

# Speech from the Throne

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Lieutenant Governor





# Speech from the Throne

Before I begin I would like to honour those who have passed since our last Speech from the Throne. Those who contributed to the strength and prosperity of our great province.

We remember remarkable Nova Scotians like Dr. Cora Greenaway, a founding member of the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, Rudy Haase, conservationist and humanitarian, and Donald Reid, who was instrumental in Joggins becoming a UNESCO World Heritage site. All three of these individuals are also Order of Nova Scotia recipients.

We also recognize the contributions of Nova Scotians including Ethel Garnier, who served for 50 years as Executive Housekeeper at Government House, and Wayne Smith, CFL star and two-time Grey Cup winner, and Phil Pacey, a champion for heritage in our province. We lost community leaders like Joan Eisner, former Director of Volunteer Services with South Shore Health, and Wade Smith, beloved educator and coach.

John Nichols, retired Provincial Court Judge, and Dianne Tompkins Brushett, former Member of Parliament for Cumberland-Colchester, and Joe Feeney, former Mayor of Mahone Bay, proudly served Nova Scotians in their respective public institutions.

Just last week, our country said goodbye to the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, a former Member of Parliament, cabinet minister, and deputy prime minister. His accomplishments as a parliamentarian leave behind a legacy felt by all Canadians.

Finally, we pay our respects to three former members of this House of Assembly – the Honourable Paul MacEwan, the Honourable Ralph Fiske, and John Archie MacKenzie. Our sincere condolences to their friends, families, neighbours, and to all those carrying on their memory.

## Open to the World

I am honoured to deliver this address, and I thank former lieutenant governor J. J. Grant for his years of service. I am humbled to hold the same office as him – he served our province in a way that makes us proud.

À titre de premier lieutenant-gouverneur de la province d'origine acadienne, je suis fier d'avoir cette occasion d'être au service de ma province et de représenter ma communauté.

As our province's first lieutenant governor of Acadian descent, I am proud to have this opportunity to serve my province and represent my community.

Congratulations to all those elected, who sit in this chamber, as they earned the confidence of their constituents. And we are here today not focused on celebrating victory, but focused on what needs to be done to make our province stronger.

We owe all those who voted our thanks for their support and for their continued participation in our democracy. To those who worked and volunteered to ensure we could hold free and fair elections, we thank you for your service and commitment.

Government has made much progress, but we know there is more work to do. It is clear that challenges exist.

This spring, Nova Scotians voiced concerns about challenges in healthcare. We know that more mental health supports are needed, access to primary care must improve, and wait times are too long. Government heard these concerns, and will respond.

This is the second term for Premier McNeil and his government, but the world and our province is different now than it was in October 2013.

In four years, Nova Scotia moved from a deficit to a surplus. Our finances are stronger.

Our seafood exports are soaring.

Our wine sector is growing and is internationally recognized.

Our tourism sector is booming.

And our population is on the rise.

Without a spirit of openness, these achievements would not be possible. Our province accomplished these feats because citizens stood up and pursued an optimistic plan, government stood with them, and we are stronger now because we worked together.

Government's plan focused – and will continue to focus – on opening our province and communities, welcoming newcomers, and breaking down trade barriers wherever possible.

Now is not the time to give into fears arising from global uncertainty. Now is the time to press on.

Our government is leading by example. Just recently, Syrian-refugee-turned-entrepreneur Tareq Hadhad was appointed to the board of Invest Nova Scotia. He's helped grow Nova Scotia's Peace by Chocolate in Antigonish, received mentions from the Prime Minister at the United Nations, and plans to keep growing his family's business. He now gets to help as Nova Scotia continues to become more open and welcoming. His experience is invaluable.

Through will and determination, he and his family pulled together to create a business – they created something great.

By continuing to embrace a spirit of openness, we will discover new ideas, welcome new people, and create new businesses.

Government wanted to position itself to capitalize on opportunities when they arise. That is why such a focus was placed on controlling spending and making smart strategic investments over the last four years.

Entamons cette séance de l'Assemblée législative en faisant de notre province un exemple, non seulement au Canada atlantique, non seulement dans cette fédération, mais à l'échelle internationale. Même si nous sommes une petite province, nous pouvons avoir un grand impact.

Let us begin this sitting of the legislature focused on making our province an example – not just in Atlantic Canada, not just in this federation, but internationally. We may be small, but we can make a big impact.

## **A Healthier, Stronger Nova Scotia**

A stronger Nova Scotia shares the benefits of economic growth by investing in the services we need most. If we want a stronger Nova Scotia, we need to have a healthier Nova Scotia. Government is ready to keep investing in healthcare to ensure better access to the services people need.

Providing better access to healthcare involves hiring and retaining health professionals: doctors, nurses, paramedics, pharmacists, and mental health clinicians. We know we can do that by providing more flexibility and by further investing in efforts to educate and attract doctors.

Our doctors are not just healthcare providers, they are a source of information and insight into the healthcare system. That's why our government will provide flexibility to doctors so they can choose where and how to practice. It's why input and advice of doctors, including working with Doctors Nova Scotia, will be sought out when developing recommendations or changes to primary care.

Further funding will be provided to attract and educate new doctors by adding more spaces to the family residency program, adding more spaces for internationally trained doctors, and providing more tuition relief to doctors who want to practice here.

The focus on collaborative healthcare will continue as we hire more nurse practitioners and family practice nurses. These nurses will further improve Nova Scotians' ability to access healthcare services where and when they need it. We are also supporting the recruitment of young doctors, because they have told us this is the type of team they want to be a part of. Most importantly, the evidence demonstrates that this approach to providing primary health care will improve services and ultimately the health of Nova Scotians.

Cutting wait times for surgical procedures is also a priority. To help, government will add 15 new specialist residency positions. Five of these positions will be in Cape Breton.

This will support efforts already taken to reduce wait times. Those efforts were made possible by an \$8.1 million investment that made 2,200 additional surgeries possible. Going forward, we will continue to invest more money to further reduce wait times.

More doctors and more surgeries will help many Nova Scotians, but our province also needs more mental health supports and faster access to care.

Government will make investments to hire more clinicians and support workers, improve community-based supports, and expand crisis services. Helping our children and youth in their schools will be made possible by expanding the SchoolsPlus Program and developing new Youth Health Centres.

Nova Scotians are clear – they want investments in healthcare, and those investments will be forthcoming.

## **More Opportunity for All Nova Scotians**

Using our resources to create more opportunities for all Nova Scotians doesn't happen accidentally. It requires careful planning, determination, and strategic investments in our people.

For starters, government will cut income taxes for those in the middle class and those who need it most. This tax break will benefit 500,000 Nova Scotians. It will increase the amount going back into the pockets of Nova Scotians who need it the most. The benefit will increase to \$1000, and it means more than 60,000 people will no longer pay provincial income tax.

This is the largest income tax cut in our province's recent history.

Many Nova Scotian families are caring for loved ones with health needs. Our government will support them, too.

Wait lists for home care services have almost been eliminated. People deserve to stay in their homes as long as possible.

Government will ensure more people can receive the caregiver benefit, a program that provides \$400 per month in support and allows seniors to stay at home, around loved ones, longer. With this change, more than 1,600 people will become eligible.

Government has listened to Nova Scotians who say they want to be able to stay in their own homes and communities. Supporting people at home and supporting their caregivers has meant that fewer Nova Scotians have had to rely on nursing homes; and when it is needed, access to nursing home care has improved – with more than a 50 per cent reduction in the waitlist for nursing homes.

This September brought a game-changing investment to the education system in our province. Government launched pre-primary sites around the province.

This investment is crucial because we know the early years of a child's life are critical for their development. The facts show that four year olds who have access to such a program perform better in school. That is the strong start our children deserve.

Not only does this program help our children, it helps families too. This program is free for families enrolled in it. That means it will save those families thousands of dollars. That savings means more support and opportunity for middle class Nova Scotians.

## **Education for Prosperity**

Our government has always believed that a strong education is the foundation for a stronger Nova Scotia.

Over the last four years, education funding increased by \$65 million. I am proud to say funding for education will continue to increase.

Government created the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions so it could work with teachers to build stronger classrooms. This council empowers teachers to make a real difference in education policy, and change has already happened.

Government funded the hiring of more teachers to implement class caps from grades primary to 12. There are more teachers to provide even more help with math and literacy skills. Student assessments and data entry are being streamlined so classroom teachers can focus more on teaching.

These changes will help our young people as they grow and develop. They will also help them be more prepared to enter the workforce when they eventually graduate. We know that it is as important to educate and train our children as it is to bring new people to our province.

## **Opportunity and Jobs for Young Nova Scotians**

Already government has helped more than 2,500 young Nova Scotians stay and work here through programs like Graduate to Opportunity and the co-op program. In addition, more than 2,100 young Nova Scotians were hired into the civil service since 2013.

While progress was made, there is more work to do.

The Graduate to Opportunity Program will see its budget doubled so we can help even more Nova Scotians. Over the next four years, this expansion could create as many as 1,200 new jobs.

The number of research and innovation based jobs in Nova Scotia will increase through Innovate to Opportunity, a new program that will help employers who hire Masters and PhD graduates.

While government also eliminates tuition for apprentices when they leave work to complete their training, the apprenticeship START program that focuses on hiring apprentices will grow and support 700 new opportunities.

Keeping young people here also means making life more affordable for them. Government is taking steps that collectively will mean, along with other changes to student assistance, university students can receive over \$40,000 in non-repayment support over five years. That is more than five years of average tuition.

Our government wants to make accessing university more affordable, and it wants to make it easier for young Nova Scotians to buy their first home. To do this, households earning up to \$75,000 per year are eligible for a down payment assistance program.

With more jobs, less debt, and a down payment, more young Nova Scotians will be living and staying here.

## Helping Those Who Need It Most

A stronger Nova Scotia is only possible when we help those who need it most – a more inclusive and accessible Nova Scotia, a Nova Scotia that provides more support to at-risk women and works to bring an end to the cycle of poverty that holds so many Nova Scotians down.

Around one in five Nova Scotians identifies as having a disability. Our government wants to create a more inclusive and accessible Nova Scotia. The first step was to work with community leaders to create and pass the province's first ever Accessibility Act.

To support this legislation and accelerate the spread of accessible spaces and buildings, government will create a \$1 million Small Business ACCESS-ability Program and increase the Community ACCESS-ability Program to \$1 million per year.

Becoming more inclusive and accessible will also help families caring for people with disabilities. Government will create a respite care program, expand the independent living program, and improve the existing Independent Living Support Program. These changes will help families, help people with disabilities gain more independence, and create stronger communities.

While working to make our province more inclusive and accessible, government will take concrete steps to address violence against women. We cannot create more opportunity for everyone until people feel safe and secure in the province.

A safer province will come from an annual investment of \$1 million to fight sexual violence. This will fund things like Prevention Innovation Grants that help organizations support victims and help prevent sexual violence.

A safer province will also come from an action plan to address domestic violence. We will start by working with existing groups who help at-risk women by funding new facilities. This action plan will also lay out several programs to address domestic violence. Finally, we will add a domestic violence court in Halifax and maintain the current domestic violence court in Sydney.

A safe and secure province is one that also focuses on improving economic security. That is why government will create Advance Nova Scotia. This plan promotes six actions to boost the income of low-and middle-income Nova Scotians.

In addition to the income tax cut previously mentioned, government will take steps to increase support and make it easier for people to get back to work. Together these efforts will give more Nova Scotians a chance to build a better life for themselves and their families.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives proposed introducing a standard household rate for income assistance clients. We will do that and increase rates for all types of households.

Our government will make it easier for people to transition off income assistance and back into the workforce. This will be accomplished by creating a work incentive to allow clients to earn more without seeing a reduction in their payments. This does away with an old, antiquated system that actually made it hard to get off income assistance by putting up barriers to people who wanted to re-enter the workforce.

A four-year Blueprint to End Poverty will be funded, and \$20 million will help form partnerships between the province, other levels of government, and non-profits. It will focus on working with community groups that have new ideas, focus on employment and skills development, and find ways to tackle barriers that prevent people from improving their standard of living.

In addition to these steps, more maintenance enforcement workers will be hired to collect the millions owed to children. Government will work to ensure no one can hide behind provincial borders. This sends a clear signal that parents are expected to meet their financial obligations to their children.

Because of our government's changes, the Heating Assistance Rebate Program will help 5,000 more Nova Scotians with the cost of energy. This means we can now help more than 42,000 people across the province.

These steps are the culmination of a once-in-a-generation effort to transform our system that helps those who need it most. It is going to produce real results that will make meaningful changes in the lives of thousands.

Economic security, personal security, and fewer barriers will create a stronger province and a healthier Nova Scotia.

## **The Power of New People and New Ideas**

Whether it is investing in healthcare, strengthening our classrooms, or helping those who need it most, we need a stronger economy. A stronger economy provides the resources necessary to make these investments. We cannot build a stronger economy without embracing new people and new ideas.

Over the last four years Nova Scotia has continued to welcome more immigrants, more international students, and more refugees to our shores. This effort led to our population growing, and it is adding to our province's diversity. This success was not accidental – it was planned, supported, and invested in.

Our government repeatedly made it a priority to attract new people, launching new immigration streams for international graduates, aggressively recruiting immigrants from around the world, and making it easier for people to move here and start new businesses.

Last year, Nova Scotia welcomed more than 5,000 newcomers to our province – the highest number of arrivals since the end of the Second World War.

The federal government has recognized our immigration success and believes in our ability to attract immigrants. They have signaled their support for our population growth by working with our province to develop a multi-year plan for immigration levels, addressing ongoing labour market demands faced by provinces and territories.

Now, under the Provincial Nominee Program, Nova Scotia received 1,350 nominations in 2017. The province also has a further 800 nominations through the new federal Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program. Combined, this totals a record 2,150 potential nominations.

We will continue to work with the federal government to keep growing our population.

Welcoming new people to our province is the right thing to do.

Immigration strengthens the economy by increasing the labour force, finding people with skills we need, and improving our productivity.

Bringing new people with new perspectives and ideas will also see more businesses get started and more Nova Scotians employed.

Helping our traditional industries thrive means investing to help them hire more people, help them find the skilled workers they need, and help them create new products to sell around the world.

We are on track to post the best tourism season in our province's history. This follows last year's record-breaking season that brought \$2.6 billion in revenue to the province.

Government created Tourism Nova Scotia, and put the leadership of the organization in the hands of people with business experience. They have developed a new strategy which emphasizes bringing new first-time visitors to the province and developing unique experiences for tourists.

Our success is possible because we are working with businesses to take risks and try new things.

We want to keep building on this success.

That's why government will create a \$2 million annual fund, partnering with the federal government and the tourism sector, to invest in some of our iconic tourism sites that attract first time visitors.

Our fisheries sector is booming. Seafood exports nearly doubled to \$1.8 billion annually.

We want to keep finding ways for the fisheries and aquaculture sector to keep growing so we can meet international demand. That is why we will continue with our Aquaculture Development Program. This will fund important research to help the industry improve productivity, support strong regulations, and ensure the public is engaged while we responsibly develop this sector.

Our Building Tomorrow Fund will invest \$3 million per year to build on the success of the Honeycrisp Orchard Renewal Program. This fund will help farmers and fishers create new products and capitalize on new ideas to ensure their businesses are around for generations.

This is just one more way to focus on helping to bring new ideas to our traditional industries.

The Building Tomorrow Fund will help our agriculture sector, and so will the Wine Development Program. The investments supported by this important program will help Nova Scotian producers double grape production by 2020.

While we work with our businesses to increase grape production, government will also direct the Department of Finance and Treasury Board to adopt policies that encourage further growth in our local wine, distilling, and craft beer industries. These changes will ensure better marketing and promotion of our made-in-Nova Scotia products.

We know Nova Scotians have a taste for locally made products. For proof, we only need to look at the most recent NSLC annual sales results.

Nova Scotia-made wine saw growth of nearly four per cent. Craft beer grew by 34 per cent – that’s \$10.6 million in craft beer sales alone.

The Building Tomorrow Fund and the Wine Development Program will build on the recent success of our agriculture sector, which generated \$350 million in exports last year.

While we work with traditional industries, we want to support new high-potential, high-growth industries.

Our government is placing a focus on ocean industries and technology where economic potential is very strong. With partners like the federal government, the private sector and other universities in the Atlantic region, Dalhousie University has created the Ocean Frontier Institute. As well, the province, the federal government and the private sector have all been at the table for the creation of the Centre for Ocean Ventures and Entrepreneurship (COVE).

Government will keep working with partners to build an innovation infrastructure in this province so future inventors and entrepreneurs have the support they need. We will do this by continuing to invest in sandboxes around the province.

Government worked with universities and our community college to launch these innovation hubs around Nova Scotia. Through this initiative, over 4,600 students worked with 130 mentors to turn their ideas into reality. In addition to the seven sandboxes currently operating in Nova Scotia, we will add another sandbox focused on our ocean sector.

While continuing to support tech companies, government will invest in and support small business here in Nova Scotia.

We will also cut small business taxes so they can invest, expand, and hire.

We will increase the income threshold for the 3 per cent small business tax rate from \$350,000 to \$500,000. This means small business can earn an extra \$150,000 and their tax rate is reduced.

Our government knows that cutting red tape helps small businesses grow. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has recognized Nova Scotia for the work we're doing to cut red tape. They've said we have made the most progress, in the shortest period of time, of any province in the country. We will build on this success and further reduce red tape by \$25 million.

Government will provide better internet access by taking concrete steps. We have already partnered with municipalities, private service providers and community groups to improve service. We are developing a longer-term plan which will use fibre optic cable to build a backbone for service in rural areas of the province backed up by satellite service to reach areas with challenging geography. And we are working with the federal government to leverage our investments, to reach more rural homes and businesses with improved service.

## **New Markets**

While our government works to bring more people to Nova Scotia, we want to sell more of our products abroad.

The Export Growth Program produces success stories every year. We are growing the size of this program so more businesses can find customers in other markets. This support will help with the cost of trade shows and conferences, travel to markets, and partnering on trade missions.

An Export Accelerator Program will also be established to help get Nova Scotian products to market. This program will connect businesses with international experts. It will be led by Nova Scotia Business Inc., and it will provide direct support and service to important exporters.

Our resources are in demand around the world. We are supporting our traditional sectors to find new ideas for new products so they can create even more value when sold in other markets. These efforts, combined with increased support for export programs, will help create more jobs.

These efforts will build on past government successes. Just one example is the China strategy government launched in 2016. Exports to China have grown to \$420 million per year. This strategy combined with new export programming will continue to see exports to China climb.

We want to grow the economy, not just for the sake of growth itself, but because of how that growth will empower so many Nova Scotians.

Focusing on these priorities is how government will build a stronger Nova Scotia. To ensure the successful implementation of the priority objectives highlighted here today, beginning October 1<sup>st</sup>, the mandate of the Premier's Delivery Unit will evolve to become the Office of Strategy Management. The office will be led by a deputy minister, and have a broader focus on government's overall strategic objectives. The office will establish clear measures, track and report performance, and will work across government departments to focus on achieving results while advancing government's policy agenda.

## **Opportunity and Optimism**

Providing more opportunity for all Nova Scotians and creating a healthier Nova Scotia will only be possible when we open ourselves, our communities, and our province to new people, new ideas, and new approaches.

To see the benefits of this kind of openness, we don't have to look far.

We can look to a chocolatier in Antigonish.

The growing prosperity of our Mi'kmaw communities is being recognized nationally and internationally.

Our African Nova Scotian community helped establish the province's human rights commission.

**Notre communauté acadienne travaille sans relâche dans nos secteurs traditionnels importants, soit la pêche, la foresterie et le tourisme. Elle joue aussi un rôle important dans notre secteur culturel, à la fois par les arts et par les expériences touristiques culturelles.**

Our Acadian community works tirelessly in our important traditional sectors – fisheries, forestry, and tourism. And it plays an important role in our cultural sector, both through art and through cultural tourism experiences.

European immigrants traveled here and powered our coal mines and steel mills.

The impact of our province's Lebanese community can be felt throughout our province.

Our government has appointed more women to the bench, and we are approaching gender parity.

Our province's diverse culture shines through in our art, and our creative economy is growing.

For cultural inspiration, we can look to the work of Alan Syliboy, an accomplished Mi'kmaq artist from the First Nations community of Millbrook. Or Shauntay Grant, whose storytelling is inspired by the traditions of her ancestors in Nova Scotia's historic black communities.

We want to celebrate our culture, hold tight to optimism, and remain open to new ideas, because that is the foundation of a plan that will make our province stronger.

Openness and understanding come from education and experience. The more we learn about one another and the more we interact with one another, the more we understand.

Our province's future and our children and grandchildren's prosperity depends on this very interaction.

Prosperity will come as new ideas are turned into new businesses and traditional businesses create new products.

*La croissance dont nous avons besoin découlera de notre volonté d'agir pour miser sur des possibilités. Ces possibilités font que je vois l'avenir de notre province avec optimisme.*

The growth we need will come from a willingness to reach out and capitalize on opportunities. These opportunities make me optimistic about our province's future.

From openness and opportunity comes optimism. And I know no problem exists that we as a province cannot tackle together. When we stand together, we are stronger together.

