

Building on a Plan to Make Life Better for You and Your Family

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2011

Her Honour
The Honourable Mayann E. Francis, O.N.S
Lieutenant Governor



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NOVA SCOTIA

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Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, the people of Nova Scotia:

I am pleased to welcome you to the third session of the 61st General Assembly.

I note with pleasure the participation in today's ceremonies of the Cape Breton Highlanders and the Halifax Rifles. These historic military units have been reactivated, with the support of the province.

At home and abroad, Nova Scotians have been putting their best foot forward.

We salute the athletes and volunteers responsible for the tremendous success of the Canada Winter Games. The Games set new attendance records. And Nova Scotia was honoured with the Centennial Cup for the most improved team.

Digby recently hosted the Canadian Senior Curling national championships, another success for the warm hospitality and volunteer spirit of Nova Scotians.

In the past year, our province welcomed Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh as the International Fleet Review highlighted the Navy Centennial. Memories of these events will last a lifetime.

This year, Nova Scotia will host leaders, legislators, and community builders from North America and around the world.

At the Eastern Canadian Premiers and New England Governors meeting, premiers and governors will discuss ways to manage fiscal challenges, enhance trade, maximize the region's energy resources, and protect the environment.

The 51st Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments' Eastern Regional Conference will be held for the first time in Atlantic Canada this coming year.

In June, Nova Scotia will host the Energy Council, which will bring together legislators from jurisdictions throughout North America.

And we look forward to hosting the International African Diaspora conference in September, which will bring delegates from many countries.

My government is pleased to join with other partners in honouring the past and charting the future.

Last August 31, representatives of our First People, our province, and our nation made history by signing the Terms of Reference for a Mi'kmaq–Nova Scotia–Canada Consultation Process.

To honour the Acadian heritage and the Acadian presence in Nova Scotia, the province is enthusiastically supporting the designation of Grand Pré as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Our magnificent Bay of Fundy, a breathtaking part of this province, is now Canada's lone finalist in a longstanding bid to become one of the "New7Wonders of Nature." We encourage all Nova Scotians to vote for Fundy.

My government is pleased to join with the federal government in recognizing 2011 as the Year of the Entrepreneur, because of the essential role that small and medium-sized businesses play in Nova Scotia.

My government is also pleased to take part in Yarmouth's 250th anniversary this year. And government will support efforts to aggressively market Southwestern Nova Scotia as a premium tourism destination.

We take time now to remember several Nova Scotians who have represented the best this province can be, and who are no longer with us:

- Dr. Sharon Oliver, the first African-Canadian nurse educator, public health nurse, and health executive in Nova Scotia
- Arnie Patterson, prominent local journalist and a proud Nova Scotian
- Irving Schwartz, a remarkable businessman, community leader, and philanthropist
- Former Members of the Legislative Assembly—Scott MacNutt and George Mitchell both of whom served their constituents and Nova Scotia proudly
- Sergeant James “Jimmy” McNeil and Petty Officer 2nd Class Craig Blake both sadly killed in the line of duty in Afghanistan
- Gerald Yetman, a driving force in Nova Scotia’s labour movement

And we pause in grief and concern as we watch other parts of the world struggle with devastating natural disasters and civil unrest.

These events and those closer to home remind us how small our world truly is and how important it is to cherish the qualities that define Nova Scotia—including our people, our programs, and our services.

Our services and our people were of vital importance when storms ravaged Meat Cove, Southwest Nova Scotia, and the Annapolis Valley in the past year. Nova Scotians in these communities helped their neighbours and others through a time of great need. They demonstrated the values that make this province strong.

Although we have much to be thankful for, we know, too, that our province has hard work ahead. When Nova Scotians went to the polls in June 2009, they gave my government a mandate for change.

Change that ends chronic emergency room closures...

Change from the worst economic development record in Canada for the last 20 years...



Change to keep our deficit from ballooning to \$1.4 billion ...

Change that helps people make ends meet.

These changes are well underway.

My government's plan to make life better for families is focused on the priorities of Nova Scotians.

The Better Care Sooner plan will keep emergency rooms open and deliver faster, better health care to Nova Scotians.

The jobsHere plan will create good jobs and grow a strong economy.

And my government will live within its means by building on this province's unique strengths and opportunities.

The plan is on track.

The plan is working.

Better health care for you and your family

When my government came to office, it was clear that a very different approach to health care was needed. Nova Scotians were concerned about the care available to them in their communities.

There were chronic Emergency Room closures and long waits.

Decisive steps have been taken to fundamentally change the way emergency health care is delivered from one end of the province to the other.

Better Care Sooner is my government's plan to

- improve access to health care professionals
- make emergency care more streamlined and patient-centred
- improve care for seniors, people with mental illness, and those with other complex needs, and
- increase the use of the 811 nurse line and 911 for emergencies.

The recommendations from Dr. John Ross formed the basis of Better Care Sooner—Nova Scotia’s plan to provide consistent, safe, quality care to **every** Nova Scotian.

Better Care Sooner ensures that Nova Scotian’s get the right care when they need it by keeping emergency rooms open, reducing wait times, and making the best use of the skills and expertise of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, and other health professionals.

Collaborative Emergency Centres in communities around the province are key to shorter wait times. The province’s first Collaborative Emergency Centre will be announced in the coming days.

In the next year, the province will extend the hours of operation for the Cobequid Emergency Room.

And to further improve emergency care, the province will work with the Pictou District Health Authority to build a modern, cost effective, and efficient Emergency Department at the Aberdeen Regional Hospital, taking advantage of the recommendations made by Dr. Ross.

Better Care Sooner means other groundbreaking improvements, as well.

Our Emergency Health System is an integral part of Better Care Sooner, providing timely and skilled ambulance and paramedic care.

Paramedics begin assessing and stabilizing patients the minute they receive a call. They are trained and equipped to offer a wide range of pre-hospital care.

Nova Scotia is one of only a few jurisdictions in North America to allow advanced-care paramedics to save lives by administering clot-busting drugs for heart attack victims.

Other health-care advice is just a phone call away. The 811 nurse line has seen a 30 per cent increase since December.

Thanks to a fulfilled commitment, “pre-hab” clinics in four District Health Authorities give patients the tools and information to prepare for a more successful surgery and recovery. The pre-hab teams will reduce wait times for consultations with orthopedic surgeons.



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There are shorter waits for admission, and improved patient flow, because additional hospital beds and a rapid assessment unit have opened at the Halifax Infirmary.

Dr. Pat Croskerry—an international leader in his field—has agreed to be the first chair of the Quality and Patient Safety Advisory Committee. The committee will work to improve patient safety and health-service quality across the province.

Nova Scotia is the first province in Canada to develop emergency room standards. And, as promised, accountability for emergency departments rests with the Minister of Health and Wellness. The second Accountability Report on Emergency Departments will be tabled next month.

Using our resources more effectively and ensuring that the right care is available when it's needed are important pieces of our plan for Better Care Sooner.

Controlling costs while protecting patient care is another critically important piece.

In the past 10 years, health care costs have doubled. Without change, that trend was destined to continue. My government would not allow that to happen.

That's why we have worked with our partners throughout the health care system to help the province live within its means.

We have worked with doctors, who agreed to amend their master agreement, saving the province about \$45 million over the next two years.

Initiatives with District Health Authorities—such as group purchasing for products and services, and more appropriate use of diagnostic testing—will save millions of dollars while protecting patient care.

Nova Scotians pay too much for drugs. My government has a plan to change that.

Legislation will be introduced this spring to ensure better drug prices for Nova Scotians who rely on Pharmacare, and a better deal for taxpayers.

My government is fulfilling its commitment to establish a drug management policy unit. It will focus on the better use of prescription drugs.

My government has already been successful in bringing drug costs down. So far this year, savings of \$4 million have been achieved for Nova Scotians needing medication for high cholesterol. Annual savings of \$6 million are projected.

And seniors are receiving care when and where they need it.

Last month, my government announced that extended-care paramedics had begun treating seniors in nursing homes—right at their bedsides, avoiding the stress and trauma of unnecessary trips to the hospital.

Seniors and their families will also benefit from the new Supportive Care Program and the Caregiver Benefit Program, which help seniors stay in their own homes and communities, and maintain their independence.

Good health must also include a focus on prevention and promotion.

This year my government will seek your approval of legislation required to implement the new Gaming Strategy. This strategy will focus on research into problem gambling and improve the range of options to address risk and problem gambling.

To ensure our children are given a healthy start, a new childhood obesity strategy will promote healthy, active lifestyles and the consumption of healthy foods.

A new food policy for daycares will also ensure young children eat nutritious foods that will help them grow strong and healthy.

Later this spring, a renewed Tobacco Strategy will be launched.

And we will respond in the near future to the recommendations of the Autism Advisory Team.

Better Care Sooner is good news for patients. It is making life better for Nova Scotia families.



Creating good jobs and growing the economy

As a result of the recent recession, the economy remains fragile. Nova Scotia must continue to focus on creating good jobs and growing the economy.

Past economic development strategies have produced dismal results, despite the many millions invested. For the past 20 years, Nova Scotia has consistently had the lowest economic growth in the country.

My government has taken a different approach, recognizing that significant change is essential.

jobsHere equips Nova Scotia to compete and succeed in the global marketplace.

In this age of innovation, Nova Scotia **must** be prepared to take on the world.

jobsHere gives businesses the tools and learning opportunities to succeed.

My government has committed \$200 million to this strategy. The range of new initiatives is extensive.

By refocusing our efforts, and reallocating precious tax dollars, my government has modified dozens of programs and brought in more than 20 new initiatives.

The Productivity Investment Program is one example. This \$25 million program provides support for investments in employee skills, as well as critical investments in equipment and processing.

The program doubles the capacity of the current Workplace Education Initiative so more employees have the chance to improve their education and essential skills, and better contribute to our economy.

It also triples the number of cooperative education positions so that more Nova Scotians have relevant work experience as they learn.

In short, the Productivity Investment Program helps companies in every region of the province to prepare their workforce for

improved productivity, adapt to new business processes, and encourage innovation.

My government intends to improve employer investment and employee participation through a new Workforce Strategy.

My government is investing \$500,000 to improve the apprenticeship system, which will increase flexibility for employers and apprentices.

My government will soon launch Nova Scotia's new Immigration Strategy, a plan to double the number of immigrants who land in Nova Scotia within the next 10 years, and to keep more of those immigrants in the province.

My government also respects experience. A \$1 million annual investment will identify, assess, and recognize the skills, knowledge, and competencies people acquire through formal and informal learning. This commitment to prior-learning assessment will help fuel the learning agenda and our knowledge economy.

My government will also recognize the workforce needs of the non-profit and voluntary sectors, and will provide labour market support for training initiatives and regional capacity development.

My government is investing \$3.5 million over three years to ensure more African Nova Scotians have the skills they need to enter the labour market. Skills Up will offer opportunities for African Nova Scotians to upgrade their skills and training.

A skilled workforce is a magnet for increased investment. But promising investments often require strong partnerships.

In the past, emerging companies have suffered from limited access to venture capital, stifling their growth and innovation.

A new Regional Venture Capital Fund changes that. My government has stepped up to the plate and made the first contribution to this fund. Other partners will sign on later this year.



Exports also matter to Nova Scotia. Last year, exports generated about \$3.4 billion in sales revenues.

Manufacturers matter. In 2009, they led Nova Scotia's economic recovery and sold \$8.9 billion worth of goods to customers in Canada and more than 130 countries around the world.

That's why my government will launch a new International Commerce Strategy. The strategy will help our companies build international capacity, increase international economic activity, strengthen our access to global markets and networks, and build an integrated approach to international commerce.

The changes we are making have a common objective—to create good jobs and grow the economy.

That's why, for the first time since 1992, my government cut the small business corporate tax rate by 10 per cent—leaving more money in the hands of the entrepreneurs who help drive our economy.

The rate is being cut again this year, for a small business tax reduction of 20 per cent.

jobsHere recognizes that smaller businesses need easier, more streamlined access to the programs and services that can help them grow their businesses. A web portal will provide entrepreneurs and employers with the information they need, all with the click of a mouse.

As part of jobsHere, more than \$30 million in loans have been approved under the Credit Union Loan Program to support ownership and succession planning for small businesses.

Better resources are being provided for employers and entrepreneurs, and the next phase of the Better Regulations program will build on the government's significant progress in reducing red tape.

My government will be relentless in the pursuit of economic opportunities.

That's why we welcome the National Shipbuilding Procurement strategy.

Irving Shipbuilding is competing to be one of two Centres of Excellence for construction of combat and non-combat vessels for the federal fleet.

This project will provide high-value jobs for up to 4,000 people for 30 years with benefits extending from Sydney to Yarmouth.

My government believes that no region of Canada, no shipyard, is better positioned to do this work than Nova Scotia's Irving Shipbuilding.

We will enthusiastically promote and champion this bid, ensuring it's as competitive as it can be.

We will pursue prosperity in every region of the province.

The planned Sydney Harbour dredging project has the potential to change the economic direction of industrial Cape Breton, while creating hundreds of jobs for *all* Nova Scotians.

In these times of shared challenges, my government is building the connections that will help build a stronger, greener Canada.

The Lower Churchill hydroelectricity agreement—signed by Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nalcor Energy, and Emera—will transform the economic landscape of Atlantic Canada and build a more prosperous nation. It will make a major contribution to Nova Scotia's leadership in renewable energy and Canada's reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It will create \$3.5 billion in labour and business income.

By providing stable, reliable hydro power, Lower Churchill will unlock vast renewable energy resources in all of Atlantic Canada, for our domestic markets and for northeastern North America.

This project demonstrates that the Atlantic provinces do best when we cooperate to seize the great opportunities of our time. There is no net gain when four smaller provinces compete with each other.

Nova Scotia's proximity to North American markets, excellent communication networks, and our unique position in Atlantic Canada's gateway, provide all the essentials for success.

Recent investments in the Halifax Stanfield International Airport will build on that success. The \$28 million runway extension will attract more passengers and cargo. And that will open up new markets for our fisheries and other primary industries.



Meanwhile, the province's first-ever five-year highway plan is providing a blueprint to build and maintain a highway system that connects communities and boosts our economy.

My government was proud to join with governments across Canada to deliver much-needed stimulus spending to reduce the impact of the worldwide recession. In this province, that included delivering the two largest highway improvement budgets in the province's history.

The investment is worth it. But it's vital that every dollar is spent wisely.

In the past, a lack of competition in some areas of the province resulted in high prices for asphalt and chip seal paving.

A new in-house chip seal paving operation and asphalt plant will mean that the province can pave more and pay less. The result will be better roads in areas like Shelburne and Inverness counties.

From our fields, to the forests, to the sea, our primary industries remain a foundation of the economy.

As part of jobsHere, my government has developed a 10-year plan to make our agriculture industry more competitive, innovative, and profitable. Homegrown Success is focused on helping farmers adapt to a changing marketplace and to seize every available market opportunity.

My government also fulfilled its commitment to keep soils healthy and productive, with the Soil Amendment Program.

A strong fishery means a strong economy.

My government is committed to building a strong fishery and supporting our coastal communities.

A new Commercial Fisheries Strategy will be developed in consultation with industry. It will include measures to diversify markets, to update the Fishermen's Organizational Support Act, and to expand access to relevant training.

The intergenerational license transfer program will provide the Fisheries Loan Board support to allow young people joining the industry to buy the licenses of retiring fish harvesters at fair market prices.

Mining also matters to Nova Scotia.

The Donkin coal project in Cape Breton has the potential to double the value of mineral production in the province and provide much-needed jobs for the area.

This province is blessed with an abundance of natural resources.

My government is in the final stages of developing a new approach to natural resource management that will focus on the shared values identified during an extensive consultation process: sustainability, diversity, collaboration, transparency, and informed decision making.

Informed by input from every corner of the province, the upcoming Natural Resources Strategy offers an integrated approach to managing our forests, biodiversity, provincial parks, and geological resources.

Nova Scotia's export-oriented forest industry employs 11,000 people. But changes in the marketplace and strains on our forests put the future of those jobs at risk.

New policy direction announced recently, including a 50 per cent reduction in clear-cutting, will help to ensure good jobs in a successful and sustainable industry.

The province will work with partners to ensure a wood supply that sustains this viable industry, while meeting public expectations for biodiversity and high environmental standards. Based on consultation with the Mi'kmaq and advice from other forest stakeholders, a plan to achieve the policy direction will be launched in the coming year.

The province's purchase of 140,000 acres of land—much of it with high conservation value—protects jobs in the forestry industry while supporting wilderness protection, heritage conservation, and recreation.

Clean energy is the fuel of the future. Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to institute hard caps on greenhouse gas emissions, and has set the most aggressive renewable-energy standards in the world.

We also have the first community-focused feed-in tariffs in the world, giving communities and First Nations across Nova Scotia the



opportunity to participate in building a future powered by more renewable electricity.

You will be asked to enact the new target that, by 2020, at least 40 per cent of all electricity used in Nova Scotia will come from renewable energy sources.

Our Cleaner Energy Strategy will look at new technologies to support cleaner energy sources—sources like tidal power.

Nova Scotia is a world leader in the development of tidal energy.

An underwater cable will arrive this summer and is the next step in connecting our tidal pilot projects to the grid. We have attracted world-class companies and strong local companies—like Minas Basin, Nova Scotia Power, and the Irving Shipyard—to work on this exciting tidal project.

Tourism is another important economic driver for this province. Work will continue to build Nova Scotia as a premier travel destination and attract more visitors to the province.

Nova Scotia is steeped in rich, diverse culture. This year my government will work with members of the Arts and Culture sector to implement its recently announced five-point Arts and Culture Plan. By year's end, Arts Nova Scotia, an independent body for artist funding, will be in place.

And in the next few weeks, conversations will begin with the Arts and Culture sector about creating "Status of the Artist" legislation.

We must also maintain our focus on excellence in public education.

Despite the challenges of declining enrolment, the province is increasing its per-pupil funding of public education, and focusing on excellence in the classroom.

Shortly, Dr. Ben Levin, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Education Leadership, will file his report focused on improving the quality of learning and outcomes for students.

My government has already begun to make positive changes focused on helping children succeed in school. A new literacy intervention frame-

work is one example. This flexible early-literacy program will continue to help those students in greatest need, while expanding support to more children who need help.

My government's commitment to after-school programs and to broadening the community use of schools will also be fulfilled this year.

In and out of the classroom, parents, educators, and students are becoming increasingly concerned about cyber-bullying. Working with these partners, my government will help to ensure that students have the support they need to speak out and stand up to bullies.

All students in Nova Scotia should have access to a broad range of learning opportunities, no matter where they live. That's why distance education continues to grow and evolve in Nova Scotia.

This fall, the Nova Scotia Virtual School will expand—opening the door to new opportunities for students in small and rural schools by ensuring access to courses in a rigorous, supportive online learning environment.

Access to higher learning is another important commitment. Last fall, Dr. Tim O'Neill said our Student Assistance Program was the weakest in the country. Nova Scotia must do better than that.

Soon, students will learn about a new program that will cap the debt load they face upon graduation.

Tuition is now below the national average for Nova Scotian students studying at home. By capping tuition increases, we will keep the average tuition below the national average, making this province a more affordable choice for students and their families.

Nova Scotia universities are economic drivers in this province, producing some of the best and brightest minds in a variety of disciplines and fields. But over the past ten years, the cost of publicly supporting universities has increased by 73 per cent.

That trend can no longer continue.

My government will work with universities to strengthen these institutions—strategically and affordably.



The value of working together to develop the best path forward is an approach also taken in considering how best to modernize the electoral system. A modern and efficient electoral system will ensure Nova Scotians continue to exercise their democratic rights.

To that end, my government will introduce a new Elections Act to modernize the conduct of elections. It is based on advice from the recognized parties, the Election Commission, and others who were consulted by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Helping people make ends meet

Making life better for families means making life more affordable.

That's why my government eliminated the provincial tax on essentials like home heating, books, children's shoes, clothes, feminine hygiene products, and diapers.

The Poverty Reduction Tax Credit and Affordable Living Tax Credit are two more examples of how my government is reducing the burden for those most in need.

And now, seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement no longer pay provincial tax.

Having a safe place to call home is important for us all.

For seniors, for families, and for persons with disabilities, more than \$128 million has gone to constructing or renovating more than 1,700 homes.

For those buying a heritage property, provincial tax rebates are available.

A provincial tax rebate is also available for those buying a vehicle for physically challenged people.

But we know this is not enough. New steps will be taken to help Nova Scotians make ends meet.

Making life better for families means treating people fairly and with respect.

This year my government will improve support for Nova Scotian families, provide new incentives for people to break out of the poverty cycle, and address gaps in support for persons with disabilities.

My government is making significant changes to improve the Employment, Support and Income Assistance program.

For example, people who want to come out of Income Assistance, and who find jobs, will now be able to keep more of the money they make.

And parents whose children are attending post-secondary institutions will now continue to receive housing support.

Through the creation of a new 211 system, Nova Scotians will be able to access a full range of social services within their local communities, just by picking up the phone.

And the loving families who care for foster children will also receive more support.

Services for Nova Scotians living with disabilities will improve, and we will shorten waiting lists for day programs, a critical consideration for families who wish their loved ones to live at home.

My government will continue to bring attention to the importance of safe workplaces, and engage with employers, unions, and others to eliminate workplace accidents and deaths.

Approval for stronger penalties for Occupational Health and Safety offences, and further sanctions for impaired driving, will be sought during this session. These bills will propose serious consequences for actions that endanger the lives of others.

Domestic violence is another area of great concern for many Nova Scotians.

We all saw courage and leadership when the family and friends of Paula Gallant made sure that she was remembered, and that justice was done in her memory.



The scourge of domestic violence is persistent, but my government is implementing the Domestic Violence Action Plan to increase support for victims and further support the many who work to stop domestic violence. The province's first Domestic Violence Court will be established in Sydney as a key part of the plan.

Positive, meaningful change is well underway in Nova Scotia.

My government is committed to keeping emergency rooms open and delivering better care to Nova Scotians.

My government is creating good jobs and growing the economy.

My government is helping Nova Scotians make ends meet.

And my government is living within its means.

The plan is on track.

The plan is working.

My government is making life better for families.

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

