

Speech from the Throne

**Second Session of the 62nd General Assembly
of the Nova Scotia Legislature
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**His Honour
Brigadier-General
the Honourable J.J. Grant, CMM, ONS, CD, (Ret'd)
Lieutenant Governor**

Introduction

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

Less than a year ago, my government was elected with a mandate to provide constructive change and a deliberate path forward for Nova Scotians.

At the most fundamental level, these tasks require government to rebuild a relationship of trust and respect with those it serves.

In this respect, government must lead by clearly stating its positions on the issues and challenges facing our province. And in turn, government must then maintain its commitments—and openly provide rationale for its decisions.

In the 11 months since government was offered the responsibility to lead the public affairs of Nova Scotia, the majority of its election commitments have been met:

- The “efficiency tax” is being removed from electricity bills—which will result in real savings across our province.
- Definitive steps have been taken to address the deep wounds at the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children.
- After significant cutbacks, investments in education are restoring programs to prepare young Nova Scotians to excel in a changing work environment.
- A fractured health system is being replaced by a unified authority—which will permit

Nova Scotians to access care on a more timely basis.

- The longstanding environmental scar of Boat Harbour will be addressed through legislated solutions by mid-2015.
- The concerns of Pictou County residents have been heard, and Northern Pulp will be expected to comply with a Ministerial Order to reduce air quality emissions that exceed approved limits under the industrial approval that allows the company to operate in our province.
- Antiquated economic development practices that favored a select few over the interests of the many have been rejected—and replaced.
- My government has appointed the One Nova Scotia Coalition—a non-partisan group of Nova Scotians—to examine ways to confront many of the long-term challenges facing our province.
- A deliberate program to balance the legitimate aspirations of public employees with the realities of our province's revenues has been initiated.

Taken together, each of these initiatives have been designed to respond effectively to the needs of individual Nova Scotians and their families—while simultaneously promoting our collective interests as a unified and progressive jurisdiction.

However, these accomplishments must be put in the context of the province's fiscal sustainability for years to come.

The central challenge facing our public finances right now is the cost of labour.

Most recently, the wage pattern devised by the former government saw increases of more than 7.5 per cent over three years.

It is important to remember that each percentage point equates to an additional \$50 million of tax dollars that become embedded in the cost of government. The current public sector contract has cost taxpayers \$711 million so far.

Unlike the previous administration, this government will take a more deliberate and careful approach to labour relations in Nova Scotia. There will be no improvised and ad hoc decisions that ultimately cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

Last spring's Essential Services Act restored a long overdue degree of balance to the relationship between employer and employees. Simultaneously, the broad collective of Nova Scotians now have the security of knowing that the healthcare system will function—while maintaining respect for collective bargaining.

Furthermore, it has to be understood that 58.6 per cent of the provincial budget is

devoted to wages and salaries.

To put the province on a sustainable course, all partners in this must be reasonable—all partners must ensure that the long-term interests of the province take precedence in the renovation of our fiscal foundation.

Matters of Recognition

Since I last addressed this chamber, we have lost many Nova Scotians who gave much to the life and spirit of this province.

Noel Knockwood, a pillar of his community, touched the lives of many Nova Scotians. He was the first aboriginal sergeant at arms for this legislature, a Mi'kmaq elder and spiritual leader who shared his knowledge of Mi'kmaq heritage and culture generously with us all.

Lawrence Paul made tremendous contributions to improve the economic conditions of his community of Millbrook, and at the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs.

The beauty and complexity of Cape Breton was never more aptly captured than through the writings of Alistair MacLeod. Mr. MacLeod's work was celebrated nationally and internationally.

Buddy MacMaster told the story of Cape Breton through music. He was a recipient of the Order of Canada and the Order of Nova Scotia in recognition of his lasting musical legacy.

Purdy Crawford, a respected lawyer, businessman, and philanthropist, made an important mark on a generation of business leaders across this country.

John "Nova" Chisholm owned one of the province's leading road construction businesses and paved the way for large, successful industrial projects in this province. His legacy is one of kindness and generosity to his community and his province.

Former members of the Nova Scotia Legislature, Paul Kinsman, Ronald Barkhouse, and Maxine Cochrane are all worthy of our thanks for their contributions to their communities and this province as whole.

We feel the loss of these outstanding Nova Scotians, and many others who have left us, but we are richer as a province for their many and varied contributions.

Guiding Priorities

In the last 10 years government has lacked a clear, coordinated, and focused strategy. This has led Nova Scotia to a critical juncture and government to a turning point.

Now is the time to work together and take the right actions to build a better Nova Scotia.

Government has a clear strategy with four critical priorities that align with the recommendations of the One Nova Scotia Commission: fiscal sustainability, the economy, demographics, and education and skills training.

In each of these areas, we are taking specific action that will contribute to change.

We will maintain focus and execute with discipline as we advance towards a better province.

Fiscal Sustainability

Families and business people work hard to balance their personal budgets and to stay in the black. Government has no less of a responsibility to do the same with every taxpayer dollar.

Budgets must be approached with diligence, based on priorities, and have some flexibility when there are unexpected costs. But in the past, that is not how things have been done.

When revenues were growing, government spent.

When revenues fell, government spent.

There is no question that the road to sustainable spending and a balanced budget is long and steep. But it is a road that must be traveled. My government will balance the budget by 2017–18 and will do so, in part, by eliminating programs that are not achieving their desired results. To get there, my government is looking with a critical eye to determine how to best deliver services—including asking if the service could be better delivered by the private sector.

My government will also reduce or eliminate spending in areas where the costs clearly exceed what Nova Scotians want and need from their government today.

As I have mentioned, wages make up the vast majority of government spending. Over the years, unsustainable wage increases have exceeded government's ability to pay for them and added to a mounting debt. My government has already directed a hiring slow down and will take steps to achieve a more sustainable wage pattern.

My government committed to take a closer look at taxes, fees, and regulations based on the principles of fairness, sustainability, simplicity, and competitiveness. The upcoming tax and regulatory review will fulfill this commitment and will be delivered this fall. The goal of the review is to better position Nova Scotia to deal with its demographic, fiscal, and economic challenges.

Economic Growth

A thriving private sector is essential for Nova Scotia to prosper, create new jobs, attract private investment, and attract newcomers to our region.

However, undue direct intervention in the private sector can inhibit growth.

Therefore, my government sees its role clearly: to create a climate that fosters and supports growth in the private sector.

To start, my government will focus efforts on the areas where the greatest impact will be felt.

In a responsible and sustainable way my government will support sector development in areas such as fishery, forestry, farming, information and communication technology, ocean technology, and oil and gas resources. This will be supported by a world-class regulatory regime that reflects the values of Nova Scotians and is rigorously enforced.

The sectoral approach is equitable and resists the past practice of choosing winners and losers.

As one step toward supporting growth in our resource sectors, my government will establish an industry-led Nova Scotia Lobster Industry Advisory Committee involving harvesters, processors, and buyers. This committee will provide advice and play a key role in advancing the aspirations of this important export.

Work will also be undertaken to double agricultural exports over the next 10 years. To help drive this, my government is committed to working with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan that will increase production to realize this target.

The concerns raised by Pictou residents underscore the need for a stronger regulatory regime surrounding the environment. This work will be an area of focus for my government in the months ahead.

One of the most important energy opportunities is off the coast of our province. My government is steadfast in its efforts to champion offshore energy projects and will work determinedly to make certain those resources are developed in a safe, sustainable, and responsible manner.

Both Shell and its partners and British Petroleum continue to show great promise with their large-scale exploration and development plans. My government will seek out new opportunities through strategic investments in geoscience to further demonstrate the resource potential off the Scotian Shelf.

My government believes Nova Scotians must remain the primary beneficiaries of our own resources. Through the Offshore Growth Plan, resource development that

advances our province and local communities will be pursued. Offshore projects are a vital building block to achieve future prosperity and realize the potential of this province.

Recognizing the success of our offshore Play Fairway Analysis, the Department of Energy is undertaking a similar program through geoscience mapping to create an atlas of onshore energy potential. This important work will further advance our knowledge and understanding of hydrocarbon reserves on our lands. This effort will improve the probability of success with onshore energy projects that can be undertaken in an environmentally friendly, safe, and sustainable manner.

My government will also pursue greater regional cooperation and freer interprovincial trade to expand and create new markets for Nova Scotia products and opportunities for businesses.

Through this focus, key sectors will grow, and opportunities in foreign markets including Europe and Asia will allow the province to increase its exports. Nova Scotia looks forward to freer trade—but expects the federal government to ensure that all provincial jurisdictions are treated equitably.

Through a new focus on entrepreneurship in Nova Scotia's high-school curriculum, students will also learn how to build their own businesses and take advantage of existing and emerging markets.

My government recognizes that the way economic development has traditionally been managed in this province needs to be streamlined to better position the private sector to lead economic growth. To that end, the way government's economic development department and agencies do business has changed.

Legislation will be introduced this fall to confirm the roles for economic development agencies.

The creation of a new office of Service Nova Scotia last spring was a step toward a better climate for business and evidence of a strong commitment to improved service and reduced red tape.

- Nova Scotia Business Inc. has been named as the single government entity responsible for trade operations, working directly with businesses to deliver provincial trade programs and connect them with new markets and new export opportunities.
- Innovacorp will take on all equity investments for high-potential business startups to make it easier for them to access venture capital.
- And, later this fall government will request proposals to establish a new venture capital fund to supplement existing initiatives.

My government will focus on supporting the economy by creating the winning conditions

for business, developing our workforce, supporting rural communities, promoting entrepreneurship, driving innovation, and growing tourism.

My government will play a key role in advancing the development of the Donkin coal project in Cape Breton. In fall 2014, government will complete a due-diligence process to ensure that the new majority owner of the mine can safely develop the project, has the technical expertise to operate the mine, and has the financial capacity to develop the project without government funding.

At all stages in the development of the mine, the Donkin project would help to grow our provincial economy, provide new jobs and training opportunities for Cape Bretoners, and provide new revenue for government from coal royalties and taxes. Coal from the Donkin mine could help to reduce electricity fuel costs for Nova Scotia Power, help to reduce the need for imported coal, and help to create an affordable energy future for all Nova Scotians.

Demographics and Population

Much discussion has taken place since the release of the One Nova Scotia Commission report about the need to increase our population and to tackle the systemic attitudinal and economic issues that have held the province back.

My government recognizes that population growth can only happen if our economy is strong, diverse, and growing—can only happen with forward-looking policy changes that effectively allow us to adapt to changes in our demographics. Youth outmigration is a factor that is increasingly impacting the economic success and demographic future of our province.

Government will work with partners to retain our youth through initiatives that help them get jobs, build their networks, and tap into the experience of mentors. We will streamline processes and direct our resources to the programs that are successfully getting more people into the workforce.

My government will lead efforts in the Atlantic region to advocate for increased flexibility in the national immigration system. Efforts to increase immigration will be ineffective without the support and partnership of the federal government.

My government has already seen results negotiating with Canada as we opened up a pathway for international graduates. They are now applying and being nominated. They see their future here and want to build a life in Nova Scotia.

In August, Premier Stephen McNeil announced the membership of the Premier's Immigration Advisory Council. Mr. Wadih Fares is the national chair, working with private sector partners and advising the Premier on the immigration challenges and opportunities that exist for Nova Scotia businesses. Dr. Colin Dodds, as international chair, will provide advice and guidance on international relations and recruitment efforts,

particularly regarding international students. The advisors are already active and working.

My government has ignited a dynamic partnership between Nova Scotia and the YMCA and Immigrant Settlement Integration Services to provide services to support and truly welcome newcomers across the province. Work will continue with the broad range of partners who contribute to the critical job of welcoming new people in our province.

Over the next year my government will work to realign the Nova Scotia Nominee Program, enhancing existing immigration streams and introducing a business stream to attract entrepreneurs and investors to Nova Scotia.

Education

Improving educational programs is the key priority of my government.

The reason is simple: A well-educated workforce prepared to enter into and contribute to the labour force is a necessary building block for a growing economy for all of us and a prosperous future for each of us.

My government will increase workforce participation and entrepreneurship by improving the primary-to-12 education system.

Incremental steps have already been taken, but much remains to be done. My government has begun to restore education funding that was previously cut. Those restored funds will help keep class sizes small for students. Our first step is to ensure small class sizes for our youngest students in grades primary to 2.

More students interested in pursuing the skilled trades after high school will have access to a skilled trade education because of skilled trades centres located in schools across the province. There are currently 11 schools with centres, including Glace Bay and Cole Harbour, which just recently opened.

Helping students succeed in math and literacy is an important part of my government's commitment to ensure students have the skills they need for jobs now and in the future. Over the next year, we will continue to provide additional math and literacy supports for students and teachers to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

Students and families in communities throughout Nova Scotia will have greater access to services and after-school programs with a multi-year expansion of SchoolsPlus and the addition of more mental health clinicians in schools.

My government is opening four sites at schools in Glace Bay, New Glasgow, Aylesford, and Inverness to support more students and families with important services such as homework support, health-related information, and guidance and mental health

counseling.

My government has also pre-approved additional SchoolsPlus sites for the next two years. This will make SchoolsPlus available in all 18 counties.

The first comprehensive review of the education system in many years will be completed next month. More than 19,000 Nova Scotians participated in the Review Panel's consultations. Their thoughts and ideas, along with expert research, will form the basis of the final report.

My government wishes to thank all Nova Scotians who took the time to share their thoughts and ideas about the future of our education system.

Within a few weeks of receiving the review, my government will act quickly to respond, and deliver on the commitment to improve the education system in Nova Scotia.

Our post-secondary system is among our greatest assets.

In the weeks ahead, my government will consult with universities and colleges to enhance their contributions and increase focus on their areas of strength with the goal of creating a sustainable system—one that links this sector to economic growth opportunities, innovation through research and development, and improvements in immigration.

The feedback of students and families will also be considered in these consultations.

My government will move forward with the implementation of Graduate Scholarships for Innovation and Research in the fall. This program will focus on putting money directly into the hands of smart, talented graduate students who are conducting research that is connected with industry, is innovative, and has the potential for commercialization.

We will continue to increase opportunities for ongoing skills development and knowledge growth through our post-secondary education system. Focus on apprenticeships, internships, and co-op programs will increase, and the Graduate to Opportunity program will launch, helping our youth get that all-important first job after graduating and connect them with our workforce—an important part of keeping them here.

My government believes that the public service must also work harder to create an environment that attracts and retains young people.

The Youth in the Public Sector Strategy will focus on creating entry-level positions that welcome new graduates with little or no experience, comprehensive training for new hires, and internships and coop opportunities for students.

oneNS

This time last year, Ray Ivany and the commissioners of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, or oneNS, were travelling around the province working and talking with communities.

This important report was provided to all Nova Scotians—and eloquently makes the point that we all need to work together to build a stronger province. The members of the One Nova Scotia Coalition are doing their part and are pursuing the difficult task of helping to find and shape joint solutions.

My government is taking action on the goals over which it has direct control. All other goals and recommendations have been adapted as foundations for key priorities.

My government will also be a vocal champion of private sector and community leaders who have come together to take action, and we will actively support the efforts of the newly formed oneNS Coalition.

This fall, it will ramp up efforts to engage Nova Scotians in next steps, as it commits to immediate actions and continues its work on the 10-year plan to reach goals called for in the oneNS Report. This work will include encouraging community-led action, change, and engagement.

Healthcare

Using Nova Scotia's healthcare assets in the smartest, most-efficient way possible is an enduring challenge faced by countless governments over many, many years. My government is committed to ensure the focus in healthcare is placed where it should be: on front-line care.

Steps will be taken this year to unify our healthcare system. This program of unification has one overarching goal: improving access to needed healthcare services.

Within the North American context, Nova Scotia is a relatively small jurisdiction.

A splintered healthcare system that places arbitrary barriers between communities makes little sense. Instead, a unified healthcare system will permit greater mobility of Nova Scotians—so that they can access high-quality care on a more timely and effective basis.

My government will build a health system that thinks and acts like one—so Nova Scotians receive the highest quality care in the safest way possible.

Consider the reality of Nova Scotia's health delivery system: nine health authorities with nine different business plans, nine different visions and missions, nine strategies—all competing for equipment, staff, and doctors.

That is the past.

On April 1, 2015, Nova Scotia will launch a new structure to create the foundation for a health system that thinks and acts as one. Nine current district health authorities will be consolidated into one provincial authority, partnering with the IWK Health Centre—acting and caring as one for Nova Scotians.

This change will enhance consistency of policies and procedures, while allowing the health system to act with consistent vision and goals, for the benefit of all Nova Scotians. Through consolidation, steps will be taken to reduce wait times in critical health areas and improve patient and client experiences with the health system.

And the health system's ability to focus on patient quality and safety will increase.

Consultations with more than 1,000 Nova Scotians inside and outside the health system along with the input of doctors, nurses, CEOs and front-line workers, unions, and employers has been solicited and considered. An advisory panel is in place to guide the work, and a CEO-designate has been selected.

As the Nova Scotian population continues to age, there will be increased pressure on the provincial healthcare system to deliver timely and appropriate care to people living with dementia.

My government will introduce a dementia strategy in spring 2015 to meet this increasing demand and to ensure that Nova Scotians living with dementia, as well as their families and caregivers, are well supported by public services.

Mental health issues touch the lives of many Nova Scotians including our young people. My government will continue to invest in programs that provide students with access to mental health supports in their schools. Work will also continue on the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

Communities

Supporting and building strong, inclusive, and thriving communities is a priority for my government. In the months ahead a variety of activities will be undertaken to support communities across this province.

In 2015, the construction of the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown will be completed, and we will welcome the facility to the Nova Scotia Museum system, addressing a significant gap in the interpretation of our shared provincial story.

Province-wide consultations will soon begin on Nova Scotia's culture strategy. Nova Scotia's culture is a broad, interconnected community that includes libraries, museums, heritage properties, cultural identities, languages, the arts, creative industries, and culture education.

My government's strategy will explore options to grow the significant individual, social, and economic impacts of culture and to better understand the role cultural diversity and expression plays in welcoming people to Nova Scotia and strengthening our communities.

Nova Scotia has a long and proud military tradition that includes honourable service during the major armed conflicts of the past century. A military presence in Nova Scotia brings jobs, economic opportunity, and vibrancy to many communities and connects Nova Scotia to the global priorities of peace, security, and prosperity.

As Canada and the world mark the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, my government will continue to place importance on its relationship with the Canadian military. As the only province with a Minister of Military Relations, Nova Scotia recognizes the tremendous contributions that current and former members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the military reserves, and cadets make to the defence of our country and the vitality of our communities.

Nova Scotia will continue to promote and support the role of the military in our province.

My government is dedicated to aboriginal women's empowerment, equity, and leadership, which will be the focus of the 4th National Aboriginal Women's Summit that Nova Scotia is proud to co-host this October at Membertou First Nation in Cape Breton.

The summit will provide a forum for governments—aboriginal, provincial, territorial, and federal—and community-based representatives to share expertise and knowledge; showcase innovative and promising practices; and identify opportunities for working collaboratively on a range of issues affecting aboriginal women, their families, and communities.

Sexual violence is an important societal issue that affects us all. The complexity of improving services for victims and preventing sexual violence from occurring requires the support and efforts of all Nova Scotians. In the year ahead, a sexual violence strategy will be launched.

My government is acting on its promise to make Nova Scotia a more accessible and inclusive place to live and work. Changes will be made in how social services are delivered in this province. Choice, self-reliance, dignity, and inclusion will be the cornerstones of a new approach to supporting persons with disabilities to live more independently in their own communities. Work continues on accessibility legislation planned for 2016, beginning with consultations this fall.

Bloomfield Centre in Halifax is a former school being redeveloped as a mixed-use, mixed-income community that will include non-profit, community, and commercial space. The innovative private-public partnership will provide nearly 500 units at mixed price points for families. During the summer, community volunteers led public

engagement to shape the final design, to be announced this fall.

Nova Scotia is a province where families and communities come first. My government will make a major step forward to increase home ownership and reduce waitlists for affordable housing.

Nova Scotia's roads help to connect us to our partners in business and trade. They also connect us to those we cherish most—our families and friends. My government is taking steps to improve road safety through the use of new signage and a social media campaign to raise awareness of key safety issues, such as seatbelt wearing, speeding, and distracted driving.

My government will also proclaim a 2010 piece of legislation that will double fines and add four demerit points on conviction for cell phone use while driving. This will give Nova Scotia some of the strongest distracted-driving legislation in the country.

My government, through the department of Education and Early Childhood Development, has already started a review of regulated child-care programs. This review is focusing on the safety of children in childcare and identifying ways to make childcare more accessible and affordable for families, enhancing the quality of programming for children, and supporting staff who work with our youngest children.

Recommendations from the review will be ready in the spring of 2015.

My government supports an integrated approach that will enable partnerships with community-based providers of programs and services for young children, pre-birth to school entry.

Four Early Years centres have been established within regional school boards, with four new sites planned for 2014–15. These centres are located within a school and are a model of integrated service delivery, which links programs within the early-years sector.

Many Nova Scotians worry about their retirement and their ability to maintain the same standard of living they currently enjoy and have worked hard to attain. In this sitting of the legislature, my government will introduce legislation that will help Nova Scotians better fund their retirements.

Through Pooled Registered Pension Plans, this legislation will create retirement savings options for individuals, including those who are self-employed, that will allow them to benefit from lower management fees and will be portable if they switch jobs.

My government will continue to help towns and rural municipalities reduce the size of government and reduce red tape for potential new businesses.

My government will encourage and support those municipalities showing leadership in proposing governance changes that will make their population, finances, and

infrastructure more sustainable.

Legislative Agenda For Fall 2014

During this Second Session of the 62nd General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature, my government will bring forward a legislative agenda that includes:

- The Health Authorities Act
- Amendments to the Housing Nova Scotia Act
- Amendments to the Animal Protection Act
- Limitations of Actions Act
- Shared Services Act
- Amendments to the Consumer Safety and the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Acts respectively
- Amendments to the Smoke-free Place Act and Tobacco Access Act
- Amendments to the Maritime Harness Racing Commission Act
- Amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act
- Amendments to the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act

Conclusion

My government understands that trust and respect are privileges that must be earned.

And so, my government will continue to focus on fulfilling its commitments to all Nova Scotians—in a deliberate and well-considered manner.

My government will remain open and accountable.

And, my government will encourage all Nova Scotians to take an active and equal role in addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities we collectively face.

My government believes that by working together, we can create a better Nova Scotia. One that is more inclusive, is more successful, and offers people real opportunities to stay, work and raise their families.

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.