

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND SPEECH FROM THE THRONE



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

November 14th 2017

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SPEECH FROM
THE **THRONE**



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

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

November 14, 2017
at 2:00 p.m.

People, Prosperity, Progress

Working Together for All Islanders

Introduction

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and all Prince Edward Islanders, welcome to the Third 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.

I would like to thank all members of this Assembly, and indeed all Islanders, for the warm welcome that has greeted me since being installed as Lieutenant-Governor three weeks ago in my hometown of Tignish. I am honoured in this role to work on behalf of all Islanders. To serve in this way is a privilege, and I look forward to continuing to learn, connect and share with all Islanders in the coming months and years.

All members of this Assembly know very well the privilege of service. In every case, you have pledged to serve the best interests of the people of Prince Edward Island, in your districts and throughout the province. While some of our perspectives may be different, our objective should be the same: to achieve the best for the people, families and communities of Prince Edward Island. I encourage you to work together for the best outcomes for our province.

We all know that Prince Edward Island is a special place. Every year, we welcome hundreds of thousands of people from all parts of the world as visitors to our province. We are happy to show off our mighty Island, share our favourite places and extend our well-known hospitality. We have reason to be proud of this province, our people and our communities. We can see the progress being made in all parts of Prince Edward Island to build strong communities, welcoming and supportive neighbourhoods, vibrant businesses and creative culture.

As we take stock of our current prosperity and promise, we acknowledge the determined and sensitive leadership of those who have come before us.

Prince Edward Island's First Nations, the Mi'kmaq, have been here for millennia. They have been the stewards of our land and resources, and continue to encourage us to be responsible in the use of our air, waters and land, and responsive leaders to the needs and hopes of our people.

Our province has seen progress through combining new approaches with our best traditions. We learn from each other.

Getting things done requires energy, commitment and collaboration.

Those who arrived as early settlers to this Province did so with the expectation of embracing a future for themselves and their families. They built community and enterprise, developed responsible government, began trading relationships with partners across continents, and grew schools, hospitals and churches. I hope you will allow me to acknowledge in particular my own Acadian forebearers who worked so diligently to build culture and community across the generations.

Through the 20th century, Prince Edward Island grew in population, economy and diversity. Education and work opportunities were provided in increasing numbers, and government enhanced public services and public infrastructure. In this century, we have continued to welcome new Islanders from across Canada and around the globe. We have shown the same welcome to new residents as we do to visitors, and our Island community is being enriched by new perspectives and diverse cultures.

Our province has seen progress by combining new approaches with our best traditions. We learn from each other. We recognize and celebrate our achievements. We tackle our challenges together. And when we succeed, we share and celebrate that success with our neighbours and friends.

Progress on our Agenda

Getting things done requires energy, commitment and collaboration.

Since 2015, by working together with Islanders and in this Assembly, My Government has achieved much in building on the strengths of Prince Edward Island and striving to do better for our residents. Our focus has been on the people and prosperity of our province, while modernizing government to support this work. In two and a half years, we have made real progress on our agenda.

- ❑ Our economy is stronger than it ever has been, and growing faster than the region and the country. Islanders are better off and our businesses and communities are growing and diversifying into new areas of activity.
- ❑ More Islanders are working, with more full-time jobs available, including more than 2,500 new full-time jobs in the last year.

- ❑ Total labour income in the province is experiencing the second-fastest growth in the country.
- ❑ Our population is growing, reaching 152,000 in 2017, the fastest growth in Canada. For the first time since 1968, our median age has declined. We are well on track to meet the goal of a population of 160,000 Islanders by 2022.
- ❑ My Government has balanced its books, with the first balanced budget in a decade, allowing for more investments in health, education, children and families in communities throughout PEI.
- ❑ The Generic Drug Program has provided 18,000 Islanders with greater access to needed medication at a reasonable cost to them.
- ❑ We have provided direct tax relief to 85,000 Islanders and 3,000 fewer Islanders are now not paying any provincial income tax.
- ❑ Together with our Federal partner, we have made historic investments in infrastructure, including the PEI-New Brunswick Submarine Cable Project, the single largest infrastructure project since the Confederation Bridge.
- ❑ We have taken ambitious steps toward greater government transparency and accountability, including the establishment of the position of Ethics and Integrity Commissioner, the development of whistleblower policy and draft legislation, extended conflict of interest requirements, and more public disclosures.
- ❑ Since 2015, this Assembly has enacted 113 bills across all aspects of life and governance.

Prince Edward Island is on a solid path of fiscal strength and enhanced economic prosperity, allowing for smart investments in important services for our residents. The reinvigoration of the economic landscape, coupled with My Government's understanding of its core responsibilities, is offering our province new scope to succeed on the regional, national and international stages.

Prince Edward Island is on a solid path of fiscal strength and enhanced economic prosperity, allowing for smart investments in important services for our residents.

The story of our population is a positive one. We have grown and diversified. Still, there is more to do.

A Growing and Engaged Population

The story of our population is a positive one. We have grown and diversified. Still, there is more to do. The development of our Province's population is a matter of continuous evolution and initiative. This is a primary commitment of My Government. We are creating an environment of opportunity and enterprise, resulting in reduced out-migration and the attraction of new Islanders. We embrace the talents and contributions of seniors. And we must develop more opportunities and capacity for our workforce. The goal must always be to ensure that our people have the best possible opportunities to live, work, and thrive in Prince Edward Island.

Earlier this year, My Government put in place a comprehensive plan to strengthen the population and workforce in Prince Edward Island through repatriation, recruitment and retention. The plan confirms our commitment to building a resilient, diverse, and sustainable population. And it reflects our collective responsibility to grow the local economy and expand the range of opportunities for all Islanders.

Over the last six months, we have worked closely with our federal and municipal partners, local business owners, and community organizations to deliver on a number of key action items in our plan.

My Government recently announced new intermediaries for the provincial immigration program through an open and transparent process. These intermediaries, who compete around the world for new immigrants to our province, have been tasked with attracting more residents who want to live, work, and do business in all parts of Prince Edward Island.

We are collaborating with municipalities to develop "welcome to the community" initiatives to further strengthen our culture of inclusiveness. The objective is to help newcomers feel at home in Prince Edward Island. In addition, we have committed to working with community partners to create a more regional presence when it comes to the delivery of settlement services throughout our province.

In the coming year, My Government will take further steps to maximize retention rates for new immigrants. We will escalate our efforts to encourage more young Islanders to pursue opportunities here and to return home. By working with industry, we have found collaborative

employment opportunities across strategic sectors, including expansion of the “Team Seafood” concept to other sectors, such as construction and transportation.

We will continue to strengthen efforts to attract and retain post-secondary graduates, including international students, by developing more opportunities locally. Last year, for example, we created the International Student Employer Liaison Office to help support the transition of international students into the local labour market when their studies are completed. We must build on this momentum.

And we will continue to expand the WorkPEI website to match job-seekers with employers looking for new employees. The website will include a comprehensive and evergreen database of expatriate workers and entrepreneurs. This new database will be used to recruit and entice Islanders to return home.

My Government has set ambitious targets for near and long-term population growth. These targets send a clear signal to our neighbours and partners that we are committed to the future. And success, as is so often the case, will depend upon our collective commitment to developing the most valuable resource in Prince Edward Island: our people.

An Increasingly Diversified Economy

Population growth and economic growth go hand in hand. It is the hard work and ingenuity of people in communities across Prince Edward Island that is driving our economic success.

Our traditional sectors – agriculture, fisheries, and tourism – continue to perform well. In 2016, farm receipts reached almost a half a billion dollars, and the landed value for fisheries over a quarter of a billion dollars. Tourism generated over \$400 million in spending throughout the province. This diverse economic activity is leading to employment and investment in all parts of Prince Edward Island.

My Government will continue to place emphasis on these core economic sectors. With our Federal partner, we will make investments in innovation in agriculture and fisheries that support the development of new products and processes to reach markets across Canada and

My Government has set ambitious targets for near and long-term population growth. These targets send a clear signal to our neighbours and partners that we are committed to the future.

It is the hard work and ingenuity of people in communities across Prince Edward Island that is driving our economic success.

Our tourism economy is experiencing the fourth consecutive year of record growth, and all parts of our province are seeing benefits from the increased visitation.

We will continue to work with our small businesses and recognize their entrepreneurial spirit, risk-taking and contributions to our communities. We will invest strategically in new business development.

around the world. For example, the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, developed in partnership with the Federal government, will stimulate economic growth, encourage innovation and expand domestic and international market access for our seafood products.

We will develop a Food Cluster that combines the best research and practice on food safety and security to underline our place as Canada's Food Island. As part of this, Government will work together with organizations to support Islanders' ability to benefit from our local food system.

Our tourism economy is experiencing the fourth consecutive year of record growth, and all parts of our province are seeing benefits from the increased visitation. Working with industry, we will continue to invest in marketing PEI as a destination of choice for visitors from around the world. We will extend our efforts to build more visitation during shoulder seasons, and support tourism growth in all regions of the province. Working with federal partners, we will extend our marketing efforts to key international locations, including the US, UK, Europe and Asia.

While traditional sectors are experiencing solid and sustained growth, newer sectors such as biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, marine technology and information technology are all seeing increased investment and growth. My Government will work with leaders in each of these sectors to ensure we are taking full advantage of the investment, exports, employment and growth opportunities. Our newly-created Regional Economic Advisory Councils, with leadership from business and community, will identify strategic growth actions in each region of the province that will be treated as priorities by My Government.

We will continue to work with our small businesses and recognize their entrepreneurial spirit, risk-taking and contributions to our communities. We will invest strategically in new business development. The Start-Up Zone has provided early support to 30 companies since its inception, leading to direct investment growth and employment opportunities. Forty-five companies have participated in LaunchPad, with an estimated 175 jobs created. My government will work with the business community to identify opportunities for enhanced collaboration or procurement of local solutions and services.

Prince Edward Island is doing well economically through export sales, and we will continue to support accelerated growth in these sectors. While growing exports in goods, we will take an approach that better integrates the export of services, including education and culture. We will

launch this year a five-year plan for culture and creative industries that includes the establishment of a Creative Industry Market Development Program that will work with artists, enterprises and industry development groups to help grow creative business and better access new markets.

The increasing diversity of sectors in our economy is leading to more retail sales, increased building and construction, greater export sales, a high degree of business confidence, and more full-time employment. As underlined by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, Prince Edward Island is “on a tear” economically.

Strong Communities and Modern Infrastructure

My Government has consistently focused on building strong communities throughout our province, providing needed infrastructure investment and governance supports to allow for strong local leadership to drive development and smart growth. The introduction of the *Municipal Governance Act* has provided a renewed context for strengthened local governance.

The establishment of the new Rural and Regional Development portfolio has encouraged greater collaboration with community and business leaders, as well as existing development organizations, to ensure coordinated approaches to regional growth opportunities.

Our collective development of infrastructure across PEI has been unparalleled, with more than \$300 million in provincial-federal investment. This has included the new transmission cables, ensuring stable and secure energy supply for Island homes and businesses. And a \$90 million investment in water and wastewater projects in 19 Island communities is increasing capacity and ensuring safer supply. Improvements to roads and bridges provide safer passage and new growth opportunities for business and communities.

In this sitting, My Government will introduce a Capital Plan that commits to extensive infrastructure renewal and development throughout Prince Edward Island, taking advantage of our strong fiscal situation while not affecting our relative debt positioning.

We will launch this year a 5-year plan for culture and creative industries that includes the establishment of a Creative Industry Market Development Program that will work with artists, enterprises and industry development groups to help grow creative business and better access new markets.

My Government will introduce a Capital Plan that commits to extensive infrastructure renewal and development throughout Prince Edward Island, taking advantage of our strong fiscal situation while not affecting our relative debt positioning.

We will escalate our plan to extend and enhance broadband services across the province. Increasingly, businesses and homes in all parts of Prince Edward Island need access to higher speed and higher capacity services. Whether required to connect to customers around the world or to connect to educational platforms in another city, the reality is that there are more devices needing more internet capacity everywhere. My Government will work with federal and business partners to provide a means to achieve the goal of higher speed internet services for our province. We have been working closely with our Internet Service Providers and are encouraged by the increased access to higher capacity services. We will build on this relationship and assist our private enterprise by building a high-speed fibre network – or backbone – from tip-to-tip of our province. Service providers will be able to connect to this network, making it easier for them to deliver higher-speed internet to communities and homes throughout our province.

As our population grows, the state of housing supply has been challenging in some parts of our province. Access to appropriate and affordable housing can be limited. My Government will be developing a PEI Housing Strategy over the next year. As a first step, we will establish a Housing Supply Task Force to look at the best approaches in all parts of the province underway or planned to develop housing supply, and creative initiatives that can be encouraged to further provide accessible housing.

Clean Energy and a Sustainable Environment

Prince Edward Island is a pioneer in clean energy. Ahead of our time, we made significant early investments in wind energy that now make us the second strongest wind regime in the world after Denmark. Added to that, our energy from waste initiatives, biomass installations and waste management program place us ahead of all but Quebec when it come to low per capita carbon emissions.

My Government's Energy Strategy focuses on moving us to greater electrification to reduce our carbon emissions, enhanced efficiency as a way to save on energy expenses per household, and an expanded role for more PEI-based solutions, particularly through additional renewable energy.

*Prince Edward Island
is a pioneer in clean
energy.*

In early 2018, we will come forward with a Carbon Mitigation Strategy and a Carbon Adaptation Plan. The PEI approach to climate change and carbon pricing will respect the economic context and realities of our province while being consistent with our pledge to further lower our per capita emissions. We are working with our federal and regional government partners to strike the approach, including the path and timing of implementation, that will achieve optimal results for the economy and environment of our province and region.

Our approach will include infrastructure development and direct supports for Islanders to encourage a shift to electricity consumption and enhanced efficiencies, especially in our homes and buildings, as we directly tackle the impacts of climate change.

In this sitting, My Government will table the *Water Act*, the first time this legislation will be proposed for our province. The Act comes forward following extensive public consultations.

A Healthy Population

By any measure of investment or interaction, there is no greater public service in our province than healthcare. In Budget 2017, My Government made the largest spending increase in a decade to health and wellness, and today we are investing \$640 million for the provision of health services for our residents.

The service to Islanders by health providers are significant: in the last year, 94,000 visits were made to emergency departments, with 71,000 visits made to Primary Care Health Centres; 45,000 Islanders submitted to Pharmacare; and 11,500 children participated in the Public Health Dental Program. The fact is we rely heavily on our health care providers.

My Government has placed an emphasis on wellness. The Universal Influenza Program makes it possible for all people, including vulnerable populations, to have access to free flu shots. The Opioid Action Plan, released last month, provides better education and coordination for populations who may be vulnerable. The Women's Wellness Program is fully functioning at the community level. Later this year, a Children's Wellbeing Report will be released and will help identify key issues and possible responses concerning the health and wellness of our young people.

By any measure of investment or interaction, there is no greater public service in our province than healthcare.

My Government has initiated and will move forward on the design of a modern campus of mental health services in Charlottetown. With the mental health landscape changing, and with more complex needs associated, this development will provide improved inpatient services for all Islanders.

A new seniors strategy is being developed by My Government to focus attention on the key issues facing our senior population, including health, wellness and housing. We are committed to supporting seniors to remain independent in their homes, including through expanded homecare. Our current Seniors Home Repair and Seniors Safe at Home programs have provided funding for home renovation needs. Additionally, we will develop a program to empower seniors to enjoy a better quality of life in their own homes through the funding of practical needed services. Through this program, services such as light housekeeping or snow removal will be provided to seniors, making it easier for them to remain in their own homes and communities.

Increasing access to mental health services is a key pillar of our commitment to improving healthcare for Islanders. Last year, my Government released a 10-year mental health and addictions strategy, providing a roadmap to enhance and integrate mental health services in all parts of the province. Substantial aspects of the plan have been put in place, including programs for youth, families and women, as well as the provision of mental health walk-in clinics.

Notably, My Government has initiated and will move forward on the design of a modern campus of mental health services in Charlottetown. With the mental health landscape changing, and with more complex needs associated, this development will provide improved inpatient services for all Islanders. And the Canadian Mental Health Association is leading the development of a suicide prevention strategy.

In September of this year, Student Well-being teams began working in the Montague and Westisle families of schools, advising, consulting and providing direct service to children and youth who are struggling with mental, social and physical health issues. Already, over eighty children and youth have benefited from direct one-on-one services provided by members of the Student Well-being teams. Over the next two years, these teams will be in place in all families of schools across the province.

My Government will continue the necessary work to prepare for the legalization of recreational cannabis. With principles of good public health and strong public safety, we will review public input and engage representatives from municipalities, policing, health, education and business as we develop legislation to be tabled in the Spring sitting. Central to our approach will be getting proceeds out of the hands of criminals, providing good public education and striving for a consistent approach within our region.

Investing in our Future

In recent years, Prince Edward Island has become a Canadian leader in early childhood education. Through the creation of publicly funded centres and spaces, our youngest learners are getting a headstart in life. In partnership with the federal government, an additional \$10.5 million was confirmed this year to improve the quality of our early learning and childcare system, and expand access for under-served populations and children who are more vulnerable. These investments will lead to an even greater potential of success for children who participate.

My Government recognizes that attention is consistently required to best serve our most vulnerable children, and is actively developing better paths to address their needs. A Children's Lawyer is at work. She is representing the voice of children whose families are experiencing separation or divorce, or where the child's best interests are challenged due to parental conflict. In other measures to better serve vulnerable children and families, we have implemented the PEI Bridge, provided supervised access and exchange sites, put in place a parenting coordinator, and made improvements to maintenance enforcement programs. Following legislative changes, Island families are now able to benefit from Alternative Dispute Resolution. In the coming months, we will move forward with the additional recommendations of the review of the *Child Protection Act*.

Our current investments in education are at an historic high. More teachers have been added and additional classroom supports for education assistants and English as an additional language have been made available. My Government will continue to find the best mechanisms to invest in front-line instructional staff who will encourage our students to excel in their learning. We will review our overall approach to student assessments to stay current with best practices and reflective of the overall needs of our learners.

We will strengthen the collaborative approach with the District Advisory Councils and further engage the Principals' Council on ways to strengthen the learning environment and potential for students in every part of Prince Edward Island. With the Learning Partner's Advisory Council, My Government will build on the commitment to work in partnership with community leaders and organizations to support innovative approaches to education in our province. We will equally continue to engage with Acadian and francophone communities in the provision of quality French-language education.

Prince Edward Island has become a Canadian leader in early childhood education.

Our current investments in education are at an historic high.

My Government will introduce a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy this year.

Addressing Poverty

Prince Edward Island has benefited in many ways from our rapidly developing economy and growing population. At the same time, My Government is mindful that, in times of rapid change, those who are most vulnerable can fall behind. We are committed to a future together in which all Islanders will have opportunities to participate to their fullest capacity.

Our work towards this goal begins with building a better understanding of the challenges before us, and the root causes of those challenges. Recently released census data paint a picture of the struggles facing many Islanders. While the proportion of Islanders in very low income is better than in most other provinces, we need to strive to provide more possibilities for Island households and families to exit from positions of lower income.

My Government will introduce a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy this year. With the engagement of a Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, drawn from communities across the province, we will look at all aspects of poverty, including housing, food, education, employment and health, with a report in 2018.

Open Government and Active Democracy

Islanders are justifiably proud of a historic tradition of democratic participation.

Islanders are justifiably proud of a historic tradition of democratic participation. In fact, voter turnout on the Island is the envy of jurisdictions across Canada. As a small jurisdiction, our elected officials take pride in being accessible to the people they represent, and take seriously their representation in this Assembly.

As many Islanders are aware, Government has committed to a clear referendum question on democratic renewal. To ensure a high level of participation and engagement in this important initiative, the referendum will be held in conjunction with the next Provincial Election.

On a topic of such significance, Government takes its role very seriously – and must do everything within the scope of its responsibility to assure clarity, fairness and the inclusion of all voices during this process.

To that end, Government will request the creation of a map that clearly lays out the geographic boundaries inherent in the mixed member proportional model considered in the 2016 plebiscite. Furthermore, legislation will be developed to be debated in 2018 to permit all members to offer their input and advice. This legislation will include a clear referendum question – as well as the rules required for a fair and transparent process.

By taking the responsible perspective of ensuring a fully informed and vibrant process, Government is confident of a well-considered referendum outcome based on high voter participation.

We will continue to take an ambitious path on open and transparent government. The ministerial mandate letters, made public for the first time ever by My Government, have been updated and will be posted this week. In this sitting, we will re-introduce Public Interest Disclosure legislation. And the *Lobbyist Registration Act* will also be introduced.

My Government will put forward a discussion document on Campaign Finance Reform for consideration of all members and all sides of this Assembly. We will launch during this sitting a process to review and update the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

These improvements will add to our record of initiatives that show our willingness to conduct the business of government differently than in the past.

Correspondingly, we will in the coming months launch a powerful open data platform to enhance public access to government data.

We will launch during this sitting a process to review and update the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Conclusion

We have made significant progress in the 30 months since the commencement of this 65th General Assembly, particularly on the issues that matter most to Islanders. Our prosperity as a province has never been greater, and the resulting confidence held by citizens and businesses leads the region. It is in this context of abundance and optimism that we have an even greater opportunity to advance – to build on our strengths and better tackle our challenges. To build strong communities and regional economies supported by more modern infrastructure and public services. To address our most difficult social issues by working together. To provide a greater sense of possibility for our young people. To both support and draw strength from our senior population. To welcome and embrace the diverse perspectives and cultures which comprise our mighty Island.

As a Government, we have been hard at work during these 30 months. In collaboration with many partners, we have achieved much. Now, we commit to work hard to achieve even more on behalf of everyone in this province.

During this session, Members of this Assembly will be asked to consider a number of Government bills:

- ❑ *Water Act*
- ❑ *Act to Amend the Early Learning and Child Care Act*
- ❑ *Act to Amend the Child Protection Act*
- ❑ *Planning Statutes Act*
- ❑ *Act to Amend the PEI Housing Corporation Act*
- ❑ *Act to Amend the Real Property Tax Act*
- ❑ *Business Corporations Act*
- ❑ *Act to Amend the Health Services Act*
- ❑ *Lobbyist Registration Act*
- ❑ *Public Interest Disclosure Act*

My Government has placed significant emphasis on modernizing the legislative foundations for our province. The *Water Act* is the first piece of such legislation ever proposed. The *Business Corporations Act* seeks to update legislation that has been unchanged since 1888. Previously, this Assembly has made significant changes to a 75-year old *Municipal Governance Act* unchanged and an *Education Act* unchanged since the 1970s.

I join all Islanders in wishing you well in your legislative and policy work in this Assembly. May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations

My Government has placed significant emphasis on modernizing the legislative foundations for our province.

