

Putting Nova Scotians First

**Speech from the Throne
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His Honour
Brigadier-General
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Introduction

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

For some of you, it's a "Welcome back."

For others, this is one of the first opportunities you've had to take your place in this chamber.

For all, it is an occasion to be proud of, an occasion to be enjoyed by you, your families, and those who worked so diligently in your name. Congratulations and best wishes.

The 2013 Provincial Election

In October of 2013, Nova Scotians voted for change.

Government is deeply aware of the confidence that has been placed in its program for change, and will work with unwavering purpose to achieve and implement its plan on behalf of all Nova Scotians.

Elections are a fundamental element of a proud and mature democracy, and the willingness of so many citizens to engage in the public affairs of our province is a source of confidence and optimism in Nova Scotia's future.

However, the reluctance of many others to participate in the electoral process is a source of real concern.

During the course of my government's mandate, steps will be taken to address this erosion in voter participation. These steps will be based on engaging with Nova Scotians in a discussion about our electoral process.

In keeping with that goal, government understands the need to strive for a collegial and cooperative tone in the Legislative Assembly. It is important for all members to remember that initiatives should not be rejected solely on the basis of source. Of course, vigorous and informed debate is both expected and desired.

In essence, my government believes that open and decorous debate will contribute to enhanced public trust in the Legislative Assembly. In turn, my government is confident that such constructive debates will be an important contributing factor for increasing the participation of Nova Scotians in the electoral process.

Government's Strategic Priorities

My government believes in the determination and optimism of Nova Scotians.

Therefore, my government will provide strong, clear leadership and a path forward that will be built upon the idea of harnessing the potential of our province and its people.

Nova Scotians are working hard—to create jobs, to find solutions, to make life better in their own communities.

But for too long, the day-to-day priorities of Nova Scotians have been neglected in many areas of our province's affairs.

My government will seek to redefine its role and relationship with Nova Scotians, and it will do so by always placing the needs and aspirations of citizens at the foundation of its decision-making.

The following priorities will guide my government:

- Within government's statutory authority over the provision of electricity, specific steps will be taken to ensure true consumer choice and fairness.
- The needs of Nova Scotia's entrepreneurs will be met through appropriate forms of assistance, and there will be enhanced support for employee training and skills development.
- A re-investment in our school system will ensure that every student and educator has access to the classroom supports and modern educational curriculum required to excel in a rapidly changing world.
- Health care will be realigned to place the needs of patients, families, and individuals first.
- Investments will be made in our communities so that seniors, people with disabilities, and those in need get the services and care they require.

This realignment of government's underlying strategic priorities will require a great deal of thought, effort, and deliberate action.

In pursuit of these strategic objectives, my government will rely on the lessons of the past and the hard-won successes that have guided us through our long and distinguished history as a province.

Matters of Recognition

In keeping with that sentiment, I want to recognize the valued contributions of a number of Nova Scotians who have passed since I last had the opportunity to address this chamber.

Builders and entrepreneurs Ben McCrea and James Philip Dumaresq—their impacts on the skylines, streetscapes, and economy of our province continue to this day.

Artists Dr. Alex Colville and Rita MacNeil, two of Nova Scotia's most distinguished and celebrated cultural icons—while their canvases were distinct, their individual works tugged at our very identity and shaped how the world saw us and how we saw the world.

Public servants Rose Marie Abraham, Dr. J. Clair Callaghan, Bertha Mantley, Dr. Vincent Audain, and The Hon. Malachi Jones—their lives and careers were dedicated to improving the well-being of our institutions, our communities, and our people.

Civil rights champion and social activist Dr. Burnley (Rocky) Jones—like no other, he lent his voice to those who could not be heard, and sought justice for those long deprived.

Legislator and journalist The Hon. Jane Purves—a candid and passionate member of this House, she courageously and publicly fought her own personal battles and those of her constituents. Jane always spoke honestly and openly with the public interest at heart, even when she knew it wouldn't be popular.

This was a group of remarkable Nova Scotians. Their passing is a matter of great sadness; yet simultaneously, the memory of their contributions—the legacies they have left to our province—will be a source of enduring pride for all of us. Each understood the capacity and promise of change, and that is the perspective we must embrace and maintain as we navigate this province’s fundamental shift in direction.

Respect for Nova Scotians

Our country was founded as a strong and vibrant liberal democracy. It is a history that makes us all proud, especially here in Nova Scotia—one of the first four provinces to join Confederation.

However, we must keep pace with the expectations of citizens, and institutions must evolve in tandem with legitimate expectations. Transparency and accountability are pillars of our democracy; both must be continually protected and improved.

This is why my government will:

- immediately begin a full and independent review of MLA salaries and benefits, pensions, living allowances, and other expenses
- enact legislation to increase transparency with regard to economic development assistance
- ensure through legislative change that taxpayers’ dollars are protected from partisan advertising and politically motivated signage

Fairness in Power Rates and Energy Policy

Over the last 10 years, electricity rates in our province have climbed by nearly 30 per cent – households and businesses have been hurt by this trend, while the power monopoly has profited.

My government has already taken steps to address some of the fundamental flaws in the Maritime Link agreement and shifted responsibility and risk to where they justifiably belong.

Additionally, my government's first piece of legislation will be the Electricity Reform Act – a bill that will permit consumer choice and competition while laying the groundwork for consultation with Nova Scotians on our energy future.

Upon the passage of this legislation, Nova Scotians will be offered greater choice among power providers. This will allow local providers of renewable electricity to compete with Nova Scotia Power and sell directly to customers. Compelling regulated power companies to compete for your business is a solution that puts Nova Scotians first.

My government's plans for reforming the electricity market were borne out of discussions and consultations that took place in communities across Nova Scotia. As we move toward implementing those plans, we will once again be seeking input from the people of the province.

My government will involve the public and experts on what our energy future will look like - and how we can best organize ourselves to take advantage of it. As our province continues its commitment to move toward cleaner and innovative energy sources, we know it is imperative that Nova Scotians are able to voice their concerns and have them addressed frankly and honestly. For instance, the practice of hydraulic fracturing is a huge concern for Nova Scotians.

That's why there is a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the province while the independent review is underway. This review, led by Dr. David Wheeler and a panel of experts, will help determine whether the practice can be done safely given Nova Scotia's geology. During this legislative session, my government will also introduce legislation banning the importation of fracked wastewater into our province.

Another important element of our energy and economic future is the activity taking place in our offshore. Our government will continue to invest in geoscience research. We will also ensure that this information is made available to companies so they have the information needed to assess the opportunities available in our offshore.

An Economy Built on Putting Nova Scotians First

There is no doubt that the last recession took its toll on jurisdictions throughout Canada and the world. Of course, Nova Scotia was not exempt from these global pressures and, like many other areas of Canada and the world, our province has been slow to recover from the recession's impacts.

In fact, recent economic data has clearly outlined the challenge that now faces government:

- Our province has shed 3,000 full-time jobs in the last year, while trailing every other province in the country in terms of economic growth for two decades.
- Federal transfers are not keeping pace with changing demands and demographic shifts.
- Our population is facing further decline which, in turn, is placing further pressure on programs and services.

These realities underline the need for change. A fundamental change will require my government to direct more of its economic attention toward small- and medium-sized Nova Scotia business.

In the past, too much emphasis was placed in too few areas, and our collective economic strength diminished in the process.

Instead, my government will refocus its attention on small businesses—offering supports and incentives to help them grow their operations. For example, term loan guarantees under the Credit Union Small Business Loan Program will increase from 75 per cent to 90 per cent.

My government fully understands that businesses must be able to prosper in Nova Scotia, but not at the expense of Nova Scotians. Therefore, while working with businesses my government will attach job guarantees to repayable loans and keep processes transparent through public reporting. Legislation will be introduced by our government in the coming days that will greatly improve the transparency and accountability of Nova Scotia's economic assistance programs.

Beyond transparency, our government is working to create a competitive economic environment focused on growing good, sustainable jobs.

My government realizes it cannot solve this alone, but it can lead the way forward with a new vision of economic innovation—harnessing research, maximizing comparative advantages, eliminating barriers to competitiveness, expanding apprenticeship opportunities that will keep our skilled workers in Nova Scotia and, finally, getting government out of the way of business.

There are areas, however, where government must and will play a key role. My government will continue to take steps to ensure that Nova Scotians return home to their families safely at the end of the work day. We will hire more workplace safety inspectors and, because safety is a shared responsibility, we will work with industry to ensure officers are visiting more high-risk workplaces and enforcing safety regulations.

Business operators should be able to focus on growing their business, employing Nova Scotians, and giving back to their communities. With this in mind, changes to bring balance and responsibility to First Contract Arbitration will be brought forward in this session.

My government will create a fair and competitive environment for business by engaging in a responsible and comprehensive review of taxes, regulations, and fees, guided by the principles of simplicity and fairness. All regulations will be tested for their efficiency and effectiveness. Regulations that protect Nova Scotians will be strengthened; wasteful and redundant regulations will be eliminated. The development of that broad review has commenced, and we will formulate a plan to simplify our regulatory regime—and leave as much money with Nova Scotians as possible.

Fiscal Responsibility

Within itself, government is fully cognizant of the need to restore fiscal balance to its own affairs.

Across government, a one per cent target for expenditure reduction has been set and a great deal of work is currently underway to identify appropriate areas for increased efficiency.

Government remains mindful of its duty and obligation to support Nova Scotians in need. Therefore, government will maintain fiscal discipline without further burdening our most vulnerable citizens or a new generation of Nova Scotians engaged in study. To that end, the provision of health care and education has been exempted from this process.

A true and accurate update on where our province stands financially will be delivered to Nova Scotians in mid-December. My government will then implement a fiscally responsible plan to deliver a balanced budget prudently.

Our province is witnessing a population loss like we have never before experienced. We must reverse this trend. Our province needs talented and capable individuals if we are to have a healthy economy and improve the provincial finances.

In our province newcomers have played an important role in developing our economy, and our government wants to continue to welcome newcomers to communities from one end of the province to the other.

That is why my government will create the Premier's Immigration Advisory Council, which will be made up of immigrants to Nova Scotia who have experienced the strengths and weaknesses of our immigration system. The Council will bring forward concerns on immigration issues, and propose solutions to improve Nova Scotia's attraction and retention of immigrants. The Council will also help lead my government's efforts in seeking the changes required to carve out our own future when it comes to immigration. Nova Scotia must be an active partner in national discussions and our government will engage on two fronts - building strong relationships with provinces and enhancing our collaboration with the federal government.

Our Future is Educated

If Nova Scotians are to be put first, my government needs a bold vision for education.

There has not been a comprehensive curriculum review in this province for 25 years. My government will undertake a full review with a Blue Ribbon panel of experts to find out what is working and what isn't. The world has changed significantly in the past 25 years, and our education system must adapt. Students need to earn achievements, see the value of their efforts, and be taught by teachers who can focus on teaching.

In addition, my government is reaffirming its commitment to restore the funding removed from public education over the last four years. It will take time and deliberate action to undo the damage done by decisions of the past, but we know that educational dollars achieve some of the best return on investment of any expenditure government can make. That commitment goes beyond Grade Primary—this is why my government is investing in Early Intervention Programs. Ensuring that every child begins their public school career with the foundation for learning already in place is critical to their progress through the school system.

Improving Health Care Through Improving the System

For too many years, our health-care system has been neglected. My government will begin to develop solutions so all Nova Scotians get the care they need, when they need it. My government will do what it takes so that our health-care system puts patients first.

My government will improve community-based decision making by streamlining administration so Nova Scotians can access treatment faster. My government will address wait times by reinvesting in front-line health care, by reducing the number of CEOs and Vice-Presidents, and by reducing the District Health Authorities from ten to two. This transformative process will not happen overnight, nor will it occur without the valuable input of all those involved in our healthcare system – administrators, frontline workers, patients, volunteers, advocates and communities will have their voices heard.

Nova Scotians need better access to programs, services, and a variety of health-care professionals to prevent and manage chronic diseases like arthritis and diabetes. Hospital admissions can thus be reduced, and when patients do end up in hospitals, we need to make sure they return home as quickly as possible.

Far too many Nova Scotians don't have access to a family physician, or primary care provider such as a nurse practitioner, leaving many without care and putting added strain on our emergency rooms. My government will provide up to \$120,000 in tuition relief to 25 new doctors per year for four years, in exchange for a five-year commitment to practice in under-served communities in Nova Scotia.

In addition, my government will immediately appoint an expert Physician Recruitment and Retention Action Team so that Nova Scotia is able to competitively recruit new doctors and keep the ones we have.

Supporting Our Seniors, Caring for Our Citizens

As our population ages there will be additional pressures on our health-care system. My government will work with health-care providers and Nova Scotians to turn our challenges into solutions. My government has begun work on evaluating, updating, and implementing the Continuing Care Strategy to ensure that it meets our long-term needs, both at home and in facilities where our senior population is cared for.

The increase in sexual assault and sexual violence in our province is a grave concern. Too often the organizations that work to address these issues have been asked to do far too much with too little. My government will develop a multi-year strategy that will provide services directly to victims but will also focus on prevention.

Our Communities

This government recognizes the importance of local communities in building a strong, viable province. We are committed to partnering with municipalities and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities to advance the interests of Nova Scotians through the establishment and development of effective and sustainable municipal government. To that end we will engage in open and frank discussion regarding local governance issues, support continuation of existing provincial-municipal partnerships, and seek opportunities to work collaboratively on important municipal initiatives. The relationship between the provincial government and our municipalities is one that must be repaired and strengthened if we are to meet our challenges head-on.

My government is also committed to the long-term health of our valuable, traditional natural resources, as we look forward to a future in which industries can be innovative and sustainable.

Our fisheries and agriculture industries are the backbone of rural economies and communities across the province. My government will work with partners in these important sectors to focus on their expansion and modernization through research and innovation, and to encourage Nova Scotians to buy local.

Transportation is a critical part of strengthening communities from one end of Nova Scotia to the other. My government is committed to continuing discussions with the federal government to extend twinning on Highway 103 and to complete Highway 101. We will also improve access to Burnside Industrial Park through the completion of the Burnside connector and remove the MV Miner, an environmental liability, from the Cape Breton coastline.

My government is expanding tourism opportunities by renewing our major trade and convention facilities, and restoring and enhancing our ferry connection to the United States.

Another vessel—the iconic Bluenose II—has been lovingly refurbished by Nova Scotia craftspeople to the highest standards of safety and quality. My government will join them in celebrating Bluenose II's return as Nova Scotia's sailing ambassador next spring as she helps to welcome the world to our shores.

Nova Scotians know how important culture is in our provincial identity. It is the heart and soul of a sustainable future. In partnership with the cultural community, my government will develop this province's first Culture Strategy, which will establish a new vision for culture in Nova Scotia. Together with the sector, we will identify ways that government, communities, and citizens can work together to preserve and enhance culture for the benefit of all Nova Scotians.

Strong, diverse, and vibrant communities are key to creating more opportunities for Nova Scotians to live, work, and raise their families here. My government is committed to a productive and respectful relationship with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. We look forward to working with Mi'kmaq leaders and communities to foster training and employment opportunities that will drive sustainable economic development in rural Nova Scotia.

My government will continue to champion diversity and social inclusion in the province by, for example, working with the Government of Canada on a new funding agreement to support the planning and delivery of French-language services. This will ensure that Acadian and francophone Nova Scotians have access to important public services that enhance the quality of life for their communities.

We must make time to savour that quality of life and honour our cultural identity. That's why my government is respecting and acknowledging hard-working Nova Scotians by providing a statutory holiday in February to enjoy our beautiful province and spend time with loved ones.

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR FALL 2013

During this First Session of the 62nd General Assembly, my government will bring forward a legislative agenda designed to put Nova Scotians first.

In the coming days, the following pieces of legislation will be introduced:

An Act to Amend Chapter 155 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Executive Council Act and Chapter 376 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Public Service Act

An Act to Ensure Accountability in Providing Economic Development Assistance in Nova Scotia

An Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the House of Assembly Act

An Act to Amend Chapter 7 of the Acts of 1996, the Occupational Health and Safety Act

An Act to Amend Chapter 475 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Trade Union Act

An Act to Establish a Holiday in February

An Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2004, the Electricity Act, Respecting the Sale of Renewable Electricity

An Act to Amend Chapter 376 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Public Service Act, Respecting the Office of Communications Nova Scotia

An Act to Ban the Importation of Hydraulic Fracturing Wastewater

An Act to Amend Chapter 244 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Justices of the Peace Act, and Chapter 238 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Provincial Court Act

On October 8th, Nova Scotians voted for change and that change is underway. It means a new beginning for our province: a new beginning for all Nova Scotians.

Change begins with respecting Nova Scotians. Change begins with putting Nova Scotians first, from one end of the province to the other. Change begins with trust—our government’s trust in its citizens and their trust in government.

My government will be diligent in its desire to bring governance back to the people. Elected representatives are the citizens’ trustees, but that does not mean Nova Scotians should be excluded from the decision-making processes. Democracy can only thrive when citizens are included in governing our great province.

This begins with an open and accountable government. This begins with respecting Nova Scotians’ tax dollars. This begins with creating a province where education and health care are recognized as requirements for societal well-being.

But none of this begins by leaving any Nova Scotian behind. Our government has started to implement the mandate for change that Nova Scotians asked for in October. Our government—with the help of all Nova Scotians—will continue that change.

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

