



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
SPEECH FROM
THE **THRONE**



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

June 3rd 2015

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SPEECH FROM
THE **THRONE**



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

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

June 3, 2015
at 2:00 p.m.

Working Together

Introduction

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

One month ago, and in large numbers, Islanders participated in the most basic right and responsibility we have in our democracy. Citizens expressed their commitment to the democratic process by the simple act of voting. Today we in Government and in this Legislative Assembly begin to respond to that passion with the complex act of governing on behalf of all Islanders.

The people of Prince Edward Island placed their trust in My Government to lead our province into a new era of progress and prosperity. In keeping with our pledge, we are committed to working together – across the Island and across this House - to fulfill our promises and build a better future.

We have many challenges facing our Island society and economy, but we also hold much promise and opportunity in our grasp - to build on our collective strength of purpose and capability and build economic and social opportunities for many generations of Islanders to come.

It is imperative that we seek the best from ourselves in this House, as the residents of Prince Edward Island deserve only our best in commitment, engagement and leadership. Islanders have elected us to serve them, and we must pledge to return that privilege with active, sensitive and responsible governance.

A Clear Plan Built on our History

This first Speech from the Throne sets out My Government's vision and plan to meet our challenges and seize our opportunities as a province, and to move forward with purpose and drive towards our shared goals as Islanders.

The people of Prince Edward Island placed their trust in My Government to lead our province into a new era of progress and prosperity.

From us, as elected representatives, Islanders expect serious and civil debate of their concerns. We owe them the very best of our energy, our commitment, and our professionalism over the next four years.

In so doing, My Government values will draw on the diverse knowledge and talents of this Legislative Assembly. It is my great pleasure to welcome the ten newly elected Members to this House, and to welcome back those who have already served. As well, I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to those former Members who served, for their dedication and hard work on behalf of Islanders.

From us, as elected representatives, Islanders expect serious and civil debate of their concerns. We owe them the very best of our energy, our commitment, and our professionalism over the next four years.

In this time of change and renewal, it is fitting that we will spend most or all of this 65th Assembly in this historic building while Province House undergoes restoration.

The naming of this building for George Coles, our first Premier, recognizes his outstanding contributions to our province on many fronts – economic prosperity and social progress, universal free education, and control over our land base. Perhaps most important of all, throughout the 1840s, he led the struggle to bring responsible government to Prince Edward Island, attained in 1851.

That triumph of democracy is at the core of what we have achieved since then as a society. And democracy was very much in evidence during this past spring. I commend and thank every candidate from all parties for their committed campaigns, which engaged Islanders in important choices and meaningful discussions. Together, we achieved Prince Edward Island's highest voter turnout in three decades, including a strong participation of young Islanders in a way that runs counter to the trends in all other jurisdictions in Canada.

This outstanding level of engagement represents a positive beginning to our commitment to work together as we go forward. We will seek to actively engage Islanders, communities, volunteer and social organizations, and businesses and employers as we pursue a plan to build support and opportunities for all of Prince Edward Island.

As we do so, we have a strong resource of talent, abilities and capacity on which to draw. I continue to be encouraged by the wide-ranging achievements of Islanders in every walk of life. Among others, we can celebrate 2015 Juno winner Catherine MacLellan and 2014 Juno winner Rose Cousins, 2014 Olympic Gold Medalist Heather Moyse, 2014 Outstanding Young Farmers Andrew and Heidi Lawless, 2015 junior squash champions Connor and Emma Jinks, 2015 Acadian Games Bid Committee Chair Emile Gallant and 2014 Manning Innovation Award recipient Glenn Cox.

It is achievements such as these that are putting Prince Edward Island on the map and will continue to do so. Our unique combination of strengths enables us to be leaders in a changing world. Together, we will work to build a prosperous economy and to sustain our caring and inclusive society, on a foundation of environmental stewardship of our land and water, and with an emphasis of building opportunities for future as well as current generations of Islanders.

George Coles, and others, brought responsible government to Prince Edward Island and, in 1873, we entered Confederation as a province. Today, almost a century and a half later, we continue to have that gift of jurisdiction. It gives us a vital advantage – and we will use it to the fullest to improve the quality of life and prospects for the future of all parts of our province.

A New Era of Engagement

The path to our goals begins with governing well, including engaging Islanders in the decisions that shape their future, increasing openness and transparency, holding government and especially leaders to high standards of ethical conduct and accountability, and managing our finances prudently and wisely.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Local Engagement

Our Legislative Assembly and the processes through which it is chosen are at the heart of our democratic system. During this mandate, My Government will initiate and support a thorough and comprehensive examination of ways in which to strengthen our electoral system, our representation, and the role and functioning of the Legislative Assembly. During this Session, we will table a White Paper on Democratic Renewal that will be referred to this Assembly and serve as a means to engage Islanders on the fundamentals of our democratic process.

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While we can take pride in the level of democratic participation here, we are committed to ensuring that our institutions, processes and representation continue to reflect the values and interests of Islanders. We will work to make sure that we are encouraging diverse voices in our democratic and governing process.

Our municipalities also play an important democratic role. They offer Islanders a voice in many matters that affect them day to day, and provide residents a way to shape their communities through planning processes and serving in office. We will work with local governments to start the process to develop a new *Municipal Government Act* aimed at increasing accountability, accessibility, transparency, responsiveness and efficiency.

As well, we will work to improve the stability and predictability of municipal funding. My Government will also strive to strengthen local governments by encouraging them to work more closely where appropriate, and to maintain, upgrade and renew needed infrastructure in partnership with all levels of government, including our federal partners.

A positive and respectful relationship with First Nations Peoples is of fundamental importance to My Government. Building on the agreements that have been put in place, we will work collaboratively with Prince Edward Island's First Nations to advance the interests of their communities and of Aboriginal Islanders.

There are no services that are more vital to all Islanders than healthcare and education. My Government will take action on several fronts to give Islanders and communities a greater voice in the governance of those systems. To better ensure local and regional input, advisory bodies will be developed for both the health and education systems. These bodies, organized in regional districts, will work in tandem with our departments to ensure that necessary front-line services are in place in the issues that matter most to Islanders.

We will address the future nature of governance. My Government will develop and put in place a new initiative around youth and engagement that invites and includes the perspectives of young residents of Prince Edward Island in our democratic and policy renewal processes.

In 2013, government signed into law the *French Language Services Act*. We remain committed to ensuring that Acadian and francophone Islanders are full participants in all aspects of our governing.

A More Open Policy Process

My Government firmly believes that “working together” applies not just to implementation but also to design. A diversity of ideas and perspectives is critically important to creating good and effective public policy. Democracy demands that the people affected by a decision have a voice in that decision. And common sense dictates that new directions are most likely to be supported and enabled by Islanders if they have a say early in the process.

During the coming year, My Government will engage Islanders on a number of important issues. In addition to the Commission on Electoral Boundaries and the Legislative Assembly’s work to enhance democracy, we will seek the guidance of Islanders with regard to a new *Water Act*, a Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the *Municipal Government Act*.

Technology creates new ways for Islanders to express their views and have a voice, and My Government will work to make the most of those opportunities. At the same time, we remain mindful that face-to-face communication remains a vitally important way to hear from Islanders.

Increasing Transparency

Public access to a broad range of high quality information is vital to engagement and to working together. Such access expresses trust and respect; it provides knowledge and information upon which to base good decisions and informed opinions; and, it saves both Islanders and public servants time and money.

My Government will work to make government information more transparent, including a review of our Freedom of Information legislation. We will implement a whistleblower policy with protections linked to the Commissioner of Ethics and Integrity. And we will work with the Speaker and Assembly to bring all parts of the Legislature under the authority and review of the Auditor General.

A greater range of provincial government information will routinely be made public. As one example, My Government has taken action to increase the level of detail required for Ministerial disclosure of travel and hospitality expenditures, and to extend these strengthened requirements to senior officials and political staff. The first posting to departmental websites of such expenses occurred on May 20. Islanders can look forward to seeing greater evidence of a commitment to Open Government.

We will implement a whistleblower policy with protections linked to the Commissioner of Ethics and Integrity.

My government looks forward to the active engagement of all Islanders, of all governments, of all peoples, sector and communities, as we address the issues that matter most.

Enhancing Ethics and Accountability

My Government has also taken strong action to enhance accountability and ethical conduct within government.

Conflict of interest disclosure requirements have been strengthened for Ministers, senior management and political staff. The post-employment restrictions previously applying only to elected officials have been extended to senior management and political staff.

The position of Ethics and Integrity Commissioner has been established, and a highly-esteemed former public servant has been appointed to the post. The Commissioner is playing an active role in the implementation of the new requirements, including orientation of newly appointed officials, as well as the development of a whistleblower protection policy.

Collaborative Government

The major challenges we face today cannot be solved by government alone. The issues are many and complex, and the solutions need to be found in the way we come together to tackle them. My government looks forward to the active engagement of all Islanders, of all governments, of all peoples, sectors and communities, as we address the issues that matter most.

Building PEI's Prosperity

The people of Prince Edward Island are well equipped to meet the demands of the world economy. We have the skills, the creativity and the entrepreneurial drive to accelerate the economic growth our province needs. We have successful sectors where products and services are reaching markets around the world. We have talent that is driving success in start-up, small, medium and larger business.

In the past week, the Conference Board of Canada pointed to the fact that Prince Edward Island's economy is on the right path of growth and fiscal balance, a trend counter to lower growth expectations for the overall Canadian economy. We have continued the important work of ensuring that our expenditures are focused on the priority areas for Islanders while seeking ways of growing revenues. My Government is committed to continuing this work and getting to full budget balance in 2016-2017.

Against the many worldwide economic challenges and opportunities, we cannot rest. The future success of our private and public enterprise lies in growing our local, domestic and international markets. Robust action now will build our prosperity for many future generations.

Living Within our Means

Our first financial responsibility lies at home, and within government itself. Living within our means is critical to achieving our fiscal and social goals. Steady progress has been made toward restoring fiscal balance, through a combined approach of growing revenues while containing expenditures.

Almost 40 per cent of the resources necessary to provide the essential services to Prince Edward Islanders come from the federal government. My Government looks forward to enhancing our collaboration with our federal partners, and to a positive, healthy relationship between our levels of government as we seek to serve the needs and interests of Islanders.

Even with rigorous expenditure control, forecasts make it clear that attaining fiscal balance this year will require a range and scope of additional measures that would cause undue hardship for Islanders and disruption to government services and programs.

To date, much of our revenue growth has been attained through changes in taxes and increases in fees. Looking ahead, My Government will focus on growing the economy and increasing trade and exports to generate wealth and revenues. As well, we will vigorously engage the federal government and partner with other provinces to achieve the best possible results in our intergovernmental relations, and specifically to seek new fiscal arrangements, as well as a new level of participation in national programs and new federal investments in Prince Edward Island.

On the expenditure side, My Government's Budget Speech will set out a number of measures to reduce spending where possible, and to maximize the impact and value for money on all expenditures. In so doing, we remain committed to fairness, and to protecting the most vulnerable in our population. We also are committed to placing priority on the services that are closest to the residents of our province.

Our first financial responsibility lies at home, and within government itself. Living within our means is critical to achieving our fiscal and social goals.

Prince Edward Island is blessed to have a talented, committed, and engaged public service which actively seeks out the best solutions for all Islanders.

We will work with businesses, tourism and cultural groups, post-secondary institutions, and capital sources to ensure that Prince Edward Island has a vibrant economic development strategy.

Our professional and skilled public service will continue to play a key role in finding the best ways to contain expenditures, and to manage resources prudently. Prince Edward Island is blessed to have a talented, committed and engaged public service which actively seeks out the best solutions for all Islanders.

We are committed to leading by example. My Government has already decreased the number of Cabinet portfolios and members. We have reduced the cumulative operating budgets of the Premier's, Executive Council and Ministers' Offices. We will further review MLA compensation and benefits, and specifically will bring forward proposals to reduce transitional allowances for MLAs, and will increase accountability and oversight of expense claims.

Growing our Means

While we must begin our work of fiscal prudence at home, the future prosperity of our province lies in growing our economy. Prince Edward Island's GDP has grown from \$4.62 Billion in 2007 to \$5.79 Billion in 2013. We have historic strength in our food-based sector, where receipts and landings reached all-time record highs in 2013 and 2014. Our biosciences, information and communications technology, and aerospace sectors together comprise 145 companies employing over 4,500 people. Tourism visitation in 2014 reached the highest level in a decade.

My Government will place a priority on collaborating with economic sectors and partners to grow the Island economy. We will work with businesses, tourism and cultural groups, post-secondary institutions, and capital sources to ensure that Prince Edward Island has a vibrant economic development strategy. This will include support and encouragement for all enterprises from early start-ups to globally successful companies, and will provide the necessary infrastructure and market connectivity to increase our success in key sectors.

Central to our collective success will be increasing our trade activity. In 2014, Prince Edward Island's total merchandise exports outside Canada surpassed \$1 Billion for the first time. Exports to emerging markets have tripled as a proportion of our total export envelope. Exports to China alone have grown 225 per cent. We have a strong base, but we need to continue to increase both our total exports and reduce the gap in our balance of trade.

Through Sales Force PEI, we will initiate an aggressive prospecting and sales strategy that builds on many of our province's strengths in sectors and workforce to advance our sales into international markets. Working with business leaders and expatriate Islanders, we will coalesce and increase current activity to bring new companies to Prince Edward Island, to promote Island products and to build markets for our products and services worldwide.

My Government will in particular support small business by reducing red tape, advancing programs aimed at market expansion, and by working to build greater accessible pools of capital for business growth.

Of equal importance in our economic growth is the need to diversify and rejuvenate our population. Sustainable economic prosperity is contingent on our ability to grow our labour force and increase the number of skilled workers. Prince Edward Island stands out in the region with the recent growth in our population base. This has been a significant part of our positive economic strength and future prospects.

Prince Edward Island, like all parts of Canada, has an aging population with many people leaving or getting ready to leave the workforce. At the same time, we can create work and career opportunities for young people so that they do not have to leave the province.

My Government will undertake a coordinated strategy to build our workforce and enhance the talents of current workers. We will develop a comprehensive long-term repatriation strategy to attract talented Islanders back home. We will, in concert with our immigrant investor programs and our post-secondary institutions, recruit young and established skilled workers. And we will work with local communities and organizations to retain both skilled Islanders and skilled new immigrants. By actively working to create and sustain opportunities, we will establish Prince Edward Island as one of the best places in Canada to live and work and thrive.

The Environment to Succeed

One of the distinctive characteristics we enjoy on Prince Edward Island is our historic awareness of and desire to protect our natural environment. People love to visit and live on Prince Edward Island because of the natural beauty, pristine water, and access to parks, greenspace and watersheds. These are advantages we can never take for granted.

Through Sales Force PEI, we will initiate an aggressive prospecting and sales strategy that builds on many of our province's strengths in sectors and people to advance our sales into international markets.

The two most important physical resources we have on Prince Edward Island are our land and our water. Islanders have rightly expressed concern about coastal erosion and soil quality, as well as the quality and availability of our drinking water.

My Government believes in active collaboration with UPEI, Holland College and Collège Acadie, and the role they each play in Island life. We are committed to enhancing that collaboration as we tackle the many challenges and opportunities we face.

The two most important physical resources we have on Prince Edward Island are our land and our water. Islanders have rightly expressed concern about coastal erosion and soil quality, as well as the quality and availability of our drinking water.

My Government's new Department of Communities, Land and Environment will, as a priority, address the central issues of land and water use. In addition to near-term engagement on the *Water Act*, the Department will, through active engagement with local communities, develop a renewed *Planning Act* and continue with the process of revising the *Lands Protection Act*.

We will partner with local landowners and the farming community, many of who have taken positive steps to improve our environment, to enforce buffer zones around our waterways and pursue additional measures to reduce soil erosion. And we will continue to support the effective work of watershed organizations who are playing a critical role in enhancing and protecting our waterways.

The Tools to Succeed

Education is at the heart of preparing our young people for success in economic, social and community life. Our institutions of advanced learning and training play a critical role in ensuring Islanders are prepared early, and that they have opportunities for continuing and lifelong learning.

My Government believes in active collaboration with UPEI, Holland College and Collège Acadie, and the role they each play in Island life. We are committed to enhancing that collaboration as we tackle the many challenges and opportunities we face.

In the name of George Coles, government bursaries have supported more than 5,200 Island students in their educational endeavours. These young people represent our future leaders, and we need to continue to invest to build their present potential and our collective future. Our post-secondary institutions provide our island with access to the world. Sixteen per cent of UPEI's student body is international, with students from 68 different countries, while students from around the world are also choosing Holland College to pursue their training. We will work with UPEI, Holland College and local businesses and organizations to encourage students from around the world, across Canada and from the Island to find work opportunities and be part of our economic and community growth.

My Government will support collaboration between Collège Acadie and Holland College to extend and expand the delivery of post-secondary programs in French. This unique partnership between our province's two publicly-funded colleges will ensure educational pathways for our French-speaking high school graduates, which will contribute to the preservation and enrichment of the Acadian and francophone community, and help to ensure a broader provision of French language services by public and private sector employers.

To ensure that our post-secondary institutions can continue their vital role into the future, their fiscal sustainability must be assured, and pensions play a major role in this. My Government has made progress toward securing its pensions for the future, and we will continue to strongly encourage our publicly funded institutions to place priority and follow a similar course.

The People to Succeed

In 2014, Prince Edward Island's population was more than 146,000 people, the highest in history. Our province stands out in the Atlantic region as the only jurisdiction with a growing population. Much of this can be attributed to international migration, where Prince Edward Island in 2014 had the fifth highest immigration rate in the country. New Canadians are coming to our Island and are making a difference, contributing to the social and economic fabric of our province and opening our eyes to new ideas and possibilities around the world.

In this mandate, My Government will strengthen the administration of our programs to attract immigrant entrepreneurs. We will expand programs like Community Connections to help immigrants link to investment and career opportunities. And we will work with local groups to develop a strategy for Diverse and Inclusive Communities so that we all enjoy the value of multicultural and diverse relationships.

My Government will launch a comprehensive strategy to repatriate Islanders living away. Working with business, education and community leaders, we will identify present and future labour market possibilities for those wanting to stay or return home.

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The Strength to Succeed

Prince Edward Island's historic strength in the resource sectors has allowed us to have sustained success in agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and food processing. Spurred on by leadership from small business owners, the province's reputation in the food sector is known well beyond our borders. Fully 10 per cent of our GDP is generated through primary agriculture and food processing, and 40 per cent of our international exports are from food and food processing, including seafood.

My Government will build on this strength with a strategic emphasis on the Island's Food Sector. Underlining the premium quality of our land- and sea-based products, and drawing from our talent in food research, we will actively advance a brand for Prince Edward Island as 'Canada's Food Island.' We will work with producers and processors to provide support for product development and innovation, marketing and branding, and access to financing. We will draw from these measures to highlight the best of what we do here to audiences across Canada and around the world.

We will pay particular attention to involving the young people of Prince Edward Island as the future in this sector, working with primary industries, advanced manufacturing and the culinary community, including the Culinary Institute at Holland College, to provide opportunities for the next generations to become more actively involved in our food industry.

My Government will take the same approach to get young people connected to and involved in Prince Edward Island's other growth sectors, including bioscience, information technology, aerospace and marine technology.

In building prosperity, we acknowledge that economic growth is a means, not an end in itself. Growing our sector strength, building our export markets and managing government finances, when successful, will result in jobs and opportunities for Islanders and their families. The result can be better security for individuals, communities and our society, allowing a better sustained quality of life for all parts of Prince Edward Island. My Government is committed to working to build economic strength that will lead to better social inclusion.

Encouraging our People and our Communities

Building our communities lies at the heart of what My Government aspires to do. It is through community that Islanders thrive - communities drawn together through geography, demography and affinity. Prince Edward Island itself represents an exemplary community, and we will build the necessary supports to ensure that Islanders are provided with timely healthcare, supports for wellness and robust educational opportunities. And, we will work to establish a stronger continuum of family and human services.

In all cases, our investment and development emphasis will be on front-line services, meeting Islanders where the needs are most apparent.

A Healthy Island

The delivery of timely and quality healthcare to Islanders has never been more important or more challenging. We continue to experience some of the highest rates of chronic disease in our country. With an aging population, complex health issues and human resource challenges, and increasingly expensive medical care delivery, the challenges are steep.

Improving Access to Medications

My government is committed to increasing the access that Islanders have to medications and treatment as part of delivery of health care services.

In April of 2015, we invested an additional \$1.5 million to provide Islanders with better access to high-cost medications. We believe that increasing the use of generic drugs represents a key potential for continuing to improve access and preventative health.

During this Legislative session, we will initiate the requirements for the Prince Edward Island Generic Drug Plan, which will cap the cost of generic drugs at a price lower than twenty dollars for uninsured Islanders under the age of 65. This represents a significant savings for all Islanders and for our health care system.

By more effectively utilizing generic drugs in our provincial drug formulary, we are freeing up resources that can be directed at new, high-cost medications. For example, savings made it possible to add the \$1.5 million in new drugs in April, and to become the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide its residents a new life-saving drug treatment for hepatitis.

Prince Edward Island itself represents an exemplary community, and we will build the necessary supports to ensure that Islanders are provided with timely healthcare, supports for wellness and robust educational opportunities.

Much more can be done in this area. As a region, it is estimated that governments and private drug plans in Atlantic Canada could save as much as \$400 million per year through collaboration and joint purchasing. My Government will engage our Atlantic regional neighbours to pursue such a plan. Our goal is to dramatically expand savings in our existing drug budget by 2016 to free up resources to support the sustainability of our health care system.

Enhancing Front-Line Healthcare

Islanders expect and need access to skilled health care workers. My Government is committed to improving access for all Islanders, and finding ways to use our current resources to better meet their needs. We will continue to recruit and retain doctors and nurses to provide high quality care to Islanders. Between 2006 and 2015, to keep pace with demands, the number of physicians practicing on Prince Edward Island increased by 25 per cent and, between 2007 and 2014, over 200 nurse positions were added. We have invested and need to make sure that our health human resources keep pace with our ongoing and changing needs.

To this end, we will find ways to update existing resources to meet current needs. We will increase the number of nurse practitioners, who are playing a vital delivery role in our system now. We will enhance the role of paramedics and community pharmacists who can play a more active role in our health care system, including the implementation of a rural paramedicine pilot program in Eastern Kings. This \$1 million investment will allow paramedics to visit seniors and others in their homes to assist with non-urgent medical issues. Working with our new district health advisory groups, we will make sure that needed health supports are provided in all regions of our province. And, we will address services for youth with special needs to get them the supports they need faster at a crucial time in their development.

My Government will also make investments in health infrastructure. The new Linear Accelerator at the PEI Cancer Treatment Centre will reduce wait times for radiation therapy. In addition to the launch of a new dedicated youth mental health unit in Charlottetown that will complement the Youth Recovery Centre in Summerside, my Government will engage Islanders in the development of a Mental Health Strategy that seeks to meet the needs of those struggling with mental illness and addictions.

We will continue to place emphasis on wellness, including amendments to be brought forward in this Legislative session to limit access to e-cigarettes and flavoured tobacco products.

We will enhance the role of paramedics and community pharmacists who can play a more active role in our health care system, including the implementation of a rural paramedicine pilot program in Eastern Kings.

A Caring Island

Every member of Island society deserves the opportunity for a fulfilling and rewarding life. However, many Islanders struggle day-to-day to make ends meet. It is the commitment of my Government to provide necessary supports for those struggling the most, and to ensure that Islanders are given every opportunity to succeed.

These supports start at home, and in our families. This spring, we will introduce the necessary amendments to the *Income Tax Act* which will assist over 12,000 lower income Islanders, more than 2,000 of whom will no longer pay personal income tax. We will provide assistance to help retain foster homes that now exist and to help recruit more foster families. We will address the question of food insecurity, where our levels are higher than the national average, including providing enhanced support to school breakfast and lunch programs.

More fundamentally, we will begin work on a new multi-year plan which will look at our family and human services and how we can collectively work to reduce poverty in our province.

An Educated Island

Since 2007, the education budget in our province has grown by over 35 per cent, consistent with a commitment to invest in our infrastructure and to improve our student-teacher ratio. We can be proud of the investment in our young people, and of the many committed educational professionals who are building a brighter future for Islanders and our communities.

The results have been better graduation rates and significantly improved results in assessments.

My Government will continue to emphasize our education system as the best means for developing our future. Equipping our young people in skill, understanding and empathy will ensure we have the talent and energy we need for economic and social prosperity. We will work with our new district advisory councils, community leaders, parents and educators to ensure that our services meet the front-line needs of our students.

We will look to build the best infrastructure to ensure our students are able to thrive in a globally-connected environment, including ensuring there is Wi-Fi in all schools by the end of 2016.

My Government will continue to emphasize our education system as the best means for developing our future. Equipping our young people in skill, understanding and empathy will ensure we have the talent and energy we need for economic and social prosperity.

An Empowered Island

Prince Edward Island is a special place. It is the people and the communities here that make it so. We should never take these realities for granted; indeed, we must do everything we can to continue to build and support strong communities on our Island.

My Government is committed to working with local governments to meet the ongoing needs of all Islanders. We will engage communities on a new *Municipal Government Act* that emphasizes accountability, responsiveness and efficiency. We will address the active development of rural Prince Edward Island, and consider how we can build sustained renewal in all parts of our province.

Community can and should also be built in other ways. My Government will place particular emphasis on coalescing our community of young people to build better engagement and opportunity for them to live and thrive on Prince Edward Island. Through creative and entrepreneurship spaces, we will provide an ability for them to start their own business and social enterprise, and to engage with and support each other as they do.

Conclusion

As we gather today, we need to collectively consider what we want to achieve in four years time. My Government's view is that we have many opportunities ahead of us, and much work to do to provide Islanders with every chance to succeed as individuals, as families, and as communities. Through renewed engagement, and with an emphasis on our greatest resource – our people – we have the potential to build a more prosperous future for our Island. We look forward to working together across the aisles of the Legislative Assembly and across the province to put Prince Edward Island on the map.

During this session, Members of the Legislative Assembly will be asked to consider a number of Government bills, including amendments to the *Income Tax Act* and to allow for the establishment of district advisory councils in health and education.

We look forward to working together across the aisles of the Legislative Assembly and across the province to put Prince Edward Island on the map.

Other bills will include the:

- *Electoral Boundaries Act*
- *Pharmacy Act*
- *Tobacco Sales and Access Act*
- *Smoke-Free Places Act*
- *Environment Tax Act*
- *Highway Traffic Act*
- *Renewable Energy Act*
- *Provincial Court Act*
- *Regulated Health Professions Act*
- *Animal Welfare Act*

As you deliberate, I would encourage you to show leadership on these issues and in the way you govern on behalf of all Islanders. Through their active participation in voting, the citizens of Prince Edward Island have underlined the importance of this Assembly and this Government. They rightly expect that the seriousness of attention and tone that emanates from your work will honour them.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

