

The Future Starts Here

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2012

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



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NOVA SCOTIA

The Future Starts Here: Speech from the Throne 2012

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, ladies and gentlemen,
Nova Scotians.

Welcome to the Fourth Session of this, the 61st General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature. As this is my final opportunity to speak as Her Majesty's representative in this historic chamber, I want to wish all Nova Scotians well and thank them for their kindness to me over the past five-and-a-half years.

This year is an auspicious one for Nova Scotians, as it is for our fellow citizens in every part of our great worldwide Commonwealth. In 2012, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her Diamond Jubilee. Throughout the year, Nova Scotians will join others all over the Commonwealth in celebrating Her Majesty's 60-year reign. Long may she reign over us.

In July, as the Council of the Federation's incoming chair, the Premier will proudly host his colleagues from across Canada and lead the provinces in discussions about sustaining and strengthening the growth of our national economy. And, Canada's premiers and the national aboriginal leaders will hold their annual meetings in Nova Scotia this year.

In the year that has passed since I last spoke in this Chamber, Nova Scotians have lost fellow citizens who gave much and freely of themselves. We take time now to remember these Nova Scotians whose contributions have fundamentally shaped this province across a wide variety of sectors:

- Graham W. Dennis, perhaps the greatest champion of Nova Scotia of his generation and publisher of Nova Scotia's fiercely independent daily newspaper, who ensured that the power of his press was used in the service of that which is best in this province
- Senator Fred Dickson, who, as loyal as he was to his political party, never put the interests of anything ahead of the legitimate and honourable interests of his fellow Nova Scotians



- Joyce Carman Barkhouse, of Bridgewater, who wrote beautiful children’s literature, including the Nova Scotian classic *Pit Pony*
- Dr. Peter Aucoin and Dr. James Murray Beck, two of Nova Scotia’s most distinguished and quoted political scientists, who were academic and teaching giants at Dalhousie University
- Allan Blakeney, the first Nova Scotia–born NDP Premier in Canada, who provided leadership to the province of Saskatchewan for many, many years
- Dr. Willard Sterling Boyle, of Wallace, who was the co-inventor of an imaging semiconductor circuit known as the charge-coupled device (CCD sensor) and shared the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physics for the invention
- The Most Reverend Colin Campbell, Bishop and Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Antigonish, a leader in his church and in his community
- Cape Breton Regional Police Service Chief Myles Burke, a community leader who worked his way up through the ranks and served the people of Cape Breton with distinction
- John J. Jodrey, an entrepreneur and community leader who served, among other capacities, as president of Scotia Investments
- Paul O’Regan, who built one of the province’s most successful automobile companies, and never lost his loyalty for or pride in his hometown of Parrsboro
- Ken Spinney, who grew, donated, and was justifiably proud of the Nova Scotia Christmas tree in Boston in 2011
- Dr. Marie B. Elwood, who served as the Chief Curator of History for the Nova Scotia Museum and made an extraordinary contribution to this province, drawing Nova Scotians into a better understanding and appreciation of our cultural history.
- two former members of this House, Richie Hubbard and Harold Huskilson, both of whom served their constituents and Nova Scotia proudly
- and Peter Underwood, a dedicated and long-serving deputy minister with the provincial government

Our province can move forward in confidence because of the contributions of people such as these.

In 2009, Nova Scotians voted for a new approach to government, rejecting an approach that had become stale, short-sighted and unable to learn from mistakes. Nova Scotians, seeking to make life better for families, provided a strong mandate for change. The priorities of Nova Scotians are as clear today as they were three years ago: good jobs and a strong economy, health care, education, and affordability.

Nova Scotia needs a strong, vibrant economy to pay for important services like health care and education.

A strong, vibrant economy will enable our children and grandchildren to find meaningful employment and raise their families.

Here. At home.

My government has been relentless in pursuit of economic opportunities that will propel the province forward. At the same time, it recognizes that the fiscal capacity of the government is driven by the way public resources are managed.

With the help of thousands of Nova Scotians, business and labour leaders, public servants, and organizations, my government has taken on the difficult task of ensuring once and for all that the province's spending is kept in line with its ability to pay.

Getting back to balance—and staying there—is critical for making sure the public services that families rely on will be there when they need them, now and for generations to come.

My government is one year away from bringing Nova Scotia back to balance.

To ensure that the province continues to live within its means every year, my government will make even more improvements to the way it operates and delivers public services.

My government is finding ways to deliver services much more cost-effectively, while maintaining or improving quality. In the coming year, it will focus further on procurement. The province spends \$1 billion a year on goods and services, and Nova Scotians rightly expect their government to make wise spending decisions.



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My government will seek savings while ensuring quality and value for taxpayers.

Previous governments have failed to find lasting savings in the administration of government, school boards and health authorities, municipalities and universities. My government is committed to providing services Nova Scotians want and need, while at the same time making the improvements necessary to deliver those programs and services more effectively.

Just this month the province, the nine district health authorities, and the IWK announced the merger of several administrative services, including the elimination of up to 20 vice-president and senior executive positions. Once fully implemented, my government forecasts to save up to \$55 million annually.

Any service or program that is funded, either wholly or in part, by the taxpayers of Nova Scotia must be delivered in the most efficient way possible. Savings through shared services must be part of the solution. Continued duplication of services at public expense is something Nova Scotia cannot afford.

My government is focused on the future. Its effort to secure a better life for families is supported by careful preparation and a strong, focused plan.

My government is sticking to its plan.

The plan is on track.

The plan is working.

Even as it has had to build a sustainable, balanced financial foundation for the province from the structural deficit it inherited, my government is also implementing significant change that is making life better for families now and into the future.

Change to bring Nova Scotians better health care sooner.

Change to put kids and learning first.

Change to make life more affordable for Nova Scotian families.

Change to create good jobs and grow the economy.

Nova Scotia is positioned to succeed. Our time is now.

Creating Good Jobs and Growing the Economy

In the past, poor economic performance was the norm. For 20 years, Nova Scotia's economic growth was the worst in Canada. Previous governments were, at best, overwhelmed by the challenge, and failed to spur a more prosperous trend.

Without change, Nova Scotia will not have a better future. My government is working with businesses, universities, and other partners to ensure that the province is strategically positioned to innovate, learn, and compete.

Nova Scotia is heading into an era of what promises to be great prosperity—a time when good jobs are the norm, a time when young people who left the province looking for work can come home and build a life here in Nova Scotia.

A strong, vibrant economy provides the foundation for the important programs and services Nova Scotians want and need.

But opportunity rarely just drops into our laps. It must be pursued, planned for, and seized.

Opportunities like the shipbuilding contract, the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project, and Shell Oil's commitment to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in exploration off our coast are going to significantly boost our economy. Much careful work and planning went into promoting and landing such opportunities.

From Yarmouth to Cape Breton you can see and feel the optimism for the future, even before any direct impact has hit.

This is truly a case of opportunity meeting preparedness.

In Nova Scotia, right now, there are more people working than at any other time in our history. In the past few months, this province has turned an important corner: employment is higher now than before the recession hit in 2008. This is great news, but my government recognizes there is much more to be done.

That's where *jobsHere* comes in.



A year after launching the *jobsHere* plan, the province has already supported the start-up and growth of hundreds of companies in all parts of Nova Scotia.

My government lowered the small business tax two years in a row, creating the most competitive tax environment for businesses in decades, and expanded the Credit Union Small Business Loan Program, ensuring that small businesses in every part of the province have access to larger loans with more time to pay them back.

jobsHere investments in workplace training help Nova Scotia employers grow their business. With funding through the Productivity Investment Program and the Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Incentive, more businesses can adapt to new technology and new ways of operating.

To date, the province has made 149 productivity training investments, totaling \$2.5 million, with 6,325 Nova Scotian employees receiving workplace productivity training. An additional 48 applications are now being processed. Workplace Education Initiatives will continue to help workers increase essential skills. By the end of this year 3,600 Nova Scotians will have moved into workplace education programs.

This year, my government will improve the apprenticeship programs that teach young people the skills and trades they'll need to make the most of their work lives in Nova Scotia's bright future.

Across Nova Scotia, demand for training in the workplace is massive. My government is expanding programs to meet that demand, and has brought all of its resources together under one virtual roof at careers.novascotia.ca.

In recent years, generations of Nova Scotians have looked west for opportunity. Soon all of Canada—and eyes around the world—will turn toward Nova Scotia as this province steps up to take its rightful place leading the country in growth and productivity.

In case anyone missed the announcement, Irving Shipyards was the successful bidder for the 30-year, \$25-billion naval ships contract. This will have a profound and positive effect on Nova Scotia's economy and on the lives of thousands of Nova Scotians and their families in all parts of the province.

It is one of the “game changers” that are becoming economic reality in Nova Scotia.

The shipbuilding contract will generate millions of dollars in economic spinoffs for the region, and create more than 11,000 good jobs during peak production. The province, through the *Ships Start Here* partnership, has already taken significant steps to help prepare businesses for participation. Last September, Shelburne Ship Repair reopened with the help of an \$8.8-million provincial investment.

Electricians, metal fabricators, sheet metal workers, welders, carpenters, steamfitters and pipefitters, and millwrights will be needed for the Irving contract. For those positions that cannot be staffed here at home, the best and the brightest from around the world will be attracted to share in our good fortune.

Two generations of Nova Scotians will have chances that their parents and grandparents lacked. They will have choices. My government is putting tools in place to help them make choices that work for them, and is fully focused on ensuring that young Nova Scotians are trained and ready to benefit so that this opportunity means as much to Nova Scotia as it should.

Through *Kids and Learning First*, the number of schools offering skilled trades will double over the next four years to 18 and a new manufacturing course connected to shipbuilding will be introduced in September 2013. These courses link learning to real-life jobs and help get young people thinking early about the opportunities out there and how they can seize them.

In addition to the “factory floor” opportunities the ships contract offers, our universities will develop the engineers, the business leaders, the innovators needed to turn contracts and concepts into Canada’s next-generation naval fleet and build lasting economic legacies.

A new \$190,000 provincial investment will help high school graduates interested in shipbuilding enrol in a new metal fabrication program at the Nova Scotia Community College.



And, my government will make a significant new investment in expanding trades training in our high schools. This investment in state-of-the-art trades training will ensure that young people from across the province are ready to take the leap into a fulfilling and rewarding career when they graduate.

The province's workforce strategy is helping Nova Scotians acquire the right skills for good jobs.

While everyone can benefit, the strategy specifically and appropriately targets groups that are under-represented in the workforce, including women, African and Aboriginal Nova Scotians, people with disabilities, older workers, and income assistance recipients.

Recently, the premier announced \$640,000 for workforce training programs offered through the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office in Membertou. Mi'kmaw workers are a brilliant, untapped resource, and the investment will increase the number of Mi'kmaw ready to go to work in industries that need workers. That will help strengthen the economy and better prepare them and the province for a brighter future.

Communities that have suffered discrimination and limited access to good jobs, particularly African Nova Scotians, have a new opportunity for training that is directly linked to worthwhile jobs. *Skills Up* offers financial assistance for participants to obtain new skills in areas such as carpentry, electronics technology, and operating heavy equipment, thereby enhancing their ability to obtain good jobs.

New, immigrant Nova Scotians are another resource the province hopes will help meet the growing workforce demands.

Welcome Home to Nova Scotia, the province's new immigration strategy, is among the most comprehensive in Canada, internationally targeting workers who have the technical skills and global contacts the province needs to become more innovative, productive, and competitive.

Nova Scotia will continue its efforts to persuade Ottawa to increase the overall cap on immigration to Canada, and continue to work with private industry to recruit new, skilled workers to this province.

In May, Nova Scotia hosts the federal/provincial/territorial Status of Women meeting, and also the Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology Policy Forum, which will highlight the need for the inclusion of women and Aboriginal people in non-traditional trades and technology for the shipbuilding industry.

In this International Year of Co-operatives, Nova Scotians are proud of the Antigonish Movement that created the province's first housing co-operatives and first credit unions, and countless good jobs. The Antigonish Movement, perhaps the world's greatest adult education project, is an inspiration as Nova Scotians again take charge of their own destiny and use adult education, apprenticeship, and other skills training to ensure that as the future starts here, each family and community is ready to be part of that future.

Through *jobsHere*, the province is supporting businesses to become more productive and globally competitive. *jobsHere* is enabling Nova Scotia businesses to win in an increasingly competitive global market.

We have no better example of a long-standing, globally competitive business in this province than Michelin Tire. The Waterville plant, which makes truck tires, is marking 30 years of production this year. My government celebrates the commitment of Michelin and its employees to growing the economy of our province, and we look forward to continued growth in the years ahead.

My government also recognizes the great economic opportunities that exist in regions across the province. We look forward to the launch of the Cape Breton Strategic Framework Advancement project, which will tap into the amazing potential the Island holds. The province also welcomes the new economic council in South West Nova Scotia, and looks forward to working with the council to establish a regional development agency.

JobsHere also recognizes the important role played by the creative sector in Nova Scotia.



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My government is working with the members of the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council to explore opportunities to enhance our creative economy and strengthen our support for arts and culture.

Just this week my government appointed the first board of Arts Nova Scotia, underscoring the importance of independence and artistic merit in decisions about funding for individual artists and the organizations that support them.

In this spring session, my government will introduce Status of the Artist legislation to reflect the importance of arts and culture to Nova Scotians.

The province will also undertake research to measure the profound impact of the creative economy across Nova Scotia.

My government takes a great interest in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the largest one of its kind in Atlantic Canada. Just over a year ago, my government and the federal government announced support for a feasibility study to help the Art Gallery determine whether it will move into a bigger location. We look forward to the results of the study later this year.

My government recognizes that this province's tourism sector is an important economic driver and has taken important steps to ensure the sector is reaching its potential through the establishment of a Special Operating Agency, which will involve tourism operators and experts in developing and implementing a long-term tourism strategy.

The agency will hit the ground running at the start of what promises to be an exciting tourism season. Nova Scotia is the place to be this year—international media have named our province one of the top global destinations for 2012.

With the eyes of the world upon us this year for the 100th anniversary of the *Titanic* disaster, we will be commemorating and proudly reflecting on Nova Scotia's important role in this tragic story.

We're also getting ready to host amazing festivals and events across the province this year, including the return of the majestic Tall Ships

to Nova Scotian ports, the TELUS World Skins Game, the Celtic Colours International Festival, and the much-anticipated relaunch of a Canadian icon, *Bluenose II*.

The *Bluenose II* restoration is the result of world-class innovation and collaboration among three former rival companies to rebuild an important piece of our shared history. In the coming months, *Bluenose II* will return to the sea to carry on the proud legacy that connects our seafaring past with an exciting future.

During the coming year, Nova Scotia's diverse culture and heritage will attract global attention. The province anxiously awaits the outcome of the nomination of Grand Pré as our third UNESCO World Heritage Site. This designation will entrench the important role the Acadians played in our history, for the entire world to know and see.

And, through an investment of \$750,000, Nova Scotia leveraged federal and private donors' support to develop the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, Shelburne County. The centre, opening in 2013 as the newest addition to the Nova Scotia Museum family, will ensure that the story of the courage and survival of Nova Scotia's Black Loyalists will be known by generations to come.

More Nova Scotian businesses than ever before are succeeding in international markets. My government is committed to helping businesses build capacity to succeed globally and increase their international activity.

This spring, the International Commerce Strategy will be released. The strategy will better align programs and services directly with the needs of businesses engaged in the global economy.

The new Jobs Fund pursues investment opportunities that support and retain industry, assist small businesses, invest in infrastructure, fund regional economic initiatives, and provide community economic stability where needed.

As Nova Scotia stands on the verge of some of the largest economic projects this province has ever seen, my government is determined to



maximize the opportunities and support innovation across all sectors, including our traditional mainstay industries.

Strong rural communities will be protected and enhanced through a partnership between the Nova Scotia Agricultural College and Dalhousie University, in Truro–Bible Hill. The merger will position the NSAC as a centre of excellence for applied research and a national leader in agriculture education, which will benefit students, improve the local economy, and maintain a focus on agricultural research and innovation.

The fishery continues as a source of employment for many Nova Scotians, and is one of the most innovative sectors of the economy.

My government will soon announce a new Commercial Fisheries Strategy that will address emerging challenges in the marketplace and will help strengthen the industry.

The new Fish Harvesters Registration and Certification Act will allow for the establishment of an industry-run board that will register and certify fish harvesters based on their knowledge and experience. It will also support skills and safety training opportunities.

Early this summer, the province will release a Coastal Strategy to guide efforts to improve coastal management in Nova Scotia. My government has taken a leadership role to protect the future of this valuable resource.

My government will soon announce a comprehensive Aquaculture Strategy that balances significant economic development potential with the need for regulation within this industry.

And while some of our long-standing industries are sharpening their focus to grab larger shares of growing markets, others are forced to retrench, refocus, and retrain in order to maintain a competitive position in static or shrinking world markets.

Nova Scotia's forestry sector has supported tens of thousands of families since the founding of our province. As world markets change,

my government has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the communities, businesses, and workers and their families who are focused on retaining Nova Scotia's position in the world market.

In year two of the Natural Resources Strategy, the province will continue to focus on innovation in this key sector. Growing quality trees, and gaining the maximum value from each tree, will generate wealth in the years to come.

My government is committed to sustaining the ability of Nova Scotia's forests to produce wealth, water, wildlife and timber for the benefit of future generations.

Through the Natural Resources Strategy, we will continue to focus on innovation in this key sector, so that our children and grandchildren can look forward to enjoying, in a sustainable manner, the same kind of good jobs this important natural resource has provided over the years.

Mining is an important job creator in Nova Scotia. New gold and coal projects are moving towards production, and the interest in exploration for rare-earth metals is increasing. My government will move forward with a new mineral incentive program, fulfilling a commitment in the new natural resources strategy to provide financial assistance to prospectors to attract exploration and development.

Nova Scotia will be more competitive thanks to the creation of an on-line Mineral and Petroleum Rights Registry System for Nova Scotia that will allow businesses anywhere in the world register their interest and claims. This will modernize the management of our mineral and petroleum resources and be of benefit to business.

My government is taking decisive steps to secure clean energy and lower, more stable power rates for Nova Scotians.

Former governments chose a high-cost, high-emission energy path that killed jobs. They felt it was safer and more comfortable to cling to past mistakes, despite rapid rises in fuel costs. Like some current opponents, they preferred to curse the darkness rather than light a candle. There is no change and no future for Nova Scotia in that high-cost path to which some still cling.



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Securing a 35-year price for clean Atlantic Canadian hydroelectricity, becoming a centre for world-leading clean energy developments, such as wind and tidal, and enabling Nova Scotian communities to be part of the clean energy future, with a globally admired community feed-in tariff, are all steps in the right direction. Escaping the fossil-fuel trap by setting and achieving renewable energy targets that will moderate the effects of decades of cost pressure on ratepayers, and continuing plans for the opening of the Donkin mine while creating more Cape Breton jobs will move Nova Scotia closer to the secure energy future we need and deserve.

Fostering renewed interest and unprecedented investment in offshore resources, promoting energy efficiency and reducing harmful emissions in a well-planned manner with minimized cost are steps in the right direction. My government is achieving the opportunities for Nova Scotia to be an energy leader and to leave this province a better place for the next generation, with a cleaner environment, secure energy supplies, and a better economic foundation.

Each step in this remarkable turnaround is subject to careful planning and public review whenever ratepayers' interests or the environment are at stake; each step taken has passed those tests and reviews.

In the next year my government will continue to develop the regulatory framework for cleaner and more affordable energy. There will be fully independent public reviews of the next steps in the electricity plans.

My government will release the Cleaner Energy Framework to guide a prudent and timely transition. It will release the Marine Renewable Energy strategy to guide the development of this emerging industry.

You, the representatives of the people of Nova Scotia, will be asked to approve further energy legislation to ensure that a modern legal framework is in place for the future.

My government will also continue to work with the federal government to make offshore regulation more efficient and effective, and to ensure that regulatory best practices for safety and environmental protection are in place.

Members of the legislature, Nova Scotia has shown that it can set and meet renewable energy targets, that it can meet and exceed federal greenhouse gas emission targets, and that it can be a partner with neighbouring provinces and the federal government in regional co-operation. These partnerships are critical for building enduring economic strength in Atlantic Canada, with the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project as the linchpin in a new era for our region of Canada.

Plans and commitments already made mean more than \$3 billion of new energy investments. Wind, tidal, wave, hydro, biomass, solar, and geothermal opportunities will all help Nova Scotia continue its energy breakthrough.

Although provincial government offices are located in every corner of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotians think of their government as being located mainly in Halifax. To show clearly that provincial departments and agencies serve all of the people, regardless of location, my government will seek locations outside this immediate area for new and consolidated agencies and offices of government. Communities throughout Nova Scotia are good places to live, work, and raise a family, for civil servants as well as for hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens. The first details of this new approach will be released in the spring to the employees affected, then to all Nova Scotians.

Modern, safe, and reliable infrastructure is vital to sustainable economic growth. In Nova Scotia that means highways. In 2011–12, the province invested some \$265 million to improve Nova Scotian highways. Even with these improvements, road safety remains a priority. To that end, legislation governing the maximum speed limits in school zones will come into force in September 2012.

My government continues to work on the Towns Task Force in collaboration with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities to address the challenges being faced by Nova Scotia's towns.

For the first time in more than a decade, work is also underway on a collaborative review of the financial arrangement between the



Province and municipalities, which will result in recommendations for improvements.

Nova Scotia's community museums and the Nova Scotia Museum are unique and valuable contributors to the strength of every region of the province. This year, once again, government is maintaining funding for the innovative Community Museum Assistance Program, an example of support for museum programming unlike any in Canada.

In the coming year, my government will focus its attention on investing in communities throughout the province. The quality of life enjoyed by Nova Scotian families in every region will improve through strategic, smart investment that recognizes the unique strengths and advantages of this province—from Cape Breton to Yarmouth.

Better Health Care for you and Your Family

My government is keeping emergency rooms open and delivering better care sooner.

It has taken decisive steps to fundamentally improve the way emergency health care is delivered in Nova Scotia.

Emergency care was hit-or-miss in communities across the province just three years ago. But today, Collaborative Emergency Centres are delivering 24/7 emergency care while ensuring that patients get appointments the same day or the next to see the care provider they need. These centres have opened in two communities. And there are more on the way.

Nova Scotia is working on a physician resource plan that will help ensure an adequate supply of family physicians across the province.

My government has consulted extensively with Nova Scotians living with mental health and addictions issues, their family members, health care workers, and community leaders. Later this year, the province will release the first strategy to improve mental health and addictions care.

For years, thoughtful Nova Scotians have expressed concerns about the cost of health care overwhelming all other public services.

Previous governments failed to manage health-care costs, allowing administrative costs, inefficiencies, and other expenses to drive up health-care spending by 8.4 per cent on average prior to 2009. That unsustainable rate of growth has been stopped.

My government is leading the country in the effective management of health-care spending, ensuring that precious dollars are spent where they are most needed.

Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada to do so.

The province is accomplishing this, not through arbitrary budget reductions, but by working in partnership with District Health Authorities, the IWK, doctors, nurses, and other front-line providers to find better, more efficient ways to provide the care Nova Scotians need.

Helping Nova Scotians stay healthy is a vital part of the health-care solution for today and tomorrow. Nova Scotia was the first province to mandate the use of helmets for skiers and snowboarders. Medical associations across the country are encouraging others to follow our lead.

After consulting more than 1,100 individuals, groups, and organizations, my government will bring in a plan that will help make Nova Scotia a place where children are supported to eat well, move more, and grow up healthy.

Nova Scotia seniors will be able to access more home care services and there will be new options to assist people with managing their mobility issues and medications in the home.

This year, my government will consult with Nova Scotian families to develop an approach to early childhood development that ensures our children get the best possible start in life. This innovative and integrated approach will bring together resources from health, community services and education to best align programs and supports for Nova Scotia's families and children.



The early years are among the most important in a child's development. Research suggests that early childhood services and programs return society's investment seven times over. In the past several years, an investment of some \$50 million has increased capacity in Nova Scotia's licensed child-care facilities. But more can and will be done.

Members of the legislature, I wonder how many of you are aware that right now there are more than 1,000 Nova Scotian children without a permanent home, and therefore in the care of the province. Surely, every child needs and deserves a loving and secure environment in which to grow and thrive with a forever family. This year my government, working with partners across the province, will develop and begin to implement a new Adoption Strategy to significantly increase adoption rates in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotian families in distress frequently find themselves in Family Court. Our body of Family Law has, over the years, been allowed to fall behind that of other Canadian jurisdictions. My government will correct that through legislation this spring.

Protection of children will be the priority. Always.

Domestic violence reduction will be the focus of concerted efforts this year, as implementation of the Domestic Violence Action Plan begins in earnest. The plan involves 16 departments and agencies of government working together to raise awareness, increase support for victims, and ultimately prevent incidents of violence in the home.

My government continues to support and applaud the work of Project Lifesaver—a search-and-rescue tracking system that makes it easier to find people with conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, autism, and other cognitive challenges when they stray from their homes.

Since government launched the program in 2011, approximately fifty 911 dispatchers and fifteen Ground Search and Rescue teams have been trained in this technique. Another nine Ground Search and Rescue teams will be trained this year.

Kids and Learning First

No government in Nova Scotia's history has shown a deeper commitment to children and education than has my government. This year, my government will invest more dollars in public education, per student, than ever before.

Kids and Learning First was developed after listening to hundreds of parents, teachers, students, school boards, employers, and community members. The plan reflects their priorities. It builds on what is working well, while identifying the challenges that must be addressed.

Student enrolment keeps going down, while education costs go up. Student test results are not improving, and they are declining in some key subjects. My government, along with parents and teachers, wants better results for every student.

The plan will help children get off to a better start by strengthening links among day care, other early childhood development programs, and grade Primary. It gives students at all levels more support in critical subjects and through transition years.

The establishment of the Africentric Learning Institute was a key recommendation of the Black Learners Advisory Committee on Education. In the coming months, a board will be fully operational and steps will be taken to secure a location for the Institute.

Kids and Learning First protects the quality of education in rural communities, where enrolment declines are sharpest. More students will soon have access to more high school courses through Nova Scotia's virtual school.

Teachers need support too. Everyone remembers a great teacher, and what a difference he or she made in their lives. Teachers should be able to spend less time on paperwork and more time with students. My government's plan will make that happen.

Average class sizes are smaller than ever. *Kids and Learning First* will keep them that way.



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Junior high school can be difficult for many, making the transition to high school that much more challenging. A new Discovering Opportunities program will help struggling grade 9 students get excited about school again, make up lost learning, and prepare them for high school.

Protecting arts education and helping students develop French-language and information and communications technology skills will continue to be priorities.

SchoolsPlus—the program that brings needed services for children and their families into schools—will soon be available in every county. *SchoolsPlus* works. Where it is available, discipline problems have declined, teachers and parents feel more supported, and student test results have improved.

The province has introduced a grants program to encourage community use of schools. This program will enable more people to use school facilities for physical activity and educational and cultural programs.

By putting kids and learning first, my government will ensure children have the best opportunities to learn and develop into caring, responsible adults ready to live happy and productive lives here in Nova Scotia.

Making Life More Affordable for Nova Scotian Families

Making life more affordable for Nova Scotian families is a priority of my government.

My government has taken steps to put more money back into the hands of families, low-income Nova Scotians, students, and seniors.

Keeping post-secondary education affordable for Nova Scotians is a commitment of my government.

Universities are essential to the success of our province. University graduates are ready to innovate, create, and improve their world.

They can enter the job market confident that they have the tools they need to adapt to the demands of today and tomorrow.

Through a new Memorandum of Understanding my government has formed a partnership with Nova Scotia's 11 universities to promote academic excellence, expand research and development, and invest \$25 million to help them become more sustainable.

My government has also taken steps to ensure tuition remains at, or below, the national average.

Last year, the province made its single largest investment ever in accessibility to higher education, \$42.5 million. The province kept tuition fees below the national average, reduced student debt, and improved student aid with more and better needs-based grants. For the first time, there is an absolute cap on Nova Scotia students' debt, lowering maximum debt by more than \$16,000.

In addition my government introduced the Graduate Retention Rebate so that eligible graduates can reduce their provincial income taxes by up to \$15,000 over six years. Community college students, who pay lower tuition, can reduce their taxes by up to \$7,500.

Low-income seniors can get assistance to adapt their homes so they can live there longer. And now, thanks to an initiative by the Premier himself, 18,000 seniors who are in receipt of the Guaranteed Income Supplement pay no provincial income tax.

Social enterprises ensure that society thinks more broadly about good jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and economic stability, especially for rural communities and for minority groups throughout the province.

Access to capital for social enterprises has been improved, and *jobsHere* offers support for more non-profits to engage in social enterprise. Barriers to social enterprise will be removed from provincial legislation and policies.

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



Members of the legislature, in this session legislation will be introduced to enact a new regulatory regime governing mortgage brokers and lenders, and a code of conduct and updated legislation and regulations for the funeral sector will be introduced in the fall.

Nova Scotians in need of prescription medicine can now get the generic form at the same price or less than that paid by most other Canadians.

My government's fair drug-pricing plan ensures that savings on generic medicine is available to every Nova Scotian family, whether their prescriptions are covered by an insurance plan or not. Generic prescriptions in Nova Scotia now cost just 40 per cent of the name brand; this summer that will be reduced further, to 35 per cent.

Members of the legislature, it is a sad reality that the most disadvantaged in our society too often suffer poor health, and inferior housing can be a large part of the problem. Healthy families live in healthy, sustainable homes. Historically, government housing programs, while well intentioned, have had the unintended consequence of stigmatizing the very people they intended to help.

This year, my government will bring forward new ways to manage and diversify public and affordable housing that will support seniors, people living with disabilities, and low-income Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotians care deeply about their communities and each other, and it shows: our volunteers devoted 207 hours on average to volunteer work in 2010, the highest average in Canada. My government recognizes the valuable work these dedicated individuals provide and is investing in the sector.

Through the establishment of an \$800,000 trust, 43 human resource management-related projects within non-profit and voluntary sector organizations across the province have been funded.

As a part of *jobsHere*, \$200,000 will be allocated each year to further strengthen the capacity of the non-profit and voluntary sector.

There are few professions where men and women are asked to put their lives on the line every day for the good of their fellow citizens. But for those who do, government needs to be there to support them during—and after—their service.

Nova Scotia has been a leader in extending benefits to those from our fire services who find themselves beset by cancers resulting from their work. In recent years, however, we have not kept pace with other jurisdictions as they extended further protections to these valued community members. In the year ahead, my government will bring Nova Scotia's benefits for firefighters back in line with our neighbours across Canada. These 2012 changes will be part of a multi-year package of regulatory improvements developed by the Workers' Compensation Board and its stakeholders.

And, my government will take additional steps to safeguard and protect pensions and benefits for Nova Scotians in the year ahead.

Nova Scotia is changing in a positive and significant way.

My government has worked hard with our partners to secure solid, long-lasting opportunities that will keep families together and bring Nova Scotians home.

My government is creating good jobs and growing the economy.

My government is delivering better care to Nova Scotians.

My government is making life more affordable for Nova Scotian families.

And, my government is living within its means.

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.



