



Speech from the Throne

Third Session of the 62nd General Assembly
of the Nova Scotia Legislature
October 13th, 2016

His Honour
Brigadier-General
the Honourable J.J. Grant, CMM, ONS, CD, (Ret'd)
Lieutenant Governor



Nova Scotia is built on the shoulders of all of those who have gone before us.

Those who have contributed to us, and this place, with their hard work and dedication to neighbour and community, and those who loved this province, and its people, as each of us does in this chamber today.

It seems only fitting then that before we look to our future, we reflect, remember, and honour some great Nova Scotians we have lost since our government's last Speech from the Throne. People we remember with fondness and gratitude.

We remember history-making women Flora MacDonald and Chief Justice Constance Glube.

Chief Justice Lorne Clarke and the Honourable Stewart McInnes, two Nova Scotians whose impact on Canadian law will be felt for years to come.

Dr. Ed Kinley and Dr. Oscar Shiu Yuet Wong, both respected physicians and recipients of the Order of Nova Scotia. And Dr. Jack Yazer, an immigrant who gave so much back to Cape Breton.

We remember community leaders Graham Downey, Walter Fitzgerald, and Dugger McNeil. Former Defence Minister Robert Coates, who represented the Amherst area for more than 30 years, MP for Southwest Nova, Harry Verran, and Senator Al Graham.

Neville Gilfoy – a veteran of the publishing industry and a true champion for Nova Scotia.

MLAs Donnie McInnes and Mike DeLory. And we remember those who walked these halls not so long ago – our friends Sid Prest and Allan Rowe.

To their families and neighbours, our sincere condolences and sympathy for your loss – for our loss as a province.

2016 Throne Speech

It is my great honour and privilege to welcome you to the Third Session of the 62nd General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature.

We have come together today in this historic house, the oldest legislature in the country, located on the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation, with whom we share a history and a common goal – to build a strong and great province.

We are resilient, creative, and hard working. We have the people, we have the place, and we are ready to learn from one another and prosper together. It begins with our children, it celebrates the wisdom of our seniors, and welcomes the diverse voices of all of our citizens.

This is why our government is among the first provinces to sign a joint agreement on Treaty Education for children – and adults – to learn about our shared history and responsibilities.

We recognize our African Nova Scotian Heritage – and are proud to support the need to find closure after systemic abuse at the Home for Colored Children.

We have initiated an inquiry and restorative process. And it is my government's hope this will help those who suffered, to heal.

We have also listened to the concerns of our Acadian community, and our Minister will soon announce a plan to better serve their needs to ensure their language and culture is recognized and celebrated.

Early next year, the first Culture Action Plan will be released and will reflect the input of hundreds of Nova Scotians, including key partners in the Acadian, Gaelic, and Mi'kmaq communities.

We are a diverse and proud people – in a province where politicians before us never shied away from making bold decisions.

And neither will this government.

This coming session, our government will put forward a progressive legislative agenda that will strengthen protection of pension benefits, increase economic development tools for Halifax Regional Municipality,

improve accessibility for those with disabilities, and enhance protections and access to child support payments.

Nova Scotia was the first province in Atlantic Canada to give women the right to vote. And today our government continues to stand beside women, in times of strength.

Just look around: we appointed the first female Deputy Premier, the first female Attorney General, and as a government we have made great strides in appointing more women to serve on boards across this province, and in senior roles in government.

This government supports women and their families in times of need.

We increased funding for transition houses and second stage housing to help support women and children in crisis.

Basic operational costs to these organizations have gone up, yet their budgets have remained the same.

So, we are spending \$11.5 million to support programs to help women at risk.

And, to better ensure privacy and understanding, this government will expand the Domestic Violence Court.

We have increased support, to \$6 million annually, to Family Resource Centres.

It is here where infants and children can get a better start in life and learn to thrive.

Children born into abuse or poverty are among our most vulnerable, and my government believes it is our duty to protect them.

We also believe all citizens deserve a chance to succeed and recognize that some need a helping hand to reach their potential.

This year, we are spending an additional \$3.6 million for the Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention program to ensure more young children with autism have access to specialized therapy.

We have also worked to eliminate the wait list for the Early Intervention Program, helping families and children from birth to school age who have a diagnosis or are showing signs of a developmental delay.

Our investments now ensure families get service within 30 days of registering.

We invested \$6.6 million to support parents in need of affordable child care.

We also increased the salaries of child-care workers, predominantly women, moving them to the national average and giving them the opportunity for professional development.

As a government, we have made it a priority to ensure that more Nova Scotians have access to affordable housing.

That's why our government cut wait lists by 10 per cent, and our goal is to do even better.

We have teamed up with the federal government to inject an additional \$70 million in affordable housing investments.

This government believes in helping those who need it most and offering support to those who simply need a helping hand.

We have made investments into the Services for Persons with Disabilities Program and, through legislation, we will make our province more accessible.

This will ensure easier access and provide a stronger sense of independence to our citizens who do not allow their disabilities to limit them.

Nova Scotians need to see themselves reflected in our public institutions, and that is why we are so proud as a government to have our Speaker's chair accessible, the first in our history.

As a government, it is our job to provide the space for all of our citizens to succeed.

Those born here, and our newcomers.

When first elected, we were given advice by the One Nova Scotia Commission, through the Ivany Report.

We were told if we want to improve our economy we must grow our population.

We took that advice, and we got to work.

In 2015 the province launched two new business immigration streams to attract international entrepreneurs and to retain international graduates of provincial universities and colleges.

The international graduate entrepreneur stream is the first of its kind in Canada.

It helps tap into the potential of our post-secondary institutions that welcome students from around the world.

We doubled our immigration capacity to 1350 per year – the only province in Atlantic Canada to fulfill its targets.

Ottawa recognized this province's hard work and agreed to increase the number of economic immigrants Nova Scotia can nominate per year, bumping up our nomination cap by 300.

Our immigration success would not be possible without the good citizens of this province opening their hearts and their homes to newcomers, many of whom have chosen to stay.

A recent report by Statistics Canada shows Nova Scotia's population at an all-time high.

In fact, more immigrants made Nova Scotia their home in the first six months of 2016 than in all of last year or in any of the past ten years.

Our population growth is part of this government's overall vision to grow the economy.

Our government is acutely aware of the importance of retaining our youth. We have advanced the Youth Employment Action Plan, which focuses on creating opportunities and jobs right here in Nova Scotia.

By developing innovative programs, we have established partnerships with businesses to create jobs for recent graduates. And we are working with industry and people in skilled trades to invest in job training.

In 2015, the government launched the Graduate to Opportunity program, a partnership with small business.

Small businesses hiring recent graduates will have government pay 25 per cent of their first year's salary. In the second year of employment, government will pay 12 and-a-half per cent of their salary.

The program helps recent graduates develop "on the job experience" like Nick Wagner, a recent graduate who was hired by Rosborough Boats in Lakeside, Nova Scotia. Nick is gaining valuable experience in the field of advanced vessel construction for a variety of professional marine customers.

Graduate to Opportunity is helping young Nova Scotians find jobs here at home. Close to 200 employers and more than 200 grads have participated.

Our government will soon announce expansions to this program to keep young talent here in Nova Scotia, where they belong.

This government understands that it is hard to find a job if you've never had one.

And so our START program assists employers willing to hire people who need work experience.

My government recently doubled funding support for apprenticeship to create more opportunities for young people by matching them with employers.

TestDrive, a Summer Youth Apprenticeship Program, introduces young people to career opportunities in the skilled trades.

Caleb Erskine took advantage of this program and got a head start on his apprenticeship at the same time he was earning high school credits in grade 12 at Musquodoboit Rural High School.

Through Nova Scotia Business Inc's payroll rebate program, the government provides additional incentives for companies in Nova Scotia who hire recent graduates.

The government is also helping those university students who need it most.

If a student finishes their university degree in four years, their provincial student debt is forgiven.

All of these programs are part of our government's overall strategy to train our youth, to keep them home to be near their families, and to support the economic growth of our province.

And it is working.

The Youth Employment Strategy helped more than 2000 young Nova Scotians last year alone.

And I am proud to say that since 2013 my government has hired more than 1500 younger workers into the civil service.

This would not be possible without the support of our public servants – a strong, focused, and dedicated group of Nova Scotians. My government is proud to stand beside them as we continue the journey to better our province.

And we will stand shoulder to shoulder with our business community. As a government, we are doing exactly what we are asking business to do when it comes to hiring younger workers who will stay and build a stronger Nova Scotia.

My government also recognizes buying a first home remains a challenge to staying in the province.

And so we want to assist first-time homebuyers.

In the new year, my government will explore ways to break down the barriers to home ownership by introducing a down payment assistance pilot program.

This government also wants to support those who never had the chance to graduate from high school.

Each year hundreds of Nova Scotia adults take the initiative to build a better future for themselves and their families by obtaining their high school equivalency.

Government will remove the testing fee for taking the General Education Diploma and engage in a review of the Adult Learning system.

We understand that growing the population is a necessary step on the path to this province's greater economic prosperity, but we also know that past approaches to economic development failed to produce sustained, meaningful, economic growth.

We decided to change the way we do business and take a new approach to economic development focusing on innovation, research, and capitalizing on our advantages.

We are surrounded by an ocean that has given us the gift of prosperity and wealth for generations – and now, with strategic investments, our seafood is shipped internationally.

Nova Scotia's focus on China has helped grow that market exponentially. Along with strong demand and prices in traditional markets, seafood businesses have increased their export sales to \$1.6 billion, last year alone.

That is a 33 per cent increase.

Our traditional seafood industry is booming, and we are making strategic investments to responsibly grow our aquaculture sector, which will spur economic growth in coastal communities and create jobs.

Our government has created a comprehensive new regulatory framework. Nova Scotia is now poised to unlock the potential of this industry and sustainably grow aquaculture to new levels.

My government also recognizes the importance of agricultural businesses to rural economic development.

Under this government's watch, our agriculture exports have grown by 21 per cent to \$385 million per year.

And we're going to do even better.

This year, the government launched a 12-million-dollar strategy to help grow the province's wine industry.

It means more grapes planted, more research and development, and ultimately more export growth.

This government has made strategic decisions to capitalize on what we have and how to sell it by getting out of the way and allowing businesses to lead.

Take tourism for example. People from around the world visit Nova Scotia for our natural beauty, our history and culture.

The government created Tourism Nova Scotia, a crown corporation led by private partners.

Business owners are now working directly with tourism operators around the province to create unique, compelling experiences for visitors.

Now they can dine on the floor of the Bay of Fundy at low tide, thanks to the Flying Apron.

Or stargaze near the Tobiatric with the help of tourism operator Trout Point.

And more than 1,000 people have stepped onto Lucien LeBlanc's lobster boat for a tour of the string of islands the LeBlancs have been fishing alongside for centuries.

These business-led efforts offer tourists more than a place to stay; now they can connect to our province's natural beauty and rich cultural experiences.

The tourism sector is growing, creating more business and more jobs here at home.

And, we are on track for one of the best tourism seasons in our province's history.

While we continue to value our traditional sectors, this government is also investing in technology and innovation.

We are in a unique position with a geographic location and connection to the sea.

And so it only makes sense as a government to take advantage of that geography.

The province and the federal government recently announced \$19.7 million in funding for COVE, a hub for ocean innovation.

COVE will provide start-up communities with access to some of the best researchers in the world, allowing private sector companies to take ideas to market.

Nova Scotia is rapidly becoming a world-class centre for ocean research.

Just recently the federal government teamed up with private sector partners from this province to announce a \$220 million Ocean Frontier Institute.

This is the workplace of the next generation, and this government wants to support our future entrepreneurs.

We are encouraged by the leadership of VOLTA – an incubator to support start-up companies, where one idea can grow and expand into a thriving business.

In three years, since our government has come to office, Volta has produced 40 companies.

Of those 40 companies, 82 per cent are still in business, raising \$32 million in equity financing with over 200 employees.

Every sector of our economy has to innovate to prosper.

This government supports innovation. And to prove that, we will establish an Innovation Procurement Process.

It will enable provincial departments to purchase goods and services from small and medium sized enterprises that need early stage customers to help their businesses grow.

This government believes in the power of creative thinking and will ensure that people with good ideas have the opportunity to set up and grow businesses here at home.

My government wants Nova Scotians to take advantage of the 10 universities and the 13-campus community college, by accessing the facilities, equipment, and research support to continue to innovate and compete on the world stage.

That is why this government will continue to support the Sandbox initiative – university and college based spaces that have experts and state-of-the-art equipment and technologies available to help students and members of the public test their ideas for commercial potential.

This government will invest in research that will have the greatest positive impact on our economy.

We will create Research Nova Scotia – an organization that will combine existing provincial research bodies into a single entity.

Research Nova Scotia will expand our research capacity by helping our researchers unlock federal and commercial funding partners.

It will be tasked with establishing a new Research Opportunities Fund that will help identify and support research-based projects in areas of particular importance to Nova Scotia.

Research Nova Scotia will attract external funding partners to create research jobs that will ensure our talented youth are working here in Nova Scotia on projects that are directly linked to our prosperity.

My government also believes in the value of small businesses and the need to access capital.

Since coming to office, the government has doubled the size of the credit union small business loan program to \$50 million and increased the loan guarantee from 75 per cent to 90 per cent.

My government will continue to help grow the creative economy by partnering with the film industry, book publishers, the music industry, the craft sector, and others in the creative industries.

We recognize that beyond the immense social benefit that comes with a vibrant culture, this sector also offers significant economic opportunities that are helping to grow our provincial GDP.

This government is also helping small business operators succeed wherever they want to work in this province.

We are investing \$6 million to improve high-speed internet access and quality, and we will announce further investments in the near future.

We are pleased that private partners are also investing to increase access for their customers.

Our response to climate change also presents an economic opportunity.

Thanks to the hard work of every Nova Scotian, our province is a national leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We are generating more power from renewable energy and taking even greater steps to conserve.

We are working closely with the federal government to find a Nova Scotia solution to further combat climate change – one that recognizes all we've done, one that won't punish the pocketbooks of Nova Scotians, and one that will ensure we remain a provincial leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Our government is continuing the good work of previous governments by developing improved transmission capacity throughout Atlantic Canada.

The Maritime Link will provide clean electricity and make it easier for our province to export renewable energy to market.

My government believes it is our responsibility to protect the environment for generations, so that they can thrive and succeed.

But we can't have a stronger Nova Scotia without a stronger public education system.

We are a diverse community, and every student comes from a different socio-economic background. And my government firmly believes education is the great equalizer.

We are preparing our children for the jobs of tomorrow by completing the first comprehensive reform of the education system in 25 years.

We are now introducing coding in the classroom and are focused on improving student achievement in literacy, numeracy, and creativity.

We are increasing the amount we invest in public education by \$65 million.

We listened to teachers, families, and students who told us they were concerned about large classes.

We responded by capping class sizes in all elementary grades.

We have hired over 500 new teachers in the last three years to ease the heavy burden many teachers are feeling.

We also hired more reading recovery teachers, early literacy specialists, math mentors, early intervention math teachers, and mental health clinicians.

These investments ensure students get the support they need and allow teachers to do what they do best – inspire our children.

Our province's Reading Recovery teachers are changing the lives of children around the province – just ask Jana Logue-Arbou.

Her skills as a Reading Recovery teacher helped her daughter Jacklyn, who has Down syndrome, to better read and write.

She also helped a young boy – a grade one student in the Annapolis Valley.

His lack of verbal skills meant he didn't speak to teachers or classmates and was so withdrawn, he walked around with his hood covering his head.

Now, after working with his Reading Recovery teacher, his hood is down and his confidence is up. He smiles and says hello to teachers in the school hallways.

My government will continue to invest in specialists such as speech language pathologists and school psychologists, as they provide support for students with complex needs.

More specialists will allow teachers to focus on achieving education outcomes for all students. These investments will be made following consultation with classroom teachers.

We want our children to succeed, and we want to give them the best possible start.

Studies show that a nutritious breakfast improves learning for all students.

Our government will work with partners to expand school breakfast programs across the province so that no student goes to class hungry.

When the government helps those who need it most – by improving access to employment, childcare, and early childhood education, or access to affordable housing – it helps break the cycle of poverty.

And experts have confirmed that income and employment impact people's health and lifestyle.

My government firmly believes a stronger Nova Scotia economy will lead to a healthier society.

But we also have to strengthen our healthcare system.

Before we came into government, the province's healthcare system was fractured. It made cooperation and collaboration difficult, which limited access for patients. It added unnecessary layers of bureaucracy.

When we merged health authorities, we took the money we saved on administration and immediately invested it into frontline services.

The merger broke down barriers and now patients can access services anywhere in the province in a timely manner.

MRI wait times are down.

In 2015–16, 745 more patients received MRIs because of the improved processes.

Wait times for orthopedic surgeries are also improving – since 2013, orthopedic procedures have increased by 1200 – that is 1200 additional Nova Scotians whose wait for surgery ended.

The merged health authority also allows for better planning.

The QEII redevelopment project, otherwise known as Nova Scotia's healthcare complex, is well underway and, when complete, will provide better access and services to people across the province.

This government continues on the path to meet its goal of a doctor for every Nova Scotian.

We have increased spending to recruit doctors, but without strong collaborative care clinics, young doctors won't practice here.

They have told us they want to practice medicine in a team-based environment, where family doctors work with other healthcare professionals, such as nurse practitioners or family practice nurses, physiotherapists, dieticians, or social workers to provide comprehensive care to their patients.

My government is investing an additional \$3.6 million to expand access to these collaborative health teams. Which means 14,000 more Nova Scotians will get access to a family doctor and a team of healthcare professionals; healthcare they need, when they need it.

Is there more work to be done?

Of course. But we are on the right track and must continue to create a modern healthcare system.

That's why we invested in myHealthNS. It gives patients convenient, electronic access to their personal health information, in some cases saving a visit to the clinic, which opens up appointments to those who need to see a doctor today.

Long-term care continues to be a priority for this government.

Since coming into office, wait lists have come down but demand for quality service continues to rise.

Our government has listened to what families are telling us, and we will be announcing strategic investments to ensure our seniors have the care they deserve.

But we also know that many Nova Scotians want to stay in their homes as long as possible.

That's why my government increased funding for home care by more than \$59 million since 2013, which reduced wait lists in the province by 70 per cent.

This government believes in moving forward and finding new, innovative solutions to tackle long-standing problems in our healthcare system.

Some problems are more complex.

The mental health of our citizens is a worry for this government.

We appointed an expert-led mental healthcare panel to help us ensure that our mental health services reflect the needs of those affected.

The panel will continue to provide key recommendations to government that can be quickly implemented to support those in need.

This year, my government invested \$274 million in mental health services, medications, and physicians.

We are awarding mental health grants, and we are funding 29 mental health clinicians who will enhance support for children in schools across our province.

We also rely on those who know firsthand what it is like to live with mental illness.

Carrie Lee is one of our citizens who helps others on their long journey of learning to live with mental illness.

As a peer counsellor, Carrie Lee helps 21 people throughout Cumberland County – something she never thought possible earlier in her life when she was battling the demons of bipolar disorder and was close to taking her own life.

As part of the province's expanded mental health and addictions services, she joined a team of peer councillors and now offers help in a variety of ways – by text, email, or face-to-face contact – connecting with youth in crisis and supporting others as they travel their own path.

This is what makes Nova Scotia special.

We are a strong and supportive people.

Always at the ready to help, to offer a lending hand.

And it's the life experience of our citizens that can help this province be great.

We are building caring communities where seniors can stay in their homes longer, stay in the workforce longer if they wish, access more housing options, and receive timely healthcare when they need it.

We also want to create a space where our wisest citizens can share their knowledge, their expertise – where they can volunteer and stay active.

We are an aging population, and while some may see this as a burden, this government believes our seniors are an asset. By the end of this year, our Seniors' Action Plan will celebrate that fact.

Nova Scotia is growing stronger, because of its citizens who rally around one another, in good times and in bad. People came together this summer to help those impacted by wildfires. And more recently, to help those dealing with flood waters.

This is who we are. A province of people who stand together and support one another.

And my government will continue to work with you to build a stronger Nova Scotia.

We are better, and we are stronger, when we work together.