

2012 Speech from the Throne

Mr. Speaker, honourable members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and fellow New Brunswickers.

Welcome to the opening of the Third Session of the 57th Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick.

The people of this province are resilient and proud. We are a unique and special corner of our great country - a province composed of diverse regions and proud cultures, with a special affinity for the land and the waters that surround and nurture us all.

This throne speech sets out the programs and initiatives that your government will introduce and enact over the coming year as part of its plan to rebuild our province, our economy and our communities.

As we begin this session, we welcome Hugh J. Flemming to the Legislature as the new member for Rothesay and as Minister of Health.

We express our congratulations as well to Brian Gallant of Shediac Bridge on his election as the new leader of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick and we wish him well.

Celebrations

I was very pleased to join with Premier David Alward and His Excellency, the Governor General to welcome Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall to Canada and to New Brunswick in May. Many thousands of New Brunswickers turned out to see and meet the Royal Couple at Base Gagetown and in Saint John on Victoria Day.

Last month, 10 more remarkable New Brunswickers were inducted into the Order of New Brunswick, marking the 11th time we have recognized our exceptional citizens with this, our highest provincial honour.

The inductees recognized this year are: Calixte Duguay of Caraquet, Raymond Fraser of Fredericton, Cindy Hewitt of Hillsborough, Arthur Irving of Saint John, Audrey Lampert of Moncton, Raymond Lagacé of Atholville, Salem Masry of Fredericton, Philip Sexsmith of Fredericton, Ann-Marie Tingley of Saint John and Ron Turcotte of Drummond.

Six distinguished New Brunswickers were invested into the Order of Canada. Former Lieutenant-Governor Marilyn Trenholme Counsel was made an officer of the order and Denis Losier and Louis LaPierre of Moncton, Salem Masry of Fredericton, Jean-Guy Rioux of Pointe-Brûlée and the late Kenneth Maybee of New Maryland were made members.

As well, a number of New Brunswickers were honoured this year for their contributions to New Brunswick and to our country with the Diamond Jubilee Medal in commemoration of Her Majesty the Queen's 60th year on the throne as Queen of Canada.

A number of soldiers from New Brunswick received decorations for valour and meritorious service from Governor General David Johnston over the past year. Master Corporal Charles St-Pierre of Saint-Quentin received the Medal of Military Valour and Lieutenant-Colonel Ronald Allan Allison of Miramichi, Warrant Officer Joseph Jacques Friolet of Bathurst, Chief Warrant Officer Joseph Camille Robichaud of Rexton, and Lieutenant-Commander Louis Christian Haché of Petit-Rocher and Middle Sackville, Nova Scotia received the Meritorious Service Medal.

As well, Chief Warrant Officer Jean-Paul Savoie of Saint John and Chief Warrant Officer Wayne Alan Bartlett, Chief Warrant Officer Norman James McLanaghan, Captain Lorne Joseph André Doucet, Chief Warrant Officer Bradley Montgomery and Captain Leo Snook of Oromocto were named members of the Order of Military Merit.

Last month, Cadet Master Warrant Officer Julie LeBlanc of Moncton received the 2012 General Walsh Memorial Sword as Canada's most outstanding army cadet.

We also welcome Colonel Craig Dalton as the new commander of 3 Area Support Group Base Gagetown and we honour Inspector Richard Wayne Votour of the RCMP in Fredericton, who was named a member of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces.

Corinne Gallant of Dieppe received the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case for her work as an academic as an advocate for Acadia and her pioneering work in the Canadian women's movement.

Bernard Joseph Blanchard of Bocabec and Corporal Daniel Richard Melanson of Saint-Paul and Campbellton received the medal of bravery. Mr. Blanchard rescued a man from a burning house and Cpl. Melanson rescued a man from possible drowning along the Bay of Chaleur.

Paul-Émile Cormier of Saint-Antoine received the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award for his work in fostering adult literacy.

Community leader Ralph Thomas of Saint John received the 2012 New Brunswick Human Rights Award and disability activist Lorraine Silliphant of Fredericton received the New Brunswick Pioneer of Human Rights Award.

Gerry Pond of Rothesay received the Canadian Red Cross 2012 Humanitarian award for New Brunswick for his outstanding contribution to reduce poverty in our region and Lauren Chartrand of Scotch Lake received the Canadian Red Cross Young Humanitarian award for her efforts to combat bullying.

Business leaders Jim Irving, Francis McGuire and the late Neil McKelvey were inducted into the New Brunswick Business Hall of Fame recently for their contributions to our province and its economy.

In literature, France Daigle of Moncton won the Governor General's Literary Award for French Fiction and won the Prix littéraire Antonine-Maillet-Acadie Vie and the Prix Champlain for her novel, *Pour sûr*.

Riel Nason of Quispamsis won the 2012 Commonwealth Book Prize, Canada and Europe, and the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award at the Atlantic Book Awards for her debut novel, *The Town That Drowned*.

At the Atlantic Book Awards, Susan White of the Kingston Peninsula also won the Ann Connor Brimer Award for Children's Literature for *The Year Mrs. Montague Cried*.

Musician Lisa LeBlanc of Rosaireville received the Félix for Discovery of the Year at the 34th annual Gala de l'Association québécoise de l'industrie du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo (ADISQ) in Montreal last month. Radio Radio won the Félix for Hip-Hop Album of the Year.

As well, Moncton played host for the second time to the finest musical talent of Atlantic Canada at the 2012 East Coast Music Awards. Congratulations to all New Brunswick musicians who took part and especially to David Myles, who won song of the year and songwriter of the year; Matt Anderson, for winning solo recording and blues recording of the year; and George Belliveau, for Francophone Recording of the Year.

I was proud to present recently the first Lieutenant-Governor's Award for Excellence in Aging to Gerald Burke and to the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Saint John for their work to improve the lives of seniors.

I also had the privilege of honouring three of our province's most accomplished and gifted artists with this year's Lieutenant-Governor Awards for High Achievement in the Arts to pioneering singer-songwriter Edith Butler from Paquetville, prolific writer Jean Dohaney of Fredericton and noted visual artist David Umholtz of Deer Island.

Congratulations to Olympian Catharine Pendrel of Harvey Station and Paralympian Dave Durepos of Charters Settlement, for their participation in the 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London. These were Catharine's second Olympic Games where she finished ninth in the mountain bike competition, while Dave Durepos, the London gold medallist in wheelchair basketball, competed at five Paralympic Games.

This past August, the Trans-Canada Highway in New Brunswick was dedicated to our service men and women as the Highway of Heroes to honour their sacrifices and their contributions to freedom here and throughout the world.

Finally, this year marked the 30th anniversary of the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons. We congratulate the council, its members and the many volunteers who work in every community of our province to improve access, increase awareness and remove barriers for New Brunswickers with disabilities.

Condolences

We pause to remember former member for Memramcook and minister of education Clarence Cormier. We also honour the memory of noted New Brunswick artist Bruno Bobak of Fredericton, renowned Acadian painter Claude Picard of Edmundston and well-known labour and employment lawyer, advocate and legal scholar, J. Gordon Petrie of Fredericton.

Rebuilding New Brunswick

This year marks the 200th anniversary of one of the defining moments in our history as New Brunswickers and Canadians, the War of 1812. This war, coming very early in our history as a

province, represents a moment in time where the peoples and cultures that make up our New Brunswick came together to fight for their homeland.

We know of the exploits of General Brock and the burning of the White House in Washington, but New Brunswickers have their own extraordinary story of courage and passion from the War of 1812. The 104th Regiment left from Fredericton in the dead of winter for a 1,600-kilometre march to join the battle for Canada and protect their homes and their land from invasion.

Our ancestors made that long march through the winter together. They showed us the way, through perseverance and courage. Now we must follow their example and come together in a common cause to rebuild our New Brunswick.

As New Brunswickers, we have all lived through the effects of the global economic downturn of the past number of years. We have experienced job losses and other changes brought by slower economic growth here and around the world.

While Canada and the rest of the world continue to recover from the downturn, it has become clear that growth will come, not from looking outside, but from the ingenuity and innovation of our New Brunswick people and businesses.

The very things that make our province such a great place to live also make it a great place to work and to build a future. Your government will work with communities, businesses and entrepreneurs throughout New Brunswick to capture those strengths and harness them to embark on a new course for our economy and our province.

This new direction will be founded on focused development in strategic sectors and on making innovation the central tenet of our economy, our communities and our way of living and working.

Innovation is part of the fabric of our province and it is central to increasing productivity in every region and every sector of our economy. It is also critical to your government's continuing efforts to restructure the way government operates and ensure tax dollars are spent wisely and services delivered effectively at the lowest cost to taxpayers.

As Premier David Alward said earlier this year, innovation will be the rocket fuel for our economy.

Over the next twelve months, your government will put in place a series of measures to transform and rebuild New Brunswick and ensure the services, programs and supports that New Brunswickers count on will continue to be there.

It will do this through rebuilding our economy, rebuilding health care, people and communities and rebuilding government and how it operates.

Rebuilding our Economy

Rebuilding and re-energizing our economy is the cornerstone of your government's plan to rebuild New Brunswick.

Your government has listened. You have told it that it must focus on helping to keep more New Brunswickers here and bring more New Brunswickers home. Government must also provide

tools to more businesses to help them succeed, to grow here and export globally so they can hire more people.

As a result, your government released *Growing Together, New Brunswick's Economic Development Action Plan* in May. This action plan lays down the foundation for economic growth in New Brunswick and identifies government's role in supporting and stimulating a prosperous economy with a focus on six key sectors: Information and Communications Technology, Biosciences, Industrial Fabrication, Aerospace and Defence, Value-added Wood, and Value-added Food.

In the coming year, your government will begin by implementing an **innovation agenda** developed with input from the private sector based on real-world success stories from around the globe. This agenda will focus on three areas: the **creation of a research and innovation council**, the **expansion of the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation**, and increased collaboration with groups and stakeholders who are prepared to make investments in our economy and innovation ecosystem including federal partners, industry and academia.

Your government also wants to thank the federal government for the recent commitment to maintaining the presence of National Research Council in both Moncton and Fredericton. Continuing collaboration with the NRC is an important aspect of our innovation plan moving forward.

The research and innovation council will provide guidance on public policy and oversee one of the largest provincial investments in innovation that our province has ever seen. It will be co-chaired by the Premier and an industry representative, with membership on the council from government, post-secondary institutions and industry.

Your government will build on the success of the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation, which will work with industry and research institutions to become the catalyst for enhancing research and innovation activity across our province. The foundation will focus its efforts on our key economic development sectors.

Your government believes that New Brunswickers have the skills, the passion and the drive to become one of the most innovative jurisdictions in the world. We can, because we already are. We can and we will do more great things together.

To better align government to focus on rebuilding our economy, a new **Ministerial Committee on Jobs and the Economy** will be established.

This committee will monitor economic performance and recommend adjustments to government direction and policy as required by developing innovative economic policies and programs that stimulate and improve business and employment opportunities.

Working with communities to empower job creation and economic growth is central to your government's vision for rebuilding New Brunswick's economy.

New Brunswickers asked for more local decision-making powers and your government is bringing this power to each region by decentralizing decision-making powers on programs for small and medium-sized businesses through the creation of five regional offices. These district offices will be in operation as of April 1.

Supported by satellite offices to reach into every corner of the province, the district office will work with small businesses to pursue strategic opportunities for capital investment, business start-ups and expansion, diversification, innovation and productivity improvements. Your government wants to support and encourage our small businesses to grow more jobs.

Addressing the skills gap and ensuring New Brunswick has a workforce with the right skills for the labour market continues to be a top priority for your government. A key component in rebuilding New Brunswick is our human resource capacity and ensuring the availability of a skilled and globally competitive labour force. This year, your government will also release a **Labour Force and Skills Development Strategy** in support of the Economic Development Plan.

Despite the fiscal restraint your government has demonstrated since taking office, your government has continued to invest in our greatest resources: our people. The need for highly qualified employees is the basis of strengthening and diversifying our economy. Our universities and our community colleges are pivotal to our province's present and future successes.

Your government will continue to work toward an equal and inclusive society where all women, men, girls and boys are able to reach their full potential and thereby contribute to our province's growth and prosperity. A milestone was reached this past year where women, for the first time in New Brunswick history, comprised 50 per cent of the workforce. Women's economic security remains a concern and government will continue to implement its current pay equity commitments.

Last year, your government announced the creation of a steering committee to develop an **Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability**. This ambitious report, tabled during Disability Awareness Week in May, sets out a culture-shifting plan to support persons with a disability to work to their fullest potential. Your government is currently examining the recommendations identified in the report and is pleased to report that it has started working on the implementation of this strategy.

Your government has made significant progress in implementing the New Brunswick Energy Blueprint, which was released just over one year ago. All 20 action items will be fully implemented by the end of 2014.

The Energy Blueprint action items are focused on taking full advantage of emerging energy opportunities, while proactively addressing key energy challenges and reflecting public and stakeholder feedback. A number of the action items have already been completed, and several others will be implemented in 2013, including the reintegration of NB Power through amendments to the *Electricity Act*, and the restructuring of the electricity market via the migration of the system-operations function back to the utility.

On November 23, Point Lepreau returned to commercial status concluding the refurbishment project. The project was completed despite a delay of over three years and substantial cost overruns.

Your government has indicated all along that it firmly believes it should not have to take responsibility for the cost overruns associated with the project and that it would exhaust all options to secure compensation for the people of New Brunswick.

With the completion of the project, your government is of the view that NB Power can now evaluate the best options for securing compensation and will urge NB Power to initiate the proper recourse.

New Brunswick has a long history of oil and gas production. All residents of our province rely on natural gas today, whether directly for energy or indirectly through the goods and services we consume. If the estimates for the potential amount of natural gas are accurate, it has the potential to heat every home in our province for several hundred years, and to provide a significant competitive advantage for our economy. Not to mention the potential for reducing Green House Gas emissions by displacing imported oil products that we currently use to generate electricity.

Recent public dialogues on this topic have reached a similar conclusion – a complete moratorium on exploration would limit the potential for research activities to determine whether shale gas is a feasible option for New Brunswick. Your government intends to continue to identify and act on the opportunity for greater scientific work to be done relating to shale gas exploration.

Through the work of Dr. Louis LaPierre as well as Dr. Eilish Cleary, your government engaged New Brunswickers on the issue of natural gas exploration and development. This and other analyses will help lay out the foundation for developing our province's natural gas resources in a safe and responsible manner. Your government will translate this knowledge into action by developing an **Oil and Natural Gas Blueprint**, which will shape a vision for our natural resource sector.

The Bioscience and Value-Added Food sectors build on the activities of many of our traditional food production companies and your government anticipates that economic growth will come in large part from diversification of existing agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture operations.

Your government will actively promote growth in the **Bioscience and Value-Added Food sectors** through support for research and development and to agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture companies looking to diversify into these priority sectors.

Your government will work with stakeholders to negotiate improvements to the joint Federal-Provincial-Territorial **Growing Forward 2** programs that will promote strategic investment to grow a strong and diversified agricultural economy.

In response to industry's desire to expand **blueberry production** in Northeast New Brunswick, your government has put increased emphasis on identifying suitable land and infrastructure required to further develop this crop.

Your government has committed to **promoting local community food products** to residents, visitors and businesses as part of its strategy to grow the Value-Added Food sector. Your government will build on this effort with initiatives to promote the benefits of healthy food choices.

Further expansion of shellfish aquaculture presents a solid economic development opportunity for the east coast of the province as export demand for fresh New Brunswick oysters grows. Your government will continue to promote New Brunswick seafood products in strategic markets world-wide to grow and diversify export opportunities for our seafood sector.

Fish health is recognized as critically important to the long-term success of the aquaculture industry. Your government will continue to work with industry, other governments and research institutions on an Atlantic-wide basis to ensure a **harmonized approach to disease and pest management**.

Over the coming year, your government will continue to invest in new technology to make New Brunswick an innovative leader in natural resource conservation. The Department of Natural Resources is equipping field staff with mobile technology, allowing them to spend significantly more time patrolling our forests and waterways and protecting our natural resources.

Your government is committed to protecting our province's recreational trail network for New Brunswickers and visitors alike. New Brunswick's **trail-use policy** will be reviewed to improve access for non-motorized, motorized and multi-use activities.

By working with local clubs, your government will take action to strengthen the sustainability of New Brunswick's growing **all-terrain vehicle industry and sport**.

Your government is committed to growing the cruise sector in New Brunswick. A **cruise strategy for Northern New Brunswick** is being developed to identify potential ports of call and key stakeholders in the region to implement it.

Your government has also committed to support a feasibility study into developing the Port of Saint John as a **cruise homeport**. Should this become a reality, the province would be able to capture an even greater share of the cruise business and continue to grow this expanding industry for the economic benefit of all New Brunswick.

New Brunswick's Provincial Parks will introduce an **Online Campground Reservation Service** that will help visitors to better plan and access our parks.

Your government will continue to partner with First Nations and the federal government to advance the current round of **tripartite negotiations**. These negotiations will lead to a better quality of life for First Nations people in New Brunswick and help build a stronger economy.

In June, the Council of Atlantic Premiers announced the establishment of an **Atlantic Workforce Partnership** to develop strategies to strengthen the region's labour force. The partnership has established six provincial priorities on which our respective governments will work collaboratively. These priorities are: immigration and attraction; apprenticeship; major projects; small- and medium-sized enterprises; federal programs; and labour market information.

The use of the Federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program by New Brunswick employers is growing. It has long been recognized that temporary foreign workers are a particularly vulnerable group of employees. Your government will conduct a formal review and hold consultations to develop **new worker recruitment and protection rules**.

As the work environment evolves over time, so must rules regarding the safety of workers. Your government will introduce **amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act** to enhance existing requirements for health and safety policies for certain workplaces; clarify the training requirements for new workers; and clarify and modernize the requirement to report accidents and incidents in the workplace.

Moving goods and people efficiently to and from their destination is critical to fostering a strong and vibrant economy. Your government will continue to invest in strategic transportation infrastructure throughout the province and remains focused on maintaining our existing transportation network. Details of your government's three-year **Capital Budget** will be tabled in the Legislature during this session.

With an integrated global economy, more than ever, we need a unified, focused approach to developing international commerce opportunities. In the coming months, your government will unveil a new **global trade and commerce strategy** with three objectives: to increase the number of exporters; increase the value of our exports; and diversify our geographical markets to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

New Brunswick is Canada's most export-oriented province. We sell approximately 80 per cent of everything we produce to customers outside the province and our exporters are interested in opening up new markets for these products and services. Your government recognizes the importance of trade agreements in providing predictable access to outside markets by establishing agreed-upon systems of rules and obligations.

New Brunswick is supportive of Canada's overall free-trade agenda including the on-going trade negotiations with the European Union, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), India and Japan. As well, trade talks with China and Brazil are anticipated to begin in the near future.

The **Canada and European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** negotiations mark the first time that provincial and territorial officials have sat at the negotiating table in international trade talks. New Brunswick officials have been active members of the Canadian delegation. This involvement guarantees any commitments made by Canada take our domestic interests and sensitivities into account. In the end, your government will only accept a trade deal that is in the best interest of New Brunswickers.

Over the coming year, your government looks forward to the completion of the runway extension project at the Greater Moncton International Airport, which will support the development of dedicated international air cargo services at the airport.

Your government will continue work on harmonizing and streamlining processes in support of the trucking industry to improve efficiencies and increase industry competitiveness. This includes harmonizing conditions for the movement of Long Combination Vehicles (LCV) between Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario, the completion of Phase 1 of developing an online special move permit (OSMP) system and the investigation requirements for developing a vehicle preclearance system.

Your government will introduce amendments to the current regulatory regime for **public motor carriers** to help ensure an appropriate framework exists that balances the economic competitiveness of the intercity bus industry with the needs of the travelling public.

Rebuilding Health Care, People and Communities

Rebuilding our health care system to ensure it is affordable, sustainable and provides the care New Brunswickers need in the official language of their choice is at the heart of rebuilding New Brunswick.

Health care is one of the most visible and important services that government provides to its citizens. The way health care is funded and how services are provided impacts the lives of all New Brunswickers no matter where they live.

Your government knows that short-term fixes and arbitrarily cutting services isn't a long-term solution to making sure we have a strong, sustainable health care system for future generations.

It is clear that the challenge of an aging population and soaring health care costs are outstripping our ability to pay for the services New Brunswickers need and want. Unless we act now to rebuild our health care system, we could lose the publicly funded, universal health care system we cherish.

Your government also continues to make progress in its health care commitments. In the coming year, further developments will be announced regarding the **Mental Health Action Plan**, the **Comprehensive Diabetes Strategy** and the **Primary Health Care Framework** in addition to a new **five-year Provincial Health Plan** that will be developed and implemented in 2013.

As well, a five-year action plan for greater equity in the provision of health care services will be released.

More than a quarter of New Brunswickers have no prescription drug coverage and the cost of drug therapy can be catastrophic for many families. Your government is committed to ensuring a **made-in-New Brunswick drug insurance plan** helps New Brunswickers afford the prescriptions they need. Your government will be moving forward with recommendations to ensure that drug coverage is more accessible to all New Brunswickers.

The Department of Healthy and Inclusive Communities will have a strong social policy focus, in addition to overseeing sport and wellness programming. A key responsibility of this new department will be providing cross-departmental leadership to community partners and agencies that collectively play a role in addressing government commitments relating to seniors, persons with disabilities, youth and those living in poverty. A **Minister's Committee on Healthy and Inclusive Communities** will also be created to provide an accountability structure within government for these important communities.

The **Wellness Strategy** will be evaluated to identify progress in its implementation through schools, communities, workplaces and homes. In addition, the evaluation will identify opportunities to strengthen its impact with key groups such as seniors, reduce poverty and improve inclusion.

New Brunswick's population is undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift. The number of seniors (over 65) is expected to increase dramatically over the next 25 years. We all know that seniors make significant contributions to their families, their communities and their province, which makes it imperative that we invest in healthy aging.

Earlier this year, your government appointed an expert panel to consider both the challenges and the opportunities over the next 10 years to help government prepare for our aging New Brunswick population. The Premier's Panel on Seniors... Living Healthy, Aging Well has been working diligently over the past several months to develop **recommendations for Healthy Aging in New Brunswick**.

These visionary recommendations will guide government investments in community development and services to help seniors live active, healthy lives.

Your government will also consult seniors in developing a **Seniors' Charter** that will lay out how seniors will be treated with compassion and respect when receiving services from government.

To ensure your government and service providers are delivering services consistent with the intent of the seniors' charter, amendments will be introduced to the **Ombudsman Act** to expand the Ombudsman's powers to include services to seniors funded by government and delivered by third-party service providers such as nursing homes, special care homes, enhanced special care homes for persons with dementia and home support services.

Your government will also make it easier for seniors to maintain their independence by establishing a **1-800-SENIORS, toll-free hotline** for people looking for government information and services for those over the age of 65.

Your government recognizes the challenges facing our future labour market and the need to engage all New Brunswickers in the labour force. The Departments of Social Development and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour have been working towards a **seamless delivery model for social assistance clients**. This project has enhanced collaboration and is providing greater employment services to clients while at the same time better responding to labour market needs.

Your government has put students and schools front and centre, with new school districts designed to help every child in New Brunswick realize his or her full potential, and strengthening the culture of collaboration within the education system.

This reorganization has been a collaborative effort. These new districts and education support centres are now in full operation thanks to the dedication of the staff members at the school, district and department level. Your government is confident the changes will create the right environment for our students to graduate with the necessary skills to build a stronger economy for New Brunswick.

Your government is proud to continue its shared partnership with Initiative on Learning, entitled *Learning: Everybody's Project*. A historic Provincial Forum was held recently which gathered leaders from every sector and corner of our province. Many commitments were made to continue this partnership. These commitments will form the basis of a Learning Agenda with the goal of changing our culture and transforming New Brunswick into the **Learning Province of Canada**.

Your government, under the guidance of experts and through working with its partners, will implement an **integrated autism training strategy** so that more teachers, educational assistants and other support staff have access to training on using evidence-based interventions to provide better services to our young children and school-aged students with autism spectrum disorder.

Your government will work with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement a new **dispute resolution process** for our school system that will provide a mechanism for open discussions between parents and educators.

Your government will create two **provincial early childhood networks**, as well as early childhood networks at the local level, to ensure services for young children are better integrated within our communities and schools. Your government will work with its community partners to increase the capacity of child-care facilities to offer inclusive services.

An equal and inclusive society also means a safe society. Violence against women and girls continues to be a priority of your government. Earlier this year, the Atlantic ministers responsible for the status of women launched an **initiative on social media** to provide girls and their parents with tools to ensure the safe use of social media by young girls.

Your government will continue to work with its many community partners, including the aboriginal communities, to create awareness on the issue of **violence against women** and improving responses to and supports for victims of violence. Your government will be exploring ways of engaging men and boys in addressing this serious societal issue.

Official bilingualism is one of the defining elements of New Brunswick. As the government of the only officially bilingual province in Canada, we remain committed to achieving real equality between the two official linguistic communities. Over the last year, a review of the **Official Languages Act** was begun. A bipartisan select committee of the Legislative Assembly has held consultations with the people of the province over the last few months and will table its report during this session.

Your government will consider the recommendations from the select committee in determining how to move forward with regard to official bilingualism. Your government is committed to following through with this by **introducing a bill** in 2013.

The Government of New Brunswick **Duty to Consult** Policy was adopted one year ago. The Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat continues to promote a coordinated “single-window” approach to the duty to consult by providing information, direction and support to provincial departments and agencies, businesses, consultants, First Nations, Aboriginal organizations, and others.

The cultural sector is an important economic and social contributor to our story and to our success as a province.

Work on the **renewal of the Cultural Policy for New Brunswick**, a platform commitment and a government renewal initiative, is well underway. The renewed cultural policy and accompanying action plan will be adopted in early 2013.

Over the next few months, the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture will coordinate a **Cultural Facilities inventory** which, once complete, will provide an inventory of cultural infrastructure and sites. The data collected will also be used to create a **cultural web portal** – a “one-stop-shop” for information on arts and culture facilities in New Brunswick.

Your government is committed to maintaining New Brunswick’s unique linguistic identity as Canada’s only officially bilingual province. To recognize the importance of balancing our immigrant attraction efforts, a **Francophone Immigration Strategy** will be developed to increase the number of Francophone immigrants to New Brunswick.

Enhancements to the **Provincial Immigration Strategy** to reflect recent national immigration rule changes will help ensure all immigrants to New Brunswick have access to the tools and support needed to thrive in our province.

Last spring, the federal government announced significant changes to the **Employment Insurance (EI) program** to be implemented in the coming year. Your government created a committee to study the pending changes and its work has informed your government's approach to gaining clarification and raising concerns surrounding these changes. This approach is working as evidenced by the federal government's recent changes to the pilot project "Working While on Claim."

Your government continues to urge the federal government to be more transparent on the upcoming changes to EI and will continue to meet with its federal counterparts to represent and defend our province and its residents.

As part of its platform, your government pledged to improve recycling in New Brunswick. As part of this initiative, four new products are being added to the province's **Extended Producer Responsibility program**: used oil; engine coolant; electronic devices; and highway and large off-road tires. This approach not only prevents these products from entering the province's landfills, but also encourages manufacturers to produce more environmentally friendly products.

Your government will engage the public, environmental, business and other sectors in developing a **multi-year Climate Action Plan** to further reduce greenhouse gases and enhance adaptation to our changing climate.

Your government has completed its consultations on the **graduated drivers' licence program** and will be bringing forward changes.

Recognizing the continuing risks associated with extreme weather events and climate conditions, your government will begin a collaborative effort to develop a **province-wide Flood Risk Reduction Strategy**. This strategy will build on past experiences including the flood event in the Perth-Andover-Tobique area earlier this year. It will benefit all areas of the province in reducing risk to life and property in the future.

Rebuilding Government

Over the past two years, your government has been working to redefine and review how government works and how to better deliver the services and programs New Brunswickers need at a lower cost to all taxpayers.

It has found efficiencies throughout government, and the recent restructurings of government departments are intended to provide better, more focussed programs and services at a cost we can all afford.

However, renewing and rebuilding government is not an exercise for one fiscal year – it's a commitment to continuous improvement and questioning how things are done and how they can be done better. Put simply, rebuilding government is about changing the culture of government and striving to make what it does as relevant and effective for citizens as possible within our means.

Last fall, your government brought forward a **Local Governance Action Plan** that has, as a fundamental goal, the long-term sustainability of New Brunswick's communities.

Expanding opportunities to deliver effective local and regional services is a key component of the Action Plan. As the new Regional Service Commissions begin operations throughout our province, your government wishes to acknowledge the service of all past and present board members of Regional Solid Waste and District Planning Commissions. Your vision, work and dedication have created a strong foundation on which to build into the future.

There are many aspects to the Local Government Action Plan and your government is pleased to bring forward a number of important actions under the plan this year. Among other key actions, your government committed to create a **new model for community-governed regional service delivery**, and that commitment will be implemented in the coming year.

A new *Regional Service Delivery Act* received Royal Assent this spring, and New Brunswick's new **Regional Service Commissions** are set to begin operations in January 2013. These commissions, which replace the 12 Solid Waste Commissions and the 12 District Planning Commissions, will help communities to communicate, collaborate, as well as plan regionally for effective service delivery.

The commissions will serve communities and be governed by them, creating direct accountability to the taxpayers and enabling them to work together and share services to meet their common needs.

A strong provincial economy begins with strong local and regional economies. Individuals, communities and businesses throughout our province support and benefit from fair and consistent financial policy. To that end, your government will introduce legislation to establish the first in a series of incremental measures supporting **fair taxation and assessment**.

The current provincially funded arrangement, known as the unconditional grant, was developed more than 40 years ago. While the intention has always been to provide for an equitable distribution of unconditional grant funding to communities that recognizes their varying ability to raise taxes locally, the distribution of the unconditional grant has become increasingly inequitable and is not accomplishing its true purpose.

To address this long-standing challenge, your government will introduce legislation to establish a **fair and equitable distribution formula** to replace the unconditional grant program based on the principle of equalization and will provide a degree of stability and predictability for communities.

Your government recognizes that local and regional decision-making is both desired and appropriate in strengthening autonomy and accountability at the community level.

As a fundamental aspect of the Local Government Action Plan, your government has ensured that any new legislation supporting the Action Plan has been developed with these objectives in mind. The next key phase in creating modernized governance legislation will involve a collaborative process to identify policy direction as an important first step in building **new planning and local governance legislation**.

Community sustainability is a key objective of your government. For communities wishing to assess and make choices relating to their longer-term sustainability, your government will introduce legislation to **enhance the existing Rural Community model** as well as measures to modernize restructuring processes.

A **culture of continuous improvement and performance alignment** is being built within the New Brunswick public service to enhance the rigor and discipline of the internal management process. This approach drives the alignment of department initiatives around common priorities, promoting improved collaboration and execution. A structured management review process has been established where departments regularly account for their results through the disciplined assessment of progress on priority initiatives and performance indicators.

The continuous improvement element of this management process provides tools such as LEAN and Six Sigma that allows public servants to view their work differently. The outcomes are increased efficiencies in service delivery to citizens while eliminating unnecessary costs. This is being piloted in several departments and early results are demonstrating positive outcomes.

If we are to build a stronger economy in this province, New Brunswick must send a message to investors that we have our fiscal house in order and are able to live within our means. However, providing health services to New Brunswickers currently demands more than 40 per cent of the provincial budget.

The per capita cost of health care in our province is well above the national average. New Brunswickers have said that we must rebuild our health care system and find ways to achieve better results within the funds available. In the coming year, New Brunswick's health care partners will work with the **Office of Health System Renewal** to increase our health system's efficiency and accountability, streamline administration, and adopt health innovations.

Last spring, New Brunswick introduced a **new shared-risk pension model** with the goal of making our province's pension system more secure, transparent and affordable. The new model was developed in collaboration with several public sector and even one private sector union and has received widespread interest and support.

Your government is committed to continuing to work collaboratively to address pension issues, thus ensuring a stronger and more sustainable pension system in New Brunswick. Over the coming months, the Task Force on Protecting Pensions will work with members and employers to move towards the new shared-risk pension model for other provincially sponsored pension plans, including the plan set out in the *Public Service Superannuation Act*.

Over the past year, your government has been implementing a new **Smart Regulations System**. This system recognizes the importance of regulations to protect New Brunswickers' health and safety, our clean environment and the rules of fair commerce, but also aims to reduce the overall regulatory burden on non-profit groups, business and individuals.

Since last year, the Regulatory Affairs Unit of the Executive Council Office has worked with departments to identify 52,970 total provincial regulatory obligations. The next steps in the development of the Smart Regulations System will include reducing these obligations by a targeted 20 per cent and then maintaining the overall burden by requiring new regulations to be offset by eliminating out-of-date obligations.

In the 2010 Speech from the Throne, your government committed to rewriting the *Public Purchasing Act* to ensure New Brunswick-based businesses have a fair chance to bid on provincial contracts. The creation of the **Procurement Act** affirms your government's commitment to be accountable with public funds.

This new Act and its regulations will bring procurement in New Brunswick into the 21st century and align the province with other jurisdictions. It will also promote innovative and strategic approaches to procurement to ensure New Brunswickers receive the best value for their tax dollars.

In alignment with your government's Continuous Improvement Initiative, the **shared-service delivery model** for internal services will be extended in such areas as payroll, print optimization and strategic procurement.

The new **Office of the Chief Information Officer** was established last year to provide a more strategic, coordinated and focused approach to information and technology services, enabling your government to deliver better services in a more efficient and effective way.

Already your government has been able to break down silos within core government departments and across all public bodies. This has created new opportunities to procure services and equipment with higher volume discounts and has also reduced technology duplication through better asset management.

Through this new technology governance structure, frameworks, methods and processes, your government will create efficiencies that will lead to significant savings and reinvest some of them toward higher value activities such as healthcare, poverty reduction and post-secondary education.

Conclusion

Throughout this legislative session, ministers will provide more information on the initiatives and legislation outlined in this Speech from the Throne. Your government will also provide details on other programs and policies of importance to all New Brunswickers.

This throne speech puts forward an agenda for the coming year that sets out targeted programs and initiatives that are part of your government's plan to rebuild our province, our economy and our communities.

This session will also include Capital and Ordinary Budget Estimates and other pieces of legislation that are critical to your government's efforts to rebuild New Brunswick.

Our province's future growth and success depends on us taking advantage of our strengths, overcoming our weaknesses and embracing innovation in how we work, how we live and how we deliver needed services to reduce costs and seize the many opportunities before us.

The way to achieve these goals is through innovation and in rebuilding and reshaping our economy, our government and its programs and services, our communities and indeed ourselves as New Brunswickers.

The task before us is not an easy one, but New Brunswickers have the history, the drive and the ability to transform this place we call home into one of the most innovative places to live, work and do business in the world.

May divine Providence continue to bless New Brunswick and its residents, and guide this Assembly in its deliberations.