

The Path to a Better Tomorrow

Speech from the Throne

Second session of the 59th Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

The Honourable Jocelyne Roy Vienneau,
Lieutenant-Governor

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The 2018 Speech from the Throne

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests, and fellow citizens:

New Brunswickers have opened this new era by electing a legislature with a diversity of parties and views. This legislature then chose to give a new executive council a chance to lead.

Today, we continue that process. Your government seeks common cause with women and men of good faith across party lines. New Brunswickers challenged this legislature – to place province above party, to embrace shared dreams and reject old grievances. In the days ahead, this legislature shall give its reply. A choice: to embrace the challenge of shared governance and prove our great democracy can change and adapt. Or, we can shrink from the moment and fall back into the false comfort of partisanship and tribalism.

Rising to meet the moment means hard work, honest debate and the potential of new solutions. Shrinking from this moment means telling New Brunswickers that we could not make this legislature work, and facing their uncertain judgement in a new round of elections.

Across the world, harsh voices are rising, telling people to nurture differences until they become resentments and divides. Leaders rise to power telling citizens their differences cannot be reconciled by our democratic institutions.

Too often, voices of division and nationalism urge us to reject common purpose and retreat into distrust.

We have a choice. We have a chance to turn our small corner of the world into a shining example for the world. The people chose a legislature that pushes us to accept the discomfort of diverse opinions and the opportunity of creative compromise.

Reclaiming the New Brunswick Dream

Sometimes we can hear our challenges repeated so often that we accept them as inevitable. Nothing is inevitable. Nothing says small towns must grow smaller, nothing says children will struggle to learn, that young people will leave, that hospitals will close, and nothing says our population will decline.

Your government rejects the narrative that says decline is inevitable, and only government can soften the blow. Our strengths – compassion, a respect for nature, imagination, acting together with our neighbours for a common cause – these are strengths that belong to our people. Government does not give those strengths to the people.

Collective action and community action are not always expressed through government programs. They can be inspired by government, but they are always driven by determined citizens.

New Brunswick's greatest strength has always been its improbability. From the rough beauty of our land and the harshness of our winters, two great cultures, French and English, have lived side by side in a story that has always arced towards cooperation. First Nations made invaluable contributions to building our province, in ways we are still imperfectly learning to celebrate and through gifts we are imperfectly learning to repay. Our experiment is over 200 years old, and improbable as it may be, those of us blessed to live here know that it works like no other place on earth. Today, we welcome anyone ready to work hard, anyone ready for the responsibility and the privilege of calling New Brunswick home.

The premier has said, the two-party era is past. Your government will embrace the potential of this new era, an era of many voices sharing a common purpose.

Making the New Legislature Work

In the days ahead, a new way of governing will be shared and forged, including reforms to expand the role of all members and not just when the legislature is in session.

Ministers will meet regularly and offer briefing to shadow ministers. Departments will prioritize requests for information from opposition members. Ministers will directly answer questions in the legislature if those questions seek information or explanation.

The premier will invite all party leaders to offer input into legislation and regulations, so discussions can focus on finding solutions. All MLAs will be invited to budget briefings and receive up-to-date information on our financial state.

Legislative committees will be reformed providing a role for private members. Committee chairs will set meetings, hold hearings and call witnesses. Committees will investigate and develop instead of simply responding to government proposals. Members of other parties will be invited to chair committees and to lead in proposing solutions.

Your government will ask the Legislature Administration Committee to review recent changes to the standing rules of the legislature and to seek consensus on changes to make the Executive Council more accountable, ensure the legislature meets regularly and predictably, and that the hours of operation of this house are family-friendly, ensuring the full participation of all members.

A New Covenant on Governing

This new era requires a new covenant – the party with executive power must share the ability to make decisions, and the other parties must share the responsibility for finding solutions.

The old two-party system allowed parties to win power by simply opposing ideas. If one party did something unpopular, the other party could win simply by rallying opposition. This was good politics, but it often led to bad outcomes. It kept citizens from hearing honest debates about alternatives. It led to parties coming to power without a positive plan to get things done. And it has led to cynicism among the electorate. Too often, parties would win an election by denying hard choices had to be made, only to find they faced the same hard choices they had denied existed.

New Brunswick's challenges will not be solved by the politics of deny and blame. All members are called upon to break that cycle and to take ownership of the quality of our debate.

Responsible government – the hallmark of our parliamentary system – requires a responsible opposition. While we will not yield our principled differences of opinion, the way in which we debate our ideals matters. Government members should have more freedom to vote freely, but that requires an opposition prepared to provide the same freedom for its members.

Citizens rightly expect governments to offer creative solutions but opposition members must give those ideas a fair hearing before pointing out errors, or areas for improvement.

All parties must be willing to seek creative, evidence-based solutions. This legislature is like our democracy – if we only support those who agree with us on everything, we will accomplish nothing. Honourable compromise means challenging ourselves and our core supporters to consider new perspectives and yield to evidence.

If we can build broad coalitions in this house, that is a step towards all citizens finding common purpose across regional, linguistic, and ideological lines.

In this first Throne Speech of a new, collaborative era of governance, your government asks all members to embrace this new covenant in which both power and responsibility are shared.

Big Dreams, Not Small Politics

Financial decisions have been dominated by a shopping list approach in which those who help a government win power get some local or personal benefit – a new road, a local project, a corporate bailout.

Your government will not offer a shopping list of small commitments. Your government does not have all the answers and will make mistakes. When we do, we aim to be open and expect the opposition to work to win favour, not through the quality of their rhetoric but the strength of their proposed alternatives.

As your government, we will set out five challenges to guide our work and invite all members to join us in working to solve them.

Our challenges:

- Establishing balanced sustainability for our finances
- Energizing the private sector
- Making public health care accessible and dependable
- Building a world-class education system
- Giving every New Brunswicker a pathway to the middle class

Too often, we have accepted that failure is inevitable. That ends now. New Brunswickers are seeking new hope. That hope will not flow from lofty promises or ideological purity. It will come from solutions that get results. The best way to restore hope in government is to get results from government.

Establishing Balanced Sustainability for our Finances

The 2008 fiscal emergency justified a year or two of excess government spending. No economic model justifies ten years of it. If we continue to borrow to provide services like health and education, we risk the future of services like health and education.

New Brunswickers broadly agree that government has a limited role to play in the economy and a moral duty to ensure equality of opportunity for those willing to work hard and play by the rules.

New Brunswickers broadly agree that if we want public services, we must pay for them.

Every dollar we spend imposes a tax on the hard work of our children, our grandchildren. We are making it harder for them to afford great schools, modern hospitals and good roads.

Borrowing without a plan for balance is not compassion. It is an act of inter-generational theft.

Early in 2019, your government will invite all parties to participate in an interactive pre-budget process. We will challenge citizens to distinguish between needs and wants. We will challenge ourselves to ensure any service provided by government should be performed by government, and is performed to the highest standards.

Your government offers a new covenant to our public service. Public service is more than a job – it should be a calling. In the months to come, each department will develop indicators that provide clear goals and track positive change.

Your government will create an online New Brunswick dashboard where citizens can track change. In exchange for embracing transparency and measurements, public servants will have the freedom to innovate. Your government will work to create an environment where fear of failure no longer crushes creativity. We need a public service where getting results is valued more than simply following rules.

Your government will ask this house to restore the *Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act*, with updates and improvements.

By March of 2020 or sooner, your government will table a balanced budget. The Minister of Finance will set clear deficit reduction and spending targets to ensure our credit rating is not further downgraded. Your government asks all members to join in a commitment to that critical goal.

Your government will increase and sustain the Auditor General's budget, ensuring that bad practices and wasteful spending are detected, and, more importantly, corrected.

Energizing the Private Sector

In recent years, thousands of jobs have been added to the public payroll while private sector employment has declined. When we consider that government also subsidizes many private sector jobs, it is clear this pattern is not sustainable.

Government employs many vital positions. Teachers, nurses, social workers, scientists, engineers and many others provide needed services and deserve our respect. We must remember that every one of those positions is paid for by taxing the work of others. For those taxes to be available for the common good, we need to respect those who start businesses, take risks, work to meet a payroll, often without sick time, pensions or the security of a regular paycheque.

We reject the false choice that helping the private sector comes at the expense of public services, or vice versa. A culture of risk-taking is best supported by a strong social safety net. Excellent public services and a thriving private sector are complementary, not contradictory.

Investments in companies should be based on the strength of business plans, not the strength of a business owner's political connections.

Your government will meet the demand of the Auditor General for an all-party review of the money government spends on subsidies and incentives. Does the current model improve economic growth and employment or would we see better results if similar amounts were spent on employment-based tax credits, focused investor incentives, or general tax reductions? Your government will find out.

Your government will take the lead in efforts to eliminate trade barriers. A province like ours with an outward-looking, export-driven economy only benefits from access to new markets within and without Canada.

Your government will work with all parties to review the mandate of Opportunities New Brunswick. Whether we call it the blue economy or the green economy, other jurisdictions are benefiting from assets similar to New Brunswick's – a long coastline, abundant natural resources and a clean environment. Moving our economy away from bailouts to research-based and green economy jobs should unite members across party lines.

Your government will also explore adding community micro-credit programs to ONB's mandate.

Your government has appointed a minister with specific responsibility for small business. This reflects the role growing local business will play in our economic turnaround. Jurisdictions worldwide are learning that success doesn't come from luring one big employer with subsidies, it comes from seeing hundreds of small and medium businesses growing bigger. When it comes to job creation, we need to stop hunting and start gardening – growing our own businesses with our own people.

The *Local Governance Act* will be revised to expand local choice and control over decision-making, and your government will explore where economic development and tourism decisions can be better run by municipalities.

Your government will develop a tourism strategy that focuses on building sustainable physical and cultural infrastructure in cities and small communities alike.

Building our coastal and green economies will allow us to develop an alternative to the federal government's bureaucratic, expensive carbon tax. A complicated formula that exempts coal and offers arbitrary rebates will do nothing to meet the challenges of climate change, and will kill jobs even in emerging, clean industries.

Your government accepts the scientific consensus that climate change is real and influenced by human activity. Your government rejects the notion that a new tax on an over-taxed province will alter that activity. Your government will join the growing coalition of provinces opposed to the carbon tax. Your government will work with an all-party committee to develop a strategy to meet our emission targets by 2030, and to develop a model for a proper scientific review of the use of glyphosate.

Your government will work across party lines to responsibly develop our natural resources. We must respect communities and First Nations who choose to pursue resource-based jobs and investment. We must ensure a respect for science and impartial oversight of development projects. Your government will work with other parties to develop a position for a legislative officer responsible for science and climate change, and to restore the independence of the recently dismantled public health system.

Respecting risk-takers and business starters means removing barriers. The minister with responsibilities for entrepreneurship and small business will lead a red tape reduction effort designed to reduce, in absolute terms, the number of regulations and the amount of paperwork small and medium business owners encounter.

Your government will provide a timetable for the phase-out of two taxes that kill risk and initiative – the small business tax and the double property tax on secondary properties. In the case of provincial property taxes, your government will work with members from all parties to ensure tenants see the benefits of that tax reduction in their rent.

Your government knows rising WorkSafe premiums are hurting small businesses and discouraging them from adding jobs. Your government has acted to reduce premiums, and will bring forward legislation to make those. Rising premiums have not led to better care for injured workers. Your government will set targets for reducing premiums and work with business and labour to ensure the system is more responsive. As always, the best insurance is in strengthening safe work practices. Your government will support that focus.

Securing Health Care for All

To ensure equal access government claims a monopoly on health services. That gives government a moral responsibility to ensure citizens in need of care get care safely and quickly

Your government will work with doctors on alternatives to billing numbers and on payment models that encourage collaboration, wellness, and the creation of community clinics.

Your government will work with urgency to reduce wait times for surgical procedures. The Minister of Health will work with regional health authorities to prioritize expenditures on actions that will most quickly reduce wait times.

Your government will work to increase the role health professionals such as pharmacists and nurse practitioners play in providing timely and effective access to health services while reducing costs.

Reducing wait times and controlling costs means patients must have a full range of options and professionals ready to provide care. The current shortage of nurses is a barrier to those goals.

In the next six months, government will develop a plan to eliminate barriers to training and recruiting nurses. The Minister of Health will engage the nurses' union, regional health authorities and post-secondary institutions.

We must reduce the number of seniors stalled in scarce hospital beds, because the system failed to develop proper alternatives. Your government will develop a plan for improved home care, building on the work of previous governments.

Your government will review the wages and working conditions of home care workers, support and respite care for families, and a review of long-term savings from investments in the home care sector.

Within six months, your government will review the Medavie Health Services New Brunswick contract for home care services to ensure New Brunswickers are getting the best possible service.

Your government will work to end the ambulance crisis. There can be no more obvious test for a government than how it responds to a citizen calling for help. Faith in government is rightly shaken if the most urgent needs cannot be met. Citizens will not accept ideology or politics blocking common sense solutions.

New Brunswickers deserve common sense decisions that protect lives and constitutional rights. Your government will direct ambulance providers to do just that.

Your government will place an emphasis on mental health, ensuring earmarked federal dollars are spent on mental health services. Your government will review youth mental health services to ensure they are as accessible as possible for young people and their families.

Your government will work to bring stability to the health system so that a proper ten-year human resource plan can be developed.

A World-Class Education System

All parties agree a head start for our children is a fundamental government responsibility. No child should have to settle for less than a world-class education because their parents live in New Brunswick.

Our teachers and school principals have world-class skills. Our universities offer teacher training envied and sought out by countries around the world. Our teachers succeed when they are given the tools, freedom, and respect they need to succeed.

In the most recent Pan-Canadian assessments, New Brunswick students who began school in 2007 achieved the biggest improvement in Canada in reading, math and science. We have led before. We can and must lead again.

We must free our teachers to reverse the decline in Grade 2 literacy levels. Decisions that affect the classroom must be based on evidence not politics. The purpose of an education system is to ensure children become informed citizens who can read, write and think.

Your government is committed to having 85 per cent of students reading at grade-level by the end of Grade 2. If we succeed, it will top the previous best results from 2009.

Improving early literacy is a goal deserving urgent action. A child who struggles to read does not have years to wait for politicians. We must act with the urgency we would expect if it was our child falling behind.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website will be renewed to allow easy public access to literacy, math and science scores over the years. We will hold ourselves accountable for doing better, and we will not allow spin to replace the hard truth of results – be they good or bad.

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development will work on a *Classroom Freedom Act* – amendments to the *Education Act* giving principals, teachers and parents the freedom to make choices that reflect the needs of the children they are teaching and the community supporting them.

Your government will establish a teacher-driven red tape reduction review. This review will reduce the number of mandated curriculum directives and will include a review of Policies 701 and 703 regarding teacher discipline and learning environment, and Policy 711 regarding school nutrition.

Your government will respond to the call from professional organizations to address the challenge of classroom composition. There must be inclusion in our schools but it must work for all students. Flexible learning groups and student-based teaching resources will allow every child to learn at their best.

New Brunswick's teachers, and their professional associations, want to lead. Your government will provide them that freedom and invite them to help us build a better system.

In the next six months, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development will organize an education summit. This summit will seek to find partners for initiatives such as community schools, after-school learning models, cooperative and volunteer education, and experiential learning.

Our school system has failed to produce bilingual graduates. Fewer than eight per cent of students who begin early French Immersion graduate with bilingual skills. Because of streaming and regional inequalities, many of those left behind are those who most need bilingual capabilities to compete for jobs.

Experience, lessons learned from other countries, and the basic tenets of fairness and equal opportunity tell us bilingualism is best defended if government ensures speaking two languages is a benefit available to all, not just to an elite few. Many European nations have made conversational competence in a second or even third language a reality for all students. Your government will decide how to make bilingual communication an opportunity and an expectation for all New Brunswick students.

Early access to assessments is essential for students who struggle. For too long, government has ignored the direction of the Supreme Court's *Jeffrey Moore* decision, which says failing to provide prompt access to inclusive education services is discrimination.

Your government will work with district education councils to use private-sector psychologists to reduce the unacceptable wait times for educational-psychological assessments.

One practice your government intends to stop is throwing out programs only because another party introduced them. Your government will work within the context of the existing 10-year education plans, amending them as needed but building on work done so far. Education must be non-partisan. Our children deserve that.

Your government will undertake an evidence-based review of existing programs supporting post-secondary education and compare and contrast their effectiveness with the canceled broad-based tax credits. We trust all parties will look at enrollment numbers and use evidence to ensure students have the security and predictability they need to plan their futures.

Your government will work to expand online learning, prior learning assessments, and other open learning platforms so higher education is more easily available to working parents and mid-career workers.

An Economy that Includes Everyone

Our greatest strength is our people. Jurisdictions like New Brunswick cannot easily compete on costs with emerging economies in Asia and Africa. Today, countries and provinces must attract businesses based on the availability of skilled and flexible workers.

Lifting up our neighbours to give every family a pathway to the New Brunswick dream is not just a moral demand, it is an economic imperative. Every New Brunswicker willing to work hard and dream big should be rewarded.

Your government will restart and reinvigorate the stalled poverty reduction process. This will begin with comprehensive social assistance reform. All parties will be invited to collaborate on changes that will end the so-called “welfare trap,” where people who apply for short-term help lose their assets, their social connections, their dignity and their hope because of restrictive rules that leave them without the resources to get a job.

Your government will open the debate on models that give short-term help to those recently on social assistance and ready to work hard to get off, more freedom to develop plans for social workers, more accountability for long-term users, and better transitions for the working poor so they can take a job without losing needed benefits.

Your government also intends to improve the child protection system with more accountability and amendments to the *Family Services Act* to give courts more options to provide for children’s safety and care.

Our population decline must be reversed.

Restarting our private sector economy will give many New Brunswick families a chance to return. We need to bring immigrants to New Brunswick to build our economy and our communities. When managed properly, immigration creates jobs. Provinces and states who attract immigrants have higher economic growth rates. Your government will re-open the Provincial Nominee Program and review programs that help new arrivals start businesses and succeed.

No economic success story will be complete until we address unkept promises to First Nations peoples. Your government has appointed a minister with a singular responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs because rebuilding this relationship deserves a full-time minister. Your government will ask members from all parties to assist in defining a new relationship with First Nations, one with fewer rules and less paternalism, and more accountability and community control over land and resources. Your government will ask a committee of this Legislative Assembly to review the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to ensure recommendations within our jurisdiction are met.

The premier has spoken of the New Brunswick dream – having a job you love and coming home, to the people you love, in a province that you love. We want that dream for ourselves, and we wish it for our neighbours. Creating a path to the New Brunswick dream for those with the least protects that dream for all of us.

Conclusion

Your government offers a new covenant between political parties, and a new covenant between government and citizens.

To members of this legislature, your government offers a simple proposal. The Executive Council will share its power, and members will share in the responsibility for evidence-driven debate and policy discussions that offer alternatives and compromise.

To citizens who believe New Brunswick's best days are yet to come, your government offers a new covenant as well. Government will offer citizens, schools and communities more freedom and more equality of opportunity. Citizens, teachers and local leaders, we will all take on more responsibility for expanding pathways into the middle class for all of us.

We all want a job that makes us feel valued in our community and in our homes. We want a house in a safe community where we know our neighbours and care about their well-being. We want good schools and big dreams for our children. We want security and good health for our parents. We share a desire to leave our world – and the people, the environment, the culture and the institutions that shape it – a little better than we found it.

Nearly five hundred years ago, explorers nearing New Brunswick remarked on its improbability. With our rough beauty and cold climate, some on Cartier's voyage wrote that our corner of the world was "the land God gave to Cain."

For five centuries, New Brunswickers defied the odds, not because our leaders were perfect but because our people were hard-working, optimistic and caring.

The New Brunswick dream has always been as beautiful as it is improbable. Together, as members of this legislature and as citizens, we can deliver that beautiful, improbable dream to our children. Deliver it with a legacy of financial security, of a peaceful and diverse society, and strong institutions encouraging innovations, growth and risk. Our job is to make that happen. Today that work begins.