climate change. My Government will work with municipal governments to modernize water and wastewater facilities across PEI, and will develop more social housing infrastructure, including for seniors.

Through the Sales PEI effort, and working with leaders in the Island business community, we will increase our profile, build our reputation as “Canada’s Food Island” and reach into key markets, including the US, Europe and Asia.

We will work closely with our federal partner to ensure that opportunities for economic growth and better social inclusion on Prince Edward Island are fully pursued.

Ensuring a Sustainable Environment

Global and national discussions have pointed to the connection between environmental sustainability and economic growth. Leaders in all sectors have underlined the need to address these matters in tandem to ensure our economic forces are themselves sustainable.

On Prince Edward Island, we have long acknowledged this connection. As an Island, we are acutely aware that our land is finite and shrinking. As a small place, we are sensitive of the impacts the practices of neighbouring lands can have. As a province with long-standing priority on primary resources, we regularly witness the impact of climate on our well-being.

My government is committed to playing its part in the regional, national and global discussions that are now transpiring around climate change. We will be contributing directly and participating fully in the national working groups convened as a result of February's First Ministers Meeting, and Prince Edward Island will, with the Government of Canada, co-chair the Working Group on Adaptation and Climate Resilience.

At a provincial level, we will this year complete the report on the public engagement on the *Water Act* and will begin drafting the legislation. We will initiate the work on a renewed *Planning Act* and introduce later this fall a new *Municipal Government Act*.

A new Energy Strategy will be developed to identify the best way forward for Prince Edward Island and its residents to plan for a lower carbon regime. The new electrical cable project, to be undertaken in the fall of this year, will upgrade the province's capacity to connect to new import and export possibilities for energy use.

More emphasis will be placed on mitigation strategies, including consumer conservation and innovations that better harness renewable capacity and potential.

My government is committed to playing its part in the regional, national and global discussions that are now transpiring around climate change.

Spending Public Funds Carefully

While focused on immediate growth of the provincial economy and our population, and the job creation that accompanies it, My Government will place further attention on how investments of public dollars are focused for longer-term social and economic prosperity on Prince Edward Island.

Like many jurisdictions across Canada, Prince Edward Island is getting older. Our demographics affect all public services, from increasing demands on our healthcare system to putting new requirements on our early learning and education approach. In all circumstances, it is incumbent on us to both address immediate needs and plan for the horizon.

Currently, healthcare and education comprise over half of all government expenditures. While meeting important needs in these areas, it is critical to ensure government expenditures do not far outstrip our means of paying for these public services. As part of addressing our fiscal challenges, My Government will review future benefit arrangements in the public service, including service gratuity. We will follow through on our commitment to bring forward proposals to reduce transitional allowances for MLAs.

As expenditures have increased, the relative revenue derived from our Federal partner has declined over the past five years. We will work with the Federal Government to ensure that supports are in place for Island families and communities, and that we have an effective collaboration that spurs economic growth in our region.

My Government will work with all partners, and notably the public service, to find a better balance in the application of public funds for short- and long-term requirements. Our Budget Speech will identify the priorities for investment and how we can sustain needed public services, including for the most vulnerable of our population.

My Government will place further attention on how investments of public dollars are focused for longer-term social and economic prosperity on Prince Edward Island.

Modernizing Governance

My Government is committed to modernizing governance on PEI, including provisions that increase accountability and transparency in government operations. In the first ten months, this has included:

- Appointing the first Ethics and Integrity Commissioner;
- Publicly posting, for the first time, Ministerial mandate letters;
- Establishing new requirements for cabinet ministers to publicly release detailed copies of travel and hospitality expenses;
- Extending conflict-of-interest requirements and post-employment requirements to deputy ministers and senior political advisors, similar to ministers; and
- Adopting a whistleblower policy.

We will continue this modernizing trend in this new Session. Specifically, we will introduce in the Fall of 2016 a new *Lobbyist Registration Act* that will require the registration of anyone who transacts or develops business with government.

We will introduce new legislation around campaign financing to meet best practices.

We will re-introduce a strengthened *Financial Administration Act* that commits to provisions that disclose write-offs and cancellations of loans to the province.

Working across government, we will implement a policy of Open Government and a practice of Open Data.

We will re-introduce a strengthened Financial Administration Act that commits to provisions that disclose write-offs and cancellations of loans to the province.

Engaging Islanders on Important Matters

My Government has placed a clear emphasis on engaging Islanders on important matters. Notably,

- The public engagement on the *Water Act* involved 60 public consultation sessions and over 430 recommendations from Islanders.
- The Special Legislative Committee established to engage Islanders on Democratic Renewal had 17 community consultations and hearings and 600 total participants over a course of 9 months. We look forward to the tabling of the Committee's report in this session and the consideration of the question to be posed in the plebiscite.
- *Engage PEI*, established to invite Islanders to serve on public agencies, boards and commissions, saw 245 people come forward and 38 be appointed to 14 bodies.

This year, we will continue to engage Islanders in constructive discussions on important matters:

- Two new Community Health Advisory Councils will be established to gather local perspective on the delivery of health services to residents;
- Public and sector engagement will be initiated this spring to develop a new 10-year Cultural Strategy;
- Work will start on a new multi-year plan to look at how we can collectively reduce poverty in our province;
- A new Youth Advisory Council will be established to help focus policy and programs in a manner that best serves the interests of our young people in PEI;
- Public will be engaged on the development of our province's new energy strategy;
- A complete review of policing services will be undertaken with input from elected officials, the policing community, stakeholders and Islanders.

A new Youth Advisory Council will be established to help focus policy and programs in a manner that best serves the interests of our young people in PEI.

We are committed to putting in place stable and predictable funding arrangements for municipalities that recognize the level of services they provide to their residents.

Building Strong Communities

In the past year, My Government has launched a series of initiatives aimed to build strong communities in our province. We have encouraged local governments to work more closely together to provide better and more consistent public services to all residents of Prince Edward Island.

We will continue this path in the year ahead, including providing funding support for the study and consideration of municipal growth by local leaders. We are committed to putting in place stable and predictable funding arrangements for municipalities that recognize the level of services they provide to their residents.

My Government will introduce a new *Municipal Government Act* in the fall. The Act will give broader authority to organized municipalities, establish minimum standards and services to be provided to residents, and provide all Islanders with a measure of transparency in the organization of local government.

We will complete the review of policing services in Prince Edward Island, with input from elected officials, the policing community, stakeholders and Islanders.

As we undertake a number of initiatives to strengthen Island communities, we will pay particular attention to the interests of rural communities. My Government will, this year, renew the Rural Economic Development Secretariat, with a focus on business development, entrepreneurship and workforce.

Renewing Relationships with Aboriginal Islanders

My Government honours the long and rich history of Aboriginal people on Prince Edward Island and recognizes their role in building and shaping today's Island society.

For the Mi'kmaq this journey began deep in the past. The Mi'kmaq and their ancestors have been following a successful pathway to the future on Prince Edward Island for over five hundred generations. Today, they continue to make significant contributions to Island society, culture, heritage, identity, and the economy, a fact that we recognize and appreciate.

We share with the Mi'kmaq of Prince Edward Island a commitment to building a sustainable and prosperous future. It is together that we journey down this pathway and during our tenure My Government will continue working together with Aboriginal leaders to explore new opportunities to support the well-being and prosperity of the Mi'kmaq and broader Aboriginal community on Prince Edward Island.

We share with the Mi'kmaq of Prince Edward Island a commitment to building a sustainable and prosperous future.

Conclusion

We have achieved much in a short time since the launching of this 65th General Assembly, and we have much more work left ahead of us on behalf of all Islanders. By working toward greater prosperity for all residents of this province, we will ensure stronger families and communities, stronger services for everyone, and greater opportunities for our young people. By establishing more modern government, we will ensure more people are involved in decision shaping that affects them directly, and ultimately better public policy and public services.

During this session, Members of this Assembly will be asked to consider a number of Government bills, including the new *Education Act* and the updated *Financial Administration Act*. Other bills include:

- Amendments to *The Municipalities Act, Planning Act and Lands Protection Act*;
- Amendments to *The Elections Act* and *The Plebiscites Act*;
- *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*;
- *Private Schools Act*;
- *Common Business Identifier Act*;
- *Employment Standards Act*;
- Amendments to *Securities Act*;
- Amendments to *Coroner's Act*.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.