

P R I N C E   E D W A R D   I S L A N D



# S P E E C H   F R O M   T H E   T H R O N E

Delivered by His Honour  
The Honourable J. Léonce Bernard  
Lieutenant Governor



At the Opening of the Second Session of the Sixty-Second General Assembly  
of Prince Edward Island

NOVEMBER 18, 2004  
3 p.m.



## *A Clear Direction... Putting Islanders First*

*Honourable Speaker,  
Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

**I** take great pleasure in welcoming you back to this historic chamber for the second session of the sixty-second General Assembly.

This past year has been one of tremendous activity and celebration for our province.

- My Government proclaimed 2004 as the Year of Learning and Innovation in Prince Edward Island. This special commemoration celebrates 200 years of higher education, dating back to 1804 when Lieutenant Governor Edmund Fanning set aside 10 town lots for the first college in the province.
- This year, we celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of l'Acadie and hosted many wonderful events that highlighted the rich Acadian culture in our province.
- Prince Edward Island continues to be recognized as a great island. In a *Travel & Leisure Magazine* readers' survey, Prince Edward Island was designated the highest ranking island in the continental United States and Canada.
- It has been almost a year since the Canadian premiers convened here in Charlottetown to form the Council of the Federation. As Founding Chair of the Council, My Premier has demonstrated significant leadership on behalf of this important institution.

- The inaugural Thomas Symons Lecture on the State of Canadian Confederation was hosted successfully at the Confederation Centre of the Arts earlier this month. Plans for next year's lecture have already been initiated so that this event can evolve into one of Canada's premier examinations of the Canadian ideal.

It has been an unsettling year in world events in respect to the situation in the Middle East and the ongoing threats of terrorism. The images that we see on television and the stories that we read in newspapers are sobering reminders that world events really do touch us all. We are part of the global community.

It is important for us to keep taking charge of our future with the realization that we are vitally connected to the world. Even as a small island, we have a significant role to play. We offer the world an example in the way we treat our precious Island resources, in the priority we give our communities, in the way we persevere to make our economy stronger and in the quality of products we produce and export.

My Government is committed to continue working in partnership with the citizens of Prince Edward Island to follow a solid strategic path that will further strengthen our economy and be based firmly on the foundation of a healthy population and vibrant communities.

*"It is important for us to keep taking charge of our future with the realization that we are vitally connected to the world."*

## *Progress and Achievements*

**T**his has been a year of economic progress for our province despite the national and international challenges we faced. My Government is committed to keeping our economy strong and supporting new business development initiatives for continued future growth.

Our economic achievements are many.

- We have the highest proportion of economic activity generated from manufacturing output of all the Canadian provinces.
- Our population is at an all-time high.
- We are experiencing record levels of employment.
- Our labour income is the highest in our history.
- Retail sales have increased 57 per cent over the last decade.
- Islanders are building new homes in record numbers, the highest number of new housing starts since 1989.

My Government is committed to providing high-quality health care, innovation and growth, and stewardship of the environment and promoting quality and value.

Collectively, we are committed to self-reliance, lifelong learning, safe communities and a healthy populace.

*“Collectively, we are committed to self-reliance, lifelong learning, safe communities and a healthy populace.”*

## *A Clear Direction for Health Care and Healthy Living*

**M**y Government believes that healthy people are the foundation of a compassionate and productive society. We remain committed to health care as our number one priority.

Along with other Canadian provinces, Prince Edward Island is facing many health-care challenges now and into the future. The demand for health-care services is driven largely by an aging population, the high-incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cancer, new technology and pharmaceuticals, and specialized human resources.

However, these current and future challenges are positioned alongside significant achievements. In the year ahead, My Government will continue to improve the quality of the health and social services system.

Recruitment of health professionals continues to be a key priority for My Government. Currently, the province has more nurses and physicians than ever before, and this is a direct result of our ongoing recruitment efforts to ensure high-quality, professional services for Islanders.

The original four-year Nurse Recruitment and Retention Strategy was implemented by My Government in 2000 and yielded many positive initiatives including sponsorships offered to students at the University of Prince Edward Island School of Nursing, as well as the creation of new registered nurse positions. The continuation of the nursing recruitment and retention strategy signifies a commitment to ensuring that the current and future need for registered nurses across the health system is fulfilled.

Similarly, the enhancement of physician services continues to be a significant priority of My Government. The new three-year Master Agreement with Island physicians will ensure that we remain competitive with other jurisdictions, so Islanders can continue to have a quality health-care system. An additional \$2.1 million will be invested over three years to increase the recruitment and retention efforts for physicians.

*"In the year ahead, My Government will continue to improve the quality of the health and social services system."*

The new \$55-million Prince County Hospital has been in operation since the spring and is providing the latest technology in health care and services for the residents of East Prince and for all Islanders. Working in conjunction with all Island hospitals, the Prince County Hospital is an integral part of our health-care system.

The expanded PEI Cancer Treatment Centre continues to provide positive benefits for Islanders. This expanded centre means 95 per cent of Island cancer patients are now able to remain in the province for their treatment.

My Government continues to be committed to providing quality health care in rural areas. Our community hospitals serve a very valuable purpose and remain an important priority. Communities must be involved in planning for health-care delivery; therefore, consultation will continue to be an important component for planning for the future.

My Government acknowledges the need for upgrading the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and is, in concert with health providers, developing a comprehensive plan to ensure high-quality, efficient health-care service delivery for the future.

Serious illnesses such as cancer place a huge burden on individuals, their families and the health-care system. My Government recently launched a new Cancer Control Strategy. This comprehensive strategy sets out a course to reduce cancer incidence and enhance the quality of life of cancer patients.

Building on the *Smoke-Free Places Act*, during this session My Government will be introducing legislation to further restrict the sale and availability of tobacco products.

For the past four years, the Healthy Child Development Strategy has led government efforts to invest in the future of our province through our children. What began as a five-year strategy has evolved into a comprehensive policy platform for government and community partners. Healthy Child Development will continue to be a major focus of My Government, with Islanders actively engaged in establishing priorities and direction based on what works for children and what makes a difference in their lives.

*"My Government continues to be committed to providing quality health care in rural areas. Our community hospitals serve a very valuable purpose and remain an important priority."*

After the first year of operation under the new *Child Protection Act*, My Government is pleased to announce that direct improvements are being seen through more focused interventions and better child development results for children in care. To further support children and families at risk, My Government has strengthened our capacity in the provision of emergency duty services. This investment supports front-line staff, first responders and families.

Many Islanders are enjoying longer, healthier lives, and My Government will establish a Seniors Secretariat dedicated to promoting the interests of Island seniors through research and policy development and achievements within the community.

To better understand the issues of Islanders with disabilities, My Government has established the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Disability Issues to recommend priorities, policies and programs and to maintain an ongoing consultation with members of the disabled community.

*“ ... My Government will establish a Seniors Secretariat dedicated to promoting the interests of Island seniors ... ”*



## *A Clear Direction for Education and Learning*

**M**y Government believes that education is the greatest opportunity we can give our children, and with a good education, there is no limit to what people can achieve or contribute.

We understand that Islanders should have access to high-quality lifelong learning opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential and contribute to society.

My Government has demonstrated its commitment to our public education system by increasing funding for education by more than 20 per cent over the past five years. This has included major investments in a new publicly funded kindergarten program that now serves over 1,400 students. Further investments were made to increase the wages and benefits of all certified kindergarten instructors.

My Government recognizes the vital role of teachers in helping students to reach their full learning potential. As part of a strategic initiative to improve student learning by investing in the front lines of education, My Government continues to implement its Investing in Island Classrooms Strategy that is now reducing class size, improving student-teacher ratios and providing students with more access to specialized teachers. During the current year, six new teachers were added, and 19 teaching positions were maintained which would otherwise have been lost due to declining enrolments.

My Government understands the vital importance of early literacy. When a child experiences a good introduction to school and reads well in the early grades, the child has a greater chance to succeed in school and develops a positive attitude toward learning. For this reason, My Government will continue to invest heavily in early literacy programs. This year, an additional teacher-leader was hired and 10 more teachers were trained in the Reading Recovery Program.

*“... My Government continues to implement its Investing in Island Classrooms Strategy ...”*

My Government understands the challenges school boards are facing to meet increasing operational costs while maintaining high standards of education. To this end, the boards are being provided with additional funding of \$2.2 million this year to address rising costs such as energy, transportation and insurance.

It should be noted that average annual spending on students in grades one to 12 is now \$6,738 per child, an increase of \$689 per child over the previous year.

We must recognize the powerful impact that an active healthy lifestyle has on a child's readiness to learn and the vital role that schools can play in helping students to develop healthy lifestyles. An Active Healthy School Communities Strategy will be introduced this year to encourage schools and communities to work together to promote healthy eating, physical activity, substance-abuse prevention and youth engagement in Island communities. My Government will be supporting this strategy by examining what types of snack foods are currently offered in our schools with the view of encouraging healthy choices.

My Government understands that the need for educated and skilled workers has never been greater and that is why it has increased funding for post-secondary education by more than 57 per cent over the past five years. We are proud of the excellent progress being made by the University of Prince Edward Island and Holland College to prepare Islanders for a changing workforce by providing exceptional, post-secondary learning opportunities here at home.

Enrolment at UPEI is at record levels. A major Campus-Renewal Program is now well underway with the addition of a new student centre, and athletics and recreation facilities. Construction began this fall on a new student residence, and groundbreaking is set for 2005 on a \$30-million expansion to the Atlantic Veterinary College. My Government will continue to support UPEI through increased operational funding and a \$25-million commitment to the capital campaign.

Enrolment at Holland College continues to increase and My Government continues to support this growth through increased operational funding of \$750,000 and new capital investments of \$8.5 million in the Justice Institute and \$3.5 million in the Marine Centre.

*"... increased funding for post-secondary education by more than 57 per cent over the past five years."*

My Government also assists students directly with the cost of post-secondary learning. Last year, financial assistance of \$7.9 million, an increase of 36 per cent, was provided to 2,250 full-time students through the PEI Student Loan Program. My Government will continue to work with our partners in the Council of Ministers of Education to urge the federal government to acknowledge and exercise its responsibility to assist students to reduce and manage debt, as well as its responsibility to assist the provinces in improving access to affordable high-quality, post-secondary education.

My Government is taking action to meet changing needs and labour market shortages in the skilled trades. More trades-related courses are being introduced in high schools, and students are receiving career guidance to help them explore career options in the trades. Sector councils have been established to bring employers and educators together to look at demand and supply in the trades and to develop a strategy to guide the future direction of trades training in Prince Edward Island.

*“More trades-related courses are being introduced in high schools, and students are receiving career guidance to help them explore career options in the trades.”*

## *A Clear Direction for Growth and Prosperity*

**P**rince Edward Island has more people working than ever before. There are also a wider range of job opportunities in more diverse industries. Linked with a more entrepreneurial environment and a thriving post-secondary learning culture, increased employment opportunities will be a trend that will continue.

The province's economy is growing...but there is still much to be done.

My Government has developed and will be announcing an innovative Tax Rebate Program which will stimulate economic growth by addressing key structural issues in the Island economy.

This new program signals a progressive approach to business development and will give My Minister of Development and Technology additional tools to continue his success in building a stronger Island economy.

Four important measures will be introduced, including a corporate tax rebate for the development of innovative products and services, and an increase to the existing Investment Tax Credit for manufacturing and processing companies which invest in high-end technologies.

Two rebates to individuals will also be introduced – one to encourage investment by Islanders in Island companies and another to assist companies in attracting workers with skills which are not yet available in the Prince Edward Island labour force.

The four points will be introduced as a tax rebate program, however, discussions with the Government of Canada regarding implementation of these measures as income tax credits will continue.

My Government's investments in growth are paying off.

*"My Government has developed and will be announcing an innovative Tax Rebate Program which will stimulate economic growth by addressing key structural issues in the Island economy."*

Last Friday, ground was broken for the \$18 million National Research Council's Institute for Nutriscience and Health, located on the UPEI campus. This initiative further supports My Government's objective to grow Prince Edward Island as Canada's premier bio-science centre.

In addition to bringing world-class scientists, equipment and infrastructure to the province, the institute represents a bold new model in research partnerships which goes beyond the mere sharing of space and equipment. Within the institute, university, government and private-sector scientists will work side by side toward a common theme of discovery, innovation and commercialization to address critical health issues.

Building on this culture of innovation, My Government supported the expansion of the Food Technology Centre to develop new extraction technologies for nutraceuticals and functional foods which will lead to more economic opportunities.

My Government is taking steps to address the very real challenges as population ages. The facts are plain. By 2010, there will be more Islanders leaving the workforce than entering it. To face this challenge, we must look at many solutions. That is why a new Population Secretariat will begin to identify and address barriers to population growth. We want to draw on the Island's strengths to attract new residents and to retain our young people.

*"... a new Population Secretariat will begin to identify and address barriers to population growth."*

## *A Clear Direction for Our Primary Industries*

**O**ver the past year, My Government has worked closely with those involved in our primary industries to deal with the challenges and issues before them and to help ensure their sustainable growth and development.

### *Agriculture*

The Prince Edward Island agriculture and food industry continues to adapt to a rapidly changing global marketplace. This past year, in co-operation with all sectors of the industry, My Government helped to organize a major symposium on the future of agriculture in Prince Edward Island. An industry-led working group has been established to followup on the recommendations of the symposium and to present further options for growth and sustainability.

This approach will be based on making the transition from an industrialized, commodity-based model to one which is based on product differentiation and branding, building on the Island's pastoral image, geographic isolation, healthy environment and tradition of family farming.

Cattle producers in Prince Edward Island have incurred significant losses as a result of BSE. My Government has already committed more than \$2.5 million as the provincial share of support to producers through federal-provincial compensation programs and continues to work closely with the industry to ensure its future prospects.

My Government has also committed close to \$5 million toward the construction of the new beef plant being established at Albany. This plant is expected to provide greater access to markets and more stability for producers. My Government wishes to congratulate beef producers for their leadership and initiative in the establishment of this new facility.

In co-operation with hog producers, we continue to explore options for the processing of hogs in Prince Edward Island and the development of value-added opportunities. The Hog Bridge Loan Program has been expanded to help producers deal with poor and uncertain returns from the marketplace.

*"The Prince Edward Island agriculture and food industry continues to adapt to a rapidly changing global marketplace."*

The Prince Edward Island potato industry continues to recover from the drought and diseases it has experienced in recent years. My Government will continue to work with the industry to ensure a balance among the seed, tablestock and processing sectors and to promote new and expanded markets.

The future of the family farm in Prince Edward Island is based on enabling new people to become actively involved in the industry. In announcing the Future Farmer Program, My Government committed itself to supporting new enterprises with a combination of business planning, risk management, skills development, extension services and access to capital. To date, more than 140 applications have been received for this program. This is a significant step in My Government's ongoing commitment to strengthen and revitalize the agriculture and food industry in this province.

## *Fisheries and Aquaculture*

The Prince Edward Island fisheries and aquaculture industries continue to make a growing contribution to the economy of this province. These industries occupy a distinct place in our Island economy.

The vitality of the fishery is dependent on sound fisheries conservation and on fair and equitable access to resources. My Government has sought to achieve greater access to a number of species, and will continue to do so, in an effort to help diversify and stabilize the industry.

Island fishers require the support of My Government to ensure that decisions made by the Government of Canada are fair and in the best interests of the industry. We will pursue the principle of fairness at every juncture and with every tool which is available, including the courts.

In the coming year, My Government will be exploring opportunities for aquaculture development and an enhanced lobster fishery in the Northumberland Strait in co-operation with other partners within the fishing and aquaculture industries.

*"My Government has sought to achieve greater access to a number of species, and will continue to do so, in an effort to help diversify and stabilize the industry."*

## *Forestry*

Forests are an integral part of our Island, affecting every aspect of our daily lives. They provide clean air and water, habitat for wildlife, places for recreation and spiritual renewal and the raw material for products we use in our everyday lives.

The recent merger of the Forestry Division into the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry demonstrates My Government's commitment to maintaining healthy public and private forests that provide many benefits to the Island's environment, economy and society.

In response to significant changes that have taken place in the forestry sector over the past decade, My Government has undertaken a major review of its provincial forest policy. The current forest policy was established in 1987 and was focused on the growth and development of the timber industry.

While timber will always be important, the forest also provides non-timber forest products such as ground hemlock and value such as landscape, recreation, wildlife habitat and water quality. Building on our achievements, the new policy will be aimed at achieving a balance among the many benefits provided by forest resources and ensuring its sustainability for present and future generations. The new forest policy will be developed in close consultation with all Islanders.

Over the coming months, My Government will be inviting public consultation on the appropriate government role in terms of public and private forests. A plan will be created which supports healthy, sustainable forests over the next several decades.

*"Forests are an integral part of our Island, affecting every aspect of our daily lives."*



## *Tourism*

The 2004 tourism year was a challenge, and Prince Edward Island felt the effects of a soft travel market, in part due to inclement weather, global events and higher fuel prices.

To ensure that the Island achieves its full economic potential from tourism, a new planning structure is being established. This initiative involves a new Tourism Advisory Council that will provide strategic direction to the province's tourism research, product development and marketing efforts.

The new council will be led by industry leaders and include significant private-sector representation which reflects My Government's commitment to work in partnership with the Island's tourism industry.

To grow the tourism industry we must remain competitive and sustain the unique and special characteristics of the Island. To be competitive we must continue to introduce new products and refine existing ones.

A cultural and heritage tourism working group is being formed to develop a Cultural Tourism Strategy for our province. To improve our understanding of the choices tourists make, a new research model is being developed to provide more reliable and accurate measures of tourism activities. This initiative will enable My Government to collect information and statistics 12 months of the year and measure the full economic impact tourism contributes toward our Island economy.

These initiatives are intended to strengthen our tourism industry and enhance Prince Edward Island's reputation as a great place to vacation.

*"To ensure that the Island achieves its full economic potential from tourism, a new planning structure is being established."*

## *A Clear Direction for a Sustainable Environment*

**A**round the globe today, there is a renewed acknowledgement of the relationship between environment, society and economy. Citizens are demanding that neighbours, businesses, communities and governments take action to minimize the impacts of their activities on the environment.

Prince Edward Island is well-positioned to take steps toward greater stewardship and My Government will lead by example.

Fuel-efficiency standards have been established for new or replacement government vehicles. Measures taken to reduce unnecessary lighting at the public administration buildings in Charlottetown are achieving energy savings and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

My Government has introduced a significant tax rebate on hybrid motor vehicles and is exploring the feasibility of incorporating more alternatively fuelled government vehicles.

As a next step, we will embark on a comprehensive Greening Government initiative. Building audits will be conducted to identify ways to achieve more efficient energy use. Procurement policies will be reviewed to determine if changes can be made to minimize environmental impacts from products and services government uses in its operations.

Water is one of our most precious resources in Prince Edward Island. More than \$1 million has been invested over the last three years to protect our drinking water. My Government has strengthened water and wastewater regulations to address the most common sources of contamination. It is now easier for Islanders to have their water tested with more services available in Access PEI offices, and our provincial water-testing laboratories have achieved the highest level of accreditation.

*“My Government has strengthened water and wastewater regulations to address the most common sources of contamination.”*

We now move into a new phase of protecting our water resources using a watershed approach. Watersheds are nature's boundaries. All activities within those boundaries combine to impact on water quality, so the best way to protect and enhance water resources is on a watershed basis.

Several community watershed groups have already embraced the concept of watershed planning. My Government will continue to support the work of these groups. The funding application process has been consolidated and a new Watershed Management Fund established, so dollars are best used to benefit watershed groups and communities.

Legislation has been passed requiring public registration of contaminated sites in the province. Changes will be made to the *Environmental Protection Act* regulations to implement this public registry so Islanders will know if contamination has occurred on a property in the past.

During this session, My Government will ask honourable members to consider the issue of genetically modified organisms more closely. There is passionate opinion on both sides of this issue so we must ensure that our direction reflects the very best interests of Prince Edward Island in the longer term.

Prince Edward Island became the first province to sign an agreement with the Government of Canada for climate change initiatives to help meet national and global commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A committee of this legislature is presently carrying out province-wide consultations to seek input from Islanders on a Climate Change Strategy for Prince Edward Island. This strategy will identify actions Prince Edward Island can take to help reduce emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change.

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## *A Clear Direction for Our Energy Future*

**M**y Government is committed to ensuring that Islanders have access to secure and competitively priced energy. For too long, Islanders have relied on imported fossil fuels to produce electricity, heat our homes and fuel our vehicles. This has put our province in a precarious position in terms of price stability and supply.

The way we produce and use energy has a significant impact on our environment. As a result, renewable energy sources such as wind, hydro and biomass are playing an increasingly important role.

Prince Edward Island is a leader in wind energy development. Last fall, expansion at the North Cape Wind Farm doubled the electrical generation capacity. Prince Edward Island is now generating enough wind energy to power nearly 6,500 homes or five per cent of the province's total electricity needs, the highest percentage of any province in Canada.

The Renewable Energy Strategy released in June by My Government will build on our strength in wind energy and explore other renewable energy options such as biofuels. Cited as the most-progressive renewable energy policy in North America, the strategy will reduce our reliance on fossil fuels that pollute the environment and provide a measure of energy self-sufficiency.

The new *Renewable Energy Act* will be introduced during this session of the Legislative Assembly. This progressive legislation will automatically enhance the viability of community or co-operative wind systems by allowing for the establishment of a guaranteed selling price for electricity supplied to the utility.

*"Prince Edward Island is a leader in wind energy development. Last fall, expansion at the North Cape Wind Farm doubled the electrical generation capacity."*

The legislation will also allow for the concept of net metering. If farmers, small business operators or homeowners are producing electricity from a renewable energy source, they will receive credit for the full retail value of the electricity they contribute to the grid.

My Government recognizes that orderly development is another important factor in the success of wind energy development. The *Renewable Energy Act* will allow large-scale wind developments only in designated areas.

My Government will also continue to work in partnership with neighbouring provinces through the Atlantic Energy Ministers' Forum to identify opportunities for regional co-operation within the energy sector to address long-term energy supply needs within the region. Through co-ordination and collaboration in planning generation capacity, we will better meet the needs of all energy consumers in Atlantic Canada.

*"The Renewable Energy Act will allow large-scale wind developments only in designated areas."*

## *A Clear Direction for Strengthened Communities*

**C**ommunities form the foundation of our Island culture and society. The strength, pride and commitment which communities offer will continue to be critical to our future economic growth.

My Government will continue its close partnership with communities.

We will continue to invest in Island communities through the excellent work of the Community Development Bureau. Since its inception, our \$9 million investment in communities has leveraged a further \$33 million investment from other sources. These funds have helped communities to realize projects which will sustain them, improve quality of life and encourage further economic development.

Through the leadership of My Government, an agreement was negotiated with the federal government to increase the definition of the National Highway System to include a portion of Route 2. This agreement is a first step to negotiate appropriate highway funding partnerships for the benefit of Island communities.

As part of the continuing effort to improve the environment and the appearance of our roadsides, My Government introduced the Adopt-A-Highway Program to combat littering. To date, partnerships have been established with 30 community groups to adopt 200 kilometres of Island roads with more than 2,000 bags of litter being collected from Island roadsides.

Infrastructure development is necessary to the growth and vitality of Island communities. That is why My Government continues to invest millions of dollars each year in community infrastructure through the Canada-PEI Infrastructure Program and the Strategic Infrastructure Program.

*"We will continue to invest in Island communities through the excellent work of the Community Development Bureau."*

My Government recognizes the importance of land as a vital resource for this province. We must continue to strive to enhance the opportunities and lifestyles of all Islanders by balancing the use of land and development in an economically sustainable manner for the benefit of the province as a whole.

This year, communities across Prince Edward Island are celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the province-wide library service. My Government is committed to continuing this strong partnership with communities to provide opportunities for literacy, access to worldwide information and cultural advancement through a strong library system.

Prince Edward Island will host the Canada Summer Games in 2009. My Government is committed to ensuring the games are athlete-centred and work will continue to ensure that the benefits of hosting this significant event are evident across Prince Edward Island.

My Government has further consolidated family legal aid services within the Office of the Attorney General to improve the access and efficiency of these services. This initiative will contribute to recommendations contained in the Access to Justice Task Force Report relative to resolving the complexity of the family legal-aid delivery system.

Over the last two years, My Government has supported a number of initiatives in partnership with the Acadian and Francophone community in Prince Edward Island.

My Government supported the development of the Vision Project. Both through grants and in-kind services, contributions have been made to the expansion of a five-year community development plan. This plan charts a course for growth, renewal and awareness.

Implementation of the *French Language Services Act* continues. In July, the first annual report on French Language Services was released. This report is the first comprehensive report on the combined efforts of all departments and agencies in the promotion of the French language and culture in Prince Edward Island.

*"... My Government has supported a number of initiatives in partnership with the Acadian and Francophone community in Prince Edward Island."*

## *A Clear Direction for Accountability*

**A**ccountability is the most important commitment of My Government. Since it was first elected, it has employed numerous mechanisms to ensure that Islanders remain involved in decision-making and are informed of the impacts of those decisions.

It is incumbent upon all honourable members to ensure that our electoral system remains relevant and accountable to Islanders.

My Government continues to examine the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Commission regarding proportional representation and will move forward with an education and implementation plan in the coming months.

Also, the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission has been received. All members look forward to considering this report to ensure that the principles of fairness and balance guide any modifications to Prince Edward Island's electoral map.

My Government has launched a comprehensive program-renewal process to ensure that the programs and services it offers remain relevant and reflect the priorities of Islanders. This initiative will utilize the expertise of existing public service employees, involve Islanders in pre-budget consultations and have as its primary objective the future sustainability of our province.

*"It is incumbent upon all honourable members to ensure that our electoral system remains relevant and accountable to Islanders."*



## *A Clear Direction for a Fair Partnership*

**I**slanders, like all Canadians, place a tremendous value on what it means to be Canadian and the entitlement of that citizenship. We are fortunate to live in a country abundant with wealth and opportunity, where the spirit of co-operation and sharing traditionally prevail.

Nevertheless, all provinces and territories continue to be disappointed with the lack of recognition by the Government of Canada that the fiscal imbalance, which currently exists, is jeopardizing the very spirit of the Canadian federation.

My Government will continue to express the view that Islanders want a renewed partnership with the Government of Canada: a true partnership which involves mutual respect and a concerted effort to work in the best interest of our citizens, together.

Granted, some progress has been made. My Premier was an active participant in this year's negotiations with the Prime Minister which resulted in increased resources for health care and some changes to the Equalization Program.

These have been important first steps, but the work has not been completed.

Greater co-operation will be needed to achieve a new highway funding agreement. My Government is ready to work with our federal colleagues to resolve critical challenges in the fishery. Co-operation is required to sustain improvements in health care and affordable post-secondary education.

The agenda is significant and My Government is prepared to work in collaboration with our federal partners. Islanders expect no more than their fair share as members of the Canadian federation, and we must remain vigilant to ensure that Islanders receive this entitlement.

*"Islanders expect no more than their fair share as members of the Canadian federation, and we must remain vigilant to ensure that Islanders receive this entitlement."*

## *Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members ...*

Islanders are a proud and resourceful people. They have great expectations of their representatives.

My Government has shaped a very ambitious and progressive agenda for your consideration during this session of the Legislative Assembly. As you consider a number of legislative proposals, may your wisdom enable our province to fulfil its full potential.

Challenge each other to create better ideas. Endeavour at every juncture to reflect the will of those who have placed their trust in you. Work collectively to ensure better communities and a caring society.

*A Clear Direction...Putting Islanders First.*

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.