

Mister Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, I am pleased to officially open the third session of the 60th General Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Monsieur le président, députés de l'Assemblée législative, j'ai l'honneur, au nom de sa Majesté la Reine, d'annoncer l'ouverture officielle de la troisième session de la soixantième Législature provinciale de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard.

On this occasion we formally extend our best wishes to Governor General Adrienne Clarkson. We wish Her Excellency every success as the Queen's representative in Canada.

“...our history is ripe with many advancements...”

It is appropriate as we begin the final session of this assembly prior to the new millennium, that we take this opportunity to reflect on the strengths and accomplishments of our province and its people, as well as on the opportunities that are before us.

While our history is ripe with many advancements, the greatest dimension of change has occurred in the past 100 years; and we extend a special greeting to those Island centenarians who have personally witnessed much of this change.

We seek at this special time in our history to reflect and to build upon those things which have guided our development. While it is essential we embrace change to ensure we meet the needs of a new millennium, we must never be afraid to preserve and protect those aspects and institutions of our society that serve us well.

“We are deeply committed to our Island...”

Islanders have a strong sense of place. Islanders have an association with the land and sea. We are Canada's smallest province, yet the birthplace of the greatest nation on

earth. We are small in size, yet maintain public and private sector services on a par with our sister provinces. Due to the size and population base, our production capacity is small, yet our products are some of the finest in the world and enjoy international reputations. We are deeply committed to our Island, yet more than prepared to compete in the global marketplace; and in the past five years that ability has been amply demonstrated by the fact that exports have increased by 80 percent.

The achievements of individual Islanders mean names such as MacEachern, Duffy, Kane, Connors, Gallant, Acorn, Arsenault, Bolger, O'Brien and Montgomery are known well beyond our borders.

It is these facts and values that My Government shall use as sign posts in charting a successful course into the new millennium. We will protect the entities which have guided those who came before us, and which can be enhanced to serve as direction and guidance to generations yet to come.

From the days of the first settlements, pride of community has been a feature of Island life. Our community names and our customs reflect our history and give a deeper meaning to our individual identities. This strong association has influenced our development and our institutions, and is the frame upon which the Island way of life is woven.

“...the future of our Island is to be found in the strength
and diversity of Island communities.”

My Government believes deeply that the future of our Island is to be found in the strength and diversity of Island communities. Even greater strength is found in the ability of those communities to work together for the greater good; not just communities defined by geographical boundaries, but those reflected in common interests, ideals and goals. That is the driving force behind our continuing commitment to maintain all hospitals and schools, to create jobs in all communities and to build the infrastructure that facilitates linkages.

My Government has met directly with many communities across this province. Mon

Gouvernement a consulté de nombreuses collectivités de la province.

In all cases we have been impressed by the strong determination to preserve and enhance community life and the willingness to join us in partnership to achieve these goals. There is great diversity but a shared sense of pride, confidence and commitment.

“The strong sense of community is cherished and respected by My Government...”

The strong sense of community is cherished and respected by My Government and continues to play a central role in the decision making process.

The Community Development Fund has already provided funding to a number of projects that will enhance community life and development across the province, and more projects will soon be announced. We know the vitality of communities is tied to the ability to foster employment opportunities in those communities. Community development officers have established new and essential linkages with community leaders in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, and have identified opportunities for lasting social, economic and cultural development. We have broadened the focus of development initiatives to include all communities so that all areas of our province share in this period of growth.

We are pleased by indications the Government of Canada will consider a new infrastructure program, and we stand ready to partner in this initiative so that we can further benefit Island communities.

In the coming year we will build on these linkages, and the well being of communities will remain a priority of My Government.

Community strength is driven by the energy of the people who live there. Everywhere Islanders are willing to give freely of their time and energy to foster the collective interest of the community. This spirit has fuelled a deep commitment to volunteerism. Individuals have taken responsibility for addressing many of our social needs, and without their involvement, our scope of supports and services would not be

as effective.

“...we want future generations to share in the rewards of helping others.”

It is an important part of our community life and we want future generations to share in the rewards of helping others. In an effort to ensure volunteerism grows in the new millennium, My Government will develop a tuition credit program. It will offer Island students entering Island post-secondary institutions, a tuition credit based on their hours of volunteer work. This initiative will encourage volunteerism, support volunteer organizations and assist young people in achieving their education goals.

For many communities, sport and recreation facilities are part of their identity. A review of the sports facilities in our province will soon be completed and will assist in meeting the government objective of becoming the most physically active province in Canada. We will partner with our health and sport communities in efforts to meet this objective.

“Greater attention must also be given to the... protection of the land...”

My Government reaffirms its commitment to the principles and ideals of the Lands Protection Act. The protection afforded by this legislation will be essential in maintaining the strength of Island communities and preserving one of the most cherished aspects of our way of life. Government is also fully aware that land ownership alone is not the key to the future of agriculture. Greater attention must also be given to the continued effective maintenance and protection of the land itself. The richness of soil and sea have blessed our province. Recent events, here and elsewhere, have further demonstrated the fragility of our natural environment; and we hold a sacred trust in preserving not only the bounty made possible by these resources, but the precious resources themselves.

“...to ensure that a safe and healthy environment is promoted
in Prince Edward Island.”

A quality environment is first and foremost essential to the health and safety of our

citizens. It is also essential to the health of key industries such as farming, fishing and tourism. Our environment is a positive factor in the attraction of new development opportunities and the diversification, job creation and community enhancement associated with such efforts. Government will take the necessary steps to ensure that a safe and healthy environment is promoted in Prince Edward Island.

The Action Committee, established as a result of damage to several waterways, worked quickly and produced a series of recommendations. Some have already been implemented, and work with essential partners is underway to address the others. We thank the members of the committee for their dedication to the task and the results of their efforts. In addition to the 24 recommendations, My Government will propose changes to enforcement measures, as well as other actions and programs for the protection of the waterways, land and environment of our province.

Many Island farmers have pioneered new soil conservation and protection measures, and we applaud farmers who have consistently demonstrated good stewardship while contributing to the development of one of our leading industries.

Such efforts have continued even in years, such as this, when the challenges of commodity prices and weather have added to the stress faced by the agriculture industry.

Government recognizes the importance of protecting those aspects of our view scape that make this Island special. Additional land will be added to the Provincial Wildlife Management areas and to the system of Provincial Forests. The Code of Practice for forestry contractors will be implemented.

“Specific initiatives will be undertaken to reduce pesticide usage...”

“Expertise will be made available to those growing crops under organic conditions.”

We must take greater care in protecting our land so that it continues to be a source of bounty through the next century. A network of soil quality monitoring sites has been established, and a comprehensive land use inventory will be carried out. Specific initiatives will be undertaken to reduce pesticide usage, and an Integrated Pest

Management Specialist has already been hired to develop pest control strategies. Expertise will be made available to those growing crops under organic conditions. Efforts to diversify Island agricultural production will continue. The Island Waste Management Commission has taken action to address the serious environmental hazard represented by large stores of used tires, and the commission will soon unveil its plans for further implementation of the Waste Watch Program. Ever mindful of changing technology, the commission is exploring several new methods for the handling and use of waste. Each Islander must assume a greater responsibility for the preservation of our environment, and responsible waste management is one aspect in which each person can make a difference.

“The implementation of the strategy will add value to our products...”

My Government’s Food Strategy is being built upon a reputation for quality food production in a safe and clean environment. The implementation of the strategy will add value to our products by responding to growing consumer demands for safe, high quality, high-value products which are produced through sustainable practices while protecting the environment. A new marketing initiative has been undertaken by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry and will feature the creation of a “PEI Brand” which will be used to market our products worldwide. The Post Harvest Virus Testing Program for seed potatoes, the first of its kind in Canada, will be improved. The Agriculture Research Investment Fund will support continuing leadership in research. The completion of a business plan for the Belvedere Group will build on international opportunities in the knowledge economy. These and other initiatives will result in new and expanded employment, as well as economic benefits.

Long term sustainability also requires new generations to take up the rewards and challenges associated with agriculture, and we will work with farm organizations in support of new farmers so agriculture remains a key element of our communities in the new millennium. A Sustainable Agriculture Conference will be held in the year 2000. These and other initiatives will build on the leadership of Island farmers and further increase the contribution of the sector to the provincial Gross Domestic Product.

“Dialogue and understanding...is the only course of action.”

My Government applauds the approach taken by native and non-native fishers in this province in response to the Supreme Court decision on native rights. Dialogue and understanding, not violence, is the only course of action. Recognizing this is a matter that must, and can only, be addressed by the Federal Government. My Government will promote federal action which respects rights and ensures the preservation of fish stocks for future generations.

The modernization of the fish processing sector has made Prince Edward Island a market leader in many areas of the world. New employment opportunities have been created, and this past year the lobster sector recorded a further increase in the value of landings. Government is investing in the research necessary to ensure the sustainability of the fishery. We will continue to build upon the success which has been achieved through programs that extend the processing season—benefiting plants, employees and communities.

“...preserve those aspects of our province which make it a special place to visit.”

Nowhere is the new confidence of Islanders more evident than with the private sector investment in the tourism industry. In dozens of communities across our province, substantial new investment has been made in attractions, accommodations and visitor services. These demonstrate confidence in the fact our Island is not only attracting new visitors, but will continue to be a leading destination for visitors into the new millennium. As we support and promote such developments, My Government will be careful to preserve those aspects of our province which make it a special place to visit. We are especially proud of our strong partnership with those involved in tourism and will continue to work closely with the industry in the promotion of Prince Edward Island as a vacation destination.

“...renew our efforts to have Prince Edward Island as a year-round tourism destination.”

Considerable opportunity remains to extend our tourism season, and government will

continue to work in cooperation with the industry, utilizing opportunities such as the Labour Market Development Agreement.

In the interests of promoting eco-tourism, a program to upgrade and enhance the province-wide system of parks will be introduced and the trail system expanded. Culture and heritage benefit from tourism, and tourism benefits from them. There is an impressive array of festivals and events held across our province that reflect our history and people. The Studio Tour guide highlights the interest in this growing sector and the opportunities it offers. Events such as the Maritime Electric Victorian Winter Festival will help attract visitors to the Island around the Christmas season. These events demonstrate that success can be achieved; and as we enter a new millennium, it is time to renew our efforts to have Prince Edward Island as a year round tourism destination.

“This will...assist in preparing to address the needs of Islanders well into the new millennium.”

Public hearings have been completed on the Population Strategy, and Government wishes to thank the many individuals and organizations who provided valuable input at the hearings across the province. For the first time Islanders have been actively consulted on the type of future they desire for themselves, their children and their communities. This will assist in the development of a meaningful strategy that will not only play a key role in government planning but will assist other organizations in preparing to address the needs of Islanders well into the new millennium. Government will be tabling the final report of the committee during this session of the assembly. It is one element of the ongoing effort to improve long-term planning in government.

“...invest in education and training.”

Children are our most vital resource. We have a collective obligation to prepare them for the future, a future that will witness even more and greater change than recent generations.

To do this we will continue to invest in education and training. Special attention will

be given to the skills necessary for the new millennium. However, we must never neglect the solid base afforded by a good basic education.

Research indicates the early years are very important in the healthy development of children and My Government will advance goals for new endeavours that support young children.

“...discussions with school boards on Phase Two of the Capital Program.”

Over the past three years, \$35 million has been invested in necessary education infrastructure. This has resulted in the construction of a new school in Summerside and one in West Royalty, as well as major renovations to other schools across the province. This program has witnessed the greatest investment in education infrastructure since the Comprehensive Development Plan. Much has been achieved, but more work remains. My Government has commenced discussions with school boards on Phase Two of the Capital Program.

Hundreds of new computers have been added to the education system. We were a leader in connecting all schools and libraries to the Internet; and as a result, Island students lead the country in terms of Web site usage. Government will take additional action to keep pace with changing technology so the Island can continue to be in a position to foster opportunities in the knowledge economy.

“Our post-secondary institutions are valuable assets...”

In addition to new physical infrastructure, My Government hired over 100 new teachers which allowed for a more orderly transition as significant numbers of Island teachers reach retirement age.

We welcome home Wade MacLauchlan to his role as President of UPEI and will work with him and the university community to meet the needs of students in the new millennium. Our post-secondary institutions are valuable assets for our province, both in terms of the educational opportunities they offer and the expertise they foster.

Mister Speaker, Prince Edward Islanders report a high level of satisfaction with the health care system, but there are serious challenges and addressing these is a priority.

“People are the most important element in the delivery of quality health care...”

People are the most important element in the delivery of quality health care; therefore, human resource planning will remain a major priority. We will work in partnership with health professionals to address immediate needs and to ensure an adequate supply of health professionals in the future. Our health workforce plan will include both short and long term solutions using planned approaches and collective action. An analysis will be conducted to examine the current and pending supply of health care professionals, to outline strategic direction for recruitment and retention and to identify other related issues. Further to the overwhelming success of the student employment initiative in health, My Government will continue this program.

We are also mindful of the stress within the system and the additional pressures placed on employees by changes over the past decade. Employees will be consulted on practical solutions to some of these issues.

“...My Government will begin construction on this new hospital...”

The planning for the new hospital in Summerside has involved one of the most extensive consultative processes ever undertaken and is resulting in a well-designed, community-focused facility. In the year 2000, My Government will begin construction on this new hospital to address the health-care needs of the region. Regional boards provide valuable public input into the administration of the health care system; and for the first time in years, some board members are being elected by the public, further strengthening the bonds with communities.

Consultations with staff of our largest acute-care referral hospital will be held to explore options for improving delivery of care for acutely ill patients during the course of illness.

“...additional nursing care beds will be allocated to the western and southeastern areas of the province.”

In recognition of increased demands and the importance of supporting communities, additional nursing care beds will be allocated to the western and southeastern areas of the province. Discussions will also be initiated with the private sector operators to develop a long-term plan for these services as we prepare to meet the ongoing needs of an aging population.

Recognizing that these challenges are not unique to our province, we continue to promote full restoration of the Canada Health and Social Transfer.

Government has received the first annual report of the Seniors Advisory Council and copies will be tabled. The insight and input of this group is appreciated as we work to meet the needs of this important sector of our society.

Government will also support the Senior-Friendly Communities Initiative.

“A fundamental aspect of the role of government is to ensure that all citizens are guaranteed necessary basic services.”

A fundamental aspect of the role of government is to ensure that all citizens are guaranteed necessary basic services. We will review the Social Assistance support programs to ensure they respond adequately to changing needs.

Lower income Islanders have benefited from several new programs; and we will build on these as we seek to support those working, but whose income is not sufficient to meet some needs.

The minimum wage will increase in three steps to \$6 per hour.

“...will provide addictions treatment on a broader range and scale.”

The New Addictions Treatment Centre will open early in the new year and add an

essential new element to the treatment of addictions in our province. This new facility will provide addictions treatment on a broader range and scale.

“Prevention and early treatment are important elements of health care.”

Prevention and early treatment are important elements of health care. Building on the success of the mammography screening program and in partnership with the Medical Society and the Canadian Cancer Society, a major public education program directed toward reducing the incidence of cervical cancer will be introduced. Work will continue on the Tobacco Reduction Campaign, services and health promotion programs related to Diabetes will be enhanced and there will be a new effort to increase organ and tissue donations.

My Government recognizes the role support programs such as Home Care play in enabling Islanders to remain in their own homes as long as possible. The range of supports provided will be increased.

The quality of life for Islanders living with a terminal illness can be significantly improved through quality palliative care services. In the coming year, a strategic direction will ensure that quality palliative care services are available to all Islanders in both rural and urban communities.

Mister Speaker, as the National Report on the Health of Canadians demonstrates, factors such as education level and employment have a direct impact on the health of Canadians. This is of special concern to our province, where unemployment remains unacceptably high and some students drop out of the system prior to completion of high school. While recognizing this is a complex problem, efforts will be undertaken to address concerns; and we will seek the cooperation of the federal government in developing strategies to address these needs.

We know that the quality of care children receive in their early years has a lasting impact on how they will perform in school, approach employment and form relationships. In follow-up to extensive public consultations with Island communities, we will be announcing our five-year provincial Healthy Child Development Strategy in

the year 2000. It will be the basis for a long-term sustainable plan for healthy child development and public policy direction.

Improved employment opportunities go hand-in-hand with vibrant communities. Government job creation efforts will continue to centre on strong private sector partnerships and strategic investments that further develop and diversify the Island economy. These partnerships are laying the groundwork for future growth and prosperity. They reflect the growing trust that Island entrepreneurs have in our ability to create the right climate for growth as we continue to work to build the Island's economy—one job, one business, one community at a time.

Small business will remain a key focus of our efforts, and business development programs have been enhanced to better meet the demands of today's entrepreneurs. All departments of government have a role to play in fostering development, and that will be reflected in the Development Strategy to be tabled this session. The Labour Market Development Agreement benefits many Islanders and Island businesses and will be expanded to include support for two important areas: the craft industry and the film production sector.

“...access to stable low-cost energy source...”

An extension of the regional natural gas pipeline to the Island would provide us access to a stable low cost energy source, thereby making the Island more attractive for new businesses. We also welcome the recent natural gas exploration initiative in PEI.

We are pleased by the recognition of the need for a Seasonal Workers Strategy among our sister provinces; and we will continue to provide leadership in addressing the challenges associated with this sector, which is vital to our economy.

“...opportunities for the future.”

“...increase the opportunity for research activity.”

All around us are opportunities for the future.

Les possibilités d'avenir nous entourent.

My Government is impressed by the outstanding calibre of expertise that exists in our province and will work with our Island institutions and organizations to increase the opportunity for research activity.

The Research Fund, which was established earlier this year, has already attracted private sector interests and will lead to exciting new opportunities for our province. Our size affords us the opportunity for linkages that enable us to take on new opportunities.

“...recognized nationally and internationally as the Smart Province...”

The “knowledge-based economy” provides new and significant opportunity for communities, businesses and individuals. Prince Edward Island is being recognized nationally and internationally as the Smart Province — a province renowned for its knowledge-based culture, industries, workforce, training capacity and model application of information technology.

“Working closely with the industry...”

Working closely with the industry association, My Government will address the factors such as workforce development and marketing that are necessary to further expand this sector.

Partnerships with the federal government and private sector have resulted in several innovative pilot projects that will further advance the industry.

“...create new products and new services...”

The recent partnership with General Electric Capital, Island firms and the Provincial Government will add an exciting new element to the development of the information technology sector in our province. This partnership will enhance our ability to market those services to companies around the world and take full advantage of IT

developments.

We will create new products and new services and we will utilize the experience in our traditional industries as a strength in the knowledge economy.

Government will continue to be a leader in the use of technology, and the Access PEI program will be expanded to more communities.

“ Government will address both these needs with a new education and business-led initiative.”

My Government wishes to take additional steps to encourage young Islanders with good business ideas to develop those ideas here. Government has identified the need for both financial and peer support. In order to take maximum advantage of the growing technology industry, it is essential that we offer the best in educational opportunities. Government will address both these needs with a new education and business-led initiative. Working in partnership with other levels of government the private sector and industry associations, we will establish an Information Technology and Innovation Centre. The centre will also serve as a support service for new technology enterprises. A key element will be peer support and guidance. Government will also establish a Technology Advancement Fund. Based on successful peer review, new innovators will be able to secure financial and other assistance to develop their ideas. This will provide essential supports in the early stage of development and marketing. This centre and program will help ensure some of the best Island innovators remain here.

“ Island roadways link our communities...”

E-mail and other technologies are changing the way we interact; and as we advance along the information highway, My Government is also mindful of the importance of our traditional highways. Island roadways link our communities, are the means of transporting our goods and are critical to our social and economic interaction. Additional resources have been allocated to the necessary work of repairing and upgrading Island roadways to enhance the safety of the travelling public. The

substantial increase in traffic volume is adding to the strain already on the system, and My Government has responded with increased construction and improved planning.

We are not alone in this challenge, nor is it a challenge we can afford to meet on our own. My First Minister has been successful in obtaining the support of his colleagues for a National Highways Program which would ensure a safe, high-quality highway interconnection across Canada. We are hopeful, given the encouraging words of the Speech from the Throne, that the Federal Budget will include funding for such a program.

“Important international contacts were developed...”

Government and the Acadian and francophone community worked cooperatively to ensure the success of the Sommet de la Francophonie held in Moncton in September. Important international contacts were developed and many opportunities identified. These will be further explored in the months ahead.

An implementation schedule for the French Language Services Act will be developed; and in partnership with the federal government, additional federal funding will be provided to support this effort.

“My Government believes firmly in the value of regional cooperation...”

My Government believes firmly in the value of regional cooperation and in the added strength for this region when we speak with a united voice. We welcome the renewed commitment among Atlantic governments to work more closely together in advancing the needs of this region and exploring areas for regional cooperation. Such efforts will benefit our province.

“...proud to be entering a new millennium with a balanced budget...”

Careful financial management over the past three years has significantly improved the province's financial picture. We are proud to be entering a new millennium with a balanced budget, and even more proud of the fact it has been achieved without major

sacrifices in programs and services. This success has permitted us to implement the first income tax reduction in Island history; and we will continue to look at opportunities to reduce the tax burden, while maintaining a balanced budget and necessary programs and services.

“...My Government is committed to a direction that continues to build on the successes of the past three years...”

Mister Speaker, Members of the Assembly, My Government is committed to a direction that continues to build on the successes of the past three years; a direction that fosters community development and enhances the level of services provided by government to all Islanders. We are working toward a future with lower unemployment, lower taxes, better health, improved services, stronger communities, a clean environment, new partnerships, greater understanding and respect.

In 46 days we enter a new millennium. We greet this milestone as a stronger province, more confident of our future, proud of our past and determined to build upon the successes that have been achieved. May it be the goal of all who occupy the seats of this assembly today, and in the future, to strive to emulate the vision, dedication and service that is our heritage.

May Divine Providence guide your deliberations.

Que vos travaux soient guidés par la divine Providence.