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| Ile-du-Prince-Edward/ Prince Edward Island | 63 | 2 | Discours du Budget/ Budget Speech | 23-04-2008 | Wesley J. Sheridan | Provincial Treasurer and Chair of Treasury Board | LIB |

**The 2008 Provincial Budget Address**

***Presented April 23, 2008***

**One Island Community - One Island Future**

Madame Speaker, I am very pleased and honoured to rise today and deliver a budget that will set a purposeful and clear direction for Prince Edward Island.

Since Government was elected less than 11 months ago with a strong mandate for change, many innovative and progressive measures have been taken.

Today, Government will build on that record of change and continue to emphasize its central and guiding theme: Our best investment is our people.

As the Premier is fond of saying, we may not be rich in minerals, oil and timber, but we are blessed with a society that truly places the interests of our Province above all other considerations.

Madame la Présidente, l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard est une collectivité remarquable, qui accueille tous les individus, les familles et les communautés. Ensemble, en travaillant vers une même visée, nous pouvons accomplir de grandes choses.

We are one Island community. And if we are unified as a Province, then our only boundaries are formed by the shoreline that embraces our Island.

The recent Speech from the Throne calls on Islanders to respond to the challenges of a world that is rapidly changing. Today, the fiscal agenda I have the honour to deliver elaborates on Government's plan to meet those challenges.

Madame Speaker, Government truly believes there is a solemn duty and obligation to move beyond the short-term and pursue initiatives that will lay a sustainable foundation for generations to come.

Great opportunities lie within our Island's grasp. But care must be taken. In a world buffeted by change, we must be deliberate and we must be constant. Our choice is simple: As a Province, will we allow ourselves to be jolted by the forces of change? Or will we harness those forces to our current and future advantage?

Madame Speaker, like the Speech from the Throne, today's budget is founded on five strategic priorities:

* A sustainable health care system that places the interests of individual Islanders above all other considerations;
* An education system that invests in Islanders by offering them better access to high quality programs;
* An economic strategy that blends our traditional industries with new opportunities;
* Environmental stewardship that protects and promotes our natural heritage; and
* An understanding that Government must constantly seek to improve the way that it delivers services and programs to all Islanders.

Madame Speaker, as a Province, we have to defeat the temptations of the short-term fix and the instant solution. We understand the dangers and pitfalls of such an approach - and Government will not succumb to those who seek temporary and fleeting relief from challenges that require a deeper and more lasting resolution.

Instead, Government is carefully and thoughtfully proposing plans meant to benefit our Island well into the future.

A prime example is the economic strategy that was recently announced. That strategy - which combines ambition with balance, will help to guide Government's economic efforts until 2014. I am particularly proud of the fact that the strategy fully incorporates accountability mechanisms that will guarantee an unprecedented level of transparency and openness in the way taxpayers' dollars are invested in our emerging economy.

**Investing in Islanders**

Madame Speaker, Government is highly committed to measures that will enhance the ability of individual Islanders and families to prosper and thrive in order to build a stronger Province.

In many respects, this commitment to every Islander means that Government must aggressively enhance the way social programs are delivered.

Of course, it follows naturally from this recognition that major improvements are required in health care, education and social services.

Madame Speaker, in light of these fundamental obligations, Government will continue to require deficit financing for the current year. Last year's anticipated deficit of $42.3 million has been forecasted to come in at $36.6 million and this year we have budgeted for a reduced deficit of $34.9 million.

Government strongly desires balanced books within as short a time frame as possible. Currently, our finances are headed in the right direction, and I am confident that a steady and cautious approach to both revenue and expenditure management will result in fiscal balance in the relative short-term.

**Health and Well-Being of Islanders**

Madame Speaker, Government's first priority must be the health of Islanders.

Therefore, Government must firmly support a health care system that responds to the needs of all Islanders - both in terms of promoting health and treating illness.

The challenges facing Government in this field are well known to every Islander. Across Canada, every province struggles with similar issues: professional recruitment and retention; higher costs; access to services and an aging population.

Madame Speaker, I am proud to belong to a Government that is not daunted by these challenges. Instead, the Government has taken decisive steps to confront the issues that face our health care system.

This Winter, the Department of Health created an Office of Recruitment and Retention, which has produced significant results in a short period of time. This year, funding for health recruitment and retention will be $4.7 million. Indeed, in 2008- 2009 we will spend an additional $2.3 million on new physicians who will be coming to the Island to practice.

As a result of these efforts, Madame Speaker, I am proud to report that Prince Edward Island now has the highest number of physicians in provincial history.

That said, Madame Speaker, there is much more to do. Improving access to primary care must be a fundamental goal, and Government is committed to its objective of ensuring that every Islander has access to a family physician.

A major component of that effort is the introduction of a Family Medicine Residency Program. This initiative is important for two key reasons. First, a Residency Program offers the opportunity for young Island doctors to receive more of their training in our Province. Second, it is far more likely those doctors will stay on our Island if they are given the opportunity to enjoy an early phase of their professional development here.

Madame Speaker, our full Family Medicine Residency Program will begin in 2009, with an anticipated budget of $1.2 million in its first year.

In preparation for the full program, I am proud to announce that a pilot Residency Program will begin this year, with an initial cost of $220,000.

Madame Speaker, another professional field that has challenged every jurisdiction is the recruitment and retention of nurses.

We are fortunate that the University of Prince Edward Island offers a nursing program. Government will invest a further $356,000 this year to improve training capacity with an Accelerated Nursing Program. This will see additional nursing graduates year after year. Further to that, Madame Speaker, an additional $192,000 will be spent as we integrate the growing Nurse Practitioner profession into our health care system, including additional resources at the Cancer Treatment Centre.

Madame Speaker, another vital area of the health care system revolves around treatment and medication.

One area of increasing concern is the growing prevalence of diabetes, and the treatment cost borne by many Islanders.

Based on that understanding, Government is extremely pleased to announce that commencing in the Fall of 2008, diabetic strips for insulin-dependent Islanders will be covered as a public service.

The details of this coverage will be designed in close collaboration with health care professionals and the Canadian Diabetes Association.

The Fall start-up will allow for adequate program development. It will also allow the results of a national panel on diabetes and blood glucose testing to be released this summer to help determine the required scope of daily testing.

This new initiative is an investment of $1.5 million in 2008-2009 in the health of thousands of Islanders.

We made a commitment to ensuring Islanders have access to vital medication. As a result, in 2008-2009, my Government will spend $3.9 million more in public support for medications than in 2007-2008. This represents an increase of fourteen per cent in provincial drug spending.

Madame Speaker, another area that requires immediate attention is Prince Edward Island's Cancer Strategy.

Over the next year, Government will spend nearly $2 million in improvements to cancer prevention and treatment.

Madame Speaker, some of these advances include:

* A Colorectal Cancer Screening Program, with a first-year cost of nearly $200,000;
* An additional $216,500 for mammography screening;
* A new pilot program to provide palliative care at home, with an initial investment of $275,000;
* The introduction of the Patient Navigator system;
* The increase in cancer medications budget by more than $500,000;
* A Radiation Pilot Project will receive $461,000;
* An Endoscopic Expansion at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital will receive $166,400;
* An allocation of $50,000 will go toward a Radon Inspection Program.

Madame Speaker, far too many Island families are hurt by cancer. But modern science has learned that many cancers are preventable - with appropriate screening and prevention programs.

For example, breast cancer is a leading cause of cancer death on Prince Edward Island. This Budget will result in a significant enhancement to our screening program. To that end, Government will contribute $835,000 toward the purchase of state-of-the-art digital mammography equipment.

Madame Speaker, another concern of Government is the reduction of wait times. Virtually everyone knows how difficult the uncertainty of diagnosis can be. For that reason, Government will invest a further $2 million in increased funding for reducing wait times in radiation therapy, sight restoration, diagnostic imaging and joint replacements. Another $600,000 will be spent to improve patient safety initiatives that flow from the recent accreditation process.

Overall, Madame Speaker, this Budget will see a further $21.6 million invested in our provincial health care system.

This is a major increase in spending, and will improve the way Islanders gain access to these vitally important services.

Madame Speaker, we are fortunate to have a network of hospitals, manors and other facilities across our Province.

Government believes that each and every institution can perform a more vital role in the delivery of health care. Over the next year, $17.7 million will be assigned to the modernization of hospitals, manors and other facilities.

Madame Speaker, our Government is pleased to announce initiatives to support children, seniors, families and the wellness of all Islanders.

I am proud to be part of a government that places a high priority on the provision of long-term care. Indeed, many aspects of the long-term care sector have been overlooked in recent years.

Soon after my Government was elected, we commissioned work to assess the trends and needs in long term care in the Province. The report of this comprehensive study will be tabled during this session of the Legislative Assembly.

Our Government will begin planning to replace some of the long- term care beds that were removed from the system since 1995. In addition, many of our public manors are functionally inadequate to meet the needs of their target population. Government will develop a five-year manor replacement strategy that will be included in the Capital Budget to be tabled this Fall. Phase one of our manor replacement program will include the Prince Edward Home and Summerset Manor. Subsequent phases will include replacement of Colville Manor, Maplewood Manor and Riverview Manor.

In addition, my Government will begin planning to significantly enhance our home care program to enable seniors and other Islanders to receive care at home and thereby decrease our reliance on institutional care.

Madame Speaker, our Government remains committed to enhancing programs and services to Islanders with disabilities. In 2007-2008, we eliminated income testing for families with children under the age of 18 who have a disability. This resulted in an increase of just over $900,000 to implement that decision.

To continue to promote equity and improved access to programs and services, my Government implemented a ceiling rate increase in late 2007 which is the first time the Disability Support Program has seen an increase since 2001.

In 2008-2009, my Government is engaged with stakeholders in a review of the Disability Support Program. The outcome of this review will help shape future improvements to services for Islanders living with disabilities.

Further, Madame Speaker, Government will eliminate Air Ambulance Transfer fees for Islanders and will cover ground ambulance services for Islanders going out of the Province.

Again, Madame Speaker, the additional infusion of nearly $21.6 million in health care is testimony to our belief that this most vital of services is Government's first priority.

**Investing in Island Education**

Madame Speaker, 12 days ago, Government announced the most ambitious economic strategy planned by an Island Government in several decades.

*Island Prosperity - A Focus for Change* sets out a series of determined and purposeful goals, which will rely on the strength of individual Islanders to succeed.

Madame Speaker, Government believes the seeds of an economic transformation have been planted - and the key to that goal lies within a new emphasis in the education system.

Beginning this year, every first-year Island student entering a provincially-funded post-secondary institution to attain a degree or diploma will receive up to $2,000 from the George Coles Bursary. This year, Government will invest $2 million in this program.

The opportunity for many more young Islanders to study the arts, business, science and trades is among the most important of the initiatives in the 2008-2009 Budget.

Madame Speaker, Government believes this will attract many more young Islanders into post-secondary education, and the benefits to our Province will immediately accelerate and then build over time.

Madame Speaker, within the public education system, planning for the integration of kindergarten will begin this year - accompanied by a full process of engagement and consultation.

In recognition of the fact that Island children deserve the best we can possibly afford, a further $2 million will be invested in the initiatives associated with the Task Force on Student Achievement. This brings the total spending in this specific area to $5 million in the current fiscal year. New initiatives this year include $752,000 for literacy programs and assistance, $400,000 for curriculum enhancements and $250,000 for the International Baccalaureate Program.

Other new expenditures include:

* Continued implementation of the Staffing and Funding Model with the addition of six teaching positions;
* Special education expenditures, including psychologists, is increased by $540,000;
* New funding for the Prince Edward Island Volunteers for Literacy to support the Let Older Volunteers Educate initiative, in which Islanders read with children in schools;
* Increased English as an Additional Language funding of $500,000;
* Begin the process of eliminating curriculum-based user fees through a $100,000 investment; and
* New funding of $100,000 to support school Breakfast Programs across Prince Edward Island.

Madame Speaker, Government also strongly believes that support for families and our youngest Islanders should begin early.

For that reason, Madame Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that spending on the Best Start Program will grow to more than $1 million this fiscal year. That represents an increase of $219,000.

Support for the Best Start Program will be expanded to assist families with children up to two years of age, which signifies Government's commitment to the early years.

Further, Madame Speaker, an additional $389,500 will be used to fund child care maintenance and child care special needs as part of the Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan.

**Environment**

Madame Speaker, in addition to social supports, Government fully understands the environmental challenges facing Prince Edward Island.

Over the past number of years, Islanders have become far more environmentally-conscious and Government will reflect the growing concern in tangible programs.

Later this year, the Commission on Nitrates in Groundwater chaired by the Honourable Armand DesRoches will be finalized. Madame Speaker, on behalf of Government and all Islanders, at this point I would like to thank Justice DesRoches for taking on this enormous task.

While Government looks forward to the work of the Commission, steps are being taken now to address known issues associated with nitrates in groundwater.

The new Alternate Land Use Services (ALUS) initiative will reward landowners and producers who implement sustainable land management practices that go beyond regulatory requirements.

The $750,000 in new spending on this initiative will reward those landowners whose individual contributions to our Province's environmental health helps us all. The program will contribute to the reduction of soil, nutrient and pesticide runoff while simultaneously promoting biodiversity and the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat throughout our Province.

Madame Speaker, the success of our Province's Watershed Management Program will also be strengthened through a further investment. That new funding will bring the Program to $520,000 this year.

The program focuses on community-based watershed planning and lays the groundwork to identify lands that could be managed under the ALUS program.

Madame Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that Government's successful introduction of free nitrate clinics will continue for another year. This program allows all Islanders to measure the quality of their water without any direct cost.

Finally, Madame Speaker, the introduction of canned beverages and the deposit system should result in less environmental contamination on our landscapes and shorelines. This year, revenue derived from the new system will see an additional $1 million for environmental initiatives, such as increased funding for community watershed groups.

**Primary Industries**

***Agriculture***

Madame Speaker, Government understands that agriculture forms the backbone of our economy. We recognize that our traditional industries have been challenged in recent years in the face of global market trends. Government is therefore committed to assisting our farmers in navigating through these uncertain times toward a more prosperous and stable future.

Since taking office, Government has spent over $12 million in grants and loan relief to hog producers, as well as $3 million to beef producers to deal with a nation-wide crisis in these areas. We are proud of the commitments we have made to date in support of these industries, but we recognize that ongoing support for the entire agricultural industry is necessary for its well-being.

Madame Speaker, the difficulties facing the agriculture sector are widely-known and require long-term solutions.

For that reason, Government must assist the agriculture sector to take a more strategic approach. To that end, Government will be unveiling a new Sustainable Diversification Initiative for agriculture.

Phase One of our new Sustainable Diversification Initiative will include:

* Renewed emphasis on research and development into cereals and oil seeds, in order to determine which varieties provide the appropriate hardiness and yields for our climate;
* The development of incentive programs to encourage further development of alternative crops through consultation with industry;
* Consultation with the Prince Edward Island Grain Elevators Corporation (GEC) to complete a review of the GEC infrastructure with a view to enhancing cereal and oilseed opportunities for Island farmers;
* An assessment of market opportunities for alternative crops;
* An analysis of opportunities for green cover crops for nutrient uptake and soil erosion management; and
* A commitment that safety net programs for alternative crops will provide adequate support for producers.

In support of this initiative, I am pleased to announce today the establishment of an Agriculture Innovation Fund, which will assist and encourage farmers to pursue product diversification and value-added technologies. This Budget allocates $200,000 to assist in the creation and development of new and innovative market products.

Further, Government will establish an Agriculture Research Fund, with an annual allocation of $200,000 for three years. This Fund will support applied and developmental research that will ultimately benefit the agricultural community in Prince Edward Island.

Madame Speaker, Government believes that it is vitally important for our farmers to have the support of both their Government and the local community. That is why we are announcing a new Buy Local Initiative, with an annual allocation of $500,000, which will seek to increase public awareness, support and demand for locally-grown and processed foods. We know that Islanders are extremely loyal to our Province, and we are confident that this Initiative will result in this loyalty translating into increased demand for Island-grown products.

In addition to these initiatives, Government is:

* establishing a new Agri-Insurance Program will expand to include livestock producers and enhance the level of business risk management support offered under previous programs;
* increasing the funding for the Future Farmer Program to $700,000 to assist and encourage new farmers to enter the industry;
* supporting Phase Three of the Hog Transition Program, with a budget of $1.4 million to provide assistance to hog producers looking to transition to a new business model; and
* proceeding with the Beef Industry Initiative to provide producers with genetic herd health incentives.

It is Government's belief that these investments and allocations will serve the agricultural industry well and assist our farmers to thrive in this new and challenging global marketplace.

***Fisheries***

Madame Speaker, Government also believes that support for the fishery and for aquaculture is vital to the success of our entire economy, given the important role these industries play in our Island way of life.

In that regard, and as highlighted in the recent Speech from the Throne, Government is proceeding with a four-year Lobster Initiative, which will assist the Department to address issues facing the sector and explore opportunities for further growth. This Initiative will dedicate an additional $100,000 in programming for the lobster industry.

Government will also work in cooperation with its federal counterparts to develop a Mussel Aquaculture Productivity Improvement Fund in conjunction with the Prince Edward Island Aquaculture Alliance. The Fund, built on a federal-provincial partnership, will assist the Prince Edward Island mussel sector to continue to explore technology needs to address the threat of aquatic invasive species.

The Prince Edward Island oyster industry offers tremendous potential to diversify the fishery and promote development of our economy. Both the public oyster fishery and private aquaculture leases have potential for further development with a focus on high quality oysters.

The Oyster Development Program will build upon this success. New funding of $100,000 will be used to expand the Oyster Enhancement Program carried out by the Prince Edward Island Shellfish Association, create a new Quality Oyster Aquaculture Program and sponsor projects to upgrade access to the shore for oyster fishers and growers.

**Investing in Communities and Infrastructure**

Madame Speaker, the Speech from the Throne talked about the need for our Province to adopt a new way of thinking, by calling on Islanders to embrace the idea of common purpose and determination.

This Government believes that a unified approach to the Island's future will strengthen all parts of our Province.

Madame la Présidente, dans le discours du Trône, nous avons communiqué le besoin d'adopter une nouvelle façon de penser dans la province, en demandant aux Insulaires de soutenir le concept d'un objectif commun et d'une résolution commune.

Le présent gouvernement croit qu'une méthode d'approche unifiée par rapport à l'avenir de l'Île renforcera toutes les parties de notre province.

Madame Speaker, there have already been several announcements made to support this new idea. Two important Government departments will be relocated outside the capital city, and the new economic strategy embraces all sectors and communities.

The emphasis on modern infrastructure also includes the goal of making sure that all Island communities have access to broadband internet services.

This initiative will allow individual entrepreneurs to operate from anywhere on the Island - and help them to compete on a provincial, national and global basis.

This year, Government will invest in the Rural Broadband Initiative, and we expect the entire Island will have access to these services in 2009.

Madame Speaker, in keeping with the goal of communications modernization, Government will also spend $1 million on the Integrated Tourism Solution project, which will lead to a centralized reservations system and data collection program. In turn, this system will provide valuable knowledge to the industry, which will allow members to thoroughly understand trends and challenges.

Madame Speaker, we also believe it is time for the Province to take a close look at our Island's municipal framework.

It has been 25 years since the last province-wide changes to municipal structures on the Island were made. Further, there is a critical link between municipal governance, land use issues and future development.

For those reasons, a Commissioner on Land and Local Governance will be appointed to conduct a thorough review - including a broad examination of the fairness, equity and transparency of the provincial/municipal financial framework - and is expected to report in 2009.

While this work is being done, Government understands that improvements must be made to the relationship between the Province and its municipalities.

Madame Speaker, when the new Government assumed office last summer, it became clear that the practices of the previous administration were not meeting current challenges.

Government feels it is important to address these issues and introduce greater fairness to the way the Province deals with Island communities.

For too long, municipalities have been paying the Provincial Government an administration fee to assess properties and collect property taxes. This has meant hundreds of thousands of dollars meant to enrich our Island communities went straight into provincial coffers. We consider this a clawback.

Madame Speaker, we are pleased that Government will be returning that $780,000 to support services provided at the municipal level.

Further, Government will begin to disburse payments to municipalities on a monthly basis.

Madame Speaker, for years, there has been an uneven distribution of the wealth in this Province. Our Government believes in the strength of One Island Community. We cannot thrive collectively if some of our communities are being treated inequitably.

That's why we are supporting the implementation of a fully-funded equalization program, one that will ensure fairness and transparency. These are values that have been at the core of all of our decisions made on behalf of Islanders.

These initiatives combined represent an additional annual investment of $2.5 million in Island municipalities.

Madame Speaker, modernizing our infrastructure is an investment in our future, our environment, our economy and our health. This year, infrastructure investment will rise to unprecedented levels. With our Federal partners - who have demonstrated leadership and vision in the infrastructure agenda - we will soon be unveiling new community infrastructure programs.

These critically-important programs will go a long way to address the local infrastructure deficit, but there will remain some local needs that require additional support. The Province will launch a new multi-year Island Community Fund that will facilitate local infrastructure needs beyond the suite of Federal programs.

The Island Community Fund will invest $2.5 million in the current fiscal year and will grow to $5 million annually as local needs increase.

Madame Speaker, I am pleased to announce today that my Government is committed to using the Island Community Fund to help finance a new parking garage in downtown Charlottetown. Pending the approval of our municipal partner, the City of Charlottetown, this strategic investment will help spur a multi- million dollar redevelopment in the downtown core, bringing new vitality to our historic capital city community.

The Island Community Fund will also be used to support smaller, though no less vital, community infrastructure initiatives. To this end, important local infrastructure like fire halls, community centres and recreational facilities not funded by other federal-provincial agreements will be eligible for funding support.

Further to that, Government remains committed to improving the safety of Prince Edward Island's roads and bridges through its Capital Program. This year, Government will make investments worth $31.6 million in roads and highway infrastructure. This represents the single largest, one-year investment in highway infrastructure over the last decade.

**The Island's Place in the Larger Economy**

Madame Speaker, in spite of concerns in the United States, our national economy appears to be on a solid footing.

Statistics Canada estimates that the national economy grew by 2.7 per cent in 2007, and all indications suggest stable growth this year as well.

The rise in strength of the Canadian dollar has been a source of some concern, especially for Island exporters. However, this has been balanced somewhat by lower costs for machinery and equipment.

Provincially, the Island economy grew by 1.8 per cent - and is expected to grow again this year by 1.9 per cent.

There has been a distinct improvement in employment opportunities for Islanders.

In fact, Madame Speaker, the unemployment rate in 2007 was at a 29 year low. Last month we saw record high employment in our province - with 71,000 jobs.

A particularly bright spot on the economic canvas is the sturdy growth in retail sales - which grew by 8.2 per cent in 2007 to reach $1.6 billion.

Madame Speaker, the Government of Prince Edward Island participated in this activity - partly through its Capital Budget.

The 2008-2009 Capital Budget is $76.9 million, compared to $68.9 million in 2007-2008.

**Fiscal Update**

Madame Speaker, after far too many years of constant tax increases, the new Government took two major steps upon entering office in the Spring of 2007.

First, gasoline taxes were reduced by 4.4 cents per litre. This resulted in $6.6 million in savings for Islanders during the last fiscal year.

I am happy to say that reduction in gasoline tax will be continued into the current fiscal year, and it is estimated the reduction will leave $8.8 million in Islanders' hands.

The second major decision was to freeze the owner occupied component of residential property assessments. This will be of significant financial benefit to residential property owners across the Island.

Income taxes were reduced and tax credits for the disabled were improved.

Further, this year we will reduce small business corporate taxes by another 1.1 per cent. This will be followed by a 1.1 per cent reduction next year, in support of our goal of dramatically reducing small business corporate tax rates on the Island.

These reductions in corporate tax will be complemented by a thorough review of Government's regulatory regime, which will allow the private sector to more easily interact with the Government.

This "Red Tape" Review will be undertaken with input and guidance from the Island's business community.

Madame Speaker, Government is taking one revenue measure with today's budget.

Recognizing the fact that increases in tobacco prices result in a reduction in smoking, Government will increase the cost of a carton of cigarettes by five dollars beginning at midnight.

This measure will see an increase in revenue of an estimated $3.5 million, which will be devoted to important services like education and health care.

In fact, the measures outlined in this Budget to deal with cancer will be funded from increased tobacco tax revenue.

**Conclusion**

Madame Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, I want to thank both the staff in the Provincial Treasury and throughout Government for all their hard work on today's budget.

A great deal of effort goes into these documents, and over the last 12 months, staff have prepared three budgets.

I am particularly proud of the direction upon which we are embarking as a Government.

I believe in the years to come, as finances stabilize, that we will continue down an already-established path toward tax relief and improved services to Islanders.

Our priorities are clear - and the Premier's direction has been transparently demonstrated through the Speech from the Throne and the Province's new economic strategy.

Health care must remain as the primary focus for this Government - and improvements to the education system must be made in tandem.

Today's budget helps to amplify and elaborate upon a plan that is based on purpose and determination.

I thank you for your kind attention and look forward to the debate over this Budget in the coming days, weeks and months.

Thank you.